



St. Patrick's N.S. Clara
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St. Patrick's N.S. Clara, Critical Incident Policy & Plan.

Critical Incident Policy

At all times, St. Patrick's N.S. Clara aims to protect the wellbeing of all members in our school community by providing a safe, caring and learning environment which nurtures the full educational potential of each child and as defined in our Mission Statement. We have taken a number of measures to create a supportive and caring environment in our school and we have formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the safety of staff and pupils.

Our Critical Incidents Policy follows the guidelines for school available in the following publications:

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools NEPS & DES
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools NEPS & DES
- When Tragedy Strikes INTO Publication

The Board of Management, through consultation with the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has formulated this Critical Incident Policy. Copies of this policy will be distributed to the Staff, the Board of Management and the Parent's Association. A copy will also be made available in the school office.

Definition of Critical Incident

The staff and management of St. Patrick's N.S. Clara recognise a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school".

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, their family members or members of the local community e.g.

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- Unauthorised removal of a pupil from school or home.

Creation of a Coping Supportive and Caring Ethos in the School

St. Patrick's N.S. Clara has put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students through our SPHE/RSE programmes, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Physical Safety

In the area of physical safety the school has put in place the following:

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Pre-opening supervision in the school on days of inclement weather e.g. frost, rain, snow
- Secure doors accessed only during school hours
- General school rules under the school's behaviour policy to ensure all pupils have a safe environment.

Psychological safety

The management and staff of St. Patrick's N.S. Clara also use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

- It is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by including issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staffs have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staffs are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school student are available.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies e.g. HSE/Community Care/NEPS.
- **Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers**
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- There is a care system in place in the school
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member. Concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency
- Staff are informed about how to access support themselves.

The CIMT

Aim

The aim of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) is “to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable them to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff”. Having a good plan will also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It will enable the school to return to normality as soon as possible.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has access to the schools Critical Incident Management Folder which include all of the following:

- A copy of the Critical Incident Management Team/and the Key Roles
- An emergency contact list/school staff contact list
- A copy of the duties of each team member
- A copy of the Board of Management members & contacts
- An Action Plan Template.

Key Roles and Responsibilities of the Critical Incidents Management Team.

- *Team Leader : Mr. Matthew McArdle Principal /Ms. Teresa O' Hanlon DP*
- *Garda liaison : Mr. Matthew McArdle Principal*
- *Staff liaison : Mr. Matthew McArdle Principal / Ms. Teresa O' Hanlon DP*
- *Student liaison / Counselling Role : All Teachers*
- *Parent liaison : Mr. Matthew McArdle Principal*
- *Chaplaincy Role / Community liaison : Fr. John Flanagan*
- *Media liaison : Mr. Damien Treanor*
- *Administrator : Mrs. Pauline Farrell School Secretary*
- *Chairperson of Board of Management : Mr. Damien Treanor*
- *Caretaker of the School : Miss Denise Mc. Caughey .*

The Following are the Key Responsibilities of Each Role

Team Leader :

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

Garda Liaison

- Liaise with the Gardaí
- Ensure that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

The Deputy Principal will assure this role in the absence of the team leader.

Staff Liaison / Counselling Role: Intervention

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts known , gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings, ask questions , outlines the routine of the day.
- 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 materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Keep staff updated .
- Provide counselling and support services to vulnerable staff .
- Set up 'Quiet Room' where agreed

Post intervention

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

Student Liaison

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 student.
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide counselling

Post intervention

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

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

Community/Agency liaison

Intervention

- Maintain up to date lists of contact numbers - members of the Parents Association, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinate the involvement of these agencies

- Remind agency staff to wear name badges
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies

Post intervention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

Parent Liaison 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

Media Liaison

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with relevant teacher unions etc
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator

- Maintenance up to date telephone numbers of:
Parents or guardians
Teachers
Emergency services
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to
- Ensure that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepare and send out letters, emails and faxes

- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc. The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

The management and staff of St. Patrick's N.S. Clara have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do so also. For instance, the term "suicide" will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases, 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

Critical Incident Rooms

In the event of a critical incident:

- The Staff Room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- The Assembly Hall for meetings with students
- The Assembly Hall for parents to meet or in a smaller group setting the School Office may be used.
- The Assembly Hall for media
- The SEN / Office Room for other visitors

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

All staff were consulted and regard was given to their views in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments. Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff. Each member of the critical incident team has access to a personal copy of the plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by a Staff Liaison member.

St. Patrick's N.S. Clara Critical Incidents Short Term and Long term 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 (Leader of CMIT)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- 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/ Tusla
 4. NEPS

5. BOM

6. DES/Schools Inspector

- 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 , 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
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- Plan a school memorial service
 - Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
 - Update and amend school records

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in June 2023 and reviewed in May 2024. It will be reviewed at least once in each school year.

Signed: *Damien Treanor*

Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 10/06/24

Signed: *Matthew McArdle*

Principal/Secretary to the Board of Management

Date: 10/06/24