

**O'Growney National School**

# **Critical Incident Management Plan**

O'Growney National School aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of Management, through the Principal, Mr. John Brennan and staff has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policies and plans. The staff and management of O'Growney N.S. recognise a critical incident to be:

## **Definition of a Critical Incident**

**“A Critical Incident is any incident or sequence of events, which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school”.**

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community.

### **Examples of such incidents are:-**

- ❖ The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death.
- ❖ An intrusion into the school which may include a physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s).
- ❖ A major accident/tragedy in the wider community.
- ❖ Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.

## **Aim of Our Critical Incident Management Plan**

The aim of the Critical Incident Management Plan {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. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

We have 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.

## Physical safety:

- Evacuation plan formulated.
- Regular fire drills occur, once per term.
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.
- Gates are locked during school hours.
- No running is permitted inside the school building or when entering or exiting school.

## Psychological safety:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. 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 are addressed in the SPHE curriculum. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person, Mrs. Sinead Skelly. Deputy Designated Liaison Person, Mrs. Jo-Anne Brennan.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary/post primary school student are available
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy
- There is a care system in place in the school using the “Continuum of Support” approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published on 2007 for primary schools
- 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/guardians are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

# Critical Incident Management Team

**Team Leaders {Garda Liaison}:** Mr. John Brennan, Principal  
Mrs. Mary Kearney, Deputy Principal

**Staff Liaison:** Mrs. Harriet Monaghan & Ms. Niamh Ní Dhonncha

**Student Liaison:** *Junior:* Ms. Nikki Mangan (Junior & Senior Infants)

*Middle:* Ms. Hannah Walker (First, Second & Third)

*Senior:* Mrs. Lisa Clarke (Fourth, Fifth & Sixth)

**Parent/Guardian Liaison:** Ms. Fiona Mulholland  
Mrs. Sinead Skelly  
Ms. Eimear Dalton

**Media Liaison:** Mrs. Rebecca Flynn (Secretary)

**Administration: Community/Agency Liaison:**

Mrs. Rebecca Flynn (Secretary)

Mrs. Sharon Kelly (Receptionist)

Mr. Jimmy Herward (Caretaker)

## Review and Research

The Critical Incident Management Team should consult resource documents available to schools on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie), these include:

- 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 Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

## Team Leader

*A person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis (e.g. school closure, attendance at memorial services, etc.)*

- 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; SEC; ETB
- Liaises with the bereaved family
- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

1. **Gather the facts - Who? What? When? Where?**
2. **Contact appropriate agencies.**
3. **Convene the Critical Incident Management Team.**  
*(Conference Room)*
4. **Organize the supervision of students.**
5. **Inform Staff**  
*(Staff Room)*
6. **Agreement on a statement of the facts.**
7. **Organize timetable for the day.**

**MAINTAIN THE NORMAL SCHOOL ROUTINE  
WHEN AT ALL POSSIBLE**

8. **Inform parents/guardians by text / letter.**
9. **Staff will inform students.**
10. **Make contact with the bereaved family.**  
{Chairman; Principal; Class Teacher}
11. **Organize support.**
12. **Respond to media.**  
{Chairman; Principal; Deputy Principal to release Press Statement}

**Staff Liaison**

*A staff member known and trusted by the staff*

- 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 / discusses 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**

*A trusted and familiar figure to the students.*

- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed
- Consoles and talks with vulnerable and upset students
- Examines the database of vulnerable students and alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)

## **Parent/Guardian Liaison**

*Someone known to parents. This person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have skills to manage emotional reactions of individual or groups of parents*

- 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)

## **Media Liaison**

*Someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media by phone or in person. A person who is able to set limits without being offensive*

- 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.)
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

## Administrator/Community/Agency Liaison

*Someone with good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community*

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
  - 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
- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of:
  - Key parents
  - 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

### *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, material used 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:

Conference Room – {R 44} will be the main room for the Critical Incident Management Team

Staffroom – {R 27} will be the main room used to meet the staff

Special Ed rooms {R 25} for parents

{R 12} for parents

Special Ed rooms {R 39} for individual sessions with students

{R 40} for individual sessions with students

Principal's Office {R 33} for media

S.N.A's / Meeting Room {R 41} for staff

for other visitors

**Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan.**

## **Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents**

### **Gather accurate information**

It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident.

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?
- What is the location of those injured and not injured?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?

### **Contact appropriate agencies** (*Appendix 1*)

- Emergency services
- Medical services
- Health Board Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
- NEPS
- Chairman of the BOM
- DES/Schools Inspector.

### **Convene a meeting Critical Incident Management Team**

- Organize timetable/routine for the day.  
(Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate.

**Arrange supervision of students**

*Organize timetable for the day*

**AS FAR AS POSSIBLE MAINTAIN NORMAL ROUTINES**

### **Inform Parents / Guardians**

**(Ms. Yvonne O'Hare / Ms. Fiona Mulholland)**

#### **Children directly involved:**

Parents/guardians should be contacted as soon as possible and this first contact will need to be handled with great sensitivity.

- Make a list of parents/guardians who have been contacted.  
*{List of families in school available}*
- Give parents/guardians relevant and factual information.
- Set a room aside for distressed students to meet their parents/guardians.  
*{ Rooms 39/40}*
- Arrange for Tea/coffee/biscuits to be provided.
- Provide support to parents who are on their own when they arrive at the school.

#### **Children not directly involved:**

The parents of other children, closely related, in the school should be informed of the incident and that their child may be upset.

### **Child Liaison:**

**(Ms. Nikki Mangan//Ms. Hannah Walker//Ms. Lisa Ashe)**

- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours, which can cause unnecessary stress.
- Allow pupils to ask questions, tell their story and express feelings.
- Help students realize that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident.
- Contact absent children.

Make contact with the bereaved family - **Chairman; Principal; Class teacher.**



**Dealing with the media** - Chairman; Principal; Deputy Principal; Secretary.

Prepare a written statement to include:

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

Points to remember if giving a live interview:

- Sympathize with the family initially.
- Take some time to prepare
- Remember that everything you say is on record and, therefore, **keep it simple, factual and brief.**
- Decline if you are not ready or think it inappropriate.

Brief staff and advise them on dealing with the media.

**(9.00 a.m. meeting)**

## **Medium-Term Actions (24 - 72 hours)**

### **Review the events of the first 24 hours**

- Reconvene Key Critical Incident Management Team. **(8.30 a.m. - 9.00 a.m.)**
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Critical Incident Management Team meeting review. **(3.15 p.m.)**
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.

### **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.
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out.
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission.

### **Plan for the re-integration of students and staff (e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc.)**

- Name key person(s) to liaise with above on their return to school.

### **Plan visits to injured**

- Name key person(s) to visit home/hospital.

## **Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.**

- The Chairman / Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service.
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Principal + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

## **Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)**

- Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.

## **School closure**

- Request a decision on this from school management.

## ***Longer 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 the Health Board.

- 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?

## **Formalize the Critical Incident Plan for the future**

- Consult with NEPS psychologist.

## **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, 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)**

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students / staff and the may need additional support at this time.
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day.

## **Review and Monitoring:**

This policy has been made available to school personnel and the Parents' Association and is readily accessible to parents on request. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron, if requested. This policy will be monitored and reviewed annually by the Board of Management.

Policy ratified by the Board of Management on

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2017.