

Critical Incident Policy St Aidan's Community College

A critical incident is 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. 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*
- *A serious 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*

For all student/staff deaths the school should continue with normal routine as much as possible, maintaining a calm and supportive atmosphere. This reinforces the predictable and secure aspects of their life. Giving explicit details about the manner of the dying should be avoided – the focus should be on the loss of the person and the students' feelings.

Once news of a critical incident is notified to the school, the following steps will occur:

Principal will:

1. Confirm death or incident and obtain as much factual information as possible.
2. Inform Critical Response Team and Staff (if outside school time, follow agreed communication procedure to inform staff)
3. Arrange Crisis Response Team meeting and staff meeting/briefing.
4. Contact other professionals and other agencies as required (e.g. NEPS, ETB, parish priest, HSE etc.)
5. Prepare written and oral communication between school and family/staff/students/parents/media etc. When dealing with the media the purpose of a media statement should be very clear.

Crisis Response Team

This consists of the following: Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, HSCL and A-post holders. During the meeting the following will occur:

1. Identify counselling and support structures within the school.
2. Determine if outside agencies and support services are required.
3. Agree a structured system within the school for accessing counselling and support on the day and following days.
4. Identify locations for support services.
5. Arrange substitution for Chaplain and Guidance counsellor to ensure availability for counselling and support up to the funeral.
6. Prepare the following:
 - Information pack for staff (from NEPS Resource Materials for Schools)
 - Letter for parents (from NEPS Resource Materials for Schools)
7. Identify vulnerable students/staff
8. Agree designated persons to visit the family to offer sympathy on the school's behalf. Discuss the family's wishes for school involvement and support in the funeral. Confirm funeral arrangements.
9. Arrange a meeting for the staff

10. Arrange for an assembly/prayer service for the class group(s) affected.
11. Arrange follow up meeting to get feedback on how the day went and to deal with any outstanding issues e.g. return of siblings/friends to school, inform new staff, inquest/anniversary etc.
12. Determine procedures for funeral arrangements if necessary.

School Chaplain and Guidance Counsellor will:

1. Outline services available to affected students/staff
2. Be available to students/staff seeking counselling/support in the days/weeks following.
3. Set up crisis team room in the school.
4. Assist class teacher of the class/year group affected in breaking the news.
5. Give guidelines to staff in dealing with students in distress i.e. information on grief responses, identifying those with need of counselling and support.
6. Cater for the most affected students in Crisis response room.
7. Organise a Year group prayer service, once all students have been notified.
8. Contact parents of students who may be requesting to go home.
9. Encourage those who feel able to go back to class.
10. Meet any distressed parents and staff.
11. Liaise with local clergy re funeral.
12. Set up a book of condolences and light remembrance candle.

During the staff meeting/briefing the following should be considered:

1. Acknowledge staff grief.
2. Acknowledge that not all staff may be able to address classes.
3. Identify friends of the deceased student.
4. Identify vulnerable students.
5. Distribute and discuss information pack.
6. Discuss how and by whom the students will be informed of the death.
7. Discuss funeral arrangements if necessary.
8. Caution against staff speaking to media

Students need to be told the following:

1. That a fellow student /staff member has died/been seriously injured
2. Normal grief reactions are ok
3. That it is ok to be ok
4. Arrangements for counselling and support services within the school
5. The school routine for the day.
6. Discussion regarding funeral arrangements, school policy etc.
7. Caution against students speaking to media or using social media.
8. Remind students to speak to one of the support team or a teacher if they are worried or concerned about themselves or any of their friends.

Parents/Guardians need to get the following information:

1. Inform parents of the death/serious injury/incident (e.g. letter to all parents)
2. Parents need to be made aware of:
 - Difficult time ahead for some students
 - Normal grief reactions.

- The availability of counselling and support services for students within the school.
- The availability of school principal/support team to parents if they are concerned about their son/daughter.

3. Advise parents of funeral arrangements and the school policy regarding funeral attendance etc.

Death by Suicide

In response to the aftermath of suicide the school aims to:

- Commemorate the deceased who shared an important part of his/her life with the school
- Support and reduce distress of survivors
- Minimize risk of follow-on suicide
- Maintain same practice as if student had died from illness or accident

Critical incidents will be managed using the Guidelines for Schools and Resource Materials for Schools which have been developed by NEPS (National Educational Psychological Services).

The management of each Critical Incident will be determined depending upon the type of incident and how many people are affected by the incident as per the NEPS guidelines.

Ratified by Board of Management on 17th November 2021

Signed: _____ E. Breen _____

Chairperson BOM