

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Introduction

In Enable Ireland Sandymount School, we strive to create a vibrant welcoming school community in which every student feels a sense of belonging. Our aim is to protect the well-being of our students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. We have a number of measures in place to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school as per our mission statement. The school also has a number of policies and procedures in place that support the physical and psychological safety of staff and students, both in the day to day activities of the school and in the event of a critical incident. Please see Appendix 1 for relevant policies.

The Critical Incident Plan is specific to Enable Ireland Sandymount School, however all members of the school community are encouraged to consult the NEPS document RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS Resource Guide 2016 in the event of a critical Incident at our school.

<https://assets.gov.ie/40700/21b5193521d147c890b4309fe4bfce9d.pdf>

Aims and objectives of the Critical Incident Policy

A modern school, by its very nature, experiences many crises in the course of a school year. Thankfully, most of these are minor and can be dealt with adequately by the school staff following school policies and structures. However, occasionally, an incident occurs, which is termed **critical** and which cannot be dealt with in the normal way. All partners in the school community- management, staff, students, parents and members of the wider community, are likely to be seriously affected by it. Such a crisis must be managed in order to provide a sense of continuity and order, while at the same time providing maximum care for all affected parties. This policy offers guidelines- all of which might or might not be followed, as each different crisis will demand a different set of responses.

The aim of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable them to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. It helps ensure that the effects on our students and staff will be limited and enable the school to return to normality as soon as possible.

What is a Critical Incident?

For the purpose of this document, a **critical incident** is defined as a serious event or series of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and which is outside the normal scope of the school's pastoral/social/psychological system. There is no set list of what might be termed a **critical incident**, but any list would include the following:

- The sudden death of a member of the school community-student or staff member
- A serious accident involving students or staff
- A traumatic event involving the school
- A serious accident or tragedy in the wider community
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- Serious/fatal accident during a school trip



- Serious damage to the school buildings through fire, flood, vandalism etc
- Serious emergency on the school premises
- Medical emergencies
- Natural disasters: flood, storms, ice weather
- Potentially violent situations (unauthorized/suspicious person/intruder)
- Serious violence or threat of violence to a member of the school community, either within or outside school
- Abusive or violent parent/guardian
- Bomb threat
- Pandemic flu or other pandemic episodes
- Gas leak

The staff and management recognise a critical incident to be any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school. Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, their family members or members of the local community. Some crises will have deeper and more long lasting effects than others. For that purpose some identified incidents which affect schools are listed below and categorized in different levels according to how critical they are and to the type of response they require.

Level 3

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, permanent injury, terminal illness, murder or suicide.
- Serious injury or death of a person on the school premises.
- A physical assault on staff member(s) or student(s) on the school premises.

Level 2

- Criminal incident occurring during school time.
- Road traffic accident/Bus crash with no casualties.
- Onset of serious illnesses causing distress or trauma.
- Serious damages to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.

Level 1

- Intrusion into the school or criminal incident outside the school hours.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.

Creation of a Coping Supportive and Caring Ethos in the School

Sandymount School Enable Ireland (SSEI) has put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students through our SPHE/RSE programmes, 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

In the area of physical safety the school has put in place the following:

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked in-line with current safety regulations
- Secure doors accessed by fob only during school hours
- General school rules under the school's behaviour policy to ensure all pupils have a safe environment.

Psychological safety

The school also uses 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)

- It is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by including issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- Staff complete a child protection course each year. Through their training, they are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school student are available
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies e.g. HSE/ NEPS
- 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
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member. 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
- Staff are informed about how to access support themselves.



Management of Incident

In the event of a critical incident occurring, the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) is convened to plan and implement an appropriate response. The members of the team meet annually to review and update the policy and plan.

Sandymount School is co-located with Enable Ireland therapeutic services and therefore the CIMT should link closely with the Enable Ireland CIMT.

Our **Critical Incident Management Team** for the academic year 2022/2023 is as follows:

Principal	Jennifer Doyle	Team Leader Garda Contact Media Contact
Deputy principal	Emily Mc Learie	Staff Liaison Parent Liaison
Assistant Principal	Julio Berrincha	Student Liaison
School Secretary	Janice Pettigrew	Handle enquiries and maintain contacts list
CDNT 1 Psychologist	Dr. Moira Kennedy	Student Liaison Family Liaison
CDNT 1 Social Worker		Student Liaison Family Liaison
Parents Association Rep	Catherine Rossiter	

1. Key administrative tasks in planning for a Critical Incident

1.1. Maintaining an up-to-date list of contact numbers

- Members of staff
- Parents/ guardians
- Emergency support services

An up-to-date list of contact numbers is maintained and regularly updated with numbers for students, parents/guardians, staff and emergency support services.

These lists are kept on the school database.

1.2. Compiling emergency information for school trips which should include:

The class teacher organising a trip out of school is responsible for compiling the lists below and ensuring that a copy of all lists is with the group on the outing and at school reception.

- List of students/members of staff involved and teacher in charge
- List of mobile phone numbers for accompanying teacher(s)
- Up-to-date medical information on pupils with allergies, epilepsy, etc
- Up-to-date contact numbers for parents and guardians



Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents

Please see responding to critical Incidents NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools.

Maintaining administration and services such as:

- Telephone (ensure that a line is free for outgoing and important incoming calls)
- Rooms for debriefing, parents, quiet room, counselling, etc
- Log of events, letters to parents, telephone calls made and received normally done by the Secretary
- Dealing with normal school hours

Dealing with the media

When dealing with the media the following points should be adhered to:

- Seek permission from the family/families involved must be sought
- Inform family of any proposed press release
- Tell them what you are going to say, when and how

The public statement which should be a written statement includes:

- The facts about the incident
- What has been done already
- What is going to be done
- Positive information or comments about the deceased person

The CIMT may consult with the public relations department of Enable Ireland before publication of any press releases.

Some points to remember if you are asked to give a live interview:

- Consider assigning the task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with the media.
- Take the time to prepare the interview by asking in advance for an outline of the questions you will be asked
- Remember that everything you say is on record and therefore keep it simple, factual and brief
- Decline it if you feel it inappropriate or you are not ready for it
- Avoid sweeping statements and generalizations
- Avoid being drawn into speculation
- Seek guidance from INTO, NABMSE, Enable Ireland or other body for advice and guidance
- Do not answer questions you do not know the answer to
- Do not use “No comment”
- Do not read the statement to the camera
- Remember to control access of the media to students and staff
- Consider letting the media inside the school and if yes, set aside a room
- Brief staff and all members of staff and advise them on how to deal with the media and insist that all queries should be referred to the Principal

All staff members should be made aware of the Critical Incident Policy and of the procedures to follow. A plan for evacuation of the school building should be included. All staff members



and students should know what to do, where to go and what they should take with them. This plan adheres to the Fire Evacuation Procedures in the Health and Safety Statement.

The Critical Incident Policy should be made accessible to the personnel involved into putting this policy in action, i.e. the Critical Management Team, the school Secretary, etc. All members of staff who are new or temporary are required to familiarise themselves with this Policy, which is available on the school website but also in hardcopy in the Staffroom and the Secretary's office. The Principal and the Assistant Principal also have a copy.

2. Action plan

2.1 SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

2.1.1 Leadership Role

On notification of a critical incident, the Principal will convene the Critical Incident Management Team to carry out the following:

Gather the facts. It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident:

- a) What happened, where and when?
 - b) What is the extent of the injuries?
 - c) How many are involved and what are their names?
 - d) Is there a risk of further injury?
- Confirm the event
 - Ascertain that each members of the CIMT knows his/her responsibilities for this specific incident
 - Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
 - Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions
 - Organise the routine/timetables for the day
 - Arrange supervision of students
 - Organise a staff meeting, if appropriate
 - Make contact with family. Decide if this is done by phone or in person and ascertain what they wish to communicate
 - Express sympathy to family with the help of a Chaplain, if necessary, and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school involvement in funeral/memorial services
 - Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate (Student Liaison Officer and class teacher)
 - Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths
 - Clarify facts surrounding event
 - Make contact with other relevant agencies:
 - Emergency services
 - Medical services
 - Enable Ireland
 - H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
 - NEPS
 - BOM



- Dept of Education/Schools Inspector
- Depending on whether the incident is Level 1, 2 or 3, activate the procedure to follow and decide on how the news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, parents, wider community)
- Appoint the school secretary to deal with phone enquiries
- Agree on statement of the facts with CIMT in a written version
- Address the media with the public statement from the CMIT (either outside or inside the school in the designated room)

Adhere to the normal school routine if at all possible

2.1.2 Communication Role

Intervention check-List

- Address the media with a pre-statement (either outside or inside the school in the designated room)
- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Protect the family's privacy or seek permission from parents/guardians to divulge any information
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Ascertain that all the contact numbers are properly disseminated to all the relevant parties
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies
- Organise rooms for debriefing, parents, quiet room, counselling, etc
- Inform students by giving them facts and avoiding speculation. The level of the incident will influence how the students are informed
- Dispel rumours
- Ensure that any absent staff members are kept informed

2.1.3 Student Liaison/ Counselling Role

Intervention check-list

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide further information
- Refer to counselling service
- Make students/staff aware of quiet room
- Ensure that all class teachers are taking notes of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends, etc or any other relevant information.
- Allow students to ask questions, tell their story and express their feelings
- Help students realize that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident



2.1.4 Family Liaison Role

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school and support from the school in e.g. funeral service
- Liaise with family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service if appropriate
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident
- Make the parents aware of quiet room
- Seek the services of an interpreter/person who can help if the parents/guardians concerned have limited English

2.2 MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

2.2.1 Leadership Role

Intervention check-list

- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Have a review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with the involvement in support meetings a choice of opting out
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group, debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Request a decision from school management re school closure (if appropriate)

Adhere to the normal school routine if at all possible

2.2.2 Communication Role

Intervention check-List

- Facilitate students/staff members in responding with sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc
- Establish contact with absent members of staff/students

2.2.3 Student Liaison/ Counselling Role

- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/members of staff
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives, etc
- Preparation of students/members of staff attending the funeral



- Facilitate students/members of staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family

2.2.4 Family Liaison Role

Intervention check-list

- Liaise with the Student Liaison with regards to re-integration of students and staff
- Plan the visit to the injured. Family Liaison person, class teacher and principal to visit home/hospital. Decision to be made in accordance with parents'/guardians' wishes
- Plan attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service. Decision will be made in accordance with parents'/guardians' wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends

2.3 POST-INTERVENTION ACTIONS

2.3.1 Leadership Role

Post-Intervention check-list

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

2.3.2 Communication Role

Post-intervention check-List

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

2.3.3 Student Liaison/ Counselling Role

Post-intervention check-list

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

2.3.4 Family Liaison Role

Intervention check-list

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

2.4 LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress



If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from external agencies. Constant communication with family is essential.

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

Contact number for Enable Ireland Sandymount School (in the event of a critical incident)
01-2615907

In the event of a critical incident, the Principal and Deputy Principal should be notified immediately.



Key Responsibilities of Each Role

Team Leader

- Alert the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Co-ordinate the tasks of the team
- Liaise with the Board of Management; Dept of Education; NEPS;SEC;IPPN /NAMBSE
- Liaise with bereaved family if applicable
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinate the involvement of these agencies
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges if applicable
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies

The Deputy Principal (Staff Liaison) will assume this role in the absence of the Team Leader.

Staff Liaison

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions and outline the routine for the day
- Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provide materials for staff if applicable
- Keep records of students seen by external agency staff
- Look after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed and if applicable

Parent Liaison

- Visit the bereaved family with the team leader if applicable
- Arrange parent meetings if held - Facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Set up room for meetings with parents
- Meet with individual parents
- Maintain a record of parents seen
- Manage the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensure that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Provide appropriate materials for parents

Media Liaison

- In advance of an incident, the media liaison 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, the media liaison will liaise where necessary with relevant teacher unions etc
- The media liaison will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)



Administrator

- Maintain up to date lists of contact numbers –parents or guardians, teachers, members of the Parents Association, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to
- Ensure that templates are on the school’s system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepare and send out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc. The school secretary (administrator) will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc., as noted above.

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

Management and staff 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 if applicable. 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 solid 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:

- The Staff Room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- The GP area for meetings with students
- Class 8/library for parents and other visitors

Review

It is important to review this policy in light of experience. Also to keep in touch with other schools and professionals and to keep up date with accepted best practice.

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

In the event of a critical incident, the Principal and Deputy Principal should be notified immediately.



APPENDIX 1

Death of student- Protocol & Checklist ISM team

- Inform staff/parents/BOM/nursing team/ EI staff
- Arrange memorial table (photo/poster message/candle/flowers)
- Arrange book of condolences
- Arrange NEPS/EI psychology team visit/support/resources staff & students
- Organise /decide how students will be informed (if applicable/ social or sensory story/ via parents)
- Email staff with details of support/arrangements/resources
- Check if parents would like staff to visit them and school involvement in funeral
- Organise subcover /plan staffing for day of funeral
- Organise memorial assembly for a few weeks later

Review and Ratification

This policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management.

Signed:



Sé Goulding, Chairperson of Board of Management



Jennifer Doyle, Principal

Date: 30 March 2023

