



St Catherine's National School
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Critical Incident Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2017, the St. Catherine's National School Board of Management decided to review and update the school's Critical Incident Policy, which had been in place since 2010.

This updated Critical Incident Policy has been prepared in detailed reference to the document *Responding to Critical Incidents: NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools* published by the Department of Education and Skills in 2016. The *Guidelines* are available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Responding%20to%20Critical%20Incidents.pdf> or at www.education.ie.

The provisions and resources of the *Guidelines*, referred to throughout this Policy, form the primary reference material for dealing with critical incidents; **as such, a copy of the *Guidelines* forms an Appendix to the updated Critical Incident Policy for St. Catherine's National School.**

2. RELATIONSHIP TO THE ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Catherine's National School is a primary school under the patronage and ethos of the Church of Ireland, with a spirit of caring for every member of the school community. St. Catherine's National School aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

3. AIM OF THIS POLICY

The Aim of this Policy is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of a critical incident (defined below). This is intended to enable the school community of St. Catherine's NS to maintain a sense of control in the event of a critical incident, to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff, and to ensure that the impact on students and staff will be limited. This should enable the school to return to normality as soon as possible.

Having regard to Section 2 (*Prevention*) of the NEPS *Guidelines*, St. Catherine's NS has put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students through its SPHE/RSE programmes, (Stay Safe Programme and Weaving Wellbeing), in order to prepare them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Having regard to Section 3 (“*preparation and planning*”) of the NEPS *Guidelines*, this Policy establishes a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) which will primarily be responsible for managing critical incidents, and in particular to prepare a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) for the school, and to ensure its annual review and update if necessary or appropriate.

This Policy is also designed to support parents and guardians, as well as members of the school Board of Management at a time of crisis for the school.

4. DEFINITION OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

The Staff and Board of Management of St. Catherine’s NS recognise a Critical Incident to be “*an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school*” (NEPS *Guidelines* Section 1). Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. These may 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;
- A major 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.

A number of these incidents are addressed in the NEPS *Guidelines*, in particular at Sections 7 and 8. Section 11 of the *Guidelines* provides resources in respect of responding to critical incidents.

5. PHYSICAL SAFETY

The school has put in place the following in the interests of the physical safety of our staff and students:-

- Evacuation Plan has been formulated;
- Regular fire drills occur;
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked;
- Supervision in the school yard during breaks and other play-times;
- Main (front) door locked during school hours and accessed by bell only;
- Gates at front (accessing Donore Avenue) and back (accessing lane to St. Catherine’s Avenue) of the school supervised during breaks/yard playtime;
- General Code of Behaviour in place including School Rules and Playground Policy to ensure all pupils have a safe environment.

6. PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

The management and staff of St. Catherine's NS 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. Issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, resilience, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, bullying, decision-making, prevention of alcohol and drug misuse are addressed in the SPHE curriculum. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this process;
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE as part of CPD;
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and the name of the Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person, and understand how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures;
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary student are available;
- Information is provided on mental health and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety;
- Staff are aware of Section 7 of the NEPS *Guidelines* regarding suicide awareness;
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies including HSE, Community Care, Tusla, and 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. For example, recent providers have addressed anti-bullying and e-safety;
- The School has a clear Anti-Bullying Policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this Policy. In addition, information posters regarding bullying, as well as well-being, are prominently displayed within the school, particularly in main circulation areas;
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (the Principal), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents/guardians are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency such as Tusla;
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

7. CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM (CMIT)

In the immediate aftermath of a critical incident, the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will meet. This team will consist of:-

- **TEAM LEADERS:** The Principal (Karen Jordan), and The Chairperson of the School Board of Management (David Thomas);
- **GARDA LIAISON:** William Abrahamson and Kevin Gannon;
- **STAFF LIAISON:** Róisín O'Reilly and Sarah Scannell
- **STUDENT LIAISON:** Wendy Welsh and Sophie Smyth;
- **PARENT/GUARDIAN LIAISON:** Róisín O'Reilly and Deirdre McCarthy
- **COMMUNITY/AGENCY LIAISON:** Les Weekes and Hazel O'Connell;
- **MEDIA LIAISON:** Kevin Gannon, Sarah Scannell, Karen Jordan
- **CHAPLAIN:** Minister in Charge St Catherine's Church, Thomas Street (Rev. Eoghan Heaslip);
- **PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT:** NEPS Psychologist (Dearbhail Buckley);
- **ADMINISTRATOR:** Vera O'Rourke

The members of the CIMT were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for one year, commencing on 1st October. They may be re-appointed for one or more subsequent years. The appointment (or re-appointment) of the CIMT will be undertaken each September by the school Board of Management as part of its annual review of this Critical Incident Policy.

Each member of the CIMT has access to a personal copy of the school's Critical Incident Management Folder, which must include the following:-

- A list of the CIMT and key roles (as per R19 of the NEPS *Guidelines*);
- A copy of the NEPS *Guidelines* and this Critical Incident Policy;
- An emergency contact list, and school staff contact list;
- A contact list for the School Board of Management;
- A copy of the Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP), prepared and/or updated by the CIMT.

If the critical incident directly affects any member of the CIMT to an extent to which it would be impractical, impossible or inappropriate for him/her to be part of the CIMT for that specific incident, the Team through the Team Leader will co-opt another person from the school community to assume the relevant role. If the Team Leader (Principal) is so affected, the Deputy Principal will assume the role of Team Leader.

Having regard to the particular circumstances of a critical incident, the CIMT is authorised to co-opt any other individual(s) to be part of the Team for management of that specific incident.

7.1 Key Roles and Responsibilities of the CIMT (refer to R19 of the NEPS *Guidelines*)

TEAM LEADER:

- Verifies that a critical incident has taken place;
- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting;
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team (refer also to Sections 4, 5 & 6 of the NEPS *Guidelines*);
- Liaises with the Board of Management, DES, NEPS, SEC, ETB etc.;
- (Where relevant to the Critical Incident) Liaises with the bereaved or any affected family;
- In collaboration with the Media Liaison, acts as spokesperson;
- Leads the CIMT in the annual review of the CIMP;

GARDA LIAISON:

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

STAFF LIAISON:

- 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 the Critical Incident Folder);
- Keeps staff regularly updated as the day progresses;
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually;
- Advises staff of the availability of the EAS and gives them the contact number;

STUDENT LIAISON:

- Addresses the immediate needs of students, including giving information (as agreed with the CIMT);
- Alerts staff to vulnerable and/or significantly affected students in an appropriate manner;
- Provides material for students (from the Critical Incident Folder);
- Maintains student contact records (refer to R1 of the NEPS *Guidelines*);
- Keeps record of students seen by external agency staff;
- Provides ongoing support to students as required or appropriate;
- Looks after setting up and supervision of a 'quiet room' as appropriate.

PARENT/GUARDIAN LIAISON:

- Visits the bereaved or affected family with the Team Leader;
- Arranges any meetings with parents/guardians if these are required;
- Facilitates/chairs such meetings and manage 'questions and answers' if required;
- Manages any "consent" issue in accordance with agreed school policy;
- Ensures that sample letters are prepared and available for immediate adaptation and use on the schools IT system;
- Sets up meeting rooms for parents/guardians if required;
- Maintains a record of meetings held with parents/guardians;
- Meets with individual parents/guardians as appropriate or as required;
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from the Critical Incident Folder).
- Liaises with P.A class reps.

COMMUNITY/AGENCY LIAISON:

- Maintains up to date lists of key contact numbers – such as members of the Parents Association, emergency support services, and other external contacts 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 agencies;
- Reminds agency staff to have appropriate identification and wear name badges;
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

MEDIA LIAISON:

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and prepare for how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises etc.);
- In the event of an incident, will liaise as necessary with the SEC, relevant teacher unions etc.;
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed with the school Board of Management, including Principal as Team Leader);
- Will coordinate all official school statements on social media.

CHAPLAIN:

- Visits the affected family/families as appropriate or as requested;
- Liaises with other church/synagogue/mosque leaders as appropriate – particularly if an affected person belongs to a different faith;
- Leads prayer or other services as appropriate;
- Is available as a personal and/or spiritual support to staff and students;
- In liaison with Family Liaison, provides ongoing support as requested to affected families;

ADMINISTRATOR:

- Maintenance of up-to-date contact details of parents/guardians, teachers, emergency services, and any other person, body or agency as agreed by the CIMT;
- Takes calls and emails, and notes where these need a response;
- Ensures that templates are available on the school IT system and ready for adaptation;
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts;
- Photocopies materials as needed;
- Maintains records, and coordinates single repository of records that may be taken by others.

7.2 Record Keeping

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

8. CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN (CIMP)

As soon as possible following the annual appointment (or re-appointment) of members of the CIMT, by the school Board of Management, the CIMT will meet to prepare and/or review the school's Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP).

The CIMP should follow the template and details contained in the NEPS *Guidelines*, and in particular at Section 11 R19 & R20.

The preparation/review of the CIMP should be chaired by the Team Leader, who should in particular have regard to Sections 4, 5, and 6 of the *Guidelines* which address short-term, medium-term and follow-up actions for the Principal/Team Leader.

All staff should be consulted in the preparation/review of the CIMP and regard will be given to their views. Students and representatives of the Parents Association and the school Board of Management should also be consulted on the CIMP and invited to provide feedback.

This Critical Incident Policy and the CIMP should be presented to all staff and representatives of the Parents Association as soon as possible following its annual review by the school Board of Management (Policy) and the CIMT (Plan). Where the Policy and CIMP has been reviewed but not

updated (i.e. deemed to remain fit-for-purpose), it is sufficient to make staff and representatives of the Parents Association aware of this fact.

Any new or temporary staff who are not present for the annual presentation of the Policy and CIMP should be informed of the details of these documents and/or any update to these documents by the Staff Liaison of the CIMT. This is to ensure that every staff member is aware of the content of the most up-to-date Critical Incident Policy and CIMP.

9. CONFIDENTIALITY AND GOOD NAME CONSIDERATIONS

The management and staff of St. Catherine's National School 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 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 has been 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 Hall for meetings with students;
- A Learning Resource room for meetings with individuals, small number of parents, and other visitors;
- The Hall for meetings with larger numbers of parents;
- A Learning Resource room for media;

This Policy, including the appointment/re-appointment of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will be reviewed annually in September by the St. Catherine's NS Board of Management.

RATIFIED BY THE ST. CATHERINE'S NS BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

September 2021

APPENDIX ONE:

Responding to Critical Incidents: NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools published by the Department of Education and Skills (2016)

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Responding%20to%20Critical%20Incidents.pdf>