



Christian Brothers College Cork
CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE POLICY

18 September 2023

Review Procedure.

The policy will be reviewed in the light of experience. The review team will comprise the Principal and Student Support Team.

SCOPE

This policy refers to the whole College and provides a detailed explanation of the means by which the College will respond in the event of a critical incident.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Management

1. To ensure that the policy is developed and evaluated from time to time.
2. To approve the policy.
3. To consider reports from the Principal on the implementation of the policy.

Principal and Critical Incident Response Team

(The Critical Incident Response Team consists of the Principal and/or designated Deputy Principal(s), College Chaplain, Nominee of Student Support Team, Representative of Guidance Department, Relevant Year Head. Other members may be co-opted onto the team by the Principal.)

1. To provide the immediate response in the event of a critical incident occurring (see Appendix 1).
2. To monitor the implementation of the policy.

Teachers and Ancillary Employees

1. To be familiar with the policy.
2. To support each other and the Student Support Team.

Parents and Students

Are encouraged to be aware of and to support the school policy.

RATIONALE

It is imperative that the school has a policy in place to deal with a critical incident. This needs to be in place prior to such an incident occurring. A critical incident can be described as:

1. The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide;
2. An accident involving students or employees on or off school premises;
3. A physical attack involving students or employees or intrusion into the school;
4. Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.;
5. Disappearance of a member of the school community;
6. Accident or tragedy in the wider community.

GOALS

1. To outline a policy for dealing with critical incidents in the context of the school.
2. To provide clear information for all in the school community on the procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident.
3. To provide a range of supports for all in the school community to call upon in a time of crisis.
4. To indicate possible measures that may lead to avoiding such critical incidents.

POLICY CONTENT

1. Establish the Facts

It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. Therefore, it is important that management and relevant employees gather to establish the facts – this may involve contacting others such as hospitals, Gardaí, parents.

2. Immediate Response

This group will need to agree an immediate plan of action, which may involve:

- Informing students and employees;
- Contacting parents;
- Visiting the home of the bereaved – Principal, Year Head, Class Teacher;
- Organising a school assembly;
- Involving the Student Support Team, Chaplain, etc.;
- Alerting outside agencies such as NEPS, HSE, etc.;
- Reporting to the HSA using forms IR1/IR3 within three calendar days.
- Keeping records for 10 yrs. after the incident.
- Agreeing a common statement with regard to the crisis. The statement should seek to:
 - o Be communicated in a sensitive manner;
 - o Give the facts as they are known;
 - o Highlight the support that will be available;
 - o Indicate the actions that are planned;
- Assigning tasks within the group.

3. Inform

It is vital that all those needing information receive it as soon as is practicable. A common statement will be agreed prior to informing the school community. Such a statement will reduce the spread of rumour. Employees will be alerted or informed in the first instance. We will endeavour to tell the students at the same time in their normal classes.

In the case of a suspected suicide, great care will be taken not to use the term “suicide” until it has been established categorically that the student’s death was a result of suicide. In this instance, the terms “tragic” or “sudden death” will be used. (Appendix B)

In the case where an accident has occurred on a school trip, a similar statement is needed to assist those who will be telephoning relatives. Relevant employees will be involved so that all concerned are informed in or around the same time. In contacting parents, we will:

- Offer any practical help needed – transport, phone numbers, contact names;
- Enquire if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support;

- Carefully review with the parent that the information given has been fully understood;
- Alert all other involved parents to the trauma, as this will help them when they subsequently make contact with their child.
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4. Liaising with the Press

The Principal or an employee member designated by him will deal with all correspondence with the press. In preparing a press statement, the following suggestions will be taken into account:

- Priority will be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis;
- Names, addresses and telephone numbers will not be released;
- There will be a reliance on facts and avoidance of speculation;
- Likely questions will be considered and a response to them will be considered;
- A time for briefings will be agreed with the press if this is necessary in an ongoing situation;
- A specific location for press briefings will be nominated.

This Press Statement will be simple and brief. It will express the sorrow of the entire school community at the sudden death of one of their members and it will extend sympathy to the bereaved family. This statement will be adhered to – and not elaborated on – in all communications with the media and it will be familiar to every member of the school employees. A copy of this statement will be put on the notice board in the Employees room.

5. Key Stakeholders to be informed

The Principal will inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management and they will decide whether an emergency meeting of the Board is necessary.

Whether the school will remain open or will close as a mark of respect to the bereaved family will depend on the decision taken by management following consultation with the school employees. If the decision is to close the school, this will only happen after informing the students and employees of the death and of the routine which the school will follow over the coming days. Parents will be notified of the school closure.

6. Short-term Action

The action that is needed in the short-term will obviously be very dependent on the nature of the crisis. Actions will come under a number of headings:

- i. Students
- ii. Employees
- iii. Parents

i. Students

The Principal or a designated employee's member will inform the student body at the earliest possible opportunity. He / she will begin with the deceased student's class or classes. He / she will spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to the news of the death. A member of the Student Support Team or another appropriate person such as the Guidance Counsellor, Year Head or Chaplain will accompany the Principal / designated employees member and remain with the class after his / her departure. In addressing the class, the Principal / designated employees member will inform students of their friend's sudden death and advise that it is an event with which everyone – students and teachers – will find it difficult to cope with. He / she should also explain the routine for the day, the following days, and the arrangements, which will be available for students to see the Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain and other support services.

Efforts will be made to sustain an atmosphere where it is "okay" to talk about the experience. This may cause problems for some teachers. The Student Support Team will be available in a support role. Care will be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.

The most essential quality in adults needed by students is that of listening. The school will put in place a support system for students in this regard.

Parents will be able to contact the school if they need or have information that will help the school in any way in caring for their child.

The involvement of students in any funeral or other services will be encouraged. This requires invitation, planning and review. The families involved will be consulted, the students will be invited to take part and time will be given to prepare. **At all times the rights of the deceased family to privacy must be respected.**

The students may wish to organise some service or ritual within the confines of the school. They will be consulted as to the nature of such a service, where appropriate.

Attention will be given to the possible signs of distress being exhibited by students. In noticing possible signs, it is important to say that these are not necessarily indicative of stress in relation to a trauma. Rather they are merely prompts to employees as they "watch out" for the students in their care. Such signs will be related to uncharacteristic behaviour, for example, being unusually quiet, unusually boisterous, etc. It is important that employees check out signs with others before drawing conclusions.

Sensitivity should be used whilst encouraging students to discuss their feelings and reactions to a crisis.

Freedom to be upset is important for anyone responding to a trauma. The various resources needed will be put in place in order that adequate attention will be given to those concerned. This will involve the following: appropriate employees members will be released from their normal duties; individual rooms will be provided for support and / or counselling.

Students not directly involved with the trauma will also be monitored as some may be affected. Allowing students to express their sympathy can be a catalyst for such students – writing a card, attending a service, etc.

Constant reminders will be given in relation to the supports that are available within the school. We know that students react in different ways and at different times in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

Students will be encouraged to spend time with friends as this offers peer support. Often the bereaved student may not wish to speak to an adult and may rely heavily on friends. These close friends may need support as they attempt to find ways to be of help.

ii. Employees

Many employees, following a trauma, may need to air their feelings and reactions. An employee meeting will be held after which the following options may be considered: inviting in professional help; an employee prayer service; a simple confidential questionnaire to determine the needs of the employees.

Care will be taken of those employees directly involved with the trauma that they receive support, are not overworked, and have time to de-brief.

Employees who feel for whatever reason, that they are unable to be involved in the school's direct response to the trauma will be able to opt out readily.

Those employees having any concerns about students or others in relation to the trauma will have easy access to personnel who could assist them.

The Student Support Team will be the key resource in the short and medium term response. They will be facilitated, resourced and supported in their task. They will regularly meet with the Principal in reviewing progress. This group will liaise with, and support, the other members of employees.

The Principal and the Student Support Team will also need to ensure they are receiving support. The weight of responsibility surrounding a crisis may be enormous. The Principal and Student Support Team need to take care of their own well-being and should seek whatever support is appropriate within and outside the school community.

iii. Parents

The school will have a role to play in supporting parents concerned with a trauma. This will vary depending on the nature of the crisis and the resources available to the school.

The Student Support Team, in consultation with management, will decide who liaises with parents.

The Student Support Team will inform the Parents' Council and involved parents of actions being taken by the school and will suggest appropriate agencies for parents to contact.

7. Funeral Services

It is essential to consult the family concerned and then to decide what form of representation is appropriate.

Students will be prepared ahead of the funeral. For some this may be the first occasion they have been exposed to a major grief.

The Year Head may assist students who wish to write a personal message of sympathy.

Floral tributes will be sent by the school with a hand-written message.

The Principal and a member of the Student Support Team will visit the home of the bereaved. If students request to visit the home a designated member of the Student Support Team will phone ahead to check that this is appropriate. Visiting the bereaved may be distressing and support will be available for those involved.

8. Medium and Long-term Action

- i. Students returning to school after a major accident or bereavement cannot be easily categorised in terms of their needs.
- ii. The Student Support Team will support each affected student's individual needs as appropriate.
- iii. Care will be taken in monitoring their relationships with peers and teachers; falling behind in academic and other work; involvement in extra-curricular activities.
- iv. Consideration will be given to a special day of reflection / retreat, which could benefit the class affected by a tragedy.
- v. The Rainbows Programme may be offered to students. Such groups will be a resource to the school in responding to the medium to long-term needs of young people and adults in the school community most affected by a tragedy.
- vi. The Student Support Team will constantly review the needs of the students, employees and parents in relation to issues of trauma.
- vii. The Student Support Team, in co-operation with the Principal, will constantly review curricular provision, specialist employees training and links with outside agencies in the area of change, loss, death and crisis issues.
- viii. When a subsequent bereavement occurs in the school setting, care will be taken to support those who were bereaved previously as this subsequent trauma may trigger deep emotional reactions.
- ix. The school will consider holding an annual remembrance service for all those connected to the school community who have died. Students, employees and parents can be encouraged to record the names of those they would like remembered.
- x. The school may consider the dedication of a tree, special garden, piece of artwork, notice board to recall those that have died.
- xi. In-service for teachers and employees to help them explore death, dying and grief with students.

9. Conclusion:

It is hoped that this policy will be of support in the event of a tragedy occurring in our school community. It is important to note, however, that this policy cannot replace the most vital qualities needed in dealing with such personal issues as suicide, bereavement and loss – the sensitivity, care and compassion we offer to one another and our students on a daily basis.

Signed Laurence Ash Date 18/9/23

Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed Paul Loda Date 18/9/23

Principal/Secretary to the Board of Management

APPENDIX A

Checklist for Consideration by Principal and Student Support Team

The following is a checklist of things to consider on the morning of a tragedy. They are not written in order of what must come first, etc. It is important for the Principal / Student Support Team to take time to plan what they must do and what is appropriate to say to all concerned.

- Take time to let the news sink in.
- Call a meeting of the Student Support Team; include Year Head and Class Teacher of deceased member of school community.
- Put together as much information as possible.
- Inform employees what has happened.
- Discuss school routine for the first day with the employees.
- Identify particular students who may need to be told individually, e.g. close friends, relatives etc.
- Inform the students that a member of the school community has tragically died and explain that this is something everyone will find difficult to cope with. Explain what the school routine will be for the day and what support and back up will be for the students.
- Contact the Health Services executive (HSE) and National Educational Psychologists Service (NEPS).
- Contact the HAS and fill in forms IR1/IR3 within three calendar days. Records must be kept for 10 years.
- Make contact with the family of the deceased.
- Meet with key employees who can offer student support and decide on the format for this.
- Decide on any other arrangements, which need to be made on the first day, e.g. prayers for the deceased and his / her family.
- Check in with employees during the day and keep abreast of what is happening in the school.
- Be aware of any particular teachers who may be particularly distressed, e.g. teachers who are recently bereaved themselves.
- Encourage employees to come to you during the day and let you know how things are going.
- Find out details of the funeral etc. and communicate this to employees and students.
- At the end of the first day review events with employees and make plans for the following day.
- Make employees aware of students who are particularly vulnerable and what supports will be available to them.
- If there is a likelihood of interest from the media discuss a strategy to deal with any such requests.

APPENDIX B

Suicide - Indicators and Intervention Measures

Suicide is a particularly traumatic event in the life of any school. A study conducted in Ottawa, Canada, revealed a number of behaviours, which can be exhibited by those contemplating suicide. Employees may find this list and the suggested forms of intervention helpful.

Guidelines for School Employees when Confronted with a Suicidal Person

- Awareness - be aware of the signs.
- Listen - do not let helplessness stop you.
- Try not to show shock.
- Do not take responsibility for saving the person, get help.
- No judgement statements: no debating the rights / wrongs of the issue of suicide.
- Do not be afraid to be the first to mention suicide. It will generally be a relief that you are willing to discuss the subject.
- Do not tell what they should feel or do.
- Do not point out the positives i.e. "it could be worse".
- Do not suggest gratitude for...
- Do not deny the person's feelings.
- Do not suggest anything that could have them feeling guilt / blame.
- Keep the dialogue open.
- Let them know that you are there for them.
- Do not leave them alone if risk is imminent and agree a contract with the person that they will not take any further action until appropriate measures will be put in place.
- Your first responsibility is to inform the Principal. The Principal will inform the Guidance Counsellor and Student Support Team and together they will provide advice as to how to proceed.
- The Principal will inform the parents or HSE as appropriate in consultation with the Student Support Team.
- Support for friends / peers - if friends of the person are aware they need support to cope.
- Supporting parents. They usually will need a lot of support and guidance. They may be in denial or too bewildered to know what to do. You may often have to insist that they take their child for professional help.
- Support for employees. Employees will also need support in dealing with this situation, as many will be anxious.
- Follow up. Continue to offer support to the person once the initial crisis has subsided and they are back to school again (a person who attempts suicide once is seven times more likely to make a repeat attempt).
- Self-care - who is there for you as an employee's member?

Ottawa Pointers

1. Loss of interest in usual activities.
2. Withdrawal from social contact.
3. Difficulty in concentrating, problems with judgement and memory.
4. Dramatic fall-off in school performance.
5. Feelings of sadness, emptiness, hopelessness may be expressed in essays.
6. Sleep disturbance – decreased, or sometimes increased.
7. Increased overt displays of anger and rage, verbal or physical.
8. Excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol.
9. Promiscuous behaviour.
10. Uncharacteristic delinquent behaviour/thrill seeking.
11. Lack of supportive relationships with friends or family.
12. Previous suicidal threats, gestures, attempts.
13. Statements, verbal or written, revealing wish to die or preoccupation with death.
14. Nihilistic comments – life is meaningless, filled with misery.
15. Gestures to be noticed – self-mutilation, scratches.
16. Planning for death, making final arrangements, giving away treasured possessions.
17. Suddenly becoming cheerful after long depression (relief when decision taken)

Suicide - What Not to Do

1. Do not assume a person is not the “type” to commit suicide.
2. Do not leave a person alone if you believe, the risk of suicide is imminent.
3. Do not act shocked at whatever is told to you.
4. Do not debate whether suicide is right or wrong. This may make him/her feel guiltier and intensify the depression.
5. Do not take responsibility for “saving the youth”, get additional help.
6. Do not feel that you have to have an answer to all the person’s questions. Make it clear that you are there to help, not to solve problems.
7. Do not deny or cover up the person’s feelings or intents. Do not be judgemental. Acknowledge his/her feelings without reinforcing the negative. “I believe you are feeling miserable right now. Let’s talk about it”.
8. Do not abandon the person because the problems are too overwhelming. Follow through in getting him/her help. Do not be another person to reject him / her.
9. Do not wait because you hope he / she will get over it.

APPENDIX C

Trauma Response Plan

The Critical Incident Response Team will hold a meeting. This will include relevant personnel.

1. They will agree a common statement with regard to the crisis giving the facts, as they are known.
2. They will decide who tells:
 - a) Employees
 - b) Close friends of the person / people involved
 - c) The class / student
3. They will decide how to inform classes and teachers, e.g. through Student Support Team, Year Head, Class Teacher. Whole school announcements will be avoided.
4. They will discuss and decide on school routine for the first day including visiting the home of the bereaved, time out for employees and students.
5. They will arrange a further meeting for later in the day to discuss school routine for the following days, arrangements for the funeral etc.
6. Time will be allowed for the Critical Incident Response Team to inform employee's members on how to proceed. The Student Support Team will highlight the support that will be available in the school for the school community.
7. The Chaplain will arrange prayer services / assemblies for the day.

APPENDIX D

School Emergency Contact Sheet

Agency	Contact Numbers
Ambulance/Fire Brigade/Gardai	999 or 112
Fire Brigade	
Anglesea Street	021 4966333
Local Garda Stations	
Anglesea Street	021 4522000
Gurranabraher	021 4946200
Mayfield	021 4558510
Watercourse Road	021 4558260
Hospitals	
Cork University Hospital	021 4922000
Mercy University Hospital	021 4271971
South Infirmary – Victoria University Hospital	021 4926100
Social/Community Services	
South Lee - St. Finbarr's Hospital	021 4923001
North Lee -Blackpool	021 4927000
TUSLA - Area Manager	021 4923535
Local Clergy	
St. Patrick's	021 4502696
St. Mary's	021 4502267
Child and adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	021 4927821
Local GP's	
NEPS	
National Educational Psychological Service, Heritage Business Park, Mahon, Cork	01 8650450
NEPS Psychologist	
Department of Education	01 8896400
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057

Other Useful Contact Numbers

Counselling, Support and Helpline Services	Contact Number
Childline	1800 66 66 66
Samaritans	116 123
Aware - Support group for those affected by depression.	021 4550027
Pieta House Helpline Therapy	1800 247 247 0818 111 126
Barnardos - Regional Office Solas, Barnardos, 18 Patricks Hill, Cork (www.barnardos.ie) Bereavement counselling service for children	021 4310591 021 4552100
Jigsaw	021 2452500
Cork Counselling Centre.	021 4274951
Seedlings Family Ministry - Support programme for young people (11-18 years) dealing with grief through death, separation, divorce or any other significant loss.	021 4275136
Victim Support - Emotional and practical support for those affected by crime	021 4320555
Cork Rape Crisis Centre	1800 496 496
CURA - CURA offers free pregnancy testing, counselling and support, including information on services available to anyone experiencing a crisis pregnancy. Family and friends welcome.	021 4277544
GUM/STI Clinic - Free and confidential service offering diagnosis & treatment of sexually transmitted infections, HIV testing and contact tracing.	021 4966844

ISPCC Cork	021 4509588
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Press and Media	Contact Numbers
Irish Examiner	021 4272722
The Echo	021 4272722
RTE Reception	021 4805805
Today FM	01 8049000
Newstalk	01 6445100
96 FM	021 4551596
Red FM	021 486 5500