



# CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY



*Presentation Secondary School,  
Miltown, Co. Kerry*

## School Mission

*Our school is a Catholic school which aspires to the full development of all its members according to Christian Principles. Every effort is made to ensure that each student develops according to his/her talents and potential: physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually.*

*We aim to develop fully integrated people who are aware of their own dignity as persons, who have Christian values, who are reliable, trustworthy, honest, truthful, caring, prayerful, devoted to duty, lovers of God and of neighbour; people who are prepared to reach out to those less fortunate than themselves.*

This policy aims to ensure that all members of the school community are respected, supported and cared for at times of crisis and need.

## What is a Critical Incident

Any incident where death occurs or is perceived. In a school community this may include:-

- ❖ The death of a student/member of staff. (*inc terminal illness & suicide*)
- ❖ A serious/critical accident involving students /members of staff.
- ❖ A serious physical attack on students/members of staff on school premises.
- ❖ The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- ❖ Serious damage to the school through fire, flood etc. \*\* (*See Part 2 - p.10*)

## Aims of this Policy

- ❖ To ensure an appropriate and co-ordinated school response to critical incidents.
- ❖ To specify roles & responsibilities when a critical incident occurs.
- ❖ To support the bereaved / affected family.
- ❖ To ensure that support is available for all staff and students.
- ❖ To ensure a safe and caring environment for all staff and students.

**Presentation Secondary School, Miltown recognises that every situation is different and that there needs to be some flexibility within strategy.**

## Initial Stages

### The Principal

- ❖ The Principal must be contacted immediately. *(In cases where the Principal is not available the Deputy Principal assumes the role of Principal.)*
- ❖ He/she will **confirm** the death/accident/disappearance with the family or local priest. It is important that accuracy is maintained at every stage so that rumours do not take over and cause panic/distress.
- ❖ The Principal will convene a meeting of the **Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG)** as soon as is practicably possible.

### The Critical Incident Response Groups (CIRG)

- ❖ **Mrs Kerry Harkin (Principal)**
- ❖ **Mr. Sean Costelloe (Deputy Principal)**
- ❖ **Fr. Kevin Sullivan / Rev Conor Bradley**
- ❖ **Eileen Kirby (Media)**
- ❖ **Denis Maguire (Student Care)**
- ❖ **Kathleen Stack (Student Care & Staff Liaison)**

The Critical Incident Response Group will coordinate the school's response under the leadership of the Principal.

#### 1) Meeting of CIRG

- ❖ Should the incident occur on the way home from school the CIRG should meet later that evening in order to relieve some of the pressures of the following day. The CIRG will also meet at before school the morning following the incident.
- ❖ Should the incident occur during a weekend, or during holiday, provision will need to be made for re-opening the school.

## 2) Contacting Members of the School Community

- ❖ Two members of the CIRG will be designated as the Staff Liaison members of the CIRG for the duration of the incident.
- ❖ Once accurate information has been gathered, the Staff Liaison member of the CIRG will contact all members of staff to alert them to the current situation, and remind them to be in school for 9am the following day for a briefing on the situation.
- ❖ The CIRG will make arrangements for the Board of Management, CEIST, Parents Association and the Dept of Education & Science to be informed.
- ❖ All groups should receive the same information so that there are no misunderstandings.
- ❖ Staff who wish to avail of supports can do through the CIRG Staff Liaison.

## 3) Media Relations

- ❖ A members of the CIRG will be designated as the Media Relations Contact
- ❖ The CIRG will prepare a written statement of the facts known to date and up-date this statement as appropriate. The statement should include;-
  - The facts about the incident
  - What has been done already
  - What is going to be done
  - Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured/missing student.
- ❖ **All members of staff /school community should be informed as to how to respond to the media. Other than the Designated Media Contact Person on the CIRG all queries /comments must be directed to the school Principal.**
- ❖ All interviews will be carried out by the Principal or a designated member of the CIRG who has been fully briefed on the incident/press release. Interviews will be kept simple, factual and brief.
- ❖ If the need arises to close the school the day after an incident, the local radio station should be contacted. Radio Kerry; - 066 71 91255 or 066 71 91201 (newsroom)

#### **4) Student Care**

- ❖ Two or more members of the CIRG will be appointed to look after Student Care.
- ❖ Their role will be to coordinate the support services to be made available and advising staff on how to inform students of the incident.
- ❖ Where appropriate the assistance of NEPS will be sought.
- ❖ The CIRG will agree upon a statement to inform students of the facts as known.

#### **5) Family Liaison**

- ❖ A member of CIRG will be appointed to liaise with the bereaved/affected family on behalf of the school. This should be a member of the CIRG who knows the family well. Where this is not possible the Principal should assume this role.
- ❖ The wishes of the bereaved/affected family will be respected at all times.

#### **6) Other Measures**

- ❖ The CIRG will consider other measures necessary to deal appropriately with the Critical Incident at hand.
- ❖ A timetable for the Day 1 of /after the incident should be prepared (adhering to normal school routine as much as is possible)

## Day 1

### **Meeting of CIRG at 8am**

- ❖ Confirm the roles each of the CIRG members will undertake during the day as outlined above.
- ❖ Ensure all members of the CIRG are familiar with the facts and prepared statements for staff meeting (and the supervision of students during this time)
- ❖ Confirm support arrangements from the relevant agencies (internal & external)
- ❖ Confirm contact with the bereaved/affected family. If appropriate a member of the CIRG will visit the family and during this or a subsequent visit will liaise with a relative regarding funeral arrangements and the school's possible involvement. This must be dictated by the wishes of the family.

### **Staff Meeting at 9am**

- ❖ Two members of the CIRG will chair/lead this meeting. Other CIRG members will supervise students. All other staff should be present including non-teaching staff.
- ❖ A brief statement will be given of the facts as known (previously agreed by CIRG).
- ❖ Staff should be given an opportunity to express their views/feelings.
- ❖ Agreement should be reached on how the facts will be relayed to the students and how staff should respond to student queries.
- ❖ Staff will be informed of the timetable for the day.
- ❖ Staff will be informed about which outside agencies are involved and what supports are in place for both students & staff.
- ❖ Procedures for identifying and dealing with vulnerable students/staff should be outlined.

**All members of staff /school community should be informed as to how to respond to the media. Other than the Designated Media Contact Person on the CIRG all queries /comments must be directed to the school Principal.**

## First Class Contact

- ❖ It is important to remember that not every class is going to be traumatised. However, the loss for the school community as a whole must be acknowledged
- ❖ The year/class group of the student/staff member in question should be the first to be told in the presence of the Principal/Deputy, a counsellor, Year Head, Class Tutors and a member of the clergy.
- ❖ All other classes will be informed by their Class Tutor/Year Heads during period 1. This should be done in a sensitive but clear way. *(See Appendix 1 for guidance)* If any teacher is uncomfortable with informing a class a member of the CIRG will accompany them and inform the class if necessary.
- ❖ Students should be given the chance to talk among themselves.
- ❖ Students should be informed of the supports available around the school (internal & external)
- ❖ Where it is appropriate to continue with work, it may be advisable to do revision rather than new work in order to relieve the pressure on students. **Students should not be left to their own devices. They should either be in class, with a counsellor, or with friends in a supervised area.**

## Contacting Parents of Distressed Students

- ❖ Class Tutors / Year Heads should liaise with the designated member of the CIRG with regard to distressed students.
- ❖ In some cases it may be necessary to inform the parents of these concerns and possibly suggest that the student might be better at home, with family support, for the remainder of the day.

## **Prayer Services**

- ❖ A member of the CIRG may liaise with Fr. O’Sullivan/Rev Bradley (local clergy) to organise prayer services in various year groups, if deemed appropriate. The organisation of and attendance at prayer services will depend on the year/class groups associated with the student/teacher and their siblings/close friends.
- ❖ A Book of Condolence will be opened and placed at a central location (*students will be informed of location*)

## **The Rest of Day 1**

- ❖ The school should continue to maintain a calm, supportive environment and, as far as is possible, continue with normal routine whilst allowing for flexibility.
- ❖ Staff should continue to stress the supports that are available throughout the day.
- ❖ It is advisable that more staff than usual would mingle with the students during breaks to act as support.
- ❖ The CIRG will meet at lunchtime to evaluate the school’s response, gather names of students which colleagues are concerned about and agree a plan for the afternoon.
- ❖ A brief staff meeting should be held at the end of the school day to discuss how the day went, identify vulnerable students, plan for tomorrow and detail funeral arrangements if available.

## 24 – 72 Hours After the Critical Incident

The **CIRG** will meet again the following morning to:-

- ❖ Check how members of the CIRG and other colleagues are coping.
- ❖ Decide on an effective means of monitoring vulnerable students.
- ❖ Confirm the family's wishes regarding school involvement in the funeral arrangements where appropriate. Other staff may need/wish to be involved.

A further **Staff Meeting** will also be called to:-

- ❖ Update staff on developments.
- ❖ Take feedback from teachers about concerns they may have.
- ❖ Encourage sensitivity and consideration of how colleagues are coping on a personal and professional level.

### **The Funeral**

- ❖ Where appropriate the Principal will contact the relevant bodies with regard to closing the school on the day of the funeral as a mark of respect. (DES, Bus services etc)
- ❖ A member of the CIRG will coordinate student involvement in the funeral (Guard of Honour etc). Other staff will be invited to assist where necessary.
- ❖ Students involved in the funeral on behalf of the school should be dressed in full school uniform.
- ❖ The wishes of the bereaved family will be respected at all times.

## **Reopening of School After the Funeral**

- ❖ Members of the CIRG and other relevant staff members should liaise with students who return from absence due to the incident. Students who are seen as vulnerable should be monitored and referred to counselling.
- ❖ Students who are finding the events of the last few days stressful and difficult may be invited to a Critical Incident Concern session. The session will be facilitated by a counsellor and/or member of the clergy/order and will involve the Year Head and /or other teachers who knew the student/staff member well.
- ❖ The session should last approx 90 mins and aims to enable students to start dealing with grieving process.

### Aims;-

- To provide students with a safe, confidential place in which to tell their story and share their feelings.
- To alert the school to individuals who are in need of more specific long term support.
- To prevent the onset of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.
- To enable the student body to get back to normal as soon as possible.

## **Long Term Action**

- ❖ Continue to monitor students for signs of continuing distress
- ❖ Evaluate school's response to incident and amend this policy accordingly.
- ❖ Ensure that new members of staff are aware of recent events, vulnerable students & the school's procedures.
- ❖ Anniversaries can trigger emotional responses and additional support may be needed at these times.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT – PART 2

### **Flood, Fire, Serious Damage to the School**

In the case of a critical incident of this nature the following procedures will apply;-

- 1) The Principal will contact An Garda Síochána, the Board of Management, the Trustees & the Dept.of Education & Science.
- 2) A meeting of the CIRG (*as detailed on p.2*) will be convened;-
  - ❖ If the damage is discovered in the afternoon/early evening the CIRG should met that evening.
  - ❖ If the damage is discovered late at night or early morning the CIRG should meet the following morning before school or as soon as is practically possible.
- 3) The CIRG will decide whether it is safe and practical to open the school.
  - ❖ Where it is possible to open the school the CIRG will decide on a plan for the day, including areas that will need to be out of use/cordoned off.

A brief staff meeting will be held at the beginning of the school day to outline this plan and again at the end of the day for feedback.
  - ❖ Where there is a need for the school to close Radio Kerry and bus companies should be informed. (Information to both should be in the form of a statement agreed by the CIRG)
  - ❖ Once a timeframe for the re-opening of the school has been determined the CIRG should draw up a plan for ;-
    - a) The period of closure (*alternative accommodation etc*)
    - b) The re-opening of the school.
    - c) Response to the media – (*See p.4*)
- 4) In the event that a fire/flood etc occurs during the school day the school's emergency procedures as outlined in the school's Health & Safety Statement will be implemented. The CIRG will then meet immediately and follow the procedures outlined above.

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## Staff Training

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Presentation Secondary School is committed to the ongoing training of staff with regard to critical incidents & dealing with bereaved/distressed students/staff.

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## Success Criteria

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The effectiveness of this policy will be defined by the following;-

- ❖ Critical Incidents are managed effectively and sensitively.
- ❖ Communication is handled effectively.
- ❖ A sense of support and a level of closure is achieved for those affected.

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## Monitoring & Review Procedures

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The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through actual experience of critical incidents and with consideration for the changing needs of our school community.

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if monitoring indicates the need for adaptation.

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**Ratified on;** - 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**Review Date ;-** October 2018

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**GUIDANCE FOR BREAKING THE NEWS TO STUDENTS**

- ❑ All staff will be furnished with the facts as known. **Only these facts should be conveyed to students.**
- ❑ Only if the tragedy is confirmed as a suicide by the family can it be relayed as such to the students.
- ❑ The year group/class of the student/member of staff who has died should be the first to be told.
- ❑ Other classes to be told by their Class Tutor/Year Heads during Period 1. It is important to remember that not every class is going to be traumatised. However, the loss for the school community as a whole must be acknowledged
- ❑ Tell the class that you have sad news and that it is difficult for you to do this.
- ❑ Let them know the name of the person the news is about.
- ❑ Let them know the facts as you know them (vital to avoid rumours and added distress)
- ❑ Encourage questions, but be careful to only answer with what you have been told as fact. Other questions can be directed to members of the CIRG and relayed back to students if appropriate.
- ❑ Let the students know of common reactions to the tragic news. Shock is usually the most common reaction.
- ❑ Don't allow students to leave the classroom alone if they are in a state of distress. Students should be constantly supervised whilst in a state of distress.
- ❑ Inform students of the people/groups available to support them.
- ❑ Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news.
- ❑ Allow students time to talk to each other and explain how they can support one another.
- ❑ Be alert to students who are not coping well with the news.
- ❑ A short prayer and moment of silence may be appropriate and may help students to relax.
- ❑ Some students/staff will be able to continue with class. Others may need to go to the counselling/support services available.
- ❑ All staff should try to continue with normal routine where appropriate but allow for flexibility and time for students to talk.

**FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH A CRITICAL INCIDENT**

|               |             |           |            |               |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|------------|---------------|
| Bewildered    | Depressed   | Grief     | Dazed      | Disorientated |
| Unwanted      | Denial      | Panic     | Redundant  | Self Pity     |
| Distress      | Helpless    | Alienated | Unloved    | Shocked       |
| Lonely        | Burdened    | Powerless | Vulnerable | Ashamed       |
| Sad           | Anxious     | Hurt      | Release    | Insecure      |
| Apprehensive  | Relief      | Guilty    | Pain       | Numb          |
| Tearful       | Hopeless    | Fear      | Tired      | Unhappy       |
| Revengeful    | Worthless   | Gratitude | Emotional  | Disappointed  |
| Confused      | Overwhelmed | Anxiety   | Nausea     | Agitated      |
| Misunderstood | Irritable   | Disbelief |            |               |

**SAMPLE STATEMENT FOR THE MEDIA**

It is with profound sadness that the Management, staff and students of Presentation Secondary School, Miltown, have learnt of the tragic death of .....

Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the .....family.

On hearing the tragic news the school's policy for dealing with such a traumatic incident was initiated. Procedures have been in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given all the support and help they may need at this time.

Counselling and support services are available in school for students, parents and staff affected by this tragedy. Prayer Services will be/have been held for students throughout the day.

We offer our prayers and support to all those affected by this tragedy.

## SUICIDE AWARENESS– GUIDELINES

### **Indicators & Intervention Measures**

Suicide is a particularly traumatic event in the life of any school. A study conducted in Ottawa, Canada, revealed a number of behaviours which can be exhibited by those contemplating suicide. Principals/Counsellors may find this list and the suggested forms of intervention helpful.

### **Pointers**

1. Loss of interest in usual activities.
2. Withdrawal from social contact.
3. Difficulty in concentrating, problems with judgement and memory.
4. Dramatic fall-off in school performance.
5. Feelings of sadness, emptiness, hopelessness may be expressed in essays.
6. Sleep disturbance – decreased, or sometimes increased.
7. Increased overt displays of anger and rage, verbal or physical.
8. Excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol.
9. Promiscuous behaviour.
10. Uncharacteristic delinquent behaviour/thrill seeking.
11. Lack of supportive relationships with friends or family.
12. Previous suicidal threats, gestures, attempts.
13. Statements, verbal or written, revealing wish to die or preoccupation with death.
14. Nihilistic comments – life is meaningless, filled with misery.
15. Gestures to be noticed – self mutilation, scratches.
16. Planning for death, making final arrangements, giving away treasured possessions.
17. Suddenly becoming cheerful after long depression (relief when decision taken).

WHAT TO DO:

**TAKE IT SERIOUSLY** – have a talk with the young person keeping some principles in mind:

1. Remain in control – don't panic, act slowly, listen.
2. Encourage expression of feelings and accept them (give time).
3. Avoid judgemental comments or empty reassurance.
4. Avoid promises you can't keep (e.g. secrecy; call me any time; confidentiality).
5. Empathise and let them know you care (biggest single preventative is knowing someone cares).
6. Encourage them to see a counsellor or therapist (carefully).
7. Inform Parents and Management of school.
8. If seriously worried, don't leave them alone.
9. Seek advice and support yourself (nobody should carry the worry about a suicidal youngster alone).

**All information, even vague concerns, in relation to suicide/self-harm should be passed on to the Designated Liaison Person (Principal/Deputy)**

WHAT NOT TO DO:

1. Don't assume a young person is not the "type" to commit suicide.
2. Don't leave a child/teenager alone if you believe the risk of suicide is imminent.
3. Don't act shocked at whatever is told to you.
4. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong. This may make him/her feel more guilty and intensify the depression.
5. Don't take responsibility for "saving" the young person, get additional help.
6. Don't feel that you have to have an answer to all the child's questions. If you do not know the 'meaning of life', say so. Make it clear that you are there to listen, not to solve problems.
7. Don't be afraid to be the first to mention suicide. Generally it comes as a relief to the young person that you are willing to discuss the subject.
8. Don't deny or cover up the young person's feelings or intents. Don't be judgmental. Acknowledge his/her feelings without reinforcing the negative. "I believe you are feeling miserable right now. Let's talk about it".
9. Don't abandon the young person because the problems are too overwhelming. Follow through in getting him/her help (Designated Liaison Person). Don't be another loss or rejection to him/her.
10. Don't wait too long in the hope he/she will get over it. Even vague concerns should be passed on.