

Catholic University School

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CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

(Ratified)

Link to Mission Statement

The Catholic University school is a secondary school for boys under the patronage of the Marist Fathers. The primary aim of the school through its spiritual and humanistic endeavours, is to promote and develop a sense of community where those entrusted to its care can be brought to the fullness of their human potential in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel.

The school, through its academic, pastoral and spiritual undertakings strives to provide for the holistic development and welfare of each of the students in its care. Dealing with death, loss and trauma is inevitable in a school community. It is recognised that responding to tragedies can never be fully prepared for – each situation is unique. Nonetheless this does not absolve the school community from considering what elements of preparedness can be in place. The key to managing a critical incident is planning. Having a plan enable staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. It may also ensure that normality returns as soon as possible and that the effects on the students and staff are limited.

Pastoral Goals for the School

School which have a good network of relationships, where there is a concern for the whole person throughout the life of the school, will be in a better position to respond healthily to crises when they inevitably arise. We therefore strive to attain the following core pastoral goals:

- Personal attention to value and develop each student
- Acknowledgment of, and support for, each person's role in the school community.
- Promoting an environment which meets students' needs.
- Priority given to the nurturing of teaching and learning relationships.
- Recognition of talents and abilities.
- Clear values that animate the school.
- Strong collaborative leadership.
- Clarity of policies, roles responsibilities and tasks.
- Accountability, support and evaluation at every level.
- Involving all concerned in the life of the school.

In relation to responding to crises, we aim to:

- Provide a range of supports for all in the school community to call upon in a time of crisis, both in the short and long term.
- Raise issues of trauma in a variety of locations throughout the curriculum.
- Outline a policy for dealing with common traumas in the context of the school.
- Regularly review the structures of support and referral available in the school.

Review and Research

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) have consulted resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie and www.nosp.ie including:

- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community – A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools – Guideline for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

What we mean by the term ‘critical incident’

The staff and management of the Catholic University School 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, or members of our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- 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, et.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

Aim

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an accident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to student and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the Catholic University School

We have put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students, 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

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Supervision in the school yard
- Rules of the school

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of The Catholic University School aim to 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) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing 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.
- The Ember and the Amber team (Care system run by students)
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Staff are informed of the area of suicide awareness, and some are trained in interventions for suicidal students.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies – e.g., Tusla
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a Care Team in place in the school using the “Continuum of Support” approach which is outlined in the NEPS document published in 2010 for post primary schools. These documents are available on www.education.ie
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (i.e., guidance counsellor, Mr. John Curran) 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 for themselves.

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 a least one school year. The member of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Team Leader: Principal – Mr. Clive Martin (Ms. Patricia Roberts Byrne act in his absence)

Role:

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS, SEC
- Liaises with the bereaved family

Garda Liaison Role: Principal – Mr. Clive Martin

- Liaises with the Gardai
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison: Deputy Principal - Ms. Patricia Roberts Byrne

Role

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students.
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and contacts them individually
- Advises them of the availability of the EAS and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison (X

Role

- At post-primary level, may co-ordinate information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about.
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical folder)
- Maintains student contact records (R1)
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.

Community/agency liaison (X)

Role

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council. Emergency support services and other external contracts and resources.
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

Parent Liaison (X)

Role

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation.
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

Media Liaison Ms. Roberts Byrne while Mr. Martin will give briefings and interviews as required

Role

- 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 the SEC; relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

Administrator

Role:

- Maintenance of up-to-date telephone numbers of Parents or guardians, Teachers, Emergency Services.
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to.
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation.
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts.
- 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.

Confidentiality and good name considerations

Management and staff of The Catholic University School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of public statements. Members of school staff will bear this in mind, and seek to ensure that students do so also, e.g. 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 work 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms are designated for the indicated purposes:

Room Name:	Designated Purpose:
Staffroom	Main room for meeting staff
Principal's Office	Meeting with parents
Principal's Office	Meeting with media
Guidance Counsellors Office	Individual sessions with students
Principal's Office	Meetings with other visitors

Members of the Critical Incident Management Team have each other's mobile numbers

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES: PRINCIPAL/DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

Prevention Responsibilities:

- Develop and implement a policy on suicide prevention, intervention and postvention
- To have in place a trained Crisis Response Team
- Provide in-service to staff around issue of loss and trauma
- Promote the inclusion of programmes that deal with bereavement, loss and related issues in the curriculum
- Put in place a resource list of personnel and agencies including school psychologist, mental health professions, clergy, Gardai, local doctors and relevant voluntary agencies.

Intervention Responsibilities:

- As outlined

Postvention Responsibilities

- Ensure the provision of on-going support to student, staff and parents
- Hold a meeting of the crisis team to evaluate the effectiveness of the response
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial event

COUNSELLOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Prevention Responsibilities

- Assist with the development of programmes dealing with bereavement and suicide prevention
- Support and resource those teachers involved in the facilitation of such programmes within the Social, Personal and Health Education programme
- Contribute to the organisation and delivery on in-service to staff around issue of loss, crisis management and suicide
- Co-ordinate a panel of personnel from within the staff who will assist in the support of students and staff in distress. Any staff member who has received training in the area of bereavement counselling can be a member of this panel.
- Developing a network of, and a working relationship with, the school psychologist, mental health professional, clergy, Gardai, local doctors and relevant voluntary agencies.

Intervention Responsibilities

- As outlined above

Postvention Responsibilities

- On-going support to vulnerable students with a particular eye to the concern around copycat incidents. An effective identification and referral strategy will be a significant resource in this area.
- Continue to monitor the bereaved class group
- With the Crisis Response Team, evaluate the overall effectiveness of the school's response and put in place any changes necessary. In particular, the counsellor will be concerned with the effectiveness of the referral procedures; support panel of staff; the liaison with outside personnel/agencies and the programmes dealing with loss, bereavement and suicide.

RESPONDING TO A TRAUMA

Establish Facts:

- It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. Therefore, it is important that senior and involved staff gather to establish the facts. – this may involve contacting others such as hospitals, Gardai, parents.

Outline an Immediate Response:

- This group of senior and involved staff need to agree an immediate plan of action which may involve:
- Informing students and remaining staff
- Contacting parents
- Visiting the home of the bereaved
- Organising a school assembly
- Deploying the pastoral team
- Alerting outside agencies
- Liaising with those at an accident site (e.g., in the case of an out of school crisis)
- Agreeing a common statement regarding the crisis
- Assigning tasks within the group

Inform:

- It is vital that all those needing information receive it as soon as is practicable. It is helpful if a common statement is agreed when informing students and others. Such a statement will reduce the spread of rumour. Attempt to alert and inform staff in the first instance. If at all possible, the students should be told at the same time in no larger than normal class size. The statement should seek to:
- Be communicated in a sensitive manner
- Give the facts as they are known
- Highlight the supports that will be available
- Indicate the actions that are planned

In the case where an accident has occurred on a school trip, a similar statement is needed to assist those who will be telephoning relatives. It is preferable to have a group of people involved so that all concerned are informed in or around the same time. Some further considerations in contacting parents:

- Offer any practical help needed – transport, phone numbers, contact names
- Enquire if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support
- Carefully review with the parent that the information given has been fully understood
- Alerting parents to the trauma will help them when they subsequently make contact with their child.

Liaising with the Press: if there are to be enquiries from the press, it is important that the school cater for this possibility by nominating one person only to act as a liaison. In preparing a press statement, thought should be given to the following suggestions:

- Priority to be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis
- The non-release of names, addresses and telephone numbers unless authorised to do so by the family
- Rely on fact and avoid speculation
- Consider likely questions and a response to them
- Agree with the press a time for briefing if this is necessary in an on-going situation
- Nominate a specific location for press briefings.

Others to be informed: When possible, inform the chairperson of the Board of Management and decide whether an emergency meeting of the Board is necessary. Consider when, or if, it is appropriate to inform the school's insurance company and other concerned agencies.

SHORT TERM ACTION

The action that is needed in the short term will obviously be very dependent on the nature of the crisis. Actions will come under a number of headings:

STUDENTS

- **Sustaining an atmosphere where it is okay to talk about the experience.** This will require the availability of staff and others. It will entail sensitivity to the time needed for such sharing. Care should be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.
- **The most essential quality in adults needed by students is that of listening.** The school needs to put in place a support system for students in this regard. Such a system may involve those staff who are willing and able to offer support, outside professionals where required, time and resources to carry out their role, a method of supporting each other, and a review of their effectiveness.
- **Encourage contact with home in the initial stages of a crisis.** Parents need to be able to contact the school if they have information that will help the school in any way in caring for their child.
- **Involvement of students in any funeral or other services.** This requires invitation, planning and review. The families involved need to be consulted, the students invited to take part, time given to prepare for this participation and finally a debriefing of those concerned.
- **Some form of ritual in the context of the school.** The students should be carefully consulted as to the nature of such a ritual. Such an experience may also be of great benefit to staff and parents.
- **Attention needs to be given to the possible signs of distress being exhibited by students.** In noticing possible signs, it is important to say that these are not necessarily indicative of stress in relation to a trauma. Rather they are merely prompts to staff as they 'watch out' for the students in their care. Such signs will be related to uncharacteristic behaviour for example, being unusually quiet. It is important that staff can check-out signs with others before drawing conclusions.
- **Students need to be asked their 'permission' regarding discussing their feelings and reactions to a crisis.** The guidance counsellor is a key person in addressing the needs of individual students.
- **Freedom to be upset is important for anyone responding to a trauma.** The school needs to ask itself how it creates a safe atmosphere for this to occur.
- **Students not directly involved with the trauma should also be recognised as some may be affected.** Allowing students to express their sympathy can be a catalyst for such students – writing a card, attending a service.
- **Constant reminders will need to be given in relation to the supports that are available.** Students will react in different ways and at different times.

- **Focus on the friends of a bereaved student as they can be the best source of support.** Often the bereaved student may not wish to speak to an adult and may rely heavily on friends. These friends may need support as they attempt to find ways to be of help.

STAFF

Many staff, following a trauma, may need to air their feelings and reactions. It will be helpful to consider a number of possibilities such as: availability of the pastoral team; contacts for professional help; a staff ritual; a de-briefing meeting of the staff; a simple confidential questionnaire to determine the needs of the staff.

- Care needs to be taken of those staff directly involved with a trauma that they receive support, are not overworked, are able to de-brief.
- Staff who feel, for whatever reason, that they are unable to be involved in the school's direct response to the trauma should be able to readily opt out.
- Those staff having any concerns about students or others in relation to the trauma should have easy access to personnel who can assist them.
- The Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain and other members of the pastoral team will be the key resource in short- and medium-term response. They need to be facilitated, resourced and supported in their task. It is vital that they regularly meet with the principal in reviewing progress. It will be this group who can liaise with and support the staff.
- The Principal will also need to ensure (s) he is receiving support.

PARENTS

- The school will have some role to play in supporting parents concerned with a trauma. This will vary depending on the nature of the crisis and the resources available to the school.
- Provide contact people for parents to liaise with, particularly regarding monitoring the progress of their children.
- Put parents in contact with each other if it is appropriate.
- Discuss with involved parents and/or the parent's council what action can be taken to support those concerned.
- Where available, the home-school co-ordinator is an invaluable resource.
- Involve parents in a school liturgy or ritual following a tragedy.

FUNERAL SERVICES

- Decide what form of representation is appropriate. It is essential, where possible, to consult the family concerned. Do not presume that the bereaved family will appreciate a very public presence of the school.
- Prepare students ahead of the funeral. For some this may be the first occasion they have been exposed to a major grief. Take time after the event to de-brief students.
- For those students who wish, encourage, and assist them to write a personal message of sympathy. Also consider a common expression from students and/or staff.
- Check out, perhaps with the funeral directors, the arrangements concerning floral tributes. Any accompanying message should be handwritten.

- If possible, representatives of the school should visit the home of the bereaved . If students request to visit the home, phone ahead to check that this is appropriate. Visiting the bereaved may be distressing – support those involved.

Useful Addresses & Relevant References for Critical Incident Policy

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

An organisation of bereaved parents who offer support. It is open to all parents who have suffered the loss of a child of any age.

Dublin Tel: 01-8322197

Donegal Tel: 075-41493

Cork Tel: 021-291892

Clare Tel: 065-20024

Cavan Tel: 049-38436

IRISH FRIENDS OF THE SUICIDE BEREAVED

Support group for individuals bereaved by suicide. P.O. Box 162, Cork. Tel: 021-294318

Solas – BEREAVEMENT COUNSELLING FOR CHILDREN

Bereavement service for children and their families following the death of a parent, carer, or siblings.

Barnardo's, Christchurch Sq, Dublin 8 Tel 01-4540355

BEGINNING EXPERIENCE GROUPS

A nationwide group providing weekends for those bereaved through death or loss. The Young Adult Beginning Experience (YABE) is a connected group. Their Dublin address: St. Audoen's, High St. Dublin 8 Tel: 01-6791018

Policy Ratified: _____

Mr. Clive G. Martin
Principal

Dr. Maeve Martin
Chairperson

Board of Management