



## Scoil Ruáin



## Critical Incident Policy and Plan



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## **CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY & PLAN**

The staff and management of Scoil Ruáin 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 students or staff members, or members of our local community.

The Board of Management, through the principal, has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school’s policies and plans.

### **Core Values**

Scoil Ruáin is a co-educational, multidenominational ETB school that is underpinned by the core values of excellence in education, care, equality, community, and respect. At Scoil Ruáin, we work hard to give every student an equal chance to participate in curricular and extracurricular activities, to prepare our students to be open-minded and responsible citizens with a strong sense of our core values. Everyone in our school community is treated equally in all aspects of school life. Our aim is to provide an inclusive education that acknowledges the variety of identities, viewpoints, and values that students, parents and staff members have.

### **Definition of a critical incident**

- An accident involving members of the school community.
- The death (especially sudden or unexpected) of a member of the school community.
- A death or attempted suicide on the premises.
- An intrusion into the school.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- A major accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Any other trauma which impacts on the entire school community.

### **Aim**

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to 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 impact on students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

### **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.

### **Safety**

- Anti-bullying policy
- Code of behaviour

- School trips policy
- Acceptable Use policy
- SPHE & student well-being; RSE
- Safe TALK trained staff
- Health & safety policy
- Risk management register
- Child Protection Policy & DLP & DDLP
- Student support system and team
- Guidance
- HSCLO
- School Completion Programme
- Coiscéim
- Evacuation procedures
- Campus security
- Supervision rota

### **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

The team is comprised of

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Career Guidance Counsellor
- Student Support Team
- HSCLO
- Assistant Principals
- CIMT admin

Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves via the employee assistance & wellbeing programme (see appendix 11 for details)

The school has developed links with a range of external agencies:

- DE
- NEPS
- HSE
- TETB
- TUSLA
- Gardaí
- SEC

**TEAM LEADERS:** Principal and Deputy

- Alert the CIMT to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Co-ordinate the tasks of the team

- Liaise with the board of management, TETB Director of Schools, Parents' Association, SEC, NEPS
- Liaise with bereaved family where appropriate
- Liaise with Gardaí
- Liaise with media
- Ensure any information is checked for accuracy
- Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- 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.
- **STAFF LIAISON** Guidance Counsellor
- is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises staff of the availability of the Employee Assistance Scheme and gives them the contact number.
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)

#### **STUDENT LIAISON** Year heads

- Co-ordinates information about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students
- Maintains student contact records (see appendix 6)
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Sets up and co-ordinates supervision of quiet room (room 19 and chill out room)

#### **PARENT/GUARDIAN LIAISON** HSCLO

- Liaises with parents
- Ensure sample letter are prepared and available for adaptation
- Manages consent issues (for work with external agencies)
- Maintains records of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides material for parents

#### **AGENCY LIAISON-NEPS** SENCO

- **ADMINISTRATOR** Maintains up-to-date contact information for all parents, teachers and emergency services.
- Takes and logs calls and notes those that need a response.
- Photocopies and sends out letters, emails and texts.
- Maintains records.

#### **Record keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters emails and texts sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc. The Administrator will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials etc.

#### **Confidentiality**

The management and staff of Scoil Ruáin 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 statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind and will seek to ensure that students do so also.

### **Good Name Considerations**

The terms 'suicide' or "murder" will not be used as this can only be confirmed by inquest. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' should be used instead.

### **Critical incident rooms**

Quiet room: room 19 and chill out room

Meetings with year group: room 6

Meetings with individual parents: Principal's office

Small group of parents: library

Individual meeting with students: guidance counsellor's office

Other small meetings: SEN office

Media: St Mary's Hall, Killenaule

Alternative pick-up point: St Mary's Church, Killenaule

### **Procedures to be followed:**

In the event of the incident happening outside school time, staff will be alerted via the text alert system to check for further information on VSWare. The CIMT meeting will be convened before the school day starts and decide on the procedures to be followed for the day. These will be communicated to staff.

Best practice is that the normal routines of the school day be followed as much as possible. Year heads, supported by their class teachers, will address their year groups in an assembly. Thereafter, subject teachers should follow their timetables. Subject teachers should begin the class by acknowledging the incident. Stick to the facts and discourage speculation, then try to establish normal routine insofar as is possible.

There will be an end-of-day session with teachers where the principal will provide an update and advise staff on schedule for the following day, where appropriate.

### **Funerals/memorials**

In the case of a student being bereaved (i.e. the deceased is not a direct member of the school community), school will remain open. The school respects parents' decision to allow their child(ren) to attend any funeral or memorial.

In the case of the death of a student, the school will consult with the family of the student about any arrangements. Staff and students may offer to assist with funeral arrangements (choir, readings, etc). The school advises parents to accompany children to funeral home and burials, and to collect from school afterwards. On the recommendation of professional agencies, the school will not organise guards of honour. After the interment, the school may reopen to allow the friends of the deceased to spend time together. This will take place in the assembly area or sports hall.

In the case of the death of a staff member, the school will consult with the family of the staff member about any arrangements. The school may close to allow staff or students to attend the funeral if appropriate. Staff and students may offer to assist with funeral arrangements, (choir, readings, etc) On the recommendation of professional agencies, the school will not organise guards of honour.

### **Supporting documentation**

Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)  
Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013) Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)  
Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)

## **Appendices**

- 1. Sample script for principal meeting with staff**
- 2. Sample letter for parent**
- 3. Sample letter for parents (violent death)**
- 4. Sample announcement to the media**
- 5. Student contact record**
- 6. Sample CIMT meeting agenda**
- 7. Script for year heads**
- 8. Script for subject teachers**
- 9. Employee assistance details for staff**
- 10. Phone tree**
- 11. Lesson plan for SPHE classes after a critical incident**

## **Appendix 1: Sample script for principal meeting with staff**

### **MEETING WITH A STAFF GROUP**

#### **SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR PRINCIPAL**

“The purpose of this meeting is to relay facts to staff and to plan the schedule for the day. It is generally the principal who leads this meeting. On occasion, this duty may be delegated to another member of the team. It is crucial that the teachers have accurate facts and are kept updated. This will help to dispel rumours which may begin to circulate. It may be useful for NEPS to give a brief input.

You may have already heard that two of our students were involved in a car accident last night (give details of where). (Name of students) who were driving together, both died as a result of their injuries. As more information becomes available, including funeral arrangements, I will speak to you again. This is a terrible tragedy for the school and community and our thoughts are with the families.

It is important to make every effort to maintain regular classroom routines in accordance with the timetable. However, for many of the students this will be difficult. I understand that this may be a very difficult time for you also and we need to be here for each other. The psychologist is now going to talk to you about how we can support each other and the students in the coming days and weeks. Thank you.

Why routine is so important: Routine is very important at a time of tragedy. It provides a sense of security, especially for younger students. It helps students to see that, despite these awful events, the world remains largely unchanged and that life goes on. They will learn this over the next hours, days, weeks. They learn this through seeing you cope with this event and seeing that the routine of life is continuing. It is important to maintain the normal routine as much as possible. So, after this meeting, it would be best if you could go to your classes and be with the students.

It is ok to be upset: Remember this is an upsetting time for you as well as the students and it is ok that the students know and see that you are upset. In fact, it may be reassuring for them.

How to share the facts with students: It is important that close friends of the deceased are told first and separately. Some of you may feel uncomfortable about relaying this information to the students. It is important to remember that the students know you and trust you and that it is better if they hear this tragic news from someone they know and that this happens in a safe and familiar environment. Remember also that you are here for the longer term. You will be the ones to whom the students will look for guidance and support in the next hours, days, weeks and months.

It is important to stick to known facts and to be alert to rumour. Rumours can proliferate at these times and be very upsetting for students.”



## **Appendix 2: Evacuation procedures**

### **Procedure to be followed in the event of a fire**

## **When the fire alarm goes off**

- Instruct students in a clear and calm manner to leave the classroom immediately in an orderly fashion.
  - Tell them the evacuation route to use to get to the appropriate assembly point.
  - The class teacher should be the last person to leave the room and the door should be closed behind you.
  - Proceed to the nearest exit. (one way system does not apply in this case)
  - Each teacher should familiarise him/herself with the appropriate emergency exit to be used
- FOR ALL CLASSROOMS

## **Doors to be used**

Rooms 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7

Exit using their own fire exits or front student entrance.

Go to assembly area via the pathway, not the steps at principal's office.

Rooms 8, 9, 10 & 11

Exit via upper back door.

Rooms 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 & library

Exit using assembly emergency exits and use steps outside the principal's office.

Rooms 18, 19, 20, 21 & 2 offices

Exit via door to building and/or emergency exit as deemed appropriate by the teacher present in the classroom.

Room 22 & 23

Exit via their own classroom door or fire exit as deemed appropriate by the teacher present in the classroom.

Rooms 24, 25, 27 and Coiscéim

Exit using classroom door or fire exit as deemed appropriate by subject in the classroom at time of incident.

Use pathway to get to assembly area.

Sports hall and gym area

The sports hall and gym area must be evacuated using the nearest appropriate exit.

## **IN THE CASE OF A SCHOOL INVASION, THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES SHOULD APPLY:**

Do NOT sound the fire alarm. This will send the school population to a central area, making them vulnerable to attack.

### **RUN HIDE TELL**

- **Run:** At the pre-agreed signal “emergency, evacuate, run or hide” over the intercom, or if you receive an instruction to evacuate, run as far and as quickly away from the source of danger as possible. Leave all belongings behind, and exit via a safe route. This may be through a window.
- **Hide:** put a solid physical barrier between you and the attacker(s). If possible, lock yourself in, barricade the door and turn out the light. Turn your phone to silent and turn the vibrate function off. Stay quiet and still, and away from doors and windows.
- **Tell:** as soon as is safe, call the Gardaí with your location, a description of the attacker(s) and as much detail as you can. Stop others from entering the area.

When the emergency services arrive, follow their instructions. Assume they will treat everyone as a potential threat, so stay calm, make no sudden movements, and wait for them to resolve the situation.

### **Appendix 3: Sample letter to parents/guardians**

(School Contact Details) (School Crest)

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

#### **Additional information:**

Samaritans: 116123

Aware (depression & anxiety) 1800 804848

Pieta House (suicide & self-harm) 1800 247247

Teen line Ireland 1800 833634

Childline: 1800 666 666

#### **Appendix 4: Sample letter to parents/guardians (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

## **Appendix 5: sample statement to the media**

(Media guidance can be found in the NEPS guidelines (2016) pp 44-47)

My name is (Name) and I am the principal of (Name) School. 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 a (5th year boy) 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

## Appendix 6: Student contact record

Name of staff member: \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

## **Appendix 7: Agenda for meeting of CIMT team**

- Share full details of the event
- Agree on the facts. These will need to be relayed in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner by all staff to the students
- Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional ones that should be informed (check Emergency Contact List See NEPS Guidelines NEPS Guidelines (2016) Section 11, R21)
- Managing communication needs careful attention. Use of social media is a good medium for facilitating factual and appropriate communication
- Discuss how to break the news to relatives and close friends and who should do this (remember that they must always be told separately)
- Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students. It is often best to do this with class groups, rather than large assemblies (See NEPS Guidelines (2016) Section 11, R5)
- If there are students of various nationalities and religions in the school, this needs to be taken into consideration in organising prayer services, attendance at the funeral etc.
- When a number of external agencies are involved in a response, co-ordination will be needed and procedures will need to be agreed. An agency such as NEPS may take on this role
- You may wish to consult students about what to do if there is an event scheduled such as a trip, concert, match, etc. This should reduce the likelihood of students being angry later on as a result of any school action or in-action
- Discuss issues relating to school routine, including school closure. Remember it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. It is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students. Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what has happened and temporarily shelve all academic activities if necessary. See NEPS Guidelines (2016) Section 11, R5 for further information
- Plan procedures for the day
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students (see NEPS Guidelines (2016) page 25)
- Parents of different religious or national groups may need to be consulted
- Plan a whole staff briefing (including ancillary staff). This may need to be done in two groups depending on the arrangements for the supervision of students
- Agree the text of a letter to be sent to parents, (See NEPS Guidelines (2016) Section 11, R2 and R3)
- Discuss how to deal with the media. Prepare a media statement and place it on the school's website, if appropriate (see NEPS Guidelines (2016) Section 9 and Section 11, R4). This can be emailed to media representatives who make contact with the school. It may also be used if an interview is requested
- Delegate responsibilities to the appropriate critical incident team member or key personnel.
- Discuss which room(s) will be available to external agencies.
- Decide whether a quiet room should be made available for students. This is a place that students can go if they are having difficulty remaining composed in the classroom. It should have tissues, a few stuffed toys, cushions, drawing and writing materials and information leaflets from the Resource Materials section appropriate to the age of the students. It is

generally recommended that this is available for the week following the incident and that its use is then reviewed. Students should sign out of their regular class and sign into the quiet room for a certain time. The room should be supervised to ensure student safety. A very distressed student may need individual support. This might be offered by the guidance counsellor, chaplain or other staff member. A similar room could be set up for staff

- A record should be kept of all students seen by school staff and agencies external to the schools, (see Section 11, R1). One person should be appointed to collate the lists regularly
- Agree the next meeting time for the Critical Management Team/key staff
- Agree a time for a follow up staff meeting at the end of the day. This gives an opportunity for the principal to update staff on any developments. It also allows time for preparation for the following day. Lastly, it gives staff a chance to share their experience and to wind down after the day.



## **Appendix 8: sample script for year heads speaking addressing students**

### **STEP 1**

Giving the facts and dispelling rumours

Tell the students in a calm, low key and factual voice:

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- When it happened
- The plan of the day

*Sample Script: I have something very sad I want to share with you. The factual information agreed upon by the staff e.g. (name of student), who attends our school and was missing, has been found. You will probably be aware, through social media, that he is dead. Yesterday, the Gardaí found his body. They are investigating what has happened and will let us know as soon as they find out more information. I am feeling very sad about what's happened.*

### **STEP 2**

Normalising the reactions

Tell the children that they will all react differently to what has happened and that there is no right or wrong way. List some possible feelings and reactions, (see NEPS Guideline (2016) R9). Explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Let the students know that the reactions or symptoms will go away in time. Tell them that if the symptoms haven't gone after a few weeks, they should let you or their parents know. In addition to conversations they may have with friends on social media they may need to talk to someone in person about how they are feeling.

### **STEP 3**

Advising about social media usage

Discussions may begin with an outline of the various social media currently being used by members of the group. The value of these as a way of keeping in contact with and supporting friends should be acknowledged. Students may be asked for experiences of ways in which such communication has helped them as well as examples of ways in which it has gone wrong. Media involving live communication such as Skype or Viber are generally more conducive to support and less open to misunderstanding than text-based means. Students will be encouraged to consider how much social media usage is too much, particularly late into the night.

### **STEP 4**

Empowerment

Help the students to identify strategies that they might use to help manage their reaction, for example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep, taking plenty of exercise and appropriate use of social media - may all help. If appropriate, students can share strategies that worked for them in other

stressful situations or brainstorm ideas as to what might help. Overall, it is important to help the students regain a sense of control.

## **STEP 5**

### Closure

End the session by focusing on the future. Depending on the nature of the incident, help the class/group decide what they would like to do about various issues, e.g., what to do about the person's empty chair, about writing cards or letters. Reiterate the message that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances.

End the session by telling them that they will be following the normal routines of the day.

## **Appendix 10:**

More info at: <https://tipperary.etb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Step-1.-Employee-EAS-Brochure.pdf>

NEPS. *Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools*. department of education, 2016.