

**Saint Catherine's College  
Armagh**

# **Critical Incident Management Policy**



**Revised June 2020**

## **Introduction**

Even though tragedy and trauma are part of life, coping with them is never easy. It is particularly difficult when trauma impacts on the lives of children. The specific needs of children following traumatic events should be recognised within the context of the education system. Critical incident management is an integral part of normal school management practice and as such, must be carefully planned for,

## **Aims and objectives of Critical Incident Management Policy**

- To respond to a critical incident in an informed way.
- To create a positive, open, communicative climate where the needs of staff and pupils are met in critical incident situations.
- To recognise which incidents are critical for the school community.
- To create a safe school environment whereby the physical, social and psychological health of pupils and staff are prioritised.
- To monitor and review the policy for dealing with emergencies.
- To promote active coping skills within the school, personal and health education curriculum.
- To establish positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, thus enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident.

## **About the Policy**

This policy sets out the procedures to be followed to ensure the safety and protection of the whole school community of Saint Catherine's College in the event of a critical incident.

The guidelines set out in this policy will be used flexibly and in relation to each situation as it arises as no two incidents are exactly alike.

## **Raising awareness of Critical Incident Management Policy.**

- It is important that all the major stakeholders of the school BOG, staff, pupils and parents are informed and regular updates are provided.
- The policy forms part of the agenda of at least one meeting of BOG per year.
- The Critical Incident Policy will be presented to all staff, academic and non-academic, at a staff meeting in Term 1.
- Hard copies of the policy will be provided to all staff including new and temporary members of staff.

- A copy of the policy will be on display for reference purposes in both offices and on the staff electronic folder.
- The policy will also be available on the school website and thus accessible to parents.
- Pupils will be informed of the policy as part of their induction programme.

### **Critical Incident Response Team**

The Critical Incident Response Team will include:

- The Principal
- Vice Principals
- Designated Teacher in Charge of Child Protection
- Director of Chaplaincy Services
- Senior Teacher in charge of PR
- Principal's Personal Assistant
- School's Facilities Manager
- Teacher in charge of Health and Safety (team of 'pointers' for arrival of emergency services)
- Head of Key Stage / Year Head of pupil(s) most directly affected by the incident.
- Home School Liaison Officer

In the case of the Principal being absent from the school premises, she is always contactable by mobile phone and will be informed immediately of any critical incident. She will appoint an incident manager to co-ordinate and manage the process in her absence.

Some staff may be co-opted onto the team as deemed appropriate in response to the incident while others can be liaised with but not form part of the actual Critical Incident response team.

The Head of Pastoral Care will be responsible for the monitoring and review of the Critical Incident Management Policy. The policy will also be reviewed in the immediate wake of any critical incident occurring.

### **Central Liaison point for dealing with critical incidents**

The Meeting Room, next to the office in the Main School Building will be the central liaison point for dealing with all incidents.

## **Definition of a Critical Incident**

Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school or the community in which they function. They may happen in school, during out of school activities or within the wider school community.

They are usually very sudden and unexpected and may involve an intensive threat to life, health, property, security, values or integrity. A critical incident is any situation in which normal coping mechanisms of the school are tested or do not function properly.

## **Different types of critical incident**

- Death of pupil, member of staff
- Major illness
- Outbreak of disease
- Criminal incidents –police to take over the situation
- Major accidents
- Serious injury
- Suicide
- Sexual / physical / psychological abuse
- Fire / natural and technological disasters
- Disappearance of student from home / school.
- Unauthorised removal of student from home / school
- Hostage situation

## **Incident Response**

### **Immediate Response**

- Contact the Principal / next available member of the critical Incident Response Team.
- Clarify factual information
- Record and verify details – The designated person to do this is the VP not in charge of Pastoral Care
- Assess the needs of the situation e.g. Evacuation / supervision.
- Notify appropriate emergency services.
- Inform parents / Chair of BOG / Staff / Pupils / Media / CCMS / EA (see communication)
- Create a calm, purposeful environment.

### **Short Term Response** *(When news has broken)*

- Maintain a calm atmosphere and clear leadership
- Assess the vulnerability and needs of different groups or individuals.
- Offer information / support / practical help, collectively or individually, to parents.
- Open a room (eg .Prayer Room/Croft Centre/Home Economics room) for pupils to gather.
- Organise staff support, providing opportunities for staff consultations.
- Be available for children, parents, each other.
- Arrange de-briefing sessions for staff.
- Liaise with relevant outside agencies eg. Critical response Team, EA
- Visit or consult with families affected e.g. in relation to funeral.
- Open a book of condolences.
- As far as possible, keep the school open, using substitute teachers / parents if necessary to maintain the school routine as far as possible, exercising extreme care re authorised personnel on school premises.
- If part or all of the school is cordoned off for the purpose of criminal investigation, work creatively with other agencies to explore the possibility of continuing to bring classes groups together in other locations until the school is reopened.
- If this is not possible, maintain contact with parents through an information session/ information leaflets/advice via the school app/website/texting service.

### **Medium term Response** *(When normality has returned but the reality is sinking in)*

- Continue liaisons with other agencies.
- Continue to record information about parents' / teachers' concerns.
- Highlight curricular opportunities for pupils to talk (discussions/ drama/ art/ music/ PD etc.
- Organise talks, if appropriate, in relation to safety etc.
- Be alert to behavioural changes / fears in pupils related to the event.
- Be aware of how staff are coping personally and professionally
- If needed, arrange referrals to external help for individuals / groups, allowing 4-6 weeks for normal bereavement process.
- Liaise with DE and other agencies in relation to funding for help and support.

### **Long - term Response** *(by end of first year and after)*

- Maintain monitoring and review
- Support individuals still affected

- Assess impact on pupils' performance
- Deal with reminders of event / impact of inquest etc.
- Continue to be aware of how staff are coping personally and professionally.
- Continue creative coping strategies via curriculum
- Commemorate anniversaries.
- Continue with help from outside agencies, if appropriate.

### **Communication with parents (verbal)**

- As soon as initial information is confirmed, inform parents by phone or in person if their daughter/son is involved. This should be done by Principal / Vice Principal / Head of Key Stages. (if number of pupils involved is large, a number of staff share this task.)
- Ensure a **correct** and **consistent message** is given.
- Provide a comfortable, secure and private waiting area out of media and public view for meeting. The Croft centre is always available with the key kept in the Main Office.
- Prepare and calm anxious parents, giving simple accurate information about incident.

### **Communication with parents (Day 1) (written)**

Letters should:

- Be brief and accurate
- Always seek family advice re visiting house/attending funeral/flowers/death notices etc
- Consider family wishes for privacy, especially in case of suicide
- Include facts
- State action taken by school
- Indicate school's next step / future plans
- Give information of common reactions of children to trauma or death emphasising that most reactions are normal but may still be in need of support.
- Invite ideas / information / feedback from parents in order to promote open channels of communication.
- Indicate where and when to seek further help within school and externally.
- Advise if plans are being made for parents' meetings. These allay fears if there is excessive anxiety e.g. about symptoms of meningitis or after a suicide. (see Appendix 1 for sample letter)

## Communication with the media (Day 1)

Press statements should:

- Be compiled in agreement with Communications Officer of CCMS/EA.
- Explain the why school has been deeply shocked.
- Explain that all available resources and support services have been contacted.
- Outline what steps are being taken to provide support for students and staff in an effort to get things back to 'normal' as soon as possible. (See Appendix 2 for sample statement)
- The Principal or nominated person, Mrs Una Corr in the Main Office will handle the media calls. **No communication with the media should be made by anyone other than the Principal and Mrs Corr.**
- The news media **should not be permitted on school property without the approval of the Principal** and has no legal access to school property without such consent.
- Stop any strangers in the school and challenge their presence.

## Communication with pupils

- Before making the announcement of a traumatic event, ensure that the families' right to privacy is respected.
- Make the announcement simultaneously so that all pupils hear about it at the same time.
- Inform pupils in their regular classroom setting, avoiding using the public address system or an assembly setting.
- Use a straightforward sympathetic announcement of loss with a simple statement of condolence. Refer to a suspected suicide as a sudden death.
- Use discretion regarding details of the incident.
- Keep to the agreed statement.
- Carefully word the content of the announcement and provide written copies for teachers to use in their classrooms.
- After the announcement in the classroom allow sufficient time for pupils to discuss their feelings in the classroom setting.
- Monitor the reactions of the pupils on hearing of the tragedy.
- Assure students they will be informed as information is available. (*see Appendix 3 for sample announcements*)

### **Communication with staff**

- There will be regular briefing sessions for staff.
- Staff will be given advice and guidance on what pupils should be told.
- Staff who are finding the situation difficult should alert a member of the Critical Incident Response Team for support. If necessary, someone will assist with pupils on their behalf.

### **Communication with BOG**

The Principal will keep in regular contact at all times with the chairperson of the BOG.

### **Contact Numbers**

The following contact numbers will be available for reference beside the Critical Incident Response Policy in both school offices.

**Emergency Services**

**Pupils / parents**

**Staff members**

**Chairperson BOG**

**EA Headquarters**

**EA Critical Response Team**

**SSHB**

**Familyworks Counselling**

**Local police**

**Local Hospital**

**CCMS**

**DE, Rathgael House**

## Appendix 1: Sample letter to parents

Date

Dear Parent,

I am writing to inform you that today we received sad news of the sudden and tragic death of \_\_\_\_\_ . The loss of this member of our school community is a very difficult time for all of us (use caution re naming individuals in writing)

In response, the school has implemented a plan which allows pupils an opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings with trained staff from the EA's Critical Incident Response Team. We expect that some will want to avail of this help while others may not. Those who do will be given the opportunity to express their feelings and grief as part of a group and helped to cope with their reactions to this loss. This is not intended to take the place of normal school pastoral care, external professionals support or religious care.

Anticipating that your child may have a reaction to this sad event, I have enclosed an information leaflet which may guide you at this time. If you would like any further advice or assistance or wish to clarify the nature of support further please do not hesitate to contact the school regarding your request or concerns.

Yours faithfully

## Appendix 2: Sample Press Release

**For immediate release**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Historical school destroyed by fire**

\_\_\_\_\_ college was destroyed by fire in the early hours of Saturday morning. Fire and Rescue Services and the PSNI responded to a 999 call reporting a blaze at 3am on Saturday. There were no injuries reported. The cause of the fire is under investigation. Damage is estimated at £\_\_\_\_\_

“It is a tragedy to have lost this school not only for our students and their families but for our community” \_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson of the Board of Governors said.

“School is much more than a place of learning. They are where communities meet for special events, to vote and to play. \_\_\_\_\_ college in particular was a landmark in our community with historical building designation”. \_\_\_\_\_ College was built in \_\_\_\_ and has undergone substantial renovations in recent years.

Arrangements have been made to house our pupils at \_\_\_\_\_ for the remainder of the school year, with the addition of temporary classrooms at \_\_\_\_\_. All parents were contacted by telephone on Sunday.

To assist in supporting our staff and pupils through this time of shock and loss, additional trained staff from the EA’s Critical Incident Response Team have been assigned to the school to provide support.

Contact \_\_\_\_\_ chairperson of the BOG, Saint Catherine’s College on 02837\_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3: Sample announcement to parents

#### After a known fatality

Today I have sad news to share with you. We are taking this time to think about \_\_\_\_\_ a Year \_\_\_ Pupil who died \_\_\_\_\_. We do not know many details at this time except that \_\_\_\_\_. The whole school is very shocked by this news and we offer our sympathy to \_\_\_\_\_'s family and friends. \_\_\_\_\_'s funeral is being held on \_\_\_\_\_. A funeral is a very special time to remember a person who has died. As more information becomes available I will share it with you.

Everyone deals with loss differently, we may feel shocked, upset, tearful or numb. At the moment we would like you to remain in your classroom, however, if you feel that you need to talk to someone about this news, the school has arranged for \_\_\_\_\_ to be available in \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. Feel free to arrange to go and talk to \_\_\_\_\_ they want to listen to your feelings and concerns.

#### After a suspected suicide

Today I have sad news to share with you. A tragedy has happened and \_\_\_\_\_, a Year \_\_\_ pupil has died suddenly. The whole school is very shocked by this news and we offer our sympathies to \_\_\_\_\_'s family and friends. As more information becomes available I will share it with you.

This kind of tragic news is hard to accept and it is a very sad time for all of us. We may feel shocked, numb, angry or tearful. Everyone deals with loss differently and it is important to respect the way others grieve. At the moment we would like you to remain in your classroom, however, if you feel that you need to talk to someone about this news, the school has arranged for \_\_\_\_\_ to be available in \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. Feel free to arrange to go and talk to them. They want to listen to your feelings and concerns.

## Critical Incident Support Personnel

| Organisation                         | Name                                      | Telephone        | Fax |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------------|-----|
| Principal                            |   |                  |     |
| Vice-Principal(s)                    |   |                  |     |
| Police, Fire, Ambulance              |   | 999              |     |
| Hospital                             |   |                  |     |
| Doctors' Surgery                     |   |                  |     |
| Social Services                      |   |                  |     |
| Chairperson of Board of Governors    |   |                  |     |
| EA                                   |   | 028 3751 2200    |     |
| EA (Emergency out of hours)          |   | 028 3751 2345    |     |
| EA Health and Safety Officer         |   | 028 3751 2429    |     |
| EATransport Section                  |   | 028 3751 2268    |     |
| EA Maintenance Manager               |   | 028 3751 2299    |     |
| EA Communications Officer            | Mr Richard Bullick                        | 028 3741<br>5356 |     |
| EA Staff Welfare Manager             | Mrs Marian Ferguson                       | 028 3751 2559    |     |
| CCMS Teacher Welfare Officer         | Ms Brid O'Neill                           | 028 90426972     |     |
| SELB Critical Incident Response Team | Mrs Ruth Bell<br>(Acting Adviser)         | 028 3751 2397    |     |
|                                      | Mrs Mary Knipe (Acting Executive Officer) | 028 3751 2515    |     |
| School Counsellor                    |   |                  |     |
| Media contacts                       |   |                  |     |
|                                      |   |                  |     |
| CCMS                                 |   |                  |     |
| Community Health Services            |   |                  |     |
| Local church or clergy               |   |                  |     |