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Critical Incident Policy

Ratified by Coláiste Mhuire's Board of Management: 2025.

Glossary of Terms

- BFL Behaviour For Learning
- CAMHS Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- CIMT Critical Incident Management Team
- CMJ Coláiste Mhuire Johnstown
- DES Department of Education and Skills
- DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
- DLP Designated Liaison Officer
- DDLP Deputy Designated Liaison Officer
- GC Guidance Counsellor
- HSCL Home-School Community Liaison Teacher
- HSE Health Service Executive
- KCETB Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board
- NCSE National Council for Special Education
- NEPS National Educational Psychologist Services
- PDST Professional Development Services for Teachers
- RSE Relationship and Sexuality Education
- SCP School Completion Programme
- SEC State Examinations Commission
- SENCO Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
- SENO Special Educational Needs Officer
- SHIP Self-Harm Intervention Project
- SNA Special Needs Assistant
- SPHE Social Personal Health Education
- SST Student Support Team
- TY Transition Year

Critical Incident Plan

- **Appendix 1 Summary Checklist for Principal – Short-term Actions**
- **Appendix 2 Summary checklist: "Incident level & actions: Day 1 & Day 2"**
- **Appendix 3 Emergency contact numbers**
- **Appendix 4 Useful contacts**
- **Appendix 5-8 Sample communication texts/letter s for staff, students, parents & media**

Critical Incident Plan (with duties)

Introduction
This plan sets out procedures to be applied in the event of a critical incident. This plan has special regard to the emotional wellbeing of the school community.

Scope
This plan applies to all our school community, irrespective of where or when such a critical incident may occur.

A critical incident occurs when the school experiences a tragic event. Such events may include:

- The 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.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school.
- Real or threatened damage to the school premises or injury to members of the school community through fire, flood, storm, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.

Relationship to Mission Statement
This plan derives from the Mission Statement. It is directly linked to the aspiration in that statement that all in the school should feel cared for and safe.

Rationale
This plan aims to build awareness among the school staff as to the potential impact disasters and critical incidents can have on the school community. It outlines the preparation that the school should undertake in order to ensure an effective response to crisis situations. It emphasizes the importance of having effective emergency plans in place before an incident occurs and it provides a framework for dealing with it.

Objectives
A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) exists in Colaiste Mhuire, Johnstown. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the Critical Incident Policy and Plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This will contain a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to his/her role to be used in the event of an incident.
The Critical Incident plan will:

- allow Coláiste Mhuire to cope more effectively in the event of an incident
- enable staff to react quickly and effectively
- enable staff to maintain a sense of control.
- ensure that normality returns as soon as possible

- ensure that the effects on students and staff are limited
- ensure effective communication

Related Policies and Documents
This plan may be read in conjunction with the following:

- Child Protection
- Substance Use Policy
- The Whole School Guidance Plan
- SPHE Programme
- Wellbeing programme
- Anti- bullying policy
- Safety Statement
- Code of Behaviour for Students
- Acceptable Usage Policy for Pupils and staff

The Critical Incident Management Policy and Plan has been developed in line with best practice, with guidance from Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) documents underpinned by relevant legislation and documents including;

- Education Act 1998
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Anti-bullying Procedures 2013
- Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools 2013
- Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention 2013
- Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools 2014
- Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017
- Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017
- Guidelines for Well-Being in Junior Cycle 2017
- Responding to Critical Incidents. NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools 2017

Preparation

The school maintains a coping, supportive and caring ethos through:

- Nurturing a physically and psychologically safe environment through the development of areas such an anti-bullying policy, peer support programmes, fire drills, equipment and buildings checks.
- Inclusive SPHE programmes covering such areas as communication skills, self-esteem, decision-making, bereavement, stress management, and coping skills.
- Maintaining pastoral care structures and reviewing their effectiveness.
- Providing information for staff to deal with critical incidents.
- Maintaining links with outside agencies.

Definition and Examples of a Critical Incident

The staff and management of Coláiste Mhuire 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.

Examples of Critical Incidents might include but are not limited to:

- 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 school community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood vandalism etc.
- A major accident / tragedy in the wider community
- Fire in the school
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

Initial Assessment of the Incident

- Below is a classification of response level to an incident.
- This classification in no way diminishes the seriousness of any particular event.
- It is intended to help the school and psychologists assess what level of intervention is needed, including the additional supports a psychologist may need to request from colleagues and other agencies.

Response Level 1: the death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; the death of parent/sibling; a fire in school not resulting in serious injury; serious damage to school property.
Response Level 2: the sudden death of a student or staff member.
Response Level 3: an accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving a number of schools.

Creating a caring and supportive ethos in Coláiste Mhuire

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

Some of the measures taken by the school to ensure the physical safety of the students include;

- Defibrillator located on site and on the school bus.
- Staff members trained in First Aid
- Specific Care Plans for students with medical needs drawn up in conjunction with parents/guardians and staff are made aware of them.
- Supervision in the school before and after school and during break
- The Code of Behaviour is printed in all Homework Diaries
- Induction for all new students
- Health and Safety Plan for all practical rooms and laboratories
- Emergency contact list on display – See **Appendix** 1
- The principal must be notified of all trips outside of school. Lists of all participants are drawn up and a copy left with the principal and on display in the staffroom
- Plant serviced annually
- Evacuation plans/fire drills/fire exits and extinguishers regularly checked/fully functional and regularly serviced Fire Alarm system
- Health and Safety Policy

Psychological Safe Environment

The management and staff of Coláiste Mhuire 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)

Mental health promotion is vital and one of the key means of supporting all students in this is through Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Wellbeing.

- 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; decision-making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse are addressed in the SPHE curriculum. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.

- SPHE supports the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development, and wellbeing of all members of the school community. It has a significant role to play in the creation of healthy, nurturing and safe environments.
- It is a 'universal' intervention, targeting all pupils, and thus enhances the health of the whole school population.
- It encourages students to develop their values and attitudes and helps provide the life skills they need to live healthy lives in the wider community
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE

The Student Support Team

- The care system in Coláiste Mhuire is co-ordinated by the Student Support Team.
- It has established systems and procedures for the identification of students at risk and for referral to school personal for screening and support
- The Student Support Team have a timetabled weekly meeting.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. guidance counsellor, school completion,) through Coláiste Mhuire's Student Support Referral Teams Site 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.

The remit of this team includes;

- The co-ordination of the support available for students in the school - Year Heads, Guidance Counsellor, School Completion Programme, Home School Community Liaison Officer, Resource.
- Co-ordination of supports from NEPS and Special Education Needs Officer SENO
- Facilitate links to the community and other non-school support services e.g. Ossory Youth
- Enable students with support needs to continue to access a full education-SENCO, SCP, Care Plans, Year Heads, HSCL
- Assist staff to manage those students effectively -referrals In and Out Lists, minutes of meetings

Themed events during the school year.

- As part of the DEIS plan Coláiste Mhuire has a planned calendar of "themed events" during the academic year.
- These themed events are selected to support students, socially, emotionally, physically, personally and academically and contribute much to the creation of a safe school that de-stigmatises mental health problems and fosters the development of young people who are healthy in mind, body and spirit.
- Some of the themed events include;

- Bonding days for 1st years. TYS and LCA students
- Bereavement and loss: *In November we remember*
- Inter-cultural Week – welcoming diversity

Child Protection

- Child protection issues are dealt with by Mr. Martin Gleeson, Principal (Child Protection Designated Liaison Person) and Mr. Alan Curran, Deputy Principal (Child Protection Deputy Designated Liaison Person).
- Any concerns around child protection is reported to Designated Liaison Person or the Deputy Designated Liaison Person for Child Protection (DLP) who take the appropriate action as stated in Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017
- All Staff are familiar with Child Protection Procedures and must complete the TUSLA e-learning training programme called 'Introduction to Children First.' These Certificates are valid for three years and must be given to Mr. Gleeson. Links for this site are found in the staff handbook
- Coláiste Mhuire is fully compliant with all aspects of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 and Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection Checks.
- For more on Child Protection please see CMJ's Child Protection Risk Assessment and Safety Statement and Child Protection Policy.

Staff

- CMJ recognises that staff have a duty of care to the students at all times and particularly during a critical incident. However, CMJ acknowledges the fact that staff will also need support during and after a critical incident and will endeavor to whatever support is appropriate.
- Staff have been made aware of how they can access support for themselves from Spectrum Life. See **Appendix** 9
- Some key staff {Principal, DPs/Guidance counsellors and HSCL coordinator] are informed in the area of suicide awareness, and have attended specialist training such as Safe Talk and ASIST provided by the HSE.

External Agencies

In CMJ we are in the fortunate position to be able to access and work with a wide variety of services to support our students. The list below is not exhaustive. These include;

- Barnado's
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services CAMHS
- Educational Welfare Officer EWO

- Health Service Executive HSE
- Health Promotion and Improvement, Health and Wellbeing Division HSE
- Meitheal – Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Services (PPFS)
- National Council for Special Education NCSE
- National Educational Psychological Services NEPS
- Occupational Therapists
- Ossory Youth
- Primary Care and Child Psychology
- Self-Harm Intervention Project SHIP
- Special Educational Needs Officer -SENO
- TUSLA Child and Family Agency

Anti-Bully Policy

The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy. Please See CMJ's Anti Bully Policy for more details.

Critical Incident Team Members

Principal	Mr. Martin Gleeson
Deputy Principals	Ms. Angela Conroy Mr. Alan Curran
Guidance Counsellors	Ms. Valerie Dempsey Ms. Caitriona Phelan Ms. Mary Buggy
Home School Community Liaison	Ms. Aine Monahan
AP1/Year Heads	Ms. Deirdre Power Ms. Cathryn O'Grady Ms. Valerie Bergin Ms. Niamh Healy Mr. Barry Moriarty Mr. Patrick Comerford Mr. John Dunne
Administration	Ms. Ruth Hickey Ms. Alice Maher

This **team will meet annually to update and review the plan** and determine the duties of each team member in the event of a critical incident. Any member of the team may bring an incident to the attention of the principal. The Principal plays a key role, having overall responsibility for many of the tasks. Certain **administrative tasks** are carried out on an ongoing basis so that communication is speedy and effective in the event of a critical incident.
Full details of the agenda page 20&21 of Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines for schools.

Roles and Responsibilities in the Critical Incident Management Team

Team	Responsibility
Team Leader **Martin Gleeson**	• Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting • Delegates and Coordinates the tasks of the team • Informs and Liaises with the KCETB, Board of Management; TUSLA, DES; NEPS; SEC • Liaises with the bereaved family • Identifies any family members, relatives, neighbours, friends, staff members [including SNAs, canteen staff, administration and caretaking staff] that may need immediate care and support
Staff Liaison **Angela Conroy &** **Alan Curran**	• Briefs staff at the earliest opportunity • Students will be supervised at these times • The facts, as known, will be disclosed to the staff members who will be given an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions • Staff will be briefed on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students. Materials for staff (from critical incident folder) will be provided • Staff will be updated as appropriate • Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually • Advises them of the availability of the Employee Assistance Scheme EAS – Inspire Workplaces 1800 817435 and gives them the contact number. Flyers on Notice Board in Staffroom
Student Liaison **Year heads:** **Barry Moriarty,** **Mary Buggy,** **Valerie Bergin,** **Deirdre Power,** **Cathryn O'Grady,** **John Dunne,** **Paddy Comerford,** **Niamh Healy**	• Inform students of the facts of the incident • Coordinate information from subject teachers regarding students whom they are concerned about, alert other staff to vulnerable students and liase with Guidance Team • Provide materials for students from critical incident folder • Keep records of students seen by external agencies
Student support: **Guidance Team** **Valerie Dempsey** **Caitriona Phelan**	• Coordinate supports for vulnerable students • In association with the DPs organise and supervise a 'quiet and comforting space' for vulnerable or emotional students/staff (HSCL

Mary Buggy	Office to be used with a small group & Room 33/Room 17 Gym if number of students too large). • Identify students/staff in need of more intensive or sustained support and liaise with school management, parents and external agencies to facilitate this support.
Parent Liaison Angela Conroy, Alan Curran, Áine Monahan	• Liaise with the family • Visits the family with the Principal • May arrange a meeting of parents • Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy • Ensures that sample letters are typed up and stored on the school system ready for adaptation • Sets up Parents Room for meeting with parents • Maintains a record of parents seen, meets with individual parents • Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder).
Garda Liaison Martin Gleeson	• Liaises with the Gardaí (where appropriate) • Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared
Media Liaison Martin Gleeson	• In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might respond (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc) • Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management
Office Staff	Alert Year Head regarding late arrivals
NEPS	Supports for staff

The Critical Incident Team

Team Leader	Martin Gleeson (Principal)
Staff Liaison	Angela Conroy & Alan Curran (Deputy Principal)
Counselling coordinator	Valerie Dempsey, Mary Buggy & Caitríona Phelan (Guidance Counsellors)
Student Liaison	Cathryn O'Grady, John Dunne, Angela Conroy, Paddy Comerford, Alan Curran. Mary Buggy, Niamh Healy, Deirdre Power, Barry Moriarty, Caitríona Phelan, Valerie Dempsey and Aine Monahan
Parents' Liaison	Martin Gleeson, Angela Conroy, Alan Curran, Aine Monahan
Community Liaison	Martin Gleeson
Media Liaison	Martin Gleeson
Relevant Year Head	As Appropriate
Garda Liaison	Martin Gleeson/ Paddy Comerford
Administrator	Ruth Hickey, Alice Maher
Other	The following staff/agencies may be involved as the CIM Team see fit: Pastoral Care team, HSCL, NEPS, School Secretary and Caretaker Other staff members may be asked to be part of the team as deemed appropriate.

Key Administrative Tasks of the Team (to be reviewed annually)

Maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers in respect of the following:

- pupils, parents, guardians
- staff
- emergency support services

Teachers taking pupils on outings involving an overnight stay must:

- Bring a proper first aid kit

- Create the following phone contact list:
  - principal
  - deputy principal
  - parent/guardian home and mobile
  - travel agent, if appropriate
  - consular offices or embassy, where appropriate
  - transport companies

- Leave a copy of the following with the principal and deputy principal prior to travelling:
  - list of those travelling including all teachers and their contact details
  - telephone contact list of the parent/guardians of those pupils travelling
  - copy of itinerary
  - name and telephone number of accommodation
  - mobile phone number of tour leader

The teacher bringing students on a day trip/match in Ireland must:

- bring a proper first aid kit
- ensure the following items are left at the office:
  - list of those travelling
  - list of all teachers and their contact details
  - copy of itinerary
  - name and address of the company providing transport

Electronic Communication

Electronic communication allows for the immediate delivery of accurate information to parents, teachers and other stakeholders. Further, it counteracts false or misleading information delivered on social media sites or by word of mouth.
When the school network is operational:

- A text message with a hyperlink will direct parents to the school's website. *
- A member of the critical incident team will put an agreed statement of facts on the homepage.
- The two steps referred to above will be repeated as the need arises.

If the school's network is not operating the deputy principal will go to the nearest Wi-Fi hub to send the text message(s) and update the homepage

*Families of those involved in the incident may be excluded to avoid unnecessary distress

Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents

1. Short-Term Actions (1st Day)

In the absence of P/DP Senior Management Team coordinates incident

Gather accurate information
It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident; this avoids the proliferation of rumours, which would add to the distress of those involved. The following fact must be established:

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?
- What is the location of those injured and not injured?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?

Contact appropriate agencies

- Emergency services *Sec/P/DP*
- Medical services *Sec/P/DP*
- HSE Psychology Departments/Community Care Services *Guidance Counsellor*
- NEPS

- BOM
- KCETB
- DES

Convene a meeting with key staff/Critical Incident Team *P/DP*

A list of possible topics to be covered follows:

- Agreeing a statement of the facts for staff, students, parents and the media. There should be a written version of this.
- Delegating responsibilities to the Critical Incident Team.
- Appointing someone to handle phone enquiries and to deal with the media.
- Ensuring that a phone line remains open and available for enquiries.
- Organising the timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important if this is possible).
- Organising a staff meeting, if appropriate.
- Organising the supervision of students during any staff meetings.
- Deciding whether an outside professional be invited to the staff meeting.
- Arrange supervision of students

Hold staff meeting

All staff will be asked to attend, including auxiliary staff. It may be necessary to do this in two shifts. The areas which might be covered are listed:

- An account of the facts as known.
- An opportunity for staff to express their views and their feelings.
- Discussion with the staff about how the facts will be shared with the students. (There should be an agreed approach to this if possible).
- An outline of the routine for the day.
- Information for staff about which outside agencies have been contacted or are involved and the supports that will be put in place for both students and staff.
- A procedure for identifying vulnerable students.
- Distribution of relevant handout material.

Organise the timetable for the day

AS FAR AS POSSIBLE MAINTAIN NORMAL ROUTINES.

Inform parents/guardians:

Children directly involved:

Parents/guardians will be contacted as soon as possible, and this first contact will be handled with great sensitivity. The steps involved are set out below:

- Agree who should share information with parents and how this should be done.

- Make a list of parents/guardians who have been contacted and those who still need to be told to avoid duplication of messages.
- Give parents/guardians relevant and factual information.
- Set a room aside for distressed students to meet their parents/guardians.
- Provide support to parents who are on their own when they arrive at the school.
- Give telephone numbers for enquiries.

Children not directly involved:

- The parents of the other children in the school will be informed of the incident and that their child might be upset
- Communicate to these parents the facts of the incident without naming those involved

Inform students

Careful preparation is important when meeting students to inform them of a critical incident. Consideration should be given to the age of the pupils and the optimum group size. It is best to do it in class groups or sub-groups. The suitability of the 'messenger' should also be considered, remembering that it is generally thought that support is best given by an adult known to the child. Any outside 'expert' might help by assisting the people undertaking this task to prepare for it and by providing ongoing advice and support as they manage it. The nature of the event will clearly have an influence on how students are informed.

The key points/actions in the process are listed below:

- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours, which can cause unnecessary stress.
- Allow pupils to ask questions, tell their story and express feelings.
- Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident.

Make contact with the bereaved family *P/DP/*

Dealing with the media *P/DP*

Prepare a written statement to include:

- the facts about the incident
- what has been done already
- what is going to be done
- positive information or comments about the deceased person.

This statement may subsequently appear on the school's website

If asked to give a live interview: *P/Chairperson of BOM/KCETB*

- consider assigning the task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with the media
- take some time to prepare
- remember that everything you say is on record and, therefore, keep it simple, factual and brief
- decline if you are not ready or think it inappropriate.

Consider setting aside a room for the media. This may help to control their access to staff and students.

Brief staff and students and advise them on dealing with the media.

Organise the reunion of students with their parents, if necessary
Inform students that their parents/guardians will be collecting them as soon as possible.
Facilitate distressed students and their parents by providing a private room *Meeting Room where* they can meet following an incident. This could be a very emotional time.
Where appropriate offer help with transport, especially for younger children.

Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents

2. Medium -Term Actions (24 – 72 Hours)

Review the events of the first 24 hours

- Reconvene key staff/Critical Incident Team.
- Briefly check out how each person on this team is coping.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review staff meeting with all staff if necessary. Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments.
- Be sensitive as to how all staff are coping on a personal and professional level.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Update media, if necessary.

Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary

- Provide a suitable room
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students in order to clarify what has happened.
- Offer advice and reassurance. Inform them about support services and provide relevant handouts.
- 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 reintegration of students and staff (e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc.)
Name key person(s) to liaise with above on their return to school.

Plan visits to injured
Name key person(s) to visit home/hospital.

Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service *P/DP*
Designate staff member to liaise with 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.
Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service
Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.

School closure
The school may have to close depending on the circumstances

Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents

3. Longer -Term Actions

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

A referral to the HSE may be necessary. For example, if over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the HSE:

- 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.

Inform new staff of pupils affected by earlier Critical Incidents where appropriate

- Ensure that new staff are aware of this plan.
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.

Dealing with the aftermath of a Suicide or Suspected Suicide

The term 'suicide' should not be used until it has been "established categorically that the student's or teacher's death was as a result of suicide" (ASTI Guidelines 1997). The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead.
The following is a guide to how the school can support the bereaved family, school staff and students.

Family

- A staff member should contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family's wishes about how the death should be described.
- Acknowledge their grief and loss.
- Organise a home visit by two staff members.
- Consult with the family regarding the appropriate support from the school e.g. at the funeral service.

Staff

- Convene a staff meeting to brief staff on the above details. It may be necessary to do this in two shifts therefore ensuring staff are available for support to students and for cover at all times. Include auxiliary staff.
- Students need to be with people they know and trust. If possible, it is better if the teachers provide support for the students. The external "expert" visitor should therefore be primarily used to brief the teachers.
- Help teachers to prepare for breaking the news to students. Close friends and relatives of the deceased in the school need to be told first. This needs to be done in a private location.

- Outline the possible reactions.
- Identify high-risk students and what supports are available.
- Remind them of the school's critical incident plan.
- Decide on the strategy to deal with queries from parents/guardians. Prepare a letter setting out the facts, how the school is dealing with the events and how parents or guardians can support their child.
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made available for students/staff.
- Hold further staff briefings during the day to update information, to offer support and to further identify high-risk students.

Students

- Give the facts as they are known.
- Create a safe and supportive space for the students where they can share their reactions and feelings.
- Advise them on their possible reactions over the next few days.
- Avoid glorifying the victim and sensationalising the suicide.
- Advise the students of the support that is available to them.
- Take any talk of suicide seriously and provide support or refer on immediately.
- Students may wish to confide in and seek support from each other rather than adults. Facilitate this if appropriate and if it is possible. However, information should be provided about how to get further help if they, or their friends, should need it.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a vital part of the process of maintaining a viable critical Incident Strategy. Crisis management can only develop with analysis of past incidents, feedback in the light of past responses and systematic evaluation of all protocols in place.
Issues to be aware of in the light of effective evaluation include:

- The confidence of the Crisis Management Team in their roles in the event of an incident.
- Was internal communication effective between staff?
- Were all staff furnished with accurate facts and kept updated on a consistent basis?
- Was the overall communication strategy successful?
- Was information disseminated quickly to avoid speculation and rumour?
- Was there adequate and effective communication with the family involved?
- What lessons could be learned from an analysis of this strategy?
- Was feedback obtained from staff as to whether they felt sufficiently equipped to deal emotionally and physically with the incident?
- Was there sufficient guidance and support to individual teachers, staff and students?
- Were students adequately supervised during the Crisis Meeting?
- Was there sufficient Pastoral Care provided to deal with the incident?
- Was communication with the media effective?

- Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?
- Were external support agencies met with for feedback in the aftermath of the incident?
- Were all expenses incurred met and dealt with in a timely manner?
- What amendments need to be made to any further crisis management incidents in the light of the review of this incident?

Review

The Board of Management reserves the right to modify this Plan at short notice so as to facilitate an immediate response to an unforeseen event or circumstance where urgent action might be appropriate. This Plan will be reviewed by the Board of Management from time to time.

Implementation

This Critical Incident Plan replaces and supersedes the previous Plan.
This new Critical Incident Plan will apply from April 2025. ~~Elements of this plan will be included in each teacher's handbook.~~

APPENDIX 1

Summary Checklist for Principal – Short-term Actions

1. Gather the facts – Who? What? When? and Where?
2. Contact appropriate agencies
3. Convene the Critical Incident Team
4. Organise the supervision of students
5. Inform staff
6. Agree on a statement of the facts
7. Identify high-risk students
8. Appoint someone to deal with phone enquiries
9. Organise timetable for the day

    MAINTAIN THE NORMAL SCHOOL ROUTINE WHEN AT ALL POSSIBLE

10. Inform parents/guardians
11. Inform students
12. Make contact with the bereaved family
13. Organise support
14. Respond to the media.

Appendix 2 Summary checklist for "Incident level & actions: Day 1 & Day 2"

3 Levels of response

• Response Level 1: Death of a student, staff member who was terminally ill; death of a parent, sibling; fire or damage to school property

• Response Level 2: Sudden death of a student or staff member

• Response Level 3: Accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with high media profile; event that involves a number of schools

Response Level 1

Day 1

- Gather accurate information
- Gather relevant team members to discuss statement of facts and delegate roles
- Organise the routine that will be followed
- If necessary make room available
- Principal/Deputy Principal/Year Head will go to classrooms to get students if needed
- Consider siblings/other relatives in the school – contact parents
- Organise staff briefing – ensure staff acknowledge with students what has happened

Day 2

- Organise events around the funeral/service
- Principal/Deputy Principal to contact the family to offer the school choir (if during school term)
- Organise a representative group of students to attend the funeral/service in uniform.

Response Level 2

Day 1

- Gather accurate information
- Gather relevant team members to discuss statement of facts and delegate roles
- Contact appropriate agencies
- Organise the routine that will be followed
- Make room available and provide supervision for the room
- Principal/Deputy Principal/Year Head to assess who may be affected and make decisions about staying in school or going home
- Organise staff briefing – ensure staff acknowledge with students what has happened. Critical incident team to help with supervision cover at this time.

- If one-year group is affected they will be given reasonable time to process the information before following normal timetable. Students who feel they need time out will be directed to go to the room made available.
- Text to be sent to parents stating that the school is aware of the critical incident and is making dealing the issue appropriately.

Day 2

- Organise events around the funeral/service
- Principal/Deputy Principal to contact the family to offer the school choir (if during school term)
- Organise a representative group of students to attend the funeral/service in uniform.
- School will send flowers If the school does not open;
    - Contact bereaved family/ies to offer condolences and support
        - Offer the school choir for funeral/service
        - School will send flowers
    - Ask students to attend funeral/service in uniform
    - Students will form a guard of honour – class group of student involved
    - Students will be asked to travel to the funeral/service themselves and meet their class teacher and class group there to gather as a group.
- After funeral communicate with parents about the opening plan for the school
    - The intention being to get back to a normal timetable as quickly as possible

In the days/weeks following

- If a student had a set seat in the classroom, that seat to be left empty
- Year Head/Class Teacher to keep an eye on students in the weeks after the death
- Guidance Counsellor to make students aware that they can speak to her one-to-one
- Teachers to speak about the bereavement and acknowledge the loss to the school community
- In the case of a student's death, the Religion classes of the year group affected would organise a remembrance/memorial before the month's mind
- In the case of a student's death, contact with parents would be maintained, inviting them to visit the school when ready to collect the deceased's belongings. If this visit happens, the items made during remembrance/memorial will be presented to the parents
- If the deceased's family agree, the school community would be made aware of the month's mind arrangements

Response Level 3

Day 1

- Gather accurate information
- Establish facts
- Contact appropriate agencies as listed and in addition also contact the Parents Association
- Convene meeting of CIMT
- Contact other schools involved (if necessary)
- Convene meeting with staff group
- Put plans in action to suspend the school day
    - Text parents about closing the school
    - Provision made for those who can't go home/delayed being collected

- Room available for relatives of students affected
- End of day session for staff
- School management to make contact with affect families

Day 2

- Take each situation in context as to whether school opens, and the supports required
- Book of condolences set up in prominent place
- If the school does open it will operate as follows;
  - Contact bereaved family/ies to offer condolences and support
    - Offer the school choir for funeral/service
    - School will send flowers
  - The school will be open as a place for students, staff and parents to drop in to gather and talk
  - Communicate with parents by text to keep them informed (advise them to keep watch on Twitter for up-to-date information
  - Rooms and refreshments will be made available

If the school does not open;

  - Contact bereaved family/ies to offer condolences and support
    - Offer the school choir for funeral/service
    - School will send flowers
  - Ask students to attend funeral/service in uniform
  - Students will form a guard of honour – class group of student involved
  - Students will be asked to travel to the funeral/service themselves and meet their class teacher and class group there to gather as a group.

After funeral communicate with parents about the opening plan for the school

  - The intention being to get back to a normal timetable as quickly as possible

Medium Term Plan

- School reopens
- Timetable resumes
- Set up supervised room for 1-2 days where students can go if feeling upset
- Teachers will be asked to watch classes/year groups closely and refer on any students if they feel they need additional support
- The Month's Mind and Anniversary will be marked within the school
- The sad events will be mentioned and acknowledged at all school events.

APPENDIX 3

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

Please display this in the staff room and on the office notice board:

General Emergency Number	999/112
Garda	Urlingford: 056 8831133
Hospital	St. Lukes General, Kilkennny 056 7785000
Local GPs	Dr Eilish & Pat Maher 056 8831618/056 8831352
Chairperson of Board of Management	Cllr. Mary Hilda Cavanagh 0868157366
Clergy/Pastoral Care Presbytery	
School Inspector	01 8896553
State Examination Commission	
ETB/DES – Communications Unit Press Office	ETB 0567770966
NEPS	Ciara 0879677276
NEPS Main Office	01 8892700
HSE – Psychological Services Child & Adolescent Mental Health	
Local Counselling Services	
TUI	01 4922588

APPENDIX 4

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

Barnardos	
The Samaritans	1850 609090
Childline	1800 666666
Parentline	1890 927277
Aware	01-6766166
Rainbows	1890 303302 01 4734175

Pieta House (Suicide/Self Harm)

National Suicide Bereavement Support Network: 1850 24 1850 and http://www.nsbsn.org. This Irish website is for people bereaved by suicide and lists support groups.

Contact details for members of the Critical Incident Team

APPENDIX 5

SAMPLE TEACHER COMMUNICATION TEXT MESSAGE

STUDENT DEATH

DEAR STAFF,

IT IS WITH GREAT SORROW THAT I INFORM YOU OF THE DEATH OF ONE OF OUR STUDENT'S _____ IN CLASS _____, DUE TO A CAR ACCIDENT. THIS IS A HUGE LOSS FOR _____'S FAMILY, OUR SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY. THE SCHOOL'S CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM HAS MET TO PLAN OUR RESPONSE.

PRINCIPAL

APPENDIX 5

Sample Teacher Communication Text Message

Teacher Death

Dear Staff

It is with great sorrow that I inform you of the death of one of our teacher's _____due to a car accident. This is a huge loss for_____'s family, our school and the community. The School's Critical Incident Management Team has met to plan our response.

Principal

LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS VIOLENT DEATH DATE

APPENDIX 6

LETTER TO PARENTS (1) - Sample letter in the event of a tragedy

Dear Parents,
The school has experienced *(the sudden death, accidental injury)* of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by the death/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost
)
We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. *(Elaborate)*

It is possible that your child may have some feelings that he/she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and encouraging them to express their feelings. It is important to give them truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

If you would like advice or assistance you may contact the following people at the school. *(Details)*

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX 7

LETTER TO PARENTS (2) - Sample letter requesting consent for involvement of outside professional/s

Dear Parents,

Following the recent (tragedy, death of X) we have arranged professional support for students in school who need particular help. (X .....) is available to help us with this work. This support will usually consist of talking to children, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your son/daughter ..... has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with the psychologist. If you would like your child to receive this support please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by.....

If you would like further information on the above or to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip or telephone the school.

Yours sincerely,

.....

I/We consent to having our daughter/son met by a psychologist employed by the Minister for Education and Science.

I/We understand that my daughter/son may meet the psychologist(s) in an individual or group session depending on the arrangements which are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of student:

Class/Year:

Date of Birth:

I would like my daughter/son ..... to avail of the support being offered by the psychologist.

Signed.....(Parent/Guardian

Appendix 8

Sample Announcement to the Media – Student Death

My name is _____ and I am the Principal of Colaiste Mhuire, Johnstown. We learned this morning of the death of_____, a _____year student in our school. This is a terrible tragedy for_____'s family, our school and the wider community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathies, thoughts and prayers are with_____'s family and friends.

We have been in contact with her parents and they have requested that we respect their need for privacy at this very difficult time. Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school has implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan. Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) are supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time. The school staff has been helping students to deal with the death. The school has been open to parents and guardians to support them and offer advice and guidance. We would ask you to respect their privacy at this challenging time.

Thank You

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SCHEME

SPECTRUM LIFE

What is EAS?
Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is a 24/7 free and confidential support service designed to assist individuals in dealing more effectively with any personal or work-related problems they might be facing. Where appropriate, EAS provides up to 6 sessions of short-term, solution focused counselling and referral services, per issue, per year.
Spectrum Life

What kind of support does this service provide?
Spectrum offer access to a telephone helpline, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Staff can also reach the service through the wellbeing app/platform via a live chat function, and a request a call back function.
Therefore, they can respond to your needs at any time, no matter where you are.
Along with counselling, employees and their families can gain sign posting to support in areas such as:
- Legal Assistance
- Financial Assistance
- Consumer Advice
- Career Guidance
- Life Coaching
- Mediation
- Support for Non-Irish Nationals & their Families
- Health Advice, including Physio, Podiatrists and Dietitians.
- Advice on practical, day to day issues and service

Contact Details
The number is free phone and open 24/7.
The freephone number are: Teachers and Special Needs Assistants: 1800 411 057
All other ETB Staff: 1800 814 243. SMS and WhatsApp: Text 'Hi' to 087 369 0010
For more see Employee Assistance Service | Kilkenny & Carlow Education & Training Board (etb.ie) and the Tyndall College Information and Resources Team in the KCETB Employee Assistance Scheme Channel