



Scoil Bhríde
Crosshaven, Co. Cork
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Critical Incident Policy Scoil Bhríde 13910N

Introduction:

In Scoil Bhríde, we aim to protect the well being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment as outlined in our school mission statement.

The Board of Management in conjunction with the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association of Scoil Bhríde has drawn up a Critical Incident Management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Rational

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school'. *Examples:*

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease (Foot & Mouth)
- Criminal incidents
- Major accidents, serious injury
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster
- Disappearance of student from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, tsunami

Critical Incidents Management Team

Leadership Role: Séamus O'Connor (Principal)

Communication Role: Sr. Anne Coffey

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Denise O'Connell/Leah Weste

Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Pat Stephenson/Sr. Eleanor (Scoil Mhuire)

Family Liaison Role: Miriam Long (Deputy Principal)

Parents Association Rep: Lorraine Ní Bheara/Jennifer Wallace

B.O.M. Rep: Jim Nyhan

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Leadership Role:

Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

Post-intervention

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

2. Communication Role:

Intervention

- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

Post-intervention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:

Intervention

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide information
- Provide counselling

Post-intervention

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

4. Chaplaincy Role:

Intervention

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

Post-intervention

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

5. Family Liaison Role:

Intervention

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident

Post-intervention

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

Action plan

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Séamus)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Séamus, Miriam, Leah, Sr. Anne, Jim Nyham, Jennifer Cashman)
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
 1. What happened, where and when?
 2. What is the extent of the injuries?
 3. How many are involved and what are their names?
 4. Is there a risk of further injury?
 5. What agencies have been contacted already?
- Contact appropriate agencies
 1. Emergency services
 2. Medical services
 3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
 4. NEPS
 5. BOM

First Day in School After the Incident Occures

- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary.
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened.
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out.
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission.
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc).
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured;
 - Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
 - Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
 - Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate).
- Request a decision on this from school management.

LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress. If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the Health Board. Constant communication with family is essential.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate

- Ensure that new staffs are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events)

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
 - Plan a school memorial service
 - Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
 - Update and amend school records

Review

This policy will be reviewed in 2021.

Ratification

Chairperson



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Consent Letter - Individual or Group Support Session

Dear Parents

You may already know that our teachers and staff have been providing support to our students following {specific reference to the incident}.

Additional support is also being provided to our school by psychologist/s from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

The psychologist will be available, where necessary, to meet with individuals or with groups of students to help them during this difficult time.

The aim of such sessions will be to:

- Provide information about dealing with grief and loss in a healthy way
- Allow students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment
- Allow students time to comfort and support each other, under the guidance of experienced staff from Scoil Bhríde
- Help students resume their normal routines as soon as possible

If you would like for your daughter to participate in such a session and any follow-up meetings that might be scheduled, please give your consent by signing below.

You should return it to the school immediately. If you have any questions, please contact our School Principal.

Yours Sincerely

Séamus O'Connor
School Principal



I give my consent for _____ to participate in a Group/Individual Session

Parent or Legal Guardian: _____ Date: _____



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Advance Parental Agreement to Child Being Seen

Dear Parent

Scoil Bhríde has developed a plan for responding when a tragedy occurs.

When such an event happens, schools are offered psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), an agency of the Department of Education and Science. If we feel it is necessary, we would like to be in a position to have your child seen by a psychologist who can offer advice and support.

Before any child is seen by a NEPS psychologist, parental consent is usually required. We will make every effort to obtain this. However, in the unlikely event of being unable to contact you, we are writing to seek your consent for your child to be seen by a member of NEPS as part of our schools immediate response. This is to allow us to support your child in the best way possible. Your child may be seen individually, in a small group or as part of a class group.

If you wish to discuss this, please contact me at your convenience.

Yours Sincerely

 Séamus O'Connor
 School Principal

Option A

Please fill in the form below confirming that you have read this letter and stating whether **you wish** or **do not wish** to have your child seen by a NEPS psychologist. Please return to Scoil Bhríde.

I wish to have _____ seen by the NEPS Psychologist.

I do not wish to have _____ seen by the NEPS Psychologist.

Parents/Guardian: _____

Date: _____

Option B

The school will assume your agreement if you do not return this slip stating that you **do not wish** to have your child seen by a NEPS Psychologist. Please fill in the form below and return to Scoil Bhríde.

I do not wish _____ to be seen by the NEPS Psychologist.

Parents/Guardian: _____

Date: _____



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Sudden Death/Accident Notification Letter

Dear Parents

Scoil Bhríde has experienced {the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.} of student(s). We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some remembrances of the person lost).

Our thoughts are with (family name).

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. (Elaborate)

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their age.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or to be tearful, anxious or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are general short-term reactions. Over the course of the days to come, please keep an eye on your child and allow her to express her feelings without criticism.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

(Optional) An information night for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given. We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.

If you would like advice, you may contact the following people at the school - List.

Yours Sincerely

Séamus O'Connor
School Principal



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Critical Incident Action Plan Short-term Actions - Day 1

Task/Action	Action to be Completed by:	Tick
Gather accurate information		
Who, what, when, where?		
Convene a CIMT meeting - specify time and place clearly		
Contact external agencies		
Arrange supervision for students		
Hold staff meeting	All staff	
Agree schedule for the day		
Inform students (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)		
Compile a list of vulnerable students		
Contact/visit the bereaved family		
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media		
Inform parents		

Hold end of day staff briefing		
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Medium-term Actions- Day 2 and Subsequent Days

Action	Action to be Completed by	Tick
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Team leader	
Meet external agencies		
Meet whole staff		
Arrange support for students, staff, parents		
Visit the injured		
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements		
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service		
Make decisions about school closures	B.O.M.	

Follow-up-beyond 72 hours

Action	Action to be Completed by	Tick
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers	

Liaise with agencies regarding referrals		
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)		
Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family		
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BoM/staff, parents and students	
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BoM	