



Critical Incident Policy and Plan

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Introduction

Saint Joseph's Community College seeks to create an inclusive school community where values, attitudes and behaviours consistent with its ethos are fostered. In partnership with parents and the wider community, it respects individual self-worth and aims to provide a safe environment in which each student may achieve his/her full potential.

Background

'The key to managing critical incidents is forward planning. Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools outlines how schools can plan for crises and also considers preventative approaches that schools should adopt in creating a safe and supportive environment.' (Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines and resource materials for Schools, 2016)

This policy was completed with reference to

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools, NEPS, 2007
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2007

Issues the school needs to address

- Creation of a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school
- Defining a critical incident
- Creation of a critical incident management team
- Development and communication of the plan
- Administrative Tasks

Initiate and Establish Structures

The school will establish a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) which will take responsibility for developing a policy and putting a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) in place.

Saint Joseph's Community College aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The school has developed a Critical Incident Management Plan as one element of the school's policies and plans.

Our aim is to establish a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the Critical Incident Management Plan.

Review and Research

The CIMT will consult resource documents available to schools. These include the following:

- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016)

- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)

Definition of a Critical Incident

For the purposes of this policy a critical incident is defined as any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school e.g.

- The death of a member of the school community.
- A serious accident involving pupils or staff.
- A traumatic event involving the school, e.g. fire, disappearance of a member of the school community, etc.
- Serious accident or tragedy in the wider community

Initial assessment of the incident

STEP 1 What type of response is needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.
STEP 2 Should a psychologist be involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider the nature of the event and how your school is coping. What support do you need from NEPS and/or other agencies?
STEP 3 How do I assess the needs of the school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there a feeling of being overwhelmed by this event?• Has there been a previous incident? How recent? What kind of incident? If more than one, how many? (If the school has experienced a recent incident or a number of incidents staff may be exhausted or distressed. On the other hand, they may feel more experienced and better able to deal with the situation).• Is there a critical incident plan/team in place?• Is there a good pastoral care system in the school?• Is there significant media interest in the incident?• Are other agencies already involved?
STEP 4 What action do I take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For an incident requiring a Level 1 response it may be sufficient to talk to the psychologist on the phone. Locate your Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools (2016). The psychologist will refer to these and talk you through relevant sections. A copy of these has been made available to all schools. It is also available on www.education.ie by following the links to NEPS.• In the case of an incident requiring a Level 2 & Level 3 response, make contact with NEPS. Depending on the incident at least one psychologist will visit the school.

Aim of the Plan

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, 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 impact on students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Available programmes and resources

Saint Joseph's Community College aims 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. It is intended that measures such as these will assist in prevention of critical incidents, build resilience in the school community and strengthen coping skills.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as; coping with loss, communication skills, use and abuse of social media, conflict management, anger management, help seeking, bullying, decision-making, and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of emotional health is an integral part of this provision. Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- Wellbeing as part of the Junior Cycle curriculum.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies which include:
 - Túsla
 - HSE
 - CAMHS
 - NEPS
- NCSE Interactions with external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content and the expertise of the providers.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a pastoral care system in place in the school. This team meets weekly to discuss vulnerable students and measures are enacted to address the issues presented. HSCL works with the Pastoral Care Team.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. Year Head, SEN teacher, Guidance Counsellor or Home School Community Liaison Officer). Concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided.
- Where a student is deemed to be at risk, Parents/Guardians are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.
- Positive Mental Health Week and various other initiatives are held regularly throughout the year.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

The Critical Incident Management Team includes:

- The Principal
- The Deputy Principal
- Assistant Principals
- Guidance Counsellor
- Home School Liaison Officer

This team will meet at least once in each school year and also when the need arises, e.g. during the time period surrounding a critical incident. The school Secretary will maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers for:

- Staff
- Parents/guardians of students
- Emergency support services

Copies will be kept in the Secretary's office and Principal's office.

CIMT Key Roles

Team Leader	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC; ETB • Coordinates the tasks of the team • Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared. • Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting <p><i>The Deputy Principal will take the lead in the absence of team leader, followed by AP1's in order of seniority and AP2's in order of seniority.</i></p>
Garda Liaison	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaises with the Gardaí • Liaises with the bereaved family
Staff Liaison	Deputy Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day • Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students • Provides materials for staff (from 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 EAS and gives them the contact number

Student Liaison	AP1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate information from teachers and school staff about students they are concerned about • Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately) • Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder) • Maintains student contact records (R1) • Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.
Parent/ guardian liaison	HSCL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits the bereaved family with the team leader • Arranges meetings, if held • May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers' sessions • Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy • Ensures that sample letters are prepared and available on the school's IT system ready for adaptation • 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).

Community liaison	AP1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council • 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 • Reminds agency staff to wear name badges • Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.
Media liaison	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 SEC, relevant teacher unions etc. • Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

Administrator	Secretary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/guardians • Teachers • Emergency services • Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response • Ensures that templates are available on the schools IT system and ready for adaptation • Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts • Photocopies materials as needed • Maintains records.
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For the 2023/ 2024 academic year:

Team Leader	John Bones
Garda Liaison	John Bones
Staff Liaison	Stacey McDermott
Student Liaison	Brendan Prendergast
Parent/ guardian liaison	Teresa Coleman
Community liaison	Lorraine O'Reilly
Media liaison	John Bones
Administrator	Breeda Oliver

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters, emails and texts sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, the material used, etc. The school secretary 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 name of school have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do so also. For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is confirmed information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

Critical incident rooms

In the event of a critical incident,

Room	Purpose
Staff room	Will be the main room used to meet the staff
Hall	For meetings with students
HSCL/ Guidance Counsellor's office	For parents
Principal's office	For media
SENCO room	For individual sessions with students
Meeting room	For other visitors

Short Term Actions

Task	Name
Gather accurate information	Team, Garda, secretary
Convene a CIMT meeting	Team
Contact external agencies	Team, Garda
Arrange supervision of students	Garda
Organise staff meeting	Staff liaison
Agree on schedule for day	All staff
Inform students	AP1
Compile list of vulnerable students	P/ DP/ relevant AP1
Contact/ visit the bereaved family	Team
Prepare and agree on media statement and deal with media	CIMT
Inform parents/ guardians	Team
Hold end of day staff meeting	Team

Medium Term Actions

Task	Name
Convene CIMT meeting to review events of the day	Principal
Meet external agencies	CIMT
Meet whole staff	CIMT
Arrange support for students, staff, parents/guardians	AP1, HSCL
Visit the injured	Principal, Deputy, AP1
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	HSCL
Agree attendance and participation at funeral service	AP1
Make decisions about school closure	John Bones and Director of Schools

Follow-up beyond 72 hours

Task	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class Teachers/ Year Heads
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Principal
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	AP1
Plan for giving of “memory box” to bereaved family	HSCL
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	Staff/ BOM
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/ BOM

Emergency Contact List

Agency	Contact Number
Ballina Garda Station/ district contact	(096) 20560
Emergency services	999
Túsla	(094) 90 49137
NEPS Psychologist	(01) 8650765
Fr Tommy Johnston	(094) 92 54315
State Examinations Commission	090 644 2700
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057
MSLETB Head Office	(094) 90 24188

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and 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 a personal copy of the plan.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by John Bones.

The plan will be updated annually by the CIMT and BOM and updated where necessary.

Implementation

The date from which the Policy will apply is 28th May 2024, which is the date of adoption by the Board of Management, Saint Joseph's Community College.

Signed: _____

Bina Munnelly
Chairperson of BOM

Signed: _____

John Bones
Secretary of BOM

Date: _____

Date: _____