

<b>Approved Date:</b>	<b>October 2025</b>
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### **Critical Incident Policy**

Scoil Cholmcille aims to protect the wellbeing of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. We have taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. We have formulated a policy and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of staff and students, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

#### **Review and Research**

The Critical Incident management Team (CIMT) has consulted resource documents provided to schools as well as publications listed in the resources section of this publication.

These include:

- Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools (NEPS 2016)
- Guidelines for Schools on How to Respond to the Sudden Unexpected Death of a Student
- When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools (INTO/Ulster Teachers Union 2000)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group 2002)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools-Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE, 2015)

#### **What is a critical incident?**

Scoil Cholmcille recognises a critical incident to be “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school” Critical Incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school, or 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.
- Major illness/outbreak of disease.
- An accident involving a member/members of the school community.
- Major accident/tragedy in the wider community.
- Sexual, physical and psychological abuse.
- Civil unrest, war.
- Fire, natural and technological disaster.
- Disappearance of student from home or school.
- Unauthorised removal of student from home or school.
- A physical attack or an intrusion into the school.

**Aim:**

At Scoil Cholmcille we recognise that the key to managing critical incidents is planning. We have developed a Critical Incident Management Policy and an accompanying plan. Our hope is that in the event of an incident these will help staff to react quickly and effectively maintain a sense of control. We have aimed to compile a policy and to return to normality as soon as possible after a potential critical incident and ensure that the effects on the students and staff would be limited.

**Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school:**

We have put systems in place to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

**Physical Safety:**

We have included into our Health and Safety Policy: -

- Evacuation plan in the event of a fire. (See fire drill.)
- Regular fire drills occur (termly).
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.

- School doors have a keypad system in operation where visitors have to be buzzed in and out.
- Children cannot be taken from school during school hours without informing the principal/class teacher or secretary.
- Pupils are regularly reminded of the rules of the playground. These rules are discussed and reviewed at staff meetings.

### **Psychological Safety:**

We have created an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help.

- Our Discipline policy includes an approach to bullying.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy (Bí Cinéalta).
- Our Mission Statement specifies that all children will be given equal hearing.
- S.P.H.E. programmes are included in the curriculum to address issues such as, grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem solving, help seeking, decision-making, and alcohol and drug prevention.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Safeguarding Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- All staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students, and are aware and vigilant to their needs.
- All staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the Primary School Child.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies such as the clergy, N.E.P.S., H.S.E, school nurse, cigire and the I.N.T.O.
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published in 2007 for primary schools and 2010 for post primary schools. See also Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014). These documents are available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)
- The staff will be cognisant of the differing needs of international pupils and special educational needs pupils.

- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves through the Employee Assistance Service (Free Phone 1800 411057).

### **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT):**

A critical incident management team is a group of individuals from the staff who know the community, the students, and each other well enough to make the necessary decisions for when an incident occurs. The members of the teams were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet once a year to review and update the plan.

### **Critical Incidents Management Team:**

Leadership Role: Lorraine O'Loughlin

Communication Role: Kate Leddy

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: N.E.P.S Psychologist

Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Stephen Kennedy, Duleek Parish

Family Liaison Role: Kate Leddy

Parents Rep: Emma Keane & David Cannon

B.O.M. Rep: Joe Collins

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **1. Leadership Role:**

#### **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 the event.

- Make contact with other relevant agencies.
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school).

#### **Postvention**

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

### **2. Communication Role:**

#### **Intervention**

- With Team, prepare a public statement.
- Organise a designated room to address the media promptly.
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls.
- Designate mobile numbers for contact.
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies.

#### **Postvention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response.

### **3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:**

#### **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 staff.
- Provide materials for staff.
- Provide information and counselling.

#### **Postvention**

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

#### **4. 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.

##### **Postvention**

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

#### **4. Family Liaison Role:**

##### **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 a critical incident.

##### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident.
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services.
- Offer to link families with community support groups.
- Review and evaluate plans.

## **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).
- 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
  4. National Education Psychological Service (N.E.P.S)
  5. Board of Management
  6. Department of Education/Schools Inspector
- Convene a meeting with the 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 etc, 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 funerals.
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by the 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 a mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Have a review of the 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 meetings 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 relatives 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 a 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.
- Plan a school memorial service.
- Care for the deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school 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, materials used etc. The school secretaries 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 Scoil Cholmcille, Mount Hanover 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. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used. The word 'murder' should not be used.

### **Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident:

- The staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- Classrooms will be used for meetings with students
- Resource rooms and the school office will be used for meetings with parents, media, individual sessions with students and for meetings with other visitors.

### **Consultation and communication regarding the plan**

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parent representatives were also 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 copy of this plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Board of Management Teachers Representative. The plan will be updated periodically.

### **Ratification**

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management at the meeting in October 2025.