



Roll No. 12180 U

# Presentation Primary School

Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

Phone: 052 - 6123548/6122940. Fax:052 - 6121253. E-mail; presclon.ias@eircom.net

## Critical Incident Policy

### Introduction:

The Board of Management of Presentation Primary School, Clonmel is committed to securing the safety, health and welfare of its pupils, staff and the wider community.

The BoM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a critical incident management plan in response to the publication of the *NEPS Guidelines for Responding to Critical Incidences 2016*. A Critical Incidents Management Team(C.I.M.T.) has been established to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

### 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’.

### Examples:

- Death, major illness of a pupil/staff member/parent
- Major accidents, serious injury
- Suicide
- Fire, natural and technological disaster
- Disappearance of student from home or school

### Critical Incidents Management Team:

Leadership Role: Tanya O’Brien (Principal)

Student Liaison: Anne Kennedy

Family Liaison: Michelle Prendergast/Eleanor Ryan

Garda Liaison: Tanya O’Brien

Media Liaison: Tanya O’Brien

Staff contact: Michelle Prendergast/Geraldine Canty

Community Agency contact: Helen Skehan/Patricia Mulcahy

Administrator: Maeve Redmond/Eleanor Ryan

B.O.M. Rep: Róisín Hennessy

Chaplaincy role: Fr. Billy Meehan

- **In the event of a Critical Incident, the Critical Incident Management Team will be excused from their teaching duties on Day 1 and following days if deemed necessary. SET team will cover classes.**

In the event of the absence of the principal, the deputy principal will assume the role of leader. Following a Critical Incident, the team members will have the opportunity to step down as a member of the C.I.M.T.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **1. Leadership Role:**

**In the event of a critical incident the leader will:**

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident Management team (C.I.M.T.)
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- 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 e.g. seek advice from NEPS
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

### **Postvention**

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

### **2. Communication/Media contact Role:**

- 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

### **Postvention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

### **3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:**

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff and guide them in helping their students

- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide support to pupils

### **Postvention**

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

### **4. Staff contact**

- Update staff on ongoing decisions/actions to be taken after the initial meeting has taken place
- Be available to staff who may need support

### **5. 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

### **Postvention**

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

### **4. Family Liaison Role: Intervention**

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident

### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

## **Action plan**

When a critical incident occurs the following steps may be taken depending on the nature of the incident

### **Step 1: Contact the bereaved family**

The facts of the tragedy will be verified and the principal will make contact with the bereaved family by phone or in person as deemed most appropriate. If on the phone, permission will be sought to visit the family at an appropriate time

Consideration for any siblings in the school will be a priority, as will consideration for siblings in other local primary or post primary schools.

### **Step 2 Principal convenes C.I.M.T meeting**

The verified facts will be presented and discussed.

Decisions will be made about referrals to other agencies.

An action plan will be started in the following steps.

### **Step 3 Whole school staff meeting**

A meeting of all staff will be held and the facts of the tragedy will be presented.

The crisis team will clarify their roles and outline the crisis team action plan.

The roles of all staff within the action plan will be agreed, including:

- Discussion about how to break the news to all classes.
- Providing general support for distressed staff/students.
- Identifying staff and students who are at special risk and providing special support.
- Discussing referrals to other agencies

### **Step 4 Breaking the news to students**

Usually principal and class teacher will break the news to students.

- Prepare the class- indicate that you have bad news
- State who the news is about
- Gently outline the facts of the tragedy as are known. If the matter of suicide is involved and raised, it should be spoken of in general terms, the details of this tragedy should not be discussed. As advised in the NEPS document suicide should be referred to as a sudden death or tragic death. (See Pg. 34)
- Convey the importance of sensitivity to family and avoidance of speculation and rumour
- Encourage questions to ensure understanding
- Discuss possible range of reactions and give reassurance
- Discuss how the class can support each other and the bereaved
- Allow time for students to talk and circulate among them
- Have a reflection and prayer
- Set up an appropriate and quiet activity to hold an appropriately sensitive atmosphere within the group that allows staff to be there for students who require individual attention.

### **Step 5 Informing the immediate class group (in the event of the death of a pupil)**

Two members of staff and the principal will be present when telling the class group of the tragedy.

Follow the same procedures as outlined in Step 4

Mark the child's place in class with a candle/flower

### **Step 6 Providing immediate support structures**

- Organise that an input on grief reactions is made and give reassurance
- Observe vulnerable students
- Contact parent/guardian of vulnerable students
- Make referral options available to them
- Resume scheduled work

### **Step 7 Dealing with the media**

The media liaison person will prepare a written statement

- difficult time for school
- express sympathy for family
- focus on school system in place
- respect needs of bereaved family
- do not focus too much on the deceased

Be co-operative and helpful, speaking only 'on record'

Consider the degree of access the media will have

A sample media statement which can be modified to suit and reflect the incident.

*"It is with profound sadness that that the B.O.M., Principal staff and students of Presentation Primary School have learned of the ..... Our sincere sympathy is extended to the family of... On hearing the tragic news the school Critical Incident Management Team was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management Team convened a meeting to ensure that pupils affected by the ..... are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this ..... are given all the help they need to cope at this time.*

*The school is offering counselling and support for pupils and parents affected by this .....*

*Prayer services have been held with each class in co-operation with the Chaplain.*

*At this time our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this ....."*

In the event of suicide the school will adhere to *the Media Guidelines for the Reporting of Suicide and Self-Harm (Irish Association of Suicidology & The Samaritans)*

### **Step 8 Preparation of statement for parents/guardians**

Dear Parent/Guardians,

It is with deep regret that we inform you of the sudden death of .... , a pupil of .... class/teacher of .... class/teacher assistant of ....class. We are all deeply saddened by this loss. We are aware that this tragedy will affect the children in different ways (and to varying degrees). We will work through a programme which will offer support and help to our students. It is possible that your child may have some feelings which he/she may want to discuss with you and you can help your child by listening and reassuring them.

Optional (depending on the circumstances): We would ask that you would be careful not to discuss the details of the tragedy in the presence of your child.

If you would like advice or assistance you may contact ....

Yours sincerely,

- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened

### **Step 9 Informing students who are absent**

- Contact the parent/guardian of absent students to give facts
- Offer guidelines on helping children to cope
- Class teacher will talk to student when he/she returns

### **Step 10 At end of day 1**

- Have a review meeting with all staff
- Discuss any emerging issues
- Update on current status
- Agree supports for crisis team and staff
- Agree provisional school plans for funeral
- Compile list of students at risk and organise support required, including making contact with their parents/guardians.

### **Immediate days following:**

- Support students from the class involved
- Ensure as far as is possible that the normal timetable continues
- Provide scheduled appointments for vulnerable students (counselling, chaplaincy)
- Monitor absent students
- Agree school plan for funeral
- Discuss possibility of school closure with the board of management
- Organise a school prayer service with special input from class group
- Prepare students for funeral service

### **On-going issues:**

- Preparation of staff and students for return of siblings/close friends to school
- Removal of name of deceased pupil from class lists and other documentation
- Make decisions about table/chair/named coat hook
- Set up pastoral care programmes
- Organise a meeting of parents/guardians, if appropriate
- Arrangements for on-going contact with bereaved family
- Support of bereaved siblings, close friends, class
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

### **Long term issues:**

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 continued support. 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 staffs 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

### **Ratification and communication**

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in November 2023 and it will be reviewed regularly or following a Critical Incident.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Chairperson, B.O.M.) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Module 3: Roles in a Critical Incident Management Team

## Roles in a Critical Incident Management Team

At a time of crisis multiple tasks need to be carried out. Identifying key roles in advance of an incident will provide clear guidance about who does what, when and how. The members of the Critical Incident Management Team may be required to fulfil a number of roles; these are outlined on pages 82-85 of the NEPS Guidelines. Setting up a Critical Incident Management Team in advance ensures that no individual is overburdened and that important elements in the response are not forgotten. It is important to note that in smaller schools, staff may need to assume more than one role.

### Roles and Their Associated Tasks

- **TEAM LEADER**

- This is typically the Principal. It needs to be a person with authority in the school and who can make decisions in a crisis.

- **GARDA LIAISON**

- This is often also the Principal. The Garda liaison role involves linking in with the Gardaí to verify the accuracy of the incident details before they are shared. It may also involve ongoing liaison depending on the nature of the incident. For example if there is an ongoing criminal investigation.

- **STAFF LIAISON**

- This should be a staff member known and trusted by the staff, usually the school principal. This staff member will brief the staff on known facts about the incident, give staff members an opportunity to express feelings and to ask questions; provide materials for staff from the CI Guidelines; keep staff updated during the day; be alert to vulnerable staff and advise them of the availability of the employee assistance service (Spectrum Life).

- **STUDENT LIAISON**



- This should be a trusted and familiar figure to the students; the role involves alerting staff to vulnerable students; providing materials to students from the CI guidelines; maintaining student contact records; setting up of a 'quiet room' for vulnerable students.
- **COMMUNITY/AGENCY LIAISON**
  - This would be someone with good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community; they liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral; maintain up to date lists of contact numbers of key parents (e.g., members of Parents' Council) and emergency support services; and update CIMT members of the involvement of external agencies.
- **PARENT/GUARDIAN LIAISON**
  - This is a staff member who is well known to parents; this person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have the skills to manage the emotional reactions of individual or groups of parents; they will visit the bereaved family with the team leader; may facilitate meetings with groups of parents; ensure that sample letters for parents are prepared; set up rooms for meetings with parents; provide appropriate materials to parents from the CI guidelines.
- **MEDIA LIAISON**
  - This is someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media by phone or in person; in advance of an incident they will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g., students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc.); they will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews. This role is often taken on by the school principal or the chairperson of the BOM.
- **ADMINISTRATOR**
  - This is often the School Secretary. The role involves maintaining up to date phone numbers of parents, teachers and emergency services; taking telephone calls and noting those that need a response; ensuring that letter templates are ready on the school IT system; preparing and sending out letters, emails and texts; photocopying materials as required; and maintaining records.