

## **St. Joseph's N.S., Leitrim Village, Roll No: 01126B**

### **Critical Incident Policy**

#### **1. Introduction**

In St. Joseph's N.S., Leitrim Village, we aim to protect the well-being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, nurturing, tolerant and well catered for environment at all times as outlined in our school mission statement and Health and Safety Policy.

The BOM through the Principal, Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan to help the school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

#### **2. Rational**

This policy has been developed as recent research suggests that schools can manage incidents better and return to normal sooner after an incident when a plan is in place.

*"The key to managing a critical incident is planning. NEPS psychologists report that schools that have developed school policy and a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) are able to cope more effectively in the aftermath of an incident. Having a plan enables staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. It may also ensure that normality returns as soon as possible and that the effects on students and staff are limited". Responding to Critical Incidents, Guidelines for Schools, NEPS, 2007*

The CIMT have consulted resource documents available to schools on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie) including: Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS, 2016) and Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE, 2015)

#### **3. Ethos**

The management and staff of St. Joseph's N.S. aim to create of coping, supportive and caring atmosphere in the school. Systems are in place to promote emotional health and wellbeing and build resilience in both staff and pupils, thus helping them to cope with a range of events. These systems (prevention systems) include measures to address both physical and psychological safety of the school community for example: -

- Regular Fire Drills to evacuation the school quickly and safely.
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Playground rules
- School and class rules
- Front gates are locked during school break times
- School doors are locked during class time. All visitors to the school must enter via the main door which has a buzzer system in place.
- School's Code of Behaviour, Anti- Bullying Policy and Health and Safety Policy
- S.P.H.E. Plan which includes resources and programmes to address the personal and social development of students to help create a psychologically safe environment. It addresses 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. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision

- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures and the School Child Protection Policy
- Regular training for staff and BOM on (Stay Safe, Walk Tall, Child Protection)
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with 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 and 2010 for post primary schools. See also Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014). These documents are available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)
- Staff are made aware of the support available to them (Employee Assistance Service, Carecall 1800 411057)

#### **4. Aims**

This policy aims to: -

- Put practical measures in place in order to cope with a critical incident should one arise (A Critical Incident Plan)
- Create a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) with clearly defined roles
- Help the school manage and the staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident
- Enable maintain a sense of control
- Ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff
- Effects on the students will be limited
- Aid returning to normality as soon as possible

#### **5. Content**

This policy will be looked at under the following headings: -

1. Definition of a critical incident
2. Types of critical incidents
3. Critical Incidents Management Team
4. Roles and responsibilities
5. Action Plan
6. Record Keeping
7. Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

##### **5.1 Definition of a Critical Incident**

For this policy a critical incident will be defined as follows: -

*'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'. (Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS, 2016 page 16)*

##### **5.2 Types of Critical Incident**

The following are examples of what might constitute a critical incident in St. Joseph's N.S.

- Death (of a pupil/ member of staff)
- Major illness/outbreak of infectious disease (e.g. Foot & Mouth)
- Criminal incidents (e.g. Break in)
- Major accidents, serious injury a pupil or staff member (e.g. 'The Navan bus crash')
- Suicide
- Fire in school (evacuation of school building)

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- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Natural and technological disaster (e.g. school ceiling collapsing in Cork)
- Disappearance of student from home or school (e.g. Middleton incident in Cork)
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/ or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/ 11, tsunami
- Bus crash

This list is not exhaustive and may be added to at any time.

### **5.3 Critical Incidents Management Team (CIMT)**

At the time of a crisis there are a large number of tasks to be carried out. By identifying key roles in advance of an incident there is a clear statement of who does what, when and how. In addition to this no individual will be overburdened and no element of the response forgotten. The critical incident management team is St. Joseph's N.S. will comprise of the following roles:

Team Leader and Garda Liaison	Richella Kelly (Principal)
Staff and Student Liaison	Siobhán Finnegan McElgunn (Deputy Principal)
Parent Liaison	Chairperson of Parents Association
Chaplaincy Role	Rev. Fr. Seamus O'Rourke (Patron's nominee on BOM)
Community/ Agency/ Media Liaison	Richella Kelly (Principal)
Administrator	Maria Moran (School Secretary)

The duties of each member of the team is outlined below: -

### **5.4 Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **5.4.1. Team Leader and Garda Liaison: Principal, Richella Kelly**

##### **Intervention**

- Confirm the event and clarify facts surrounding event.
- Activate the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) and co-ordinates the tasks of the CIMT
- Liaise with the Gardaí/ Emergency services and media (if necessary)
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared
- Liaises with bereaved family
- Liaises with the Board of Management, DES, NEPS
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

##### **Post-vention**

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

#### **5.4.2 Staff and Student Liaison: Deputy Principal, Siobhán Finnegan McElgunn**

##### **Intervention**

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give 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

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- Provides 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 ESA and gives them the contact number (Carecall 1800 411057)
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Maintains student contact records (R1).
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

**Post vention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

**5.4.3 Parent Liaison: Chairperson of the Parents Association, Currently: Pauric Keane  
Intervention**

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and 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)

**Post-vention**

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident, as appropriate
- Involve, as appropriate, the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Review and evaluate plan

**5.4.4 Chaplaincy Role: Rev. Fr. Seamus O'Rourke  
Intervention**

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

**Post vention**

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

**Community/agency and Media Liaison, **Richella Kelly**  
Intervention**

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
  - Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council
  - 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
- 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)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the SEC; relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

#### **5.4.5 Administrator: School Secretary, Maria Moran**

- Maintain up to date telephone numbers of parents/ guardians, teachers, emergency services as directed by the principal.
- This list will be available in the secretary's office in a folder clearly named 'Contact Details'. The secretary will compile a list of all pupils and teachers going on school trips. Each teacher will bring the contact details of the children in their class on the trip. At least one teacher will have a mobile phone.
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to
- Ensure that template letters are on the school system and ready for adaption
- Prepare and send out letters and e-mails
- Photocopy materials needed
- Maintain records

#### **5.5 Action Plan**

##### **SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)**

- Immediate contact with family/ families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/ staff
- Convene a meeting with Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are 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.
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/ memorial service
- The Chaplain/ 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.
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths
- **Media Briefing (if appropriate)**
- Designate a spokesperson (Leader/ Chairperson of B.O.M.)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement with the Team
- Protect the family's privacy

- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
  - What happened, where and when?
  - What is the extent of the injuries?
  - 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
  - Emergency services
  - Medical services
  - H.S.E. Psychology Departments/ Community Care Services
  - NEPS

### **MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)**

- Preparation of students/ staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/ staff in liturgy, if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students'/ staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/ students/ staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- 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
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
- Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/ hospital
- Attendance and participation at funeral/ memorial service. To be decided in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if B.O.M. consider this appropriate)

### **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 HSE/ NEPS. Constant communication with family is essential.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance

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- 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?

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 staffs 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, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries being sensitive to special days and events

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/ 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
  - Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
  - Update and amend school records

### **5.6 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 and materials used. All such records will be passed onto the principal after the incident for safe keeping. All records will be kept on file until the pupils involved in the incident have reached the age of 21. The school secretary, Maria Moran, will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

### **5.7 Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations**

The BOM and staff of St. Joseph's N.S. 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 statement. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do so also. 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 this. The phrase tragic death or sudden death may be used instead. Likewise, the term murder will not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term violent death will be used instead.

### **5.8 Critical incidents rooms**

In the event of a critical incident the following rooms will be used: -

Staffroom, to meet with staff, visitors to the school

Each classroom, for meetings with students

Principal's office for media, individuals directly involved in incident

School Hall for meetings with parents or large groups of visitors to the school

Special Education Rooms for individual sessions with pupils.

### **6. Ratification and Communication**

This policy was initially drawn up by the staff and Board of Management of St. Joseph's N.S., Leitrim Village, in the first term of the 2013 – 2014 academic year. This policy will be presented to the B.O.M for discussion, with a view to ratification, early in the 2013 – 2014 school year. This policy was reviewed early in the 2017 – 2018 school year and presented to the BOM for discussion and ratification.

Once ratified, this policy will be uploaded to the school website. All parents of children in the school will be informed about this via the next communications letter. All teachers will be given a copy of this policy on a school plan memory stick. Every member of the CIMT will be given a personal hard copy of this plan. This policy will be discussed at a staff meeting to highlight the areas of importance.

The Principal or Deputy Principal will communicate this plan to new and temporary staff.

### **7. Implementation and Review**

This policy will be implemented in full once it has been ratified by the B.O.M of St. Joseph's N.S. This policy will be reviewed on a yearly basis. Review Date: \_\_\_\_

### **8. Reference Section**

Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, (2016)

When Tragedy strikes - Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools, INTO

CPSMA Management Board Members' Handbook, 2015

Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion DES (2015)

**DES**

[www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

**Websites**

**Health and Safety Authority**

[www.hsa.ie/osh](http://www.hsa.ie/osh)

**Allianz**

[www.allianz.ie](http://www.allianz.ie)

**INTO**

[www.into.ie](http://www.into.ie)



**Appendix 1 Summary and Emergency Contact List**

<b>Critical Incident Management Team</b>		
<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Phone</b>
<b>Team leader and Garda Liaison</b>	<i>Richella Kelly, Principal</i>	
<b>Staff and Student liaison</b>	<i>Siobhán Finnegan McElgunn, Deputy Principal</i>	
<b>Community/ Media liaison</b>	<i>Richella Kelly</i>	
<b>Parent liaison</b>	<i>Chairperson of Parents Association, Currently Pauric Keane</i>	
<b>Chaplaincy Role</b>	<i>Rev. Fr. Seamus O'Rourke</i>	
<b>Administrator</b>	<i>Maria Moran</i>	

**Short term actions – Day 1**

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

**Medium term actions - (Day 2 and following days)**

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

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**Follow-up – beyond 72 hours**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Name</b>
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	
Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family	
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BOM

**EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST**

<b>AGENCY</b>	<b>CONTACT NUMBERS</b>
Garda	Carrick 071 9650510
Hospital	St. Patrick's Carrick 071 9620011
Fire Brigade	071 9641082
Local GPs	Carrick Medical Centre 071 9620091
HSE	Carrick Community Services 071 9650300
Community Care Team	
Child and Family Centre	
Child and Family Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	Sligo 071 9113969
School Inspector	Amanda Grant Amanda_grant@education.gov.ie
NEPS Psychologist	Anne Conway 076 1108701
DES	090 6483600
INTO	01 8047700 or 1850 708708
Clergy	Fr. Seamus O' Rourke
State Exams Commission	N/A
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057

***Appendix 2: Sample Letters and draft media announcement***

The following letters will be printed on school headed paper: -

**Letter 1: Sudden Death/ Accident**

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian

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

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 s/he may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is age appropriate.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to express feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or 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 reaction. Over the course of the coming days, 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.

Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.

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

Principal's signature

**Letter 2: Violent Death**

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened.

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, the sister/ brother of (*name of student*), 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 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 in their support of students.

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.

In these times, young people tend to turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive about what your son/daughter might post to others.

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

Sincerely

Principal's name

**SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA**

*This can be used as a template by to be emailed, posted on the school social media site 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 Richella Kelly and I am the principal of St. Joseph's N.S., Leitrim Village. 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 in ---- class 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 has 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.