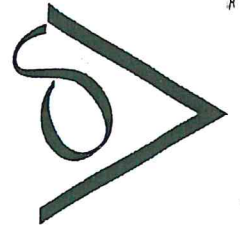


# Critical Incident Policy

Adopted by the Board of Management on 13/06/2017

**Douglas  
Community  
School**



**Douglas**

**Cork**

## **Introduction**

The following policy is designed to assist the school staff and community in responding in an effective way to a serious crisis (critical incident) within the school community.

A critical incident is defined as an event that seriously affects members of the school community.

The following are examples of the kinds of incidents that may be categorised as critical incidents.

- Death, serious illness or serious accident involving a member of the school community
- Suicide of a member of the school community
- Serious injury or death of a student while involved in a school activity
- Disappearance of a member of the school community
- Family Bereavement
- Serious violence or the threat of serious violence to a member of the school community either within or without the school
- Intrusion into the school
- Serious damage to the school buildings through fire, flood, vandalism or other cause
- Serious emergency on the school premises
- An accident or a tragedy in the wider community

## **Critical Incident Management Team CIMT**

The Principal or Acting Principal, in the absence of the Principal, will decide what constitutes a serious crisis necessitating the implementation of this policy. In order that the school is in a position to respond effectively to any crisis that it may encounter, the Principal will establish a standing committee of the school staff comprising the following members of staff.

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Guidance Counsellor/s
- Chaplain
- Relevant Year Heads
- Relevant Class Teachers
- Relevant Pastoral Care Team members if not included above
- School Secretaries and Caretakers and other support persons

According to the type of incident which has occurred, the composition of the team may need to be varied, to include support from other neighbouring schools.

CIMT Contact Numbers: Attached.

### **Schools Support Network.**

A local support network has been established comprising the Principals and Guidance Counsellors of the following schools: Christ King Secondary School, Coláiste Chríost Ri, Douglas Community School, Regina Mundi College, and Ursuline Secondary School. The network has agreed to provide support staff, Guidance Counsellors and other appropriately trained staff, to any one of the schools that may need assistance in meeting the needs of its students and staff following a critical incident.

### **Preventative Measures to Help Avoid Critical Incidents.**

The school recognizes that it must plan its response to a critical incident. It is essential that all members of the school community be provided, on an ongoing basis, with the skills and knowledge to respond to an incident. This can be done through the provision of in-service for teachers and other support staff.

The school is also committed to structures, supports and policies to try to prevent critical incidents. Through the Pastoral Care policy, the guidance and counselling plan, the SPHE programme and the inclusive ethos of the school we work to educate, inform and support students in ways that promote good mental health and relationships, to foster responsible attitudes to alcohol and other drugs and to encourage positive attitudes to road safety. This will be supported through information meetings for parents and the effective pastoral/student support structure within the school.

### **Emergencies /Critical Incidents in the School**

Where an emergency situation occurs within the school involving serious injury/illness of a member of the school community the appropriate emergency services, Ambulance Service, Fire Service or Gardaí, should be contacted immediately by the staff member present. Only then should s/he inform the senior management of the school. The telephone number for all emergency services is **112**.

### **Hearing the News**

Once a member of the school community becomes aware of a critical incident involving a member of the school community, s/he should inform the senior management of the school.

### **Establish the Facts**

The speed at which news travels by mobile phone texts and calls demands a speedy response from the school management in establishing the facts of any critical incident.



Students may already have news of a critical incident before school staff is aware of it.

It is crucial that the school has correct information regarding the crisis. The first action needed by the CIMT is to establish the facts. This may involve contacting others such as Hospitals, Gardaí, Emergency/Medical Services, and Parents/Guardians.

In the event of a suspected suicide, **it is particularly important that the word suicide is not used** and that professionalism and sensitivity is exercised at all times.

### An Outline Immediate Response

Once the facts of the crisis have been established, all available members of the CIMT will meet.

The CIMT will agree an immediate plan of action which may involve:

- Informing students and staff, teaching and non teaching
- Identifying those who are likely to be more seriously affected by the crisis than others.
- Contacting parents /guardians
- Visiting families most intimately touched by the crisis
- Organising a school assembly or service
- Deploying the pastoral care team
- Alerting outside agencies
- Liaising with relevant support groups - Counsellors, Health Service Executive, Department of Education and Science etc.
- Liaising with those at the accident site (e.g. in the case of an out of school crisis)
- Agreeing a common statement with regard to the crisis - with a view to dispelling rumours, while not adding to the distress of those involved or invading their privacy
- Establishing a policy for liaising with the press
- Assigning tasks within the CIMT
- Providing rooms for debriefing meetings, counselling etc.
- All staff involved will log telephone calls made and received, meetings held, letters sent and received, important information gathered and will contribute these logs to a central file which will ultimately be held by the Principal in case of follow up after a long time has passed
- Organising a timetable for the school to respond to the crisis - as far as possible adhering to normal timetables and routines - while avoiding any signs of insensitivity to those most intimately touched by the crisis.
- Organising a staff meeting and deciding whether or not an outside professional will be invited to that meeting. Where students are going to be in the school, it is critical that appropriate supervision be put in place for all students whose teachers may be involved in meetings.
- Where a bereavement is involved please refer to the School's Bereavement Policy.

## **Critical Incident Procedure:**

1. Critical Incident team to meet in boardroom.
2. Establish facts.
3. Ask teachers to stay in class with students for as long as necessary.
4. Inform teachers of brief staff meeting at next break in staff room.
5. Gather the impacted Year group in Room 25/25A.
6. Communication to students:
  - a. Prepared script for communicating information to students.
  - b. Give options to students – they can stay in school or go home – clear choice.
  - c. There will be areas allocated for people most affected – prayer room, careers library and Room 25/25A.
  - d. Refreshments to be prepared in Room 22.
7. Send text to parents of Year group, or class group for Junior Year groups, informing them that the school is providing support for students. In the event of students wishing to leave school parents/guardians must collect them.

### **Morning after:**

1. Critical Incident Team to meet in Boardroom.
2. Hold brief Staff Meeting.
3. Arrange support for students and staff.
4. Monitor vulnerable students and those who may be impacted by the event.
5. Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements.
6. Liaise and communicate with parents/guardians of students affected by incident.
7. Agree on attendance and participation at funeral.
8. Make decision about school closure. (BOM)
9. Put in place a Book of Condolence to be signed by staff/students/parents.

### **Ongoing Process**

1. Continue to monitor students for signs of distress.
2. After the initial 4-6 weeks grieving period has elapsed, where necessary liaise with external agencies to support students.
3. Plan for return of bereaved student.
4. Plan for giving of 'Book of Condolence' to the bereaved family.
5. Decide on memorials and anniversaries. (BOM/staff, parents and students)
6. Review response to incident and amend plan. (Staff/BOM)



## Staff Meeting

All staff (including support staff) should be invited to a staff meeting.

The following matters should be addressed by the meeting:

- A sensitive account of the facts as known, having regard for the privacy of those involved in the incident. Information needs to be provided on a need-to-know basis.
- The views and feelings of staff.
- How, by whom and in what setting students and other members of the school community should be informed of the incident.
- An outline of the timetable that the CIMT has drawn up for responding to the crisis - the timetable may, if necessary and feasible be amended at this meeting.
- Details regarding the outside agencies that have been contacted and the support programme that will be put in place for staff, students and other members of the school community.
- Need for awareness of potentially vulnerable students.

## Informing Students

It is important that all those who need to be informed of the incident receive the necessary information as soon as is practicable. In the course of preparing to inform students, the following matters should be taken into account.

- A common statement is agreed before students are informed.
- Consideration should be given to providing those delegated the task of informing students with an agreed script. But, of course, each person will have his/her own way of relating to his/her group of students.
- Students who are likely to be more seriously affected by the information than others should be informed first and support services made available to them immediately if required.
- If at all possible, students should be told at the same time in Class or Year Groups.
- The ideal person to inform a group of students is a staff member who knows them well and has their trust.
- Where a member of staff indicates that he/she would be uncomfortable undertaking the task of informing a group of students, his/her view should be respected. Indeed, where a member of staff feels, for whatever reason, that he/she is unable to be involved in the school's direct response to a serious trauma, he/she should be allowed to opt out.
- Clear unambiguous information (the facts as they are known) will reduce the spread of rumour. However, it is important to recognise that everyone does not have to be given full details of the event. Information needs to be provided on a need-to-know basis.
- Details of a critical incident will need to be communicated to a group of students in a sensitive manner and those informing a group of students should check the list of those they are informing carefully and note if there are students in the group who are more seriously affected by the information than others. This information should be passed on to the CIMT.

- Those informing students of the details of the incident should spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to news of the incident.

Where news of the death of a member of the school community is being communicated to students - please refer to the Bereavement Policy.

### **Critical Incident on a School Activity/Trip**

Different situations call for different responses but the following points should be considered:

- Those teachers present at the scene should make contact in the following order: (a) emergency services, (b) school and through the school with (c) parents.
- The preparation of a clear statement to assist those contacting the relatives of those who have been injured or affected by the incident.
- It is preferable to have a group of people involved so that all concerned are informed in or around the same time.
- Those contacted should be offered as much practical help as possible - transport, telephone numbers, relevant contact persons and other resources
- Those contacting the most affected by the incident should check to see if the contacted are on their own and therefore in need of support.
- Ideally, the most seriously affected should be spoken to face to face rather than by telephone.
- The communication should contain some element which allows the person conveying it to check that it has been fully understood.

### **Liaising with the Press**

If there are enquiries from the press, it is important that only one person acts as a liaison - this will usually be the Principal or other nominated person. All staff and students are to be told that all press enquiries are to be referred to the Principal. No other discussion with the press should take place and no interviews should be given without the approval of the Principal.

### **Contact with the press:**

- priority will be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis
- names, addresses, telephone numbers, photographs or other personal details of those affected will not be released
- Only established facts will be released without speculation
- likely questions will be considered and a response to them prepared
- a time and place for briefings will be agreed with the press, preferably in the school
- a simple and brief Press Statement will be released. It will, where appropriate, express the sorrow of the entire school community at the injury / sudden death



of one of its members and it will extend sympathy to the family affected. The statement must be adhered to in all communications with the media and it should be familiar to every member of the school staff.

### **Others to be Informed**

The Cathaoirleach of the Board of Management will be informed as soon as possible. Other relevant bodies, e.g. Parents' Council, Students' Council, National Educational Psychological Service, State Claims Agency, Health & Safety Authority will be informed as appropriate and as soon as is practicable.

### **Review**

This policy and set of procedures will be reviewed following each critical incident in this school and in any event at least annually in the light of experiences in this school and/or in neighbouring schools.

We will also review the policy with other schools and professionals to compare the effectiveness of our Critical Incident Plan.

### **Conclusion**

We recognise that while this policy will be of assistance in the event of a crisis in our school community it cannot replace the vital qualities needed in dealing with such personal issues as bereavement and loss - the sensitivity, care and compassion we offer to one another and to our students on a daily basis.