

SCOIL MHUIRE, CLONDRA

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

The staff and management of Scoil Mhuire, Clondra, recognise that critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members or members of our local community. “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.” Types of incidents might include:

- 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
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An outbreak of infectious disease.

Aim

The aim of the Critical Incident Policy is to help school management and staff to react quickly and efficiently in the event of an incident, to enable and maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible. This policy was formulated by staff in 2017. Reviewed in November 2018, November 2020. Current review: January 2024.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put 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.

- All in the school community are aware of the school Vision and Mission Statement.
- Circle Time is used to prepare children for life skills and to help sort issues relevant to the children.
- Our school has adopted the ‘Friends for Life’ programme since 2014 and Fun Friends’ programme since 2015. The class teachers are trained to deliver the programmes. The programmes are school-based anxiety prevention and resilience building programmes. We teach them as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. It helps students to develop resilience by teaching them effective strategies to cope with and solve problems and manage emotional distress, including worry, stress, change and anxiety.
- SPHE Programmes are included in the curriculum. This addresses issues such as grief and loss, stress/anger management, conflict management, bullying, decision-making, prevention of alcohol and drug abuse.

- An anti-bullying policy exists on a whole school basis. Anti-bullying awareness and encouraging a culture where bullying is not acceptable, is discussed at our monthly assemblies.
- The Fire Drill and Evacuation policy is revised and practised regularly, at least once per term.
- Children with medical problems: a file is kept on all such children and updated frequently.
- The outside school doors are locked during class times.
- Staff are familiar with and have a copy of Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions and disclosures. Our Designated Liaison Person for child protection issues is Colette McManus; our Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLDP) for child protection issues is Paula MacEoin. In Paula's absence, the DDLDP will be Fiona Reilly.
- School has developed links with a range of external agencies, e.g., NEPS, gardaí, HSE, etc.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

Our Critical Management Team (CIMT) will steer the development and implementation of the Critical Incident Management Plan. As we are a small school, all members of staff and some Board of Management members are involved with our CIMT. Each member of the team has a copy of this policy and should be aware of their role in the event of an incident. Each team member will have access to our Critical Incident Management folder. The folder is located in the main office in the school and is also accessible electronically through the school's Dropbox account. The roles may change as an incident unfolds.

Team Leader

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting; keeps a copy of what is said.
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES, NEPS, HSE, etc.
- Liaises with the family or families immediately affected by the critical incident.

In the absence of the team leader, the Deputy Principal will take over this role, followed by the Assistant Principal.

Garda Liaison

This may be seen as part of the Team Leader's Role.

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

Staff Liaison

- 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 materials for staff (if necessary).
- 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 outside agencies and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (if necessary)
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Is available to meet groups of students or individual students.
- Looks after setting up and supervision of a 'quiet' room where agreed: staff room or front office.

Major message to students: This is a difficult time for you but it is okay to be upset and to look out for your friends.

Community Liaison

- Maintains up-to-date lists of contact numbers of 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
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

Parents' Liaison

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

- Visit the bereaved family with the team leader
- May facilitate parent meeting and manage 'questions and answers'
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents, e.g. letters, handout of frequently asked questions, etc. (from their critical incidents 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.
- Will liaise where necessary with the relevant agencies, e.g., DES, NEPS, INTO, etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

It is very important to note that our school policy is as follows:

- 1 No student interviews will be given.
- 2 No photographs of the deceased will be provided
- 3 If there is a meeting for parents, no members of the media will be allowed attend.

4 Media access to the school will be limited.

5 Only the Media Liaison member of staff, or, in their absence, one nominated member of staff, will communicate with the media. This communication will only take place if absolutely necessary.

Administrator

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of Parents or guardians, Teachers, Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, e-mails, texts and faxes if appropriate.
- Photocopies materials needs
- Maintains records
- Keeps Critical Incident Folder up to date.

Chaplaincy Role

- Visit home/homes if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Be available as a personal and spiritual support to all the school community
- Make contact with other local clergy.
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident Team

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 and good name consideration

The management and staff of Clondra National 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 statement. 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 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. 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.

Social Media Use

School may use social media to provide up to date information for all concerned through the various stages of an incident. Positive messages and appropriate advice for young people and their parents/guardians can be provided. One important message would be to remind parents/guardians to discuss social media use with their children and monitor use more actively following a crisis.

When dealing with a critical incident it is advised that schools act quickly and with caution. A message could be placed on the school website and on any other school social media account along the following lines: ‘You may be aware of a recent event within the school community. We ask you to respect the family’s privacy and sensitivities by considering if you should post any comments, especially on social media. We will inform you through the normal channels of any relevant developments.’ Further information on use of social media and critical incidents available in ‘Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools’, p. 89.

Critical incident rooms:

In the event of a critical incident:

- Staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- Classroom/GP room for meeting with students
- GP room for parents
- GP room for media
- Upstairs ‘V’ room for individual sessions with students.
- Back meeting rooms for other visitors.

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

All staff were consulted and their views sought in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parents’ 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 team has a personal copy of the plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

Team Leader	Melissa Hussey
Garda Liaison	Melissa Husey
Staff Liaison	Fiona Reilly
Student Liaison	Paula MacEoin
Community Liaison	Mary Duignan
Parents Liaison	Dayna Doherty
Media Liaison	Melissa Hussey
Administrator	Sheila Stephenson
Chaplaincy Role	Fr Turlough Baxter
Record Keeping	All members of CIMT

In the event of a teacher being absent the Principal or Deputy Principal will assume their role or assign their duties to an appropriate person.

Ratification

This Critical Incident Policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Clondra National School in 2018.

This policy will be reviewed as necessary, but at latest 2027.

This policy was ratified on _____

Signed: _____

Ms Mary Duignan
Chairperson, Board of Management
Scoil Mhuire Clondra

Useful Resources, Publications

- 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 Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CIMT Critical Incident Management Team
CIMP Critical Incident Management Plan
DES Department of Enterprise and Skills
HSE Health Service Executive
INTO Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NEPS National Educational Psychological Services