



# Critical Incident Policy for Scoil Mhuire Lourdes

## Introduction

In Scoil Mhuire Lourdes, we aim to protect the wellbeing of all members in our school community by providing a safe, caring and learning environment which nurtures the full educational potential of each child. We have taken a number of measures to create a supportive and caring environment in our school and we have formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the safety of staff and pupils.

Our Critical incident policy follows the guidelines for schools available in the following publications;

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- When Tragedy Strikes INTO 2000

The BOM through consultation with the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has formulated this critical policy. Copies of this policy will be disseminated to staff, the Board of Management and the Parent's Association. A copy will also be made available in the school Office.

## What is a Critical Incident?

‘A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school’ (NEPS/DES 2008). Critical Incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school or the local community and may include;

### **Examples:**

- Death of a member of school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide
- Major illness/outbreak of disease (Foot & Mouth)
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or pupil(s)
- An intrusion into the school
- Serious damage to the school through fire, vandalism or flooding
- Criminal incidents
- Major accidents, serious injury
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Disappearance of student from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.

## **Aim**

The key to manage a critical incident is planning and Scoil Mhuire Lourdes has formulated the Critical Incident Management policy and accompanying plan. The aim is that in the event of an incident, these will help staff to act quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control and resume 'normality' as quickly as possible.

## **Critical Incidents Management Team:**

- Leadership Role/ Team Leader: Marie Coen (Principal)
- Communication/ Agency Role: Delia Ryan- Deputy Principal
- Student Liaison: Delia- Ryan-Deputy Principal
- Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Andy
- Staff Liaison: Marie Coen (Principal)
- Garda Liaison: Mr. Gerard Connolly
- Staff Health & Safety Representative: Delia Ryan
- BOM Health & Safety Representative: Pat O' Toole
- Chairperson of Parents Association/ Parent and Guardian Liaison: Goretta Bracken
- Chairperson of Board of Management/ Media Liaison: Mr. Gerard Connolly
- Caretaker: James Smithers

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

1. Leadership Role/ Team Leader: Principal

## **Intervention**

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services, Board of Management, Department of Education & Skills
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)
- Liaise with Parents Association Chairperson
- Report incidents to the Health & Safety Authority
- Communicate with the media

## **Post- Intervention**

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review & evaluate plan

## 2. Communication/ Agency Role: Deputy Principal

### **Intervention**

- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies including NEPS
- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils

### **Post Intervention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response
- Review & evaluate plan

## 3. Student Liaison: Deputy Principal

### **Intervention**

- Alert other staff to vulnerable pupils
- Activate specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Access materials for staff (from Critical Incident Folder in Office)
- Provide information to leader

### **Post Intervention**

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

## 4. Chaplaincy Role

### **Intervention**

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

### **Post Intervention**

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Parish team and NEPS
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

## 5. Staff Health & Safety Representative: Deputy Principal and Pat O'Toole

### **Intervention**

- Assessing the Health and Safety issue
- Liaising with other members of Critical Incident Management Team
- Assisting with reports of dangerous occurrences or accident for the Health and Safety Authority
- Reporting to Board of Management on any Health & Safety aspects

### **Post Intervention**

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

## 6. Chairperson of the Parent's Association/ Parent and Guardian Liaison

### **Intervention**

- Representing parents' concerns and wishes with regard to the school's response to the critical incident

### **Post Intervention**

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

## 7. Chairperson of the Board of Management/ Media Liaison

### **Intervention**

- Liaising with Patron and Department of Education & Skills
- Liaising with Principal regarding incidents and issues occurring on the ground
- Consider legal & financial consequences
- Consult with Principal & Critical Incident team in preparing a media statement

### **Post Intervention**

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

## 8. **Secretary/ Administration**

### **Intervention**

- Ring the emergency services immediately
- Ensuring that the Office is manned at all time's
- Liaising with other members of Critical Incident Management Team

### **Contact Numbers & Emergency Information**

- The Secretary has responsibility for maintaining an up to date list of Contact numbers for pupils and their parents / guardians. Private and Confidential forms will be sent

out in June to ensure all contact information is available from the first day of the new school year.

There will be two lists kept on file.

1. *Emergency contact list with all contact details for each child.*
2. *Text-a-parent list with mobile numbers nominated by each parent.*

To ensure contactability of Text a Parent service during a Critical Incident or Evacuation, the BOM and Staff Health & Safety Officers have access codes. Our neighbouring school, Scoil Phádraig Naofa also has the access code for this service.

- It will be the **responsibility of each parent** to ensure that this phone number is current. Should a number be changed during the school year, it is the parent's responsibility to inform the Secretary who will immediately update the contact list.
- The Health and Safety Representative has responsibility for ensuring that a list of contact numbers for the emergency support services is displayed in the Staff Room, the Secretary's Office and the Principal's Office. This will be reviewed and updated at the beginning of each school year.

### **Post Intervention**

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

### 9. **Caretaker**

### **Intervention**

- Controlling access to the school premises
- Maintaining security procedures
- Maintaining services such as heating, light, water and communication lines
- Liaising with other members of Critical Incident Management Team

### **Post Intervention**

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

### **Additional Responsibilities**

### **Evacuation procedures**

The evacuation procedures are displayed near the door of every classroom. The emergency evacuation procedure will be practised once per term using the fire alarm. **All visitors and parents must evacuate the building on the sound of the fire alarm, whether it is a practise drill or emergency manoeuvre.**

## **Red Card System**

Every classroom has a Red Card to be used for an Emergency within a classroom. Pupils are trained early in September should an emergency occur (such as a teacher fainting, a child taking seriously ill, a violent, abusive or intoxicated individual entering the classroom) a pupil takes the card to teacher next door. This teacher will respond immediately to the emergency. The child proceeds with the same card to the Office so that the Principal is informed immediately and can come to assist the situation. The Staff H&S Officer has responsibility to ensure each year that every class has a red card attached to front door of room and one on desk.

## **Training & Staff Development**

The school will provide opportunities for staff and members of the Board of Management to attend information /training meetings on issues such as suicide, grieving and first aid. The school will use the resources of NEPS as an advisor in planning for, and as a support facility after any incident A rotating schedule for First aid will be established.

## **Visitors**

Visitors, including parents must report to the Office, identify themselves and state their business in the school. Visitors will not be allowed beyond the Secretary's Office except at the invitation of a member of staff.

## **After Schools Activities**

In the event of a situation occurring after school, the same short term actions outlined below should be followed, including the following;

- Evacuate building immediately (if necessary)
- Get assistance from a 2<sup>nd</sup> adult (assistant coach, teaching staff still on site, cleaner, caretaker)
- Ensure safety of additional children as well as injured
- Contact emergency services (ambulance, gardai, fire service, etc)
- Contact Principal immediately
- Contact parents
- Record events & procedures taken

## **The Media**

Members of the media must report to the Secretary's Office, identify themselves and state their business in the school. Members of the media will not be allowed beyond the Secretary's Office except at the invitation of the Principal or Deputy Principal. Members of the media may be asked to remain outside school property if this in any hinders the management of a critical incident.

***\*Only the Leader will speak to the media unless directed otherwise by the Critical Incident Management Team***

## Action plan

### ***Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident***

#### SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

- Ensure the safety of all students, staff & visitors
- Convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Management team and delegate responsibilities
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate – Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Gather accurate information (use Incident Report form)
- Identify high risk, vulnerable pupils
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff (BOM room)
- Immediate contact with affected/bereaved family/families
- Contact appropriate agencies and organise support
- Contact BOM, DES, NEPS, HSA & PA
- Appoint people to assist Secretary & Caretaker in handling phone queries & manning Secretary's Office & school gates
- Arrange the supervision of pupils
- Organise a timetable for the day
- Respond to the media – only the leader will speak to the media; all other staff will refrain from commenting
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Leader, Chaplain, Student Liaison person or Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

***As far as possible, maintain normal school routine. In serious cases of intruder or abduction, neighbouring schools will be informed.***

#### Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident

1. What happened, where and when?
2. What is the extent of the injuries?
3. How many are involved and what are their names?
4. Is there a risk of further injury?
5. What agencies have been contacted already?

- Contact appropriate agencies

1. Emergency services

2. Medical services
3. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
4. NEPS
5. BOM
6. DES/Schools Inspector

#### MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Re-convene a meeting of the Critical Management Team to review the events of the first 24 hrs and to delegate responsibilities
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff in order to clarify what has happened
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Update BOM, DES, PA & other relevant external agencies
- Update the media
- Plan visits to the injured
- Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
- Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
- Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Plan restoration of normal school routine
- Consider the legal & financial consequences
- School closure (if appropriate) – Request a decision on this from school management
- In the case of a bereavement, consider the following actions;
- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school

#### LONGER TERM ACTIONS

##### ***Monitor students for signs of continuing distress***

*If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance and/or long term counselling from the HSE. Constant communication with family is essential.*

- 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

##### ***Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately***

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

***Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future***

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staff are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school

***Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events)***

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother’s Day, and Father’s Day
- ***Plan a school memorial service***
- ***Care of deceased person’s possessions. What are the parent’s wishes?***
- ***Update and amend school records***
- ***Evaluate the long term effect on the educational progress of pupils***
- ***Evaluate the legal and financial consequences***
- ***Report to the BOM, DES & PA***

**Monitoring, Review and Evaluation**

This policy was drawn up in 2010. It was reviewed in 2013 and 2019 by the staff, the Parent’s Association Committee and the Board of Management.

The Critical Incident Policy Committee will review the policy every 3 years or on formation of a new Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, staff and pupils. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

**Reviewed:**

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**Chairperson of BOM**

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**Date**

