

COLÁISTE NA SCEILGE



December 2013

Guidelines in the event of A Critical Incident

Signed: _____

Date ratified at the Board of Management meeting: __19 Dec 2013_____

Date ratified by Kerry Educational Services: _____

The representatives of the following people were consulted:

The Parents Council, the Students and the Staff.

The Policy was communicated to the following people:

The Board of Management, the Parents Council, the Students Council
and the Staff.

Date of review: _____

CONTENTS	PAGE
Mission Statement	3
Aims	3
Objectives	3
Critical Incident	4
Critical Response Team	4
Crafting this Policy	5
Short Term Strategy	6&7
Medium Term Response	8
Long Term Response	9
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Establishing the Facts	10
Appendix B: Critical Response Team Meeting Day One	11
Appendix C: Outline of Day One	12
Appendix D: For the Staff Meeting	13
Appendix E: Informing Students	14
Appendix F: Dealing with the Media	15
Appendix G: Critical Incident Team Meeting Day Two	16
Appendix H: Funeral and Guard of Honour	17
Critical Incident Summary	18
List of Emergency Contact Numbers	19

Mission Statement

We respect, we care,
We learn, we develop,
We belong.

Aims and Objectives

Aim

- To co-ordinate a whole school response to any critical incident within the school or local community

Objectives

- To formulate a strategic response to any critical incident affecting the school community.
- To activate the pre-planned strategic response to enable the whole school community to deal with the critical incident.
- To offer appropriate supports to those immediately affected by the event.
- To direct students and staff to the available support services

What is a Critical Incident?

‘Any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school’

A critical incident can be:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- Any accident or incident involving students or staff on or off the school premises.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident or tragedy in the wider community.
- Any other distressing events.

What characterises a critical incident more than anything else is not so much that it is a distressing event (which may include death) but the effect the event has on the school. Therefore, a critical incident pertains to the sudden and unexpected occurrence that overwhelms the usual coping capacity of the school and school community.

The term ‘suicide’ will not be used without the consent of the family involved or until it has been established categorically that a person’s death was the result of suicide.

The terms ‘tragic death’ or ‘sudden death’ shall be used instead.

Critical Incident Response Team

Central to the appropriate response of our school in such an event will be the school’s response team who will initiate and co-ordinate the following strategy, with the help and support of the staff, and possibly with the help of outside groups.

The Critical Incident Response Team will include:

The Principal
The Deputy Principal
The Guidance Counsellor
The School Counsellor
The Chaplain
The Relevant Year Head

John O’Connor
Karl O’Connell
Mary Golden
Susan Curran
Trish Carroll

Crafting this Policy

Our school response has drawn greatly from the following documents:

Responding to Critical Incidents: Advice and Information Pack for Schools; (NEPS 2007), www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/neps_critical_incidents_sch.pdf

When Tragedy Strikes, a Response for Schools
<http://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/WhenTragedyStrikes.pdf>

‘Guidelines for Schools on How to Respond to the Sudden Unexpected Death of a Student’ [online]; (ASTI 1997),

‘Guidelines for the Management of Critical Incidents in Schools’; (New South Wales Department of School Education),

Wise Before the Event; IAS, *Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines*. (W. Yule and A. Good)

Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines IAS, National Suicide Review Group 2002

Short Term Strategy

These are the main points of our school response over the first 24 hours of the incident happening¹.

- Upon the news of the incident being verified by the **Principal**², the Critical Incident **Response Team** needs to meet together to plan the day³.
- **Staff Members** are informed either in school by calling a meeting.
- **A Staff Meeting** is then called for 8.30 a.m. (or if during the day, at an appropriate immediate time) so as to ensure a co-ordinated structured approach⁴.
- The **Students** are then informed by the teacher of their next class⁵ while the class most affected is told by the class teacher and chaplain. Siblings and close friends are withdrawn from class and told separately as far as possible.
- The **Suaimhneas room** (B4 if possible) is set up with fluids, tissues, and comfortable chairs for those too upset to continue in the normal school routine, and the chaplain, school counsellor and guidance counsellor will be present here for students. This room will close at break times to prevent a dependence on the carers there, as well as giving them a break from such demanding ministry.
- The **Staff** meet again at break and lunch times for staff support and updates on information and alterations to the rest of the school day.
- The **Year Heads** visit their own classes to acknowledge the incident, stress the need for peer support and the availability of staff supports.
- After lunch there will be a short prayer service over the intercom led by the **Chaplain**, followed by an address by the principal.
- The **Principal** will visit the family/ies affected with the support of a teacher who may know the family, or at least know the area.
- The **Deputy Principal** will deal with all phone-calls from concerned parents, while the principal or delegated person will be the contact person with the media⁶. There will be a text sent to all parents in the school community (excluding direct family members in the event of a death) to inform them of the school response. This will be dealt with in a sensitive manner. In the event of a death of a student, the parents of their class group will be contacted via telephone to inform them of the incident so they can be of support to their child.
- The **Principal/Deputy Principal** will co-ordinate contact with the emergency services and the Gardaí where appropriate.
- The **Response Team** will meet at 4.10pm to debrief from the day as well as plan for the following day.
- In as much as is possible, the school will continue with the normal routine so as to create the much-needed stability of the familiar environment.
- All need to be alert to the signs of stress among **Staff** and provide support and time out where necessary and possible.

¹ See Appendix C on a more detailed plan for the first day.

² See Appendix A on verifying the news and gathering information.

³ See Appendix B for details on the response team meeting.

⁴ See Appendix D for details on the staff meeting

⁵ See Appendix E on informing the students.

⁶ See Appendix F on guidelines for relating with the media.

- If a critical incident occurs during school holidays or weekends, the above should be followed where possible. The **Deputy Principal** will inform the staff and school community via text message.

Medium Term Response

This focuses on the time following Day One for a period of one to two weeks, covering the time of the funeral, if one results from the incident.

- On the morning of Day Two the response team meets to plan the day ahead⁷.
- A list of vulnerable students should be verified and confirmed.
- The school routine continues, but for those who need or request individual support, the chaplain, school counsellor and guidance counsellor are available, i.e. the *Suaimhneas* room is discontinued.
- Explore the appropriateness of opening a book of condolences. The book may be signed during school breaks. Allow the relevant class group the opportunity to sign first.
- External activities (e.g. football matches, outings etc.) may be cancelled for the first week, if this is deemed appropriate.
- Keep parents informed of reactions of distraught students, as well as supports available.
- Reintegration of students/staff should be planned, careful consideration should be given to the timing and most appropriate method of this reintegration.

If a death results from the incident:

- The school will be involved in the funeral in as much as the family requests, but without overcrowding the occasion. If the family requests a guard of honour, the relevant year-head will co-ordinate this⁸.
- Give advice to students on how to sympathise at a funeral – for some this may be their first encounter with a grieving family.
- The school will remain open and students wishing to attend the funeral are advised to attend with their parents so as to have their support afterwards.
- Place a photo of the student /staff member who died on the stage with a candle light during school hours for a week.
- The school needs to be sensitive in arranging the return an individual's belongings to their family.
- There will be regular staff meetings to provide support to staff members, as well as gather information regarding concern about individual students.
- The reintegration of students or staff members absent due to the incident will happen with the support of the principal, yearheads and chaplain.
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) will be organised for those who need it.
- Outside support and facilitation will be organised for staff members and the response team, as deemed necessary.

⁷ See Appendix G on an outline of that meeting.

⁸ See Appendix H on the funeral day and procedures for a guard of honour.

Long Term Response

- Students with continuing issues and difficulties will be monitored⁹ and supported by the chaplain, counsellor and guidance counsellor.
- A memorial prayer service or Mass will be organised a number of weeks after the event.
- At an appropriate time, some students may be advised to avail of peer support through the Rainbows programme in operation in the school.
- Be alert to needs around the times of birthdays and anniversaries, as well as any possible trial or inquest.
- When comfortable and appropriate for the families directly affected by the incident, a prayer service will be organised by the chaplain followed by refreshments and a chance to draw on the support of others.
- If a death resulted from the incident, relevant families will be personally contacted and invited to the annual Mass of remembrance in November.
- The SPHE teachers will be asked to examine the programme to determine the need to incorporate a loss/grief component into it.
- The response team and the school community as a whole will evaluate the school response and make adjustments as recommended.
- Monitor staff for signs of stress and provide appropriate support.
- Affected individuals should continue to be monitored, in the long term, for stress and/or anxiety. The policy may need to be reviewed in the aftermath of a Critical Incident.

Development and communication of Policy

The development of this policy included staff, parents and students. The policy will be made available to the school community upon request.

⁹ Monitor students for signs of continuing distress over a prolonged period of time: Uncharacteristic behaviour; Deterioration in academic performance; Physical symptoms – e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness; Inappropriate emotional reactions; Increased absenteeism.

Appendix A

Establishing the Facts

The Principal or delegated person will verify the news of the incident and gather accurate information

- What happened, when, where
- How many involved and names
- Extent of injuries
- Location of injured and non injured
- Risk of further injury
- What agencies have already been contacted

Appendix B

Critical Incident Response Team meeting on Day One

The function of the Response Team is:-

- To provide a written version of statements to staff, students, parents, media
- To delegate responsibilities to each member of the team
- To prepare a media statement.
- To prepare an agreed factual statement for the phone operators.
- To ensure a phone line is free for outgoing calls and enquiries
- To agree the timetable for the day
- To organise staff meeting
- To arrange supervision of students during staff meetings
- To consider inviting outside agencies (e.g. NEPS, Southwest Counselling Centre) to support staff and students if necessary.

In the event of state exams being in progress,
contact NEPS (01 889 2700) as they provide
specific support in exam time crises.

Also contact the State Examinations Commission Branch (0920-74621)
to alert the Examination and Assessment Manager for the school.

Appendix C

Outline of Day One

During the school year the following takes place:

- School may remain open if that is practical in the circumstances.
- The school **Response Group** meets immediately.
- **All Staff** are gathered for a staff meeting as soon as possible using the contact tree if necessary.
- **Teachers** of first class inform the pupils.
- **Principal** alone deals with the media, unless he appoints someone else who has a competency in dealing with the media.
- Other enquiries will be addressed by the **Deputy Principal**.
- As recommended by NEPS, the school should continue its normal routine, as much as possible, to maintain a calm, supportive atmosphere while allowing for flexibility.
- During the course of the day, the **Year Heads** visit all classes in their own year group to remind students of available supports. It might be appropriate to do the same later on in the day.
- Aware of the fact that **Students** may be more open with peers rather than adults, there will also be the need to support friends of those who are upset.
- There is to be a meeting during the day for the school **Response Group**. The purpose of this meeting is to evaluate the school response to date, highlight difficulties/shortfalls, gather names of students requiring particular focus, agree on a plan for the next few classes and support the teachers.
- At a convenient time the **Staff** are to be gathered for a few moments in the staff room so as to be given information regarding our continuing response. If possible, staff will be updated again during the day.
- In the event of a death, the **Principal** will visit the bereaved family accompanied by a teacher who knows the family. During this or a subsequent visit, he will liaise with a relative regarding funeral arrangements and the school's possible involvement. This involvement may include readings, offertory procession, Guard of Honour, and choir. These will obviously be dictated by the wishes of the family.
- Contact will be made with **Parents** of distressed students by the relevant **Year Head, Chaplain, Guidance Counsellor or School Counsellor**. This is to highlight our care, inform the parents of our concerns, and possibly suggest that the student might be better at home, with family support, for the remainder of the day.
- After lunch there will be a short prayer service and a moment of silence over the intercom led by the **Chaplain**, and with an address from the Principal.
- There will be a staff meeting at 4.10pm to discuss how the day went, identify vulnerable students and tell of plans and future arrangements.
- The **Response Team** will meet to evaluate the day and allow time for personal debriefing.

Outside of the school time please refer to the Contact Tree page 16-17

Appendix D

For the Staff Meeting

- A staff meeting will happen as soon as possible on Day 1.
- All will have been informed using the Contact Tree if the school is closed. If the school is open, a number of teachers will go around to the classrooms to tell them of a staff meeting in the staff room at the end of that class period. At the end of the class the teacher will ask the students to go to the Mall until called for. The principal will organise a few teachers to cover supervision during the meeting.
- Update staff on basic facts, while always protecting the family's right to privacy -absolutely no rumours entertained or discussed.
- Time is to be allowed to the staff to speak amongst themselves for a few moments, so as to support each other. Staff members are to be informed as to what listening supports are available for them.
- A few minutes are to be spent to determine which students may need to be a focus of attention, e.g. obviously the class group and known close friends, but also cousins and neighbours.
- Agree a common statement as to what is said when the teachers return to class, so that all pupils hear the same thing.

This common statement should:

- Be communicated in a sensitive manner,
- Give the facts known at that time,
- Highlight the supports that will be available,
- Indicate the actions planned at that stage,
- Assure students that they will be informed about funeral arrangements, if a death resulted from the incident.
- As well as stressing the support available within the school, inform the staff of supports available outside the school for staff who wish to avail of this (e.g. the local GPs and SouthWest Counselling Centre).
- Inform staff about the Suaimhneas room in B4 for students too upset to continue in the normal school routine. The chaplain, the guidance counsellor and school counsellor will be present there and are available for those who are unable to continue with the class routine. Tissues, comfortable chairs and fluids will be available
- In the event of a death resulting in suicide, make staff aware that they may be blamed for the student's death – it relieves others. Therefore we need to support our colleagues.
- Distribute relevant handout material from NEPS.
- Over the course of the day, it will be essential that we, as a staff, support and keep an eye out for each other, as this is a difficult time for everyone.

Appendix E

Informing Students

- ◆ How the information is given is as important as the actual information itself.
- ◆ Tell them that you have bad news, tell them the name/names of the individual(s) it relates to, and that it is difficult for you to tell them this news. All this helps to prepare them for what they are about to hear.
- ◆ Be aware that for some students this may be their first major or close experience of death, grief or a traumatic event.
- ◆ Give information regarding structured supports in place for staff and pupils – e.g. chaplain, guidance counsellor, school counsellor, outside support people.
- ◆ For students who are upset, the most essential requirement is that they are listened to with empathy, and that there is an environment of respect within the class.
- ◆ Acknowledge pupils' varying reactions -grief is a natural process. This may also bring up memories or emotions from past traumatic events.
- ◆ The Suaimhneas room will be available for students who are unable to continue with the class routine. Students are to be in class or in the Suaimhneas room – not out in the corridors or in the toilets.
- ◆ Facilitate peer support if appropriate and possible since it must be acknowledged and recognised that young people often want to confide in each other. Allow students the chance to talk, but do not entertain any rumours.
- ◆ Especially in the case of a suicide, do not glorify the actions of the individual or present suicidal behaviour as a legitimate strategy for coping with difficult situations.
- ◆ Conclude with a prayer for the dead and bereaved or those affected by the incident, before continuing with class.
- ◆ When it is appropriate to continue with work, it might be better to do revision rather than new work, so that students have something familiar, and so might not feel under as much pressure.
- ◆ If a teacher is particularly concerned about a student, the teacher is to inform the year head first, so that the year head is aware of vulnerable students within the year group.
- ◆ Over the course of the day, it will be important for all staff to be open to the need in each class of time to listen and support.
- ◆ Make suggestions to students on using the routine of class and of the day for support so as to keep some degree of normality and calm.
- ◆ Inform students that the principal will deal with the media and ask students not to engage with the media as comments may be taken out of context and cause upset or hurt to individuals or families.
- ◆ If a death resulted from the incident, make suggestions to the students about attending the funeral: Tell them that there is no pressure on them to go – attend only if comfortable with it. If attending, encourage them to go with their parents or with adults rather than going with a group of friends, as they will need support at that difficult time. Tell them its ok to go in and shake hands in silence or to say a personal word; again whatever is comfortable for them.

Appendix F

Dealing with Media

Written statement to include the following:

- State that it is a difficult time for the school community
- Facts about the incident
- What has already been done
- What is going to be done
- Positive information/comments about the deceased in the event of a death
- Expression of sympathy to the family concerned

Some points to remember

- Media room may help to control access to staff and students
- The principal may assign the media task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with media
- Take time to prepare
- Relate to the media in a positive and friendly manner – they can carry important information to the community as well as such things as helpline numbers.
- What is said is on record, so keep it simple, factual and brief
- Decline if you're not ready or think it inappropriate. Avoid 'no comment' answers – tell them that you are not in a position to answer the question at this time, due to sensitivity to others or a lack of information at this time.
- Brief staff and students and advise them that the principal is the only person to deal with the media.

Appendix G

Critical incident team meeting Day Two

- Briefly check out how each person of the team is coping
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Teachers are asked to inform the year heads of vulnerable students.
- Organise review staff meeting to keep staff up to date on any developments
- Be sensitive as to how staff are coping on a personal and professional level
- Establish contact with absent staff and students
- Update media if necessary
- Plan for reintegration of students and staff affected – name key person to liaise with injured, siblings, close relatives, etc.
- Decide on attendance and participation at funeral in the event of a death
- The strong recommendation from NEPS is that the school stays open, so as to provide best support and maintain some sense of normality in such a difficult time.
- In the event of the death of a student, the student's name should be made *inactive* in the e-portal system. Ask teachers to do the same with their diaries and lists.

Appendix H

Funeral and Guard of Honour

- ◆ In the event of the death of a pupil NEPS recommends that the school should remain open on the day of the funeral because of a concern for vulnerable students being on their own. Pupils who wish to attend the funeral are advised to go with their parents.
- ◆ In the event of the death of a staff member it may be appropriate for the school to close due to potential staffing problems.
- ◆ The school's involvement will be as a result of dialogue with the family.
- ◆ The **Deputy Principal** may arrange a floral tribute, with the accompanying message being hand-written. Consult the family and/or the undertaker to find out the wishes of the family as they may request family flowers only. A donation may be made to the charity specified by the family in lieu of flowers.
- ◆ If students attend the funeral they are requested to attend with their parents. Students are recommended to wear their school uniform.
- ◆ The school will provide a Guard of Honour, if the family requests one.
- ◆ The **Year Head** will co-ordinate with other groups who may also be standing for a guard of honour, e.g. local GAA club or other interest groups.
- ◆ If the student was in 1st year to 4th year, the student's class group will be invited to form the guard of honour, with no pressure being placed on anyone. As many **Staff** members as possible will be available to take part.
- ◆ If the student was in 5th or 6th year, the class representatives of the year and close friends will be invited to form the guard of honour. It is envisaged that there would be a maximum of 40 students involved.
- ◆ The **Year Head** will co-ordinate those students for the guard of honour. Students are to organise their own travel arrangements (as opposed to the school organising a bus), so that the students will have family support for the day, and for travelling home afterwards.
- ◆ The students in the guard of honour are to be dressed in full school uniform, as they will be representing the school. It is recommended that all students attending the services be in full uniform as it identifies the students as such to the mourners.
- ◆ The **Principal, Deputy Principal**, the appropriate **Year Head** and the **Class Teacher** (if there is one) will also form part of the guard of honour.
- ◆ In the event of a staff member dying, staff members will form the guard of honour if requested.

CRITICAL INCIDENT SUMMARY

- **Principal** verifies incident.
- **Principal** contacts the **Emergency Services** and the **Gardaí** where appropriate.
- **Principal** informs the **Deputy Principal** immediately.
- **The Deputy Principal informs Critical Incident Response Team.** They meet together as soon as possible to plan the response and to delegate responsibilities to each team member.

MORNING

- **Staff Meeting** takes place at 8.30 a.m. or as soon as possible after the incident.
- **Children and or Siblings** are withdrawn discretely from class and told separately as far as possible.
- **Class** most affected is given priority. The **Class Teacher and Chaplain** speaks with the students.
- **Students** are then informed by the teacher of their next class
- **Suaimhneas Room B4** is set up with tissues, and comfortable chairs for those too upset to continue in the normal school routine. The School Counsellor, Guidance Counsellor and Chaplain are present here for students. This room is closed at break times.
- **Principal visits the family/families** affected with the support of a teacher.
- **Deputy Principal** deals with all phone-calls from concerned parents.
- **Principal** or delegated person is the contact person with the media.
- **Staff** meet again at break and lunch times.
- **Year Heads** visit the classes in their year group.
- **All** are alert to the signs of **stress** among **staff**.
- **Normal Routine** is continued **as much as is possible**

AFTERNOON

- **Chaplain** leads a short prayer service over the intercom after lunch followed by an address by the **Principal**.
- **Letter** is prepared by the **Principal** to be sent to parents to inform them of the school response.
- **Response Team** meets at 4.10 p.m. to debrief from the day as well as plan for the following day.
- **Normal Routine** is continued **as much as is possible**.

Read the Critical Incident Policy for more detail

EVALUATION AND REVIEW

This policy will be evaluated and reviewed every two years. This process will also take place a month after each critical incident.

List of Emergency Contact Numbers

Garda Cahersiveen Garda Station	Emergency	999/112 066-9472111
Ambulance	Emergency	999/112
Doctor Cahersiveen	Dr.O'Shea Dr.Donovan Dr.	066-9473555 066-9472121
Waterville	Dr.Gibson	066-9474284
Fire Brigade	Emergency	999/112
Hospital Tralee	Kerry General Bons Secours	066-7184000 066-7149800
Cahersiveen	St.Annes	066-9472100
N.E.P.S. Psychologist	Christine O'Sullivan	066-7180671
Chaplain	Trish Carroll	066-9473620 086-1069444
Counselling	SouthWest Counselling	064-6636416
Kerry Mental Health Association	Dan O'Connor	087-6998901
National Suicide Research Foundation		021-4277499
Living Links (support for suicide bereaved)		0879006300

