

Scoil Naomh Iosaf Critical Incidents Policy

Introduction:

Scoil Naomh Iosaf aims to protect the well-being of its pupils and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment.

To ensure that the coping, supportive and caring ethos synonymous with Scoil Naomh Iosaf is maintained during a critical incident The Board of Management through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a Critical Incident Management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

The staff and management of Scoil Naomh Iosaf recognise a critical incident to be “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school”. Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils or staff members, or members of our local community.

Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide, suspected suicide, sudden death, drowning.
- An intrusion into the school
- Major accidents, serious injury, major disease, illness involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- Unauthorised removal of a pupil from school or home
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- Civil unrest, war

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

The members of the CIMT comprise of the Principal, Deputy, Assistant Principals and the school secretary.

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| 1. Leadership Role: | Ursula Ni Luasaigh, Principal |
| 2. Staff Liaison: | Pierce Power, Deputy Principal, Mary Doyle |
| 3. Pupil Liaison: | Catherine Baldwin, Pádraig Bracken |
| 4. Family Liaison: | Principal/Class teacher |
| 5. Communication: | Mary Fitzgerald, Eamonn Carney |
| 6. Garda Liaison | Therese Cronin, Pat Hegarty |
| 7. Chaplaincy Role: | Fr John Newman |
| 8. Parents Association | Chairperson |
| 9. Administrator | Ann Wilkins, Paula Higgins, School Secretary |
| 10. Board of Management | Ann Walsh, Chairperson |

Aim of CIMT:

- ❖ To return the school to the pre-incident normal state as soon as possible
- ❖ To reduce the immediate and long detrimental impact on pupils, teachers and families
- ❖ First 48 hours crucial / 3 weeks vulnerability
- ❖ To enable a quick and effective response to critical incident, under short-term, medium-term and long-term actions.
- ❖ To provide a sense of control by ensuring a clarity of responsibility.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Leadership Role:

- Confirm the event and clarify facts surrounding event
- Alert and Activate the Critical Incident Management Team
- Liaise with the Board of Management DES, NEPS, Gardaí/Emergency services
- Communicate with the family impacted by the critical incident
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school, media)

Post event:

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and pupils
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events

2. Staff Liaison Role:

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions. Outline the routine for the day
- Provide materials for staff (from Critical Incident Folder)
- Keep staff updated as day progresses
- Decide with Principal how news will be communicated to different groups (pupils, outside school, media)

3. Pupil Liaison/ Counselling Role:

- Advise staff on procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Address immediate needs of staff /pupils
- Decide what information is given and how it will be communicated
- Provide materials for pupils (from Critical Incident Folder)
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Provide and supervise 'Quiet Room' if agreed
- Contact NEPS re counselling

Post event

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable pupils
- Monitor classes most affected
- Refer as appropriate

4. Family Liaison Role:

- Co-ordinate contact with affected families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in events following the incident
- Visit the bereaved family with the team leader
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any pupils affected by critical incident
- Ensure that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation Manage the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Set up room for meetings with parents
- Arrange parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Meet with individual parents
- Maintain a record of parents seen
- Provide appropriate materials for parents (from the critical incident folder)

Post event:

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family (*school liturgies/memorial services*)
- Offer to link family with community support groups

5. Communication/Media Role:

- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Maintain log of events and all calls made and received
- Maintain up to date contact numbers for -Key parents, such as members of the Parents Association, Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies /social media
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Be alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinate the involvement of these agencies
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies

6. Garda Liaison Role:

- Liaise with Garda and emergency services
- Confirm the event
- Clarify facts around the event

7. Chaplaincy Role:

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff and pupils

8. Parents' Association Role:

- Assist with communication of information that is relevant to general parent body.

9. Administrator:

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of parents, teachers, staff, emergency services.
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response.
- Ensures that template letters are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts.
- Photocopies materials as needed.
- Maintains records.

10. Board of Management Role:

- Support the team with implementing Critical Incident Plan.
- Assist the team in preparing public statement.
- Express support and empathy with family affected.

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/emails/texts, photocopying materials, etc.

Confidentiality and good name considerations

School personnel have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and the consequences of public statements. Staff will bear this in mind, and ensure that pupils do so also, e.g. 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. 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 Management Plan

Initial Action Plan

- Gather accurate information
- Refer to NEPS publications
- Contact appropriate agencies
- Convene a CIMT meeting
- Prepare a written response

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS: (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with family/families that has been impacted by the incident
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school,
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made available for pupils/staff
- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organise a staff meeting if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are contacted and kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Pupil Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of pupils
- The Chaplain/Principal/ class teacher will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Pupil Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team/ Board of Management)
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
 1. What happened, where and when?
 2. What is the extent of the injuries?
 3. How many are involved and what are their names?
 4. Is there a risk of further injury?
 5. What agencies have been contacted already?
- Contact appropriate agencies :
Emergency services/Medical services /H.S.E. DES/Schools Inspector, NEPS
Psychology Departments/ Counselling Support Services

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Preparation of pupils/staff attending any service
- Involvement of pupils/staff if agreed by family
- Facilitation of pupils/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team to review effectiveness of Plan.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/pupils/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Maintain contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual pupils, groups of pupils, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/pupils, 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 pupils and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Pupil Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
- Family Liaison person, Class Teacher and Principal to visit home/hospital
- Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service if appropriate
- Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate) Discuss decision with school management.

LONGER TERM ACTIONS (Beyond 72 Hours)

Monitor pupils and staff for signs of continuing distress

If over a prolonged period of time, a pupil continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the Health Board. 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
- Staff: Monitor need for support and counselling

Dealing with the aftermath of a suicide or suspected suicide.

While it is to be hoped that a national school pupil would not commit suicide, one has to bear in mind that a pupil could be closely related to a victim of suicide.

The term “suicide” should not be used until it has been firmly established that such was the cause of death, and then only when the family wish for and give permission for the term to be used.

Until such time as the family request that the term “suicide” be used, the terms “Tragic Death” or “Sudden Death” are the normal modes of reference.

Post Evaluation and Review

- What were the most beneficial elements of the Plan?
- 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 Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staff members are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure that all staff members 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
- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in pupils/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, subject to approval and in consultation with the family impacted
- Care of person’s possessions. What are the parent’s wishes?
- Update and amend school records.

Review: This policy will be reviewed by the Principal, Deputy Principal and the Board of Management.

Ratification: This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in October 2018