

Polasaí um Theagmhas Criticiúil / Critical Incident Policy



INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

This policy was devised and formulated by the school community, involving Board of Management, parents and Staff of Gaelscoil na Ríthe, in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Department of Education and Youth.

AIM

- To outline the steps that should be taken to ensure an effective response to crisis situations.
- 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.
- Ensure that the impact on students and staff will be limited.
- Enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school. Example include:

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease
- Criminal Incidents
- Major accidents, serious injury
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war
- Fire, natural and technological disaster
- Disappearance of student from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home

CRITICAL INCIDENTS MANAGEMENT TEAM

- **RÓNÁN MAC GIOLLA RUADH (PRINCIPAL)**
- **PÓL Ó MEACHAIR (CHAIRPERSON OF B.O.M.)**
- **MARIA NÍ CHUMHAILL (DEPUTY PRINCIPAL)**
- **MÁIRÍN NIC AMHLAOIDH (MÚÍNTEOIR SET)**
- **FR. SEÁN HENRY**
- **TERESA NÍ CHASAIDE (SCHOOL SECRETARY)**
- **CHAIRPERSON OF PARENTS ASSOCIATION**

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Leadership Role: Rónán Mac Giolla Ruaidh & Pól Ó Meachair

- Intervention
- Confirm the event
- Activate the C.I. response team
- Co-ordinate the tasks of the team
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Contact and inform Family/Friends of incident
- Make contact with other relevant agencies and establish lines of communication with agencies dealing with incident with a view to being kept informed of developments as they occur.
 - Liaise with the Board of Management; DES; Gardaí, NEPS; FSS
 - Liaise with the family / families concerned
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)
- Post-intervention
- Ensure provision of on-going support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review plan

Communication Role: Rónán Mac Giolla Ruaidh, Maria Ní Chumhaill & Pól Ó Meachair

- Intervention
- With team prepare a public statement
- Organise designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone line free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Liaison with relevant outside support agencies
- Post-intervention
- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

Staff Liaison / Communication: Maria Ní Chumhaill & Rónán Mac Giolla Ruaidh

- Leads 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
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials for staff
- Keeps staff updated throughout the day
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises staff of the availability of the EAS (Employee Assistance Service)

Student Liaison / Counselling Role: Máirín Nic Amhlaoidh

- Intervention
- Outline specific services available in school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of pupils/staff
- Decide on information to be presented to children with team leader
- Provide information on counselling services available
- Post-intervention
- On-going support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected – alert staff to vulnerable students
- Refer on, as appropriate
- Review and evaluate plan

Community / Agency Liaison: Teresa Ní Chasaide & Rónán Mac Giolla Ruaidh

- Maintain up to date lists of contact numbers - members of the Parents Council, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Be alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinate the involvement of these agencies
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges and verify Garda Vetting
- Update CIMT members on the involvement of external agencies

Parents / Guardain Liaison: Teresa Ní Chasaide, Mairín Nic Amhlaoidh & Chairperson of Association

- Intervention
- Coordinate contact with families (following first contact by C.I. Team Leader)
- Keep families of pupils involved informed of current developments in incident.
- Consult with family around involvement of school in possible events e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident.
- Post-intervention
- Provide on-going support to bereaved/affected family/families
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan
- Involve as appropriate family in school liturgies/ memorial service

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 will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

CONFIDENTIALITY & GOOD NAME

The management and staff of Gaelscoil na Ríthe 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 the following rooms will be used:

- Staff room for meeting with staff
- Classrooms for meeting with pupils
- School hall for meeting with parent body or staffroom for smaller groups
- Principal’s office for meeting with the media
- Special Education Learning Support room for meeting with individual pupils

CONSULTATION & COMMUNICATION REGARDING THE PLAN

All staff were consulted and their views sought in the preparation of this policy and plan. 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 Management Team (CIMT) has a personal copy of the plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the plan by the Principal.

Resources for dealing with Critical Incidents are detailed on the next page.

Appendix 1

Critical Incident Management Team

Role	Name	Phone & Email
Team Leader		
Garda Liaison		
Staff Liaison		
Student Liaison		
Parent/Guardian Liaison		
Community Liaison		
Media Liaison		
Administrator		

Appendix 2

Critical Incident Action Plan

Short-Term Actions – Day 1

Task	Name
Gather accurate information	
Who, what, when where?	
Convene a CIMT meeting	
Contact external agencies	
Arrange for supervision of pupils	
Hold staff meeting	
Agree schedule for the day	All staff
Inform students (<i>close friends and student with learning difficulties may need to be told separately</i>)	
Compile a list of vulnerable students	
Contact/visit the bereaved family	
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with the media	
Inform parents/guardians	
Hold end-of-day staff briefing	

Medium-Term Actions – Day 2 and Following Days

Task	Name
Convene CIMT meeting to review the events of Day 1	Team leader
Meet external agencies	
Meet whole staff	
Arrange support for students, staff, parents / guardians	
Visit the injured	
Liaise with the bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	
Make decisions about school closure	BOM

Follow-Up Actions – Beyond 72 hours

Task	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	
Plan for return of bereaved students	
Plan for giving of “memory box” to bereaved family	
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents, students
Review response to incident and amend plan if necessary	Staff/BOM

Appendix 3
Emergency Contacts

GNÍOMHAIREACHT	UIMHREACHA TEAGMHÁLA
Gardaí	
Ospidéal	
Briogáid Dóiteáin	112
Dochtúirí áitiúla	
Community Care Team	
Cigire Scoile	
Siceolaí NEPS	
Roinn Oideachais	
INTO	
Riarthóir Paróiste	
Seirbhís Chabhrach d'Oibrithe: Inspire Wellbeing	

Staff Contact Details

[illegible]

Appendix 4

Contact Details: Board of Management, Other Schools, Parents Association

Ról & Ainm	Ríomhphost	Uimhir Ghutháin
<i>Cathaoirleach</i>		
<i>Príomhoide</i>		
<i>Ionadaí an Phátrúin</i>		
<i>Ionadaí na Múinteoirí</i>		
<i>Ionadaí na dTuismitheoirí</i>		
<i>Ionadaí na dTuismitheoirí</i>		
<i>Ionadaí an Phobail</i>		
<i>Ionadaí an Phobail</i>		

Scoileanna eile

Scoil & Ainm an Phríomhoide	Uimhir Ghutháin	Seoladh ríomhphoist

Cumann na dTuismitheoirí

Ainm & ról	Ríomhphost	Uimhir Ghutháin
Cathaoirleach		
Rúnaí		
Eile		

Resource Materials

School staff or staff from external agencies can use this form to record the details of students who they met subsequent to the registration of a critical incident. This information should be kept together in one place.

[illegible]

SAMPLE CONSENT LETTER - INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP SUPPORT SESSION (Resource for schools: R2)

This letter can be used as a template for the school when we are seeking parental consent for a child to be seen in a group or individually by a NEPS psychologist.

Dear Parents,

You may already know that our teachers and staff have been providing support to our students following _____.

Additional support is also being provided to our school by psychologist/s from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). The psychologist will be available, where necessary, to meet with individuals or with groups of students to help them during this difficult time.

The aim of such sessions will be to:

- a) Provide information about dealing with grief and loss in a healthy way
- b) Allow students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment
- c) Allow students time to comfort and support each other, under the guidance of experienced staff from _____
- d) Help students resume their normal routines as soon as possible

If you would like for your son/daughter to participate in such a session and any follow-up meetings that might be scheduled, please give your consent by signing below.

You should return it to the school immediately.

If you have any questions, please contact _____

I give my consent for _____ to participate in a Group/Individual Session

Student Name

Parent or Legal Guardian

Date

Is mise le meas,

SAMPLE LETTER - SEEKING ADVANCE PARENTAL AGREEMENT TO CHILD BEING SEEN (PRIOR) (Resource for schools: R3)

This letter can be used as a template for the school if we decide to seek advance parental consent so that a child may be seen by a NEPS psychologist (in a group or individually) in the aftermath of a critical incident. It is to cater for the situation where parents cannot be immediately contacted.

Dear Parent,

Gaelscoil _____ has developed a plan for responding when a tragedy occurs. When such an event happens, schools are offered support by psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), an agency of the Department of Education and Science. If we feel it is necessary, we would like to be in a position to have your child seen by the psychologist who can offer advice and support. Before any child is seen by a NEPS psychologist parental consent is usually required. We will make every effort to obtain this. However, in the unlikely event of being unable to contact you, we are writing to seek your consent to your child being seen by a member of NEPS as part of our school's immediate response. This is to allow us to support your child in the best way possible.

Your child may be seen individually, in a small group or as part of a class group.

If you wish to discuss this, please contact me at your convenience.

Is mise le meas,

XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Príomhoide

Please fill in the form below confirming that you have read this letter and stating whether **you wish** or **do not wish** to have your child seen by a NEPS psychologist and return to the class teacher.

I have read this letter and:

I wish to have _____ seen by the NEPS psychologist.

I do not wish to have _____ seen by the NEPS psychologist.

Parents/carers: _____

Date: _____

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS – SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT

Resource for schools: R4

This letter can be used as a template by the school when we are informing parents of a tragedy, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves.

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of Name of student(s). We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost).

Our thoughts are with (family name).

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. (Elaborate).

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their age. You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or to be fearful, anxious, or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reactions. Over the course of the days to come, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

(Optional) An information night for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given.

We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school. **(Details).**

Is mise le meas,

XXXXXXXXXXXX, Príomhoide

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS - VIOLENT DEATH (Resource for Schools: R5)

This letter can be used as a template for the schools if we are informing parents of a violent death, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves.

Dear Parents,

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened. (Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, who is the brother of _____, a student here at school, was killed as a result of (a violent attack, violent incident in the street etc.) earlier this week. We are all profoundly saddened by his death.

We have shared this information and have had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened. School staff members have been available for students on an on-going basis today. Other support personnel (including psychologists etc, according to actual arrangements) are available to advise staff and, where necessary, to talk to students. This support will continue to be available for (if appropriate insert how long).

The death of any young person is tragic, but a violent death is even more difficult. It is hard to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to accept that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it. This death may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Some children/young people may be afraid for their own life and for the lives of those they love. Take time to listen to their fears and reassure them that what has happened is rare. We have enclosed some additional information that may be useful during this time.

The media are in the vicinity of the school and may approach you or your children. You need not respond to their questions if you are approached. We will not allow the media to interview your child at school and our general advice is that you should not let your children be interviewed. They are not mature enough to judge what to say and may say something they will regret later.

(If planned) A support meeting for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time we can talk further about how to help ourselves and our children.

Our thoughts are with (family name) and with each of you.

Is mise le meas,

XXXXXXXXXXXXX, Príomhoide

SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA (Resource for schools: R6)

This can be used as a template by the school to be e-mailed, faxed or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the school. In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals. This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the victim's family and the nature of the incident.

My name is XXXXXXXXXXXX and I am the Principal of Gaelscoil _____. We learned this morning of the death of (one of our students or Name of student). This is a terrible tragedy for _____ family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (Name) family and friends.

Name of student/students was a (5th class boy) and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

We have been in contact with his/her parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time. Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school have implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and (insert other information if relevant) have been with us all day supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time.

The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event.

The school has been open to parents, to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.

We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you.

CHECKLIST - STUDENTS AT RISK (Handout for schools: R16)

This checklist may be used by the psychologist or may be offered as an aid to school staff who are concerned about a student. It should be remembered that the checking of a number of items for any one student may point to other problems. Indication of a number of these factors in any one student should always be followed up.

Unexpected reduction of academic performance	
Talking about suicide	
Ideas and themes of depression, death and suicide in their work	
Making statements about hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness	
Change in mood and marked emotionally instability	
Significant grief or stress	
Withdrawal from relationships	
Break up of an important relationship	
Discipline problems, being in trouble in school	
Withdrawal from extra-curricular activities	
Giving personal belongings away	
Loss of interest in things one cares about	
Neglect of physical appearance	
Physical symptoms with emotional cause	
High risk behaviours	
Alcohol or drug abuse	
Bullying or victimization	
History of suicidal behaviour e.g. cutting or overdose risk behaviours	
Family history of suicide/attempted suicide	