

St. Nicholas' Parochial School

Critical Incident Policy

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Definition of 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”

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Critical Incidents include but are not limited to:

- Death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- An accident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident of tragedy in the wider community.
- Suicide
- Attempted Suicide
- Murder
- Attempted Murder
- A child killed in front of others crossing the road
- bus crash on a school trip or traveling to or from school where there are multiple injuries
- Kidnap
- Sexual Assault/Rape
- A physical assault of a staff member
- Serious injury or death of a person on school property
- Incidents external to the school which might affect pupils e.g. a local tragedy

Aims of Critical Incident Plan

St. Nicholas Parochial School aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times as outlined in our mission statement.

We recognize that critical incidents can greatly affect people and that coordinated and systematic procedures are necessary to facilitate the provision of a rapid and appropriate response at the time of the incident as well as post-incident support. The aim of the critical incident plan is to ensure that management and staff will react effectively and promptly to maintain control of the situation. The plan will

also assist the school community to return to normal as quickly as possible and limit the effects of the incident on staff and students.

We acknowledge the complex nature of traumatic events/bereavements which may have far reaching consequences, and can effect attitude, performance and the ability to cope. It is therefore, important for the school to have clear supportive strategies in place for our students and staff.

Breaking the News to Pupils-Guidelines for Teachers

- Only if incident is confirmed by the family, can it be relayed as such to the pupils.
- The Class of the pupils who has died should be the first to be told with the Chaplain, counsellor and class teacher and principal.
- Other classes to be told by their class teachers.
- Not every class is going to be traumatized as some pupils may not even know the deceased. But it is important to acknowledge the loss for the whole school community.
- Tell the class you have sad news and it is difficult for you to do this.
- Let them know the name of the person the news is about.
- Let them know the facts-rumours should be prevented as far as possible.
- Encourage questions.
- Let the class know of common reactions tragic news.
- The common reaction is shock.
- Expect outbursts and tears.
- Don't allow a student to leave the class in a distressed state unless they have supervision somewhere else in the building.
- Let them know that you support them.
- Let them know who else is available to support them.
- Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news.
- Allow them time to mingle and talk to one another in groups.
- Explain who they can support one another.
- Be attentive to identifying those who are not coping well with the news.
- Let them know where the Critical Incident Team will be.
- Arrange to have refreshments ready.
- A short prayer or time of reflection for the deceased may be appropriate.
- If the pupils appear ready, A School Group Assembly may be held later in the day.
- Some pupils may be able to continue and go to class, and may want to.
- Some will need to stay with the Critical Incident Team for the morning.
- Some pupils may need to go home-only if parents can collect them.
- Those who go to class may not be able to concentrate on the work of the class.

Sample Statement for the Media and letter to parents.

It is with profound sadness that the Management, staff and students of St. Nicholas Parochial School, have learned of the tragic death of _____

Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the family of _____

On hearing the tragic news, the School Critical Incident Team was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Team convened a meeting to ensure that students affected by this loss as cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all the School Community affected by this loss are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

The school is offering counseling and support for pupils and parents affected by this tragedy. Prayer services have been held with each class in the school. Pupils will attend and participate in the funeral service in consultation with the wishes of the family.

Our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this tragedy.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

The Critical Incident Management Team comprises of:

- Principal Ms. Wendy Lynch
- Deputy Principal Ms. Carol McLoughlin
- Chaplaincy Rev. Lynda Peilow

(This list is interchangeable depending on the circumstances of the Critical Incident)

Support Services Team

- School Administrative Staff
- Relevant teachers with expertise, e.g. First Aid, Bereavement Support
- Others professionals and support services
- Other staff members concerned

Key Administrative Tasks

- **Student Addresses and Phone Numbers:** Updated list of addresses and phone numbers of students to be maintained by administrative staff on the Critical Incident Management Team.
- **Staff Addresses and Phone Numbers:** Available from Principal, Deputy Principal and Administrative staff.
- **Training and Staff Development:** The management will afford staff members with opportunities to attend information/training courses in First Aid, Suicide, Bereavement etc.
- **The Media:** The Principal will liaise with the media and will also prepare a Media statement.

- **Health & Safety:** Safe School Evacuation Procedures as outlined in Health & Safety Statement. Regular fire drills.
- Management to ensure that new staff members are made aware of the critical Incident School Policy.
- All teachers to ensure that principal is aware of pupils who may be in emotional distress/affected by trauma/critical incidents and in need of special consideration.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role of School Management:

- To confirm the event and to clarify facts surrounding event.
- To alert members of the Critical Incident Management Team to the crisis and to convene a meeting of the team.
- To coordinate/delegate tasks of Critical Incident Management Team members.
- To make contact with family to express sympathy.
- To visit the home of the bereaved/injured.
- To ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students.
- To facilitate any appropriate memorial events.
- To prepare a Public/Media Statement with Critical Incident Management Team.
- To outline specific services available in school.
- To put referral procedures in place.

Role of Critical Incident Management Team Members

- Critical Incident Management Team will establishment a staff chain of communication to disseminate relevant information.
- The Critical Incident Management Team will ensure that new staff are made aware of the Critical Incident School Policy.
- In case of bereavement, to clarify funeral arrangements.
- To liaise with other relevant support agencies, e.g. NEPs, Counsellors, etc.
- To brief and advise staff members.

Rev. Lynda Peilow as Chaplaincy Role

- To address immediate needs of staff.
- To monitor class/students most affected and to facilitate ongoing support to vulnerable students.
- Visit home, if appropriate.
- Make contact with local clergy and to assist with prayer or memorial services.
- Consult with family around involvement of school, e.g., funeral service.
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff.
- Provide follow-up support to family.
- Work in partnership with religious education team.
- Involve as appropriate family in school liturgies/memorial services.

- Link family with community support groups, e.g. Rainbow, Bereavement Support Group.

Action Plan

Short-Term Actions (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with family/families.
- Convene a meeting with Critical Management Team.
- Contact appropriate agencies, e.g. emergency services, medical services, H.S.E., NEPS, BOM, DES/ School Inspectorate.
- The Rector/Principal will liaise with the family to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement.
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made available for students/staff. e.g. Staff room/Learning Support Room and counseling service.
- 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 and give to the principal.
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives.

Medium-Term Actions (24-72 hours)

- Attendance and participation at funeral to be decided-in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions.
- Involvement of pupils/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family.
- Preparation of pupils/staff attending funeral.
- Facilitation of pupil/staff responses, e.g. sympathy cards, flowers, book of condolences, etc.
- Ritual/service within the school.
- Arrange support individual pupils, groups of pupils, and parents, if necessary.
- Plan for the re-integration of pupils and staff, e.g. siblings, close relative, etc.

Long Term Actions

- To monitor pupils for signs of continuing distress.
- To inform new staff members of Critical Incident Policy and where appropriate to ensure they are aware of pupils affected by any recent incident/pupils in distress.
- Update and amend school records.
- To review and evaluate Critical Incident Policy as appropriate.

Contacting Staff If Critical Incident Occurs Over Weekend

- In the event of the death of a colleague, Principal/Deputy Principal will contact staff by phone.
- In the event of the death of a student, the Critical Incident Management Team needs to be informed immediately.
- All teaching staff and school secretary to be informed immediately also.
- All other staff to be informed on Monday.

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Ambulance/Fire	999 (Landline) 112 (Mobile)
G.P. WestDoc	1850-365000
Garda Mill Street Station	091 538000
NEPS	
U.C.H.G. A&E Galway Clinic A&E	524222 585999
C.A.M.H.S.	+353-1- 6774838
St. Anne's	(091) 521 755
Public Health Merlin Park	(091) 775200
Bereavement Counselling Service Rainbows	01 4734175