

# **St. Dymphna's School**

## **Critical incident policy**

**2022**

### **Introduction:**

In St. Dymphna's we aim to protect the well being of all members in our school community by providing a safe, caring and learning environment which nurtures the full educational potential of each pupil. We have taken several measures to create a supportive and caring environment in our school and we have formulated several policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the safety of staff and pupils.

Our Critical incident policy follows the guidelines for schools available in the following publications.

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- When Tragedy Strikes INTO 2000

The BOM through consultation with the Principal, the Staff and Parents has formulated this critical incident policy. A copy of this policy will be disseminated to staff, the Board of Management, and parents. It will be displayed in the school main entrance, on the staffroom notice board and on the school website and on the school's management system Aladdin.

A copy will also be made available in the school Office for visitors to the school.

### **What is a Critical Incident?**

'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' (NEPS/DES 2008). Critical Incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school, or the local community and may include.

## **Examples:**

- 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
- A major accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc
- A major accident/tragedy in the wider community

## **Response Levels:**

Level 1: death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; death of a parent or sibling; fire in school not resulting in serious injury; serious damage to school property.

Level 2: sudden death of a student or staff member

Level 3: incident; accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving several schools.

**Action Taken:** For level 1 it may be sufficient to talk to psychologist to get advice/support. For level 2 and 3 contact NEPS who will visit school as soon as possible to offer support and advice.

The Critical Incident Policy & Plan should be followed for all levels and the resources section of the Critical Incident folder is available to all staff.

## **Aim of Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP)**

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff.

Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

### Critical Incidents Management Team:

- Team Leader – Principal
- Staff Liaison – Deputy Principal
- Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: All class teachers
- Parent Liaison –SMT
- Community Liaison – Principal
- Media Liaison – Chairperson – B.O.M.
- Chaplaincy Role- Parish priest who visits the school and knows the pupils and staff- if appropriate.

St. Dymphna's is a small school with a SMT made up of three teachers and has no parents Association so many of the responsibilities rest with the SMT.

*The Deputy assumes responsibility on the absence of the Principal.*

### Roles and Responsibilities

1. Leadership Role: Principal

#### **Intervention**

- Confirm the event.
- Activate the Critical Incident response team.
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services, Board of Management, Department of Education & Skills
- 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.
- Contact other relevant agencies.
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)
- Liaise with Parents.

- Report incidents to the Health & Safety Authority
- Communicate with the media as agreed with Chairperson.

### **Postvention**

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students.
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events.
- Review & evaluate plan.

### **Staff Liaison – Deputy Principal**

**In the absence of the Deputy this role is taken by the most senior member of staff.**

- Leads Meetings to brief Staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and outlines the routine of the day.
- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Provides materials to staff from “Ready-to-Go-Pack”.

### **Postvention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response.
- Review & evaluate plan.

### **3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: All Class teachers**

#### **Intervention**

- Alert other staff to vulnerable pupils
- Activate specific services available in the school.
- Put in place clear referral procedures.
- Access materials for other staff (from Critical Incident Folder in Office)
- Provide information to leader.

#### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students.
- Monitor classes.
- Refer as appropriate.
- Review and evaluate Plan.

#### **4. Chaplaincy Role- Priest who visits St. Dymphna's.**

##### **Intervention**

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

#### **5. Chairperson of the Board of Management**

##### **Intervention**

- Liaising with Patron and Department of Education & Skills
- Liaising with Principal regarding incidents and issues occurring on the ground
- Consider legal & financial consequences.
- Consult with Principal & Critical Incident team in preparing a media statement.

##### **Postvention**

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

#### **6. Secretary**

##### **Intervention**

- Ring the emergency services immediately.
- Consult with the Principal about extending working hours to cover calls and visitors to school.
- Liaising with other members of Critical Incident Management Team

##### **Contact Numbers & Emergency Information**

- The Secretary has responsibility for maintaining an up-to-date list of Contact numbers for pupils and their parents / guardians. Private and Confidential forms will be sent out in September to ensure all contact information is available for the new school year.

There will be two lists kept on file.

1. *Emergency contact list with all contact details for each child.*
  2. *Text-a-parent list with mobile numbers nominated by each parent.*
- It will be the **responsibility of each parent/guardian** to ensure that this phone number is current. Should a number be changed during the school year, it is the parent's responsibility to inform the Secretary who will immediately update the contact list.
  - The Health and Safety Representative has responsibility for ensuring that a list of contact numbers for the emergency support services is displayed in the Staff Room, the Secretary's Office, and the Principal's Office. This will be reviewed and updated at the beginning of each school year.

### **Postvention**

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

### **SNA's**

SNA's to liaise with their class teacher and attend staff meetings and provide support to the pupils in their class. The presence of an SNA on the Critical incident team would be welcome addition and SNA's will be asked to nominate someone for the role depending on the circumstances.

### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students.
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

## **Additional Responsibilities**

### **Evacuation procedures**

The evacuation procedures should be displayed by all teachers in their classroom.

**All visitors and parents must evacuate the building on the sound of the fire alarm, whether it is a practise drill or emergency manoeuvre.**

### **Training & Staff Development**

The school will advise staff and members of the Board of Management of information /training meetings on issues such as suicide, grieving and first aid. The school will use the resources of NEPS as an advisor in planning for, and as a support facility after any incident.

### **Visitors**

Visitors, including parents must report to the Office, identify themselves and state their business in the school. Visitors will not be allowed beyond the Secretary's Office except at the invitation of a member of staff.

### **Action plan**

*Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident.*

### **SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)**

- Ensure the safety of all students, staff & visitors.
- Convene a meeting of the Critical incident Management team and delegate responsibilities.

- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate – Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed.
- Gather accurate information (use Incident Report form)
- Identify high risk, vulnerable pupils.
- Immediate contact with affected/bereaved family/families
- Contact appropriate agencies and organise support.
- Contact BOM, DES, NEPS, HSA.
- Appoint people to assist Secretary in handling phone queries & manning Secretary's Office & school gates.
- Arrange the supervision of pupils.
- Organise a timetable for the day.
- Respond to the media – only the leader will speak to the media; all other staff will refrain from commenting.
- 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. (Leader, Chaplain, Student Liaison person or Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

**As far as possible, maintain normal school routine. In serious cases of intruder or abduction, neighbouring schools will be informed.**

#### Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
  - Gather accurate information.
  - Prepare a brief statement (Chairperson and Principal)
  - 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. S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
- 4. NEPS
- 5. BOM
- 6. DES/Schools Inspector

### **MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)**

- Re-convene a meeting of the Critical Management Team to review the events of the first 24 hrs and to delegate responsibilities.
  - Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
  - Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
  - Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff in order to clarify what has happened.
  - Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
  - Update BOM, DES, & other relevant external agencies
  - Update the media.
  - Plan visits to the injured
  - Class Teacher or 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.
  - Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g., absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
  - Plan restoration of normal school routine
  - Consider the legal & financial consequences.
  - School closure (if appropriate) – Request a decision on this from BOM.
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- In the case of a bereavement, consider the following actions.
  - Preparation of students/staff attending funeral.
  - Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family.
  - Facilitation of students/staff's responses, e.g., Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
  - Ritual within the school considering the needs of all the pupils.

## **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 and/or long-term counselling from the HSE. 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
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- ***Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately***
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- 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?
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- ***Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future***
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- Consult with NEPS Psychologist if available.
  - Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate.
  - Ensure that new staff 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 and what is appropriate for all the pupils)*
- 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 in line with the family's wishes and what is appropriate for all the pupils in the school.*
  
- *Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?*
  
- *Update and amend school records.*
  
- *Evaluate the long-term effect on the educational progress of pupils.*
  
- *Evaluate the legal and financial consequences.*
  
- *Report to the BOM, DES.*

### **Monitoring, Review and Evaluation**

The Critical Incident Policy Committee will review the policy every 3 years or on formation of a new Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, staff, and pupils. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

**Ratified by the Board of Management of St. Dymphna's School**

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**Chairperson of BOM**

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**Date**

**Review date: January 2023 or as required in the light of an incident.**

## **Preventative measures through the curriculum**

Code of Behaviour

Anti-bullying Policy

Walk Tall

Stay Safe

SPHE policy

Child Protection training for Staff

## **Preventative measures through the Physical Environment**

Emergency Evacuation Drills

Health & Safety Policy

First Aid training

Code of Behaviour

Playground supervision

Access to school

## **Current Support**

Responding to Critical Incident: Resource Materials for Schools [http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Educational-Psychologist-NEPS-/neps\\_critical\\_incidents\\_resource\\_material\\_schools.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Educational-Psychologist-NEPS-/neps_critical_incidents_resource_material_schools.pdf)

NEPS

School Priest.

WCA Social Workers (if appropriate)

DES Employee Assistance Service

### **Websites**

DES – NEPS [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

Health and Safety Authority [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie)

Allianz (Church and General) [www.allianz.ie](http://www.allianz.ie)

CPSMA [www.cpsma.ie](http://www.cpsma.ie)

### **Critical Incident Folder Contents Review to include:**

1. Emergency Services and External support service numbers
2. Class list of pupils for each
3. Websites & access materials for staff
4. Reports on Fire drill and other evacuations
  - **See Sample letter templates in Critical incident folder along with resources for staff and copy of Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools NEPS & DES 2007**
  - Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools NEPS & DES 2007

