

Critical Incident Management Policy.

Introduction:

Our school's policy on responding to a Critical Incident has been formulated by a sub-committee established by the Board of Management of S.N. Réalt na Mara. This sub-committee was made up of the Chairperson of the BoM, the Principal and Deputy Principal of S.N. Réalt na Mara, two parents and two further members of the Board of Management, This policy follows the guidelines laid out in the NEPS "Responding to Critical Incidents –NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools" (Sept. 2016) and previous publications from the Department of Education and Science -"Responding to Critical Incidents - Guidelines for Schools" (DES 2007) "Responding to Critical Incidents Resource Materials for Schools" (DES 2007)

Rationale:

S.N. Réalt na Mara aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of Management has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of our school's Plean Scoile (School Plan).

In devising a school policy on responding to a critical incident, all the parties involved in the education of pupils in S.N. Réalt na Mara - Board of Management, parents and teachers, recognise that at a time of crisis, proper and effective measures need to be put in place to support all members of our school community: pupils, parents, teachers, S.N.A., Board of Management members and members of the wider community who have links with the school.

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has been established to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School:

Our school aims: -

- (i) to provide a caring, learning environment, which facilitates the nurturing of each child's full potential
- (ii) to reflect a vision of life and a philosophy of education inspired by the gospel values.

In line with our school's ethos, we seek to uphold the dignity of each person. It is our aim that all children attending S.N. Réalt na Mara are treated with respect and that school is a safe and caring environment for every child. In S.N. Réalt na Mara, teachers, parents/guardians and the Board of Management are partners in children's education, with partnership between home and school being vital ingredients in the educational process. We all share the same objective - the well-being of the children in our care.

Aims of Critical Incident Management Policy (CIMP)

The aims of the CIMP are:

- to help school management and staff to react quickly and to ensure a proper and effective response to critical incident / crisis situations.

- to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff.
- Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

What is a Critical Incident?

"A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school".¹

Examples

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease
- Criminal Incidents (e.g. Dunblane/Newtown shootings)
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. Navan bus crash)
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (refugees may be traumatised by events that happened elsewhere)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster (e.g. school ceiling collapsing)
- Disappearance of student from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.

What happens if a Critical Incident were to occur during a school holiday period?

If a Critical Incident were to occur during a school holiday period, a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) would be called to determine the appropriate course of action. Advice may be sought for the National Educational Psychological Service.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school.

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.

- Members of Staff are familiar with the **Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures** and how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- SPHE programmes (Stay Safe, Walk Tall, Friends First Programme) are integrated in the curriculum in a broad based way and address issues in an age-appropriate manner such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and use and the misuse of alcohol and other drugs. Members of staff have access to training for their role in teaching the SPHE curriculum.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- The creation of a physically safe environment. The school has a Health and Safety statement. Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked, regular fire-drills occur.

¹ "Responding to Critical Incidents – NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools (2016)

- The provision of staff training and resources on issues affecting young people, (see Resources section of “*Responding to Critical Incidents –NEPS Guidelines and Resource Material for Schools*” - NEPS 2016).
- The creation of systems and procedures for the identification of students at risk, and for referral to school personnel for screening and support.
- The development of links with external agencies- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), HSE, An Garda Síochána, together with clear procedures for appropriate onward referral are in place for those with more serious difficulties.
- The provision of support for school staff members and clear information on how to access the Employee Assistance Service (Free phone 1800 411 057)
- 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. (ref. Section 7 of *Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools*)
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (Principal, Deputy Principal), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency

It is our school’s policy that if, following a critical incident, it is deemed to be in the children’s best interests, a psychologist or group of psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service may address a class group or small group of children. Such a decision will be made by the Critical Incidents Management Team in consultation with our school’s Board of Management and the National Educational Psychological Service Critical Incident Response Team.

No child will be seen individually by member/members of the National Educational Psychological Service without first obtaining written consent from the child’s parents /guardians.

Critical Incidents Management Team

- **Leadership Role:** Chairperson of B.O.M. - Fr. Michael Drumm & Principal - Ms. Dearbhla Gill;
- **Communication Role/ Media Liaison:** Chairperson of B.O.M. - Fr. Michael Drumm / Principal - Ms. Dearbhla Gill,
- **Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:** Principal Teacher & Deputy Principal
- **Chaplaincy Role:** School Chaplain: Fr. Michael Drumm, P.P.
- **Family Liaison Role:** Ms. Dearbhla Gill, Principal + Class Teacher where appropriate.
- **Parents' Association Liaison role:** Mrs Máiréad Clancy Murphy, Mr. Justin Lyons.
- **Community/Agency Liaison role:** Principal and Board of Management Representative: Mrs. Patsy McElhone
- **National Educational Psychological Services Rep:** Psychologist appointed to the School.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Team leader: Dearbhla Gill Principal,

Deputy Team leader: Deputy Principal.

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS;
- Liaises with the family/families concerned.
- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff liaison: Principal/Deputy Principal

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions and outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students.
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of the Employee Assistance Scheme and gives them the contact number. (1800 411 057)

Student liaison: Principal/Deputy Principal has overall responsibility but may delegate specific duties to members of the Teaching Staff

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Community/agency liaison- Principal and BoM representative.

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of:
 - Key parents, 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 these agencies.

Parent liaison: Principal;/ Deputy Principal

- Visits the affected family with the team leader and class teacher (where appropriate)
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

Media liaison: Fr. Michael Drumm, Chairperson, B.O.M. and Principal

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the HSE, An Garda Síochána; Túsla, relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up a press statement; give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

The Team Leader (Principal) and Deputy Team Leader (Deputy Principal) will ensure that there is:

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of:
 - Parents or guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services
- Ensure that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation

The Principal/Deputy Principal will ensure that:

- Letters and emails are prepared
- Photocopies of materials needed are prepared
- Records are maintained

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, material used etc. These records will be passed to the Team Leader/ Deputy Team Leader.

In the event of a Critical Incident event, a member of the school staff designated by the Principal/ Deputy Principal will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls

Ratification: This Policy was reviewed and ratified by the BoM of S.N. Réalt na Mara on 23rd May 2017.

Names of personnel on the Critical Incident Management team were updated in October 2017 following changes of membership to Board of Management.

The roles and membership of the Critical Incident Management team were reviewed and updated on 4th December 2019.

The roles and membership of the Critical Incident Management team were reviewed and updated on 11th March 2024.

Review: This policy will be reviewed in two years or sooner if the Board of Management deems it appropriate.

In the event of a *Critical Incident* that directly impacts on our school, our school's responses to such an event will be evaluated and our school's Critical Incident Management Policy and/or procedures for dealing with a critical incident may be amended in the light of such a review.

Action Plan

Short-Term Actions (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with families involved in incident
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service.
- Contact with families of the other children affected (option of in school support or withdrawal by family) - telephone numbers are filed under class group in small filing cabinet in Principal's Office
- Contact Teaching Staff and SNA (contact details in small filing cabinet)
- Ensure a quiet place can be made for pupils/staff
- Rooms will be made available as follows:
 - Prayer room: Computer Room
 - Individual Meetings: Learning Support Room
 - Parents' Room: School Hall
 - Staff Room
- **Media Briefing (0 - 24 hours)**
 - Designate a spokesperson. (Leader)
 - Prepare a brief statement. (Team)
 - Protect the family's privacy.
 - Gather accurate information.
 1. What happened, where and when?
 2. What is the extent of the injuries/fatalities?
 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. NEPS
 5. B.O.M.
 6. DES/Schools inspector
 - Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
 1. Organise a staff meeting, if appropriate.
 2. Organise timetable/routine for the day.(Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible).
 3. 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 Student Liaison person
 4. Arrange supervision of pupils
 - Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.

1. 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.
2. Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.(Principal + Class Teacher, Principal + Deputy Principal)
3. Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

Medium-Term Actions (24-72 Hours)

- Preparation of pupils/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of pupils/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of pupils/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, book of condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school.
- Review the events of first 24 hours.
 1. Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team. (8.30 a.m.)
 2. Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/pupils/staff.
 3. Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
 4. Have reviews -Critical Incident Management Team meeting. (3.00 p.m.)
 5. Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Arrange support for individual pupils, groups of pupils, and parents, if necessary.
 1. Hold support/information meeting for parents/pupils, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened.
 2. Teacher for each age group to talk separately to own class group (content of message/talk to be age appropriate and modified) certain things they don't need to know.
 3. Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out.
 4. Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings: (with parental permission (permission slips to be included in enrolment forms)
- Plan for the re-integration of pupils / staff e.g., absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc.)
 1. Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
 2. Plan Visits to injured.
 3. Family Liaison person + Class teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital.
 4. Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service(to be decided).
 5. Decide this in accordance with parents wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends. School closure
 6. Request a decision on this form school management.

Longer Term Actions

- Monitor Pupils 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 Health Board
 1. Uncharacteristic behaviour
 2. Deterioration in academic performance
 3. Physical symptoms - e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
 4. Inappropriate emotional reactions
 5. Increased absenteeism.
- Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately
 1. What went well?
 2. Where were the gaps?
 3. What was most/least helpful?
 4. Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
 5. Is there any unfinished business?
- Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future.
- Consult with NEPS psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate.
 1. Ensure that new staff is aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.
 2. Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
 3. When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, it would be useful to brief the Principal of the new school.
- Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries. (Be sensitive to special days and events)
 1. Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in pupils/staff and they may need additional support at this time.
 2. Acknowledge the anniversary with the family.
 3. Be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.
- Plan a school memorial service e.g. plant tree (closure)
- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parents' wishes?
- Update and amend school records.

Resources

- “Responding to Critical Incidents NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools” (2016)
- "Responding to Critical Incidents -“Guidelines for Schools" DES 2007
- "Responding to Critical Incidents - Resource Materials for Schools" DES 2007
- "When Tragedy Strikes" – INTO.