

**BALLINTEER COMMUNITY SCHOOL  
CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN  
September 2015**

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This Policy has been reviewed by David O'Connell, Orlaith O'Brien, Maire Kelly Aidan Lynch Oliver Joyce Jane Rooney and Orlaith Regan.

## **Definition of a Critical Incident**

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which has the potential to overwhelm the normal coping mechanisms of the school. Ballinteer Community School has devised a Critical Incident Response Plan and has identified *some* potential critical incidents as follows:

- A death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, injury, terminal illness or suspected suicide.
- An accident involving pupils 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 incident affecting the wider community/nation, for example a terrorist attack.

The trauma caused by a critical incident challenges individuals mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Although it is not possible to predict when or where a critical incident may occur the development of a response plan will enable our school community to act promptly. The plan is designed to be flexible enough to cope with a wide range of possible incidents which may occur whether on or off site.

## **Critical Incident Response Team Membership**

Central to the plan has been the creation of a Critical Incident Response Team. The following staff have agreed to be members of this team.

### **Team Members**

- **Principal**
- **Deputy Principal**
- **Guidance Counsellor**
- **Chaplain**
- **Technical support: Bridie O'Sullivan**
- **If relevant: Head of SEN Dept.**
- **School Completion Coordinator**
- **Home School Community Liaison**

## **ACTION PLAN SHORT TERM ACTIONS 0 – 24 HOURS**

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Principal will:

#### **1 Establish the facts**

Obtain accurate information from the appropriate agencies and or parents about the incident – otherwise rumours may take over and add to the distress of those involved.

A list of contact details is available in the Appendices.

Facts to be established: **What** has happened; **when** it happened; **whether relevant family/ies know** what has happened; **how** it happened; the number and **names** of students and staff involved; are other schools involved; the **extent of the injuries**; and the exact **location** of those injured, etc.

This information will form the basis of the information given to parents and be useful in preparing a media statement.

**Note:** If a member of staff or student(s) has died in the incident, relatives and close friends of the deceased person will be told first

## **2. Convene the Critical Incident Response Team (C.I.R.T.).**

It will meet in the Boardroom. An evening meeting and/or an early meeting (7:45 am) of the team has been suggested if the incident happens outside school hours. This is to ensure the team is well prepared and has a plan in place for the school day ahead. Have a strict embargo on information until this meeting has been held. The Team will agree a statement of facts for staff, students, parents and media. If the incident occurs outside of school time the Principal and Deputy will notify all staff members. If the school is inaccessible the team will convene at David O'Connell's home. The NEPS psychologist will be invited to attend the meeting.

Decide:

- How to break the news to relatives and close friends (they must always be told first & separately)
- How to break the news to staff
- How to break news to rest of students
- How to identify vulnerable students
- Whether to take down the school website
- Issues relating to school routine - recommended the school day runs as normal, this will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting to students. Teachers should give students (who have been affected) an opportunity to talk and shelve academic activities for a time before resuming normal routines as soon as possible.
- Decide on a quiet room / post briefing room/ recovery room and assign staff to be present with students and encourage return to routine when appropriate.
- Room for external agencies, if relevant.

**3. The Principal, with the assistance of the Deputy Principal, will contact the parents of those involved, or in the case of staff, will contact the relatives of those nominated by staff.**

- Express sympathy and support
- Offer any practical help needed
- Enquire if parent is alone or has someone to offer support
- Carefully review with parent that the information given has been fully understood
- Alerting parents to a trauma will help them when they subsequently make contact with their child

**4. The Principal will:**

- contact the National Educational Psychological Service (**NEPS**)
- **inform all staff** - relay the facts to staff and to plan for the day
- inform the **Chairperson** of the Board of Management – decide whether an emergency meeting of Board is necessary
- contact **Parents Association**
- if the bereaved family welcome his involvement, may **liaise** with the different hospitals dealing with the incident.

**5. The Deputy Principal will**

- organise the school time-table for the day and subsequent days (if necessary)
- provide a quiet room which will be available to students who are closely associated with those affected by the incident so that they can talk and be together. The oratory or study hall may suit this purpose, if accessible and if considered suitable by the affected students and staff members. It is generally recommended this is used for one week following the incident and then its use reviewed
- liaise with the ancillary staff to ensure food & refreshments are available for all concerned
- liaise with technical staff re website

**6. Two members of the C.I.R.T. will manage a room for parents /guardians.**

The breakfast room would suit this purpose, if accessible. Simple accurate information, as determined by the CIRT, will be given to parents and the necessity of trying to maintain a routine will be emphasised. Young people feel safe and encouraged when they observe that significant adults in their lives are coping and in control.

**7. Guidance Counsellor**

The Guidance Counsellor will have responsibility for managing the range of support services required during times of trauma. The three areas of responsibility i.e. Prevention, Intervention and Postvention needs to be addressed.

**Students**

Students will be monitored over a period of time by staff. Where there are signs of distress and/ or untypical behaviour the student will be seen by a Guidance Counsellor. The Guidance team will consult with NEPS and advice about the necessity for onward referral to appropriate agencies will be sought

### **Prevention**

- Assist in the development of programmes dealing with bereavement and suicide prevention
- Support and resource teachers involved in the delivery of SPHE
- Support the in-service of staff on loss, crisis management and suicide

### **Intervention**

- Clarify the role as coordinators of counselling services to be offered throughout the school community
- Outline specific services in terms of what, where and when
- Put in place a clear referral procedure to staff in dealing with students in distress
- Address immediate needs of staff

### **Postvention**

- On-going support to vulnerable students
- Effective identification and referral strategy
- Monitoring of bereaved class group/ friends

### **Areas to be attended to:**

- Assist class teachers in informing students of the incident
- Provide staff with information on grief, identifying vulnerable students
- Meet vulnerable students
- Be available to meet distressed parents
- Debrief affected staff.

### **8. SEN/ Resource Staff: When the incident relates to a student associated with one of the resource rooms:**

Students will be brought from classes to Resource room.

They will be told the news as per direction above.

The students will be allowed to remain in the Resource room with the staff for an appropriate period of time. The room will be closed to other staff apart from Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, Resource Teachers and the students' SNAs.

Parents will be contacted by Resource Teachers during the day and / or a letter (as per letter guidelines in this policy) will be sent home with each child.

### **9. The Chaplain**

- The chaplain will be a member of the Critical Incident team. The chaplain, along with other members of the Critical Incident team will be made aware of the critical incident and will work with the team to support students and staff.
- If applicable, the chaplain will contact and visit the bereaved family if desired, and will offer assistance with the preparation of the funeral.
- Offer comfort and support to the bereaved family, if desired, before, during and after the funeral.
- Prepare students for the funeral. For some this may be the first occasion to attend a funeral. In some cases, it will be appropriate for students to attend the funeral with their parents. School will normally continue and only those immediately affected should attend.
- If the bereaved family would prefer a private funeral, the chaplain will liaise with the family in relation to an alternative memorial ceremony that they may wish to organise for students and other members of the school community.
- For students who wish, encourage and help them to write a personal message of sympathy. Think also about a general expression from staff and students.
- Contact the funeral directors re arrangements regarding floral tributes.

#### **Administrators/ Admin Office Staff.**

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of Parents/Guardians/ Staff/ Emergency Services
- Take telephone calls and note those who need to be responded to
- Ensures the templates are on the school system in advance and ready for adaption
- Prepare and send out letters emails faxes
- Photocopy materials needed
- Maintain records

#### **Media**

- Press will not be granted access to the premises
- David O'Connell will be our media spokesperson. Aidan Lynch will assist him.
- They will draft a media statement – it will not be delivered live (See Appendices for guidance)
- It will be brief, carefully considered and accurate
- David / Aidan shall advise staff that only they will deal with the media.
- The school website will be shut down.
- When appropriate a notice may be posted on a modified version of the website stating that a letter will issue outlining the school's schedule for the coming days.
- Parents will be advised not to allow their children to be interviewed as they do not have the maturity and judgement needed to handle it. It can

sometimes lead to regret at a later stage or may increase distress for various parties.

## **SCHOOL TOURS**

- **In the case of School Tours**, the Tour Leader will compile an information pack to include:
  - Name of the Tour Leader
  - A list of all participating teachers and pupils
  - A list of mobile phone numbers for all participating teachers and pupils
  - Passport details and (in the case of tours outside the country)
  - Photographs of participating pupils
  - Home contact numbers and mobiles of all involved
  - Relevant medical information on pupils and permission forms from parents in case of a medical emergency
  - Insurance details
  - Copy of itinerary

A copy of this file should be left with the Principal prior to departure. School mobile phones will be made available to staff for outings, trips etc.

## **Confidentiality and Reputational Consideration**

The management and staff of Ballinteer Community School recognise they 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 public statements and will seek to ensure that students do so also.

This policy will be reviewed every three years, and following implementation in the event of a critical incident.

This reviewed policy was ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting held on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015