

Critical Incidents Policy Scoil Bhríde



This policy applies to all critical incidents occurring during the school year. A critical incident is defined as a significant incident which is likely to be difficult or traumatic for members of the school community and which requires support or some other response from the school. These incidents may happen in school or in the community and impinge on school. Examples might include:

- the death of a student or teacher or serious injury to a student or teacher or a member of their family;
- terminal illness or suicide;
- a serious accident involving staff or students;
- a physical attack on a member of staff or a student;
- serious damage to the school through fire, flood or vandalism;
- the disappearance of a member of the school community

Relationship to school's Mission/Vision/Aims: Our Ethos emphasises that all members of the school community - pupils, parents, teachers and other staff - are held in very high regard and their dignity, worth and individuality is respected and that all members of the school community are cared for. This policy aims to ensure that this is so at times of critical incidents when a strong sense of community is so important.

Rationale: In light of a number of incidents nationally e.g. tragedies in Wexford etc., and some incidents locally such as the death of close friend of a member of staff, the death of a parent in school and an experience of a child that was missing for a number of hours the staff felt that there was a need to have a strategy in place to deal with such incidents. Any critical incident is a potentially traumatic time for all involved – for the staff, the students and the families involved. It has the potential to re-awaken memories of previous traumatic events and to expose those who are vulnerable to risk. While it is not possible to plan for every eventuality, it is helpful to have a plan of action for such emergencies so that a Critical Incident Team can be readily formed and take appropriate steps to deal with the matter as quickly as possible.

This policy is designed to enable the school community to cope better with critical incidents, to mobilise appropriate action and to ensure that appropriate services are offered to those who need them.

Goals:

- To have a strategy in place to deal with critical incidents that may arise.
- To specify how the school will respond to critical incidents.
- To specify roles and responsibilities when such emergencies arise.

Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident

Immediate Response: In the event of a critical incident, the Principal or teacher in charge will deal with the emergency calmly and efficiently. This may involve calling emergency medical or other services. It may involve implementing emergency evaluation procedures or other health and safety measures. In the event of medical emergencies the school's procedures outlined in our Health and Safety policies should be followed. The Principal or teacher-in-charge should contact the family as soon as practicable. A list of emergency personnel and their phone numbers will be maintained by the Office and prominently displayed there for such emergencies. A list of high- medical-risk students will also be maintained by Office staff and displayed in a prominent location.

Critical Incident Team: As soon as practicable afterwards the Principal will call a meeting of the Critical Incident Team to advise on how the school should respond. The team will comprise the Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal's, Home School Links Officer, and the School Chaplain. The team should meet at least once a year to review this policy and any associated action plans.

The team will meet as soon as possible – it should not wait until all members are able to be present but should act as quickly as circumstances require. Any person who has knowledge of the person(s) or event or circumstances of the incident is invited to make that knowledge known to a member of the team as soon as possible.

Gather accurate information

It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident; otherwise rumours may take over and add to the distress of those involved.

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?

Contact appropriate agencies

- Emergency services
- Medical services

- § What is the location of those injured and not injured?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?
- Health Board Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
- NEPS
- BOM
- DES/Schools Inspector.

Convene a Meeting of the Critical Incident Team and arrange suitable cover for them

The team will share information about the event and will map out a response, which will include the following:

- Ensuring that the normal school routine continues as far as practicable
- Liaison with the person(s) involved and/or their families
- In the event of a suicide, consult with the family about how they would wish the death to be described
- Deciding how the staff will be informed about the incident and ensuring that students are properly supervised while staff is being informed.
- Issues for staff will include:
 - An account of the known facts
 - An opportunity to express their views and feelings
 - Discussion on the best way to inform students about the incident
 - Discussion around identifying vulnerable students and arrangements for same
 - An outline of the routine for the remainder of the day
 - Where a service will be required, a meeting of a core group of teachers should be arranged to make the necessary preparations
 - Give further updates throughout the day as circumstances allow
- Deciding how the students will be informed about the incident
 - Preferably in class groups or small -groups
 - Depending on the circumstances, a short prayerful reflection may be required; it would be wise to have a few short alternative reflections attached as an appendix to this policy

- Making arrangements for service(s) in the school
- Making arrangements to visit with the family as appropriate and acknowledge their feelings
- Making arrangements with the family for the involvement of the school in any funeral or other services
- Making provision for counselling and support for students as appropriate
 - The Convent Oratory will be made available for Teachers and students to meet and pray
 - Arrange for suitable expertise from outside agencies to meet with students as appropriate and with parental permission
- Making provision for counselling and support for staff as appropriate
- Preparing a written statement for the media (where one is required); deciding on a spokesperson and a support person for the spokesperson
- Making provision for keeping a written record of the event and the school's response and developments as they unfold
- Ensuring that at least one phone line remains open
- Consider which students may wish to attend the service(s) and make appropriate arrangements; if a school closure is required consult school management (Board Chairperson) and the school Inspector
- Plan time, venue and agenda for further meetings of the group

Longer Term Actions

In due course

- Consider whether a referral to the Health Board may be advised for any student
- Evaluate the effectiveness of these procedures and amend them accordingly
- Consider how anniversaries should be handled
- Consider how to bring the matter to a formal conclusion, after which no further meetings of the Critical Incident Group will be required in respect of the incident

Roles & Responsibilities: The Principal or teacher in charge at the time of the event will ensure that this policy is implemented as quickly as possible. The Principal is ultimately responsible for its implementation. Other members of the Critical Incident Team will be assigned responsibilities as appropriate by the Principal or the Team as the need arises. For a more detailed description of duties please see Appendix section. All staff are asked to be generous in their response to any critical incident and to make themselves available to the Critical Incident Team for additional duties according to identified needs.

Success Criteria:

- Critical Incidents are managed effectively
- Communication is handled effectively
- Closure is achieved

Monitoring Procedures:

- This policy will be monitored in the light of experience.

Review Procedures:

- The overall policy and each appendix will be reviewed in turn over a period of five years. In addition, appendices will be reviewed in the light of challenges or difficulties that may present themselves from time to time and in light of ongoing good practice and changes in legislation.