



St Louise's

Comprehensive College, Belfast

A Specialist College

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY



Mission Statement

"In partnership with parents, guardians, staff, governors and students St Louise's promotes excellence in teaching and learning within a Catholic, Vincentian, Comprehensive ethos"

OVERVIEW

The Mission of Jesus calls us to care for one another at all times (Matthew 25:31 ff) and in doing so we are called to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8)

In line with our Catholic, Vincentian ethos underpinned by our value system we will ensure that:

- ✓ our duty of care to students and staff is fulfilled to the best of our ability and in line with statutory responsibilities as outlined in the DE Guidance – A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in schools
- ✓ our practices reflect our belief in our Catholic, Vincentian community and are inspired by the Gospel values of care, respect, dignity compassion, love and forgiveness
- ✓ a safe and stable environment is provided for students and staff
- ✓ the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the school community is safeguarded

As a critical incident is likely to have a severe impact upon the school, both in the short term and long term, our aim is to ensure that the school strategies and procedures are in place to look after the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of every member of the St Louise's School Community.

In partnership with parents, guardians, staff, governors and students, St Louise's promotes excellence in learning and teaching within a Catholic, Vincentian, Comprehensive ethos

SECTION 1 - RATIONALE

Our Catholic school exists to lead its members to encounter and engage with Jesus and His message. St Louise's has always been characterised by a strong community, family spirit. It is in this context that the Pastoral Care and Safeguarding of the school community becomes a high priority particularly for those in need of help and support. This management plan for dealing with Critical Incidents is an extremely important aspect of the pastoral/ safeguarding planning within our school. The existence of this plan will help to ensure that as a school community we respond to such incidents responsibly, compassionately, immediately and comprehensively.

SECTION 2 - DEFINITION

Section 2a - What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident can be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which could overwhelm its normal coping mechanism.

The Critical Incident may affect students, staff, parents and governors, may relate directly to the safety of the school community or may involve an incident beyond the school premises.

Section 2b - Points to Note

- ✓ The Critical Incident Policy and Plan cannot cover every aspect of recovery from a critical incident
- ✓ Occurrences may arise which cannot be foreseen or considered
- ✓ The critical incident may occur during the school day, during the evening, during the school holidays or on a school trip

It is important that the incident policy is easily understood and is actioned immediately. The following must be remembered in relation to the Critical Incident Policy:

- ✓ that it is followed as closely as possible;
- ✓ that designated personnel understand their tasks and are competent in carrying them out;
- ✓ that other people do not take unilateral actions;
- ✓ that consideration and sensitivity is shown by all;
- ✓ that students, staff and parents are protected from press intrusion;
- ✓ that normal routines are resumed as soon as possible; and
- ✓ there is a realisation that total recovery may take a long time.

The Critical Incident Recovery Team (CIMT) has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion. If the incident involves legal action, a precise response to the incident should be known and is able to be verified by more than one person.

Section 2c - Examples of Critical Incidents

- ✓ Sudden death of a student or member of staff
- ✓ Disappearance of a student or member of staff
- ✓ Death or injury of a student or staff member on a school outing
- ✓ Severe injury to a student or staff member as a result of an accident
- ✓ Serious assault on a student or staff member in school
- ✓ Violent/disturbed intruder on school premises during school day
- ✓ Serious damage to school building or property through fire, flood or vandalism
- ✓ Civil disturbance in local community
- ✓ Member of the school population with a contagious illness
- ✓ Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours
- ✓ Sudden death of a parent, sibling or family member
- ✓ Disturbance during the examination period

SECTION 3 - CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Critical Incidents cannot be predicted and happen when least expected. To ensure St Louise's is ready to respond and manage any Critical Incident we have agreed a Critical Incident Management Strategy, identified a Critical Incident Management Team and developed a Critical Incident Management Plan.

In the first instance, all critical incidents must be reported to the Principal or through the Principal's Personal Assistant. In the case of an accident where Emergency Services have to be contacted, this may have to be actioned first.

Section 3a - Aims and Objectives

When presented with a traumatic situation we will endeavour to:

- ✓ ensure that a swift and appropriate action is taken in the case of the school being made aware that a critical incident has occurred
- ✓ ensure that the welfare of staff and students is paramount
- ✓ ensure that the school responds in a sensitive, consistent manner which reduces confusion, panic and extreme emotion
- ✓ create a positive, open, communicative climate where the varied needs of students and staff are shared
- ✓ create a safe school environment where the physical, social, emotional and spiritual health of students and staff is prioritised
- ✓ offer sensitive, non-intrusive support in the short, medium and long term to all those affected directly or indirectly by the incident
- ✓ establish positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, to enable full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident
- ✓ promote active coping skills within the curriculum

- ✓ establish immediate access to all relevant contact details (including outside agencies)

Section 3b – Safeguarding and Sacred Space

In our Catholic School, the underlying foundation in the Critical Incident Management is the provision of a focus for reflection, prayer and healing. Our School Oratory will provide a 'space' for formal and informal prayer and will be supported by our School Chaplain. The Pastoral Support Centre will be led by the SENCO and the Assistant Principal/Designated Teacher for Child Protection and will provide support for staff and students.

The Principal, Chaplain and Year Teams will support briefings and assemblies throughout the process.

Section 3c - Critical Incident Management Team

Principal – Miss M McHenry

Mrs D Mooney – Principal's Personal Assistant

Miss K McGahan (Vice Principal)

Mrs E Weir (Designated Teacher for Child Protection)

Mrs C Carson (SENCO and Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection/Leader of Pastoral Support Centre)

Mr D Brown (Assistant Principal)

Sister Anna Byrne (School Chaplain)

Mr J O'Rourke (Chair of Board of Governors)

Dr Janine Lynch – Safeguarding

The Principal will co-ordinate the school's response to any Critical Incident. In her absence the CIMT will take charge. The Principal will allocate roles to the CIMT (refer Appendix 1)

Section 3d – Dealing with a Critical Incident

In the event of a Critical Incident:

- ✓ The Principal should be contacted first
- ✓ The Principal should seek to clarify from relevant sources the nature and circumstances of the incident
- ✓ The CIMT will meet at the earliest opportunity and agree on procedures for managing the critical incident (*refer Appendix 2*)
- ✓ If the incident is on site, health and safety measures will be put in place and the emergency services contacted

Longer term issues

- ✓ School structures and routines will be re-established
- ✓ Supportive strategies for students, staff and parents will be implemented
- ✓ There will be ongoing contact with parents
- ✓ Actions taken will be reviewed and policies amended if appropriate
- ✓ On-going review of the personal development programme to meet the ever-changing needs of our students and the wider community
- ✓ Staff are mindful of anniversaries and other special dates

The use of appropriate outside agencies is crucial to providing long term support as is the use of appropriately trained members of staff who are known to those who in need of help.

Preventative Strategies

- ✓ Regular review of relevant policies e.g. Child Protection, Health and Safety: School Trips and Outings
- ✓ First Aid Training
- ✓ Fire Drills and Fire Policy Procedures
- ✓ PSE Programme
- ✓ Faith based Programme

All members of the Critical Incident Management Team must:

- ✓ have a copy of the Critical Incident Kit and Policy at home and at school
- ✓ be aware of the roles of each part of the plan and enable the school to act swiftly and accordingly
- ✓ have contact numbers of each other for 24 hour contact
- ✓ in the event of a school trip/visit, have access to a list of names for students and staff
- ✓ will have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies

Please note

- ✓ Relevant members of the support staff will have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies
- ✓ Emergency evacuation drills are familiar to all members of the school community and are practiced regularly
- ✓ Opportunities to explore sensitive issues such as tragedy and death will be built into our assembly programme, Vincentian Programme, Kairos Programme and PSE and Pastoral Programmes

Section 3e – Critical Incident Central Point

The Principal's Office will be the Central Information Point during any Critical Incident. The Principal's direct line will be the dedicated phone line throughout the Critical Incident. In the case of staff reporting incidents such as an accident on a school trip, the extension number for the Principal is 2000 and the Principal's PA is 2114.

In the event of an issue arising outside school hours where access is not convenient to the school building the CIMT will meet in the Daughters of Charity House, 23 Glen Road.

Section 3f - Critical Incidents Contacts List

(Appendix 3)

In responding to any Critical Incident the CIMT will enlist the support of key personnel identified in the Critical Incidents Contacts List. This contact list will be reviewed termly and all members of the CIMT will keep a copy of this contact list at home. In a Critical Incident, the Critical Incident Response Team (EA) together with the Independent Counselling Services for Schools will be contacted immediately. The CIMT's response will be dictated by an agreed Critical Incident Management Plan.

SECTION 4 – THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The CIMP aims to balance the twin objectives of:

1. Effectively managing the incident
2. Sensitively meeting the varied needs of all members of the school community

The CIMP is divided into two sections:

Section 1: During the Incident

Section 2: After the Incident

CIMP - Section 4a: During the Incident

The Principal will review the facts of the incident received so far, assess its significance for the school, and determine if it is a Critical Incident. If the incident is a confirmed Critical Incident the Principal will ensure that the following tasks are undertaken in Day 1:

Section 4b – Day 1 - Checklist

The CIMT will:

- ✓ respond to any inevitable risk or threat eg evacuation or first aid
- ✓ notify the emergency services, other relevant authorities and agreed
- ✓ parties (Key Personnel - Chair of BOG, CCMS, EA - Critical Incident Response Team, Independent Counselling Services for Schools)
- ✓ mobilise the CIMT
- ✓ agree the school routine for the day
- ✓ inform staff
- ✓ establish a dedicated, telephone line
- ✓ set-up recovery/designated room
- ✓ inform students and parents
- ✓ prepare/adapt a media statement
- ✓ assess initial impact of the critical incident on students and staff
- ✓ debrief staff (*Appendix 4*)

School Routine

We will try to restore the normal school routine as soon as practicable. Doing so will allow us to maintain a sense of continuity and stability for the whole school community. There will be timetable flexibility if appropriate to allow students and staff to access support from the Critical Incident Response Team and external agencies.

Informing staff

A formal staff briefing will take place as soon as possible after the circumstances of the incident are known. During this briefing the Principal will:

- ✓ give a brief statement of factual information
- ✓ outline the school's response and proposed plan of action
- ✓ allow staff to ask questions and to get a response
- ✓ outline staff responsibility for monitoring student and staff welfare
- ✓ identify vulnerable staff and students who may be at risk
- ✓ clarify specific responsibilities for staff
- ✓ advise staff on procedure for dealing with media enquiries
- ✓ advise staff on agreed procedure for informing students and parents
- ✓ inform staff of the support services that are available
- ✓ reassure staff that they and students will be supported
- ✓ advise staff of time/place of next briefing and debriefing session.

Staff will be kept updated on developments during the course of the day. This will be done during morning breaks and/or lunchtime using the staff room or through email if appropriate. Staff will also be debriefed at the end of Day 1.

Absent teachers will also be briefed on the situation by a member of the CIMT.

Supporting staff

Staff play a key role in any Critical Incident. They will receive advice and support from the CIMT on an ongoing basis. As

a school community we will support each other. For staff who may wish to avail of more formal support this can be accessed through a member of CIMT eg. we will provide cover arrangements for staff that are temporarily unable to carry out their normal duties, arrange for staff to have time out if necessary and advise staff of external counselling support available to them. This is clearly signposted throughout the incident.

Informing Students

Students will be informed of a Critical Incident as soon as possible. Throughout the process:

- ✓ Every effort will be made to create a sense of calm
- ✓ Students will be informed by familiar adults, their Form Tutor or Head of Year, where possible
- ✓ They will be informed in tutor/class groups, in familiar classroom settings, where possible
- ✓ Announcements will be made simultaneously, using an agreed script
- ✓ All announcements will be brief, factual and truthful. The language used will be simple, straightforward and sincere. Announcements will be age appropriate
- ✓ Teachers will be aware of vulnerable students in their groups when they are making the announcement
- ✓ Teachers will receive advice as to how to break the news to students
- ✓ The announcement will advise students of the support arrangements in place and how they can access this support
- ✓ Absent students will be informed of the situation by their Head of Year (*Appendix 5 and 6*)

Supporting students

- ✓ Time will be made available for students to discuss their feelings and to ask questions after the initial announcement is made
- ✓ This time will be with familiar adults, the student's Form Tutor or Head of Year

- ✓ Students will be carefully monitored while in class, corridors and on school grounds to ensure they are supported at all times
- ✓ The Pastoral Support Centre will be the designated area for students should they wish to come out of class to talk about their feelings to someone
- ✓ Key members of our Pastoral Care Team, the Critical Incident Support Team, and Counsellors from the Independent Counselling Service for Schools will be based there throughout the Critical Incident. They will provide advice and support to all students who require it. (*Appendix 7*)

We recognise that a Critical Incident may act as a trigger for an extreme response among some of our most vulnerable students, even though they may not be directly involved in the incident.

Particularly vulnerable students include:

- ✓ Close friends and relatives of those affected
- ✓ Students with a history of self-harm or suicidal ideation
- ✓ Students who have experienced recent bereavement or separation
- ✓ Students with mental health difficulties
- ✓ Students with a history of substance abuse
- ✓ Students with child protection needs
- ✓ Students with learning, communication or sensory difficulties
- ✓ Non-communicative students who have difficulty talking about their feelings
- ✓ Students experiencing serious family difficulties including mental/physical illness

These high risk students will be monitored particularly carefully in this period. They will receive frequent reminders of the support available to them.

Informing Parents

Parents of students directly involved will be telephoned or visited by the Principal/member of the CIMT. Other parents will be informed of the Critical Incident by letter. This letter will give the facts of the critical incident. If a Critical Incident requires all parents to be contacted as a matter of urgency, they will be contacted using our text messaging service. (*Appendix 8*)

Supporting Parents

Parents will also be given practical and constructive suggestions as to how to support their child through the Critical Incident. Parents will be advised how to access support both within the school and externally. (*Appendix 9*)

Student Death

If the death of a student has occurred, the Principal/member of the CIMT will make contact with the student's parents as soon as possible to express sympathy, liaise over messages of condolence from staff/students and to provide support.

Death of a member of staff

If the death of a member of staff has occurred, the Principal/member of the CIMT will make contact with the family as soon as possible to express sympathy, liaise over messages of condolence from staff/students and to provide support.

Informing and Managing the Media

The Principal will liaise with the media and will be the "one spokesperson" on the incident. The Principal will be supported in her dealings with the media by the CIMT, CCMS Communications Officers and the BELB - Critical Incident Response Team (*Appendix 10*).

Please note:

- ✓ Administrative staff taking incoming calls from the media will use a prepared statement agreed by the Principal and the CIMT if appropriate.
- ✓ No other staff members will be permitted to make comment on the incident.
- ✓ Students and parents will be discouraged from speaking to the media and/or communicating through social media.
- ✓ To safeguard the school community, the media will not be permitted on to school property without the prior approval of the Principal.
- ✓ Students, parents and staff will be encouraged to use their discretion when commenting about the incident on social networking sites.

Section 4c - Day 2 Checklist

We will:

- ✓ brief staff about the practical arrangements for the day, and inform them of support arrangements in place for students and themselves
- ✓ provide students with further information, if appropriate
- ✓ provide students with care and support, signpost them to internal and external support
- ✓ attempt to re-establish or maintain routine and predictability among the school community
- ✓ provide parents with further information, if appropriate
- ✓ debrief staff, provide them with information about ongoing practical arrangements, support for students and themselves, remind them of the need for self-care
- ✓ plan for memorials, services and ceremonies (CIMT)

SECTION 5 - AFTER THE INCIDENT

The key aim of the work carried out in any school during the weeks, months and sometimes years following a Critical Incident is to help the immediate and broader school community cope with and recover from the critical incident.

Section 5a - Ongoing support for students

Staff will:

- ✓ re-establish normal routine and structures
- ✓ provide continuity for students
- ✓ support students
- ✓ monitor students' emotional wellbeing and watch out for signs of distress
- ✓ refer individual students who appear to be experiencing difficulties to internal or external support
- ✓ facilitate individual students positive return to school, (adhere to individual support plans, where applicable)
- ✓ mark significant dates such as anniversaries appropriately

Section 5b - Ongoing support for staff

The CIMT will:

- ✓ promote self-care
- ✓ be alert to staff needs
- ✓ ensure that teaching and non-teaching staff are directed to sources of support if required

Section 5c - Ongoing support for parents

The family of a student who has died will receive ongoing support after the tragic death of their child. We will respect parents' wishes at all times and agree with parents a way forward in terms of:

- ✓ the return of personal belongings and/or school work
- ✓ the management of public examination results and the return of coursework
- ✓ what to do when events arise that would have involved the deceased student, for example, award ceremonies

- ✓ the organisation of memorials and commemorations
- ✓ the marking of significant dates such as anniversaries
- ✓ the management of personnel records

SECTION 6 - REVIEW OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The CIMT will review their management of the Critical Incident, 6 weeks after it. They will:

- ✓ review actions taken
- ✓ identify what went well, was helpful/effective
- ✓ identify what did not go well, was unhelpful/ineffective
- ✓ what gaps there were
- ✓ what was learned

The Critical Incident Policy will be revised then based on experience.

Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluating Procedures

The Critical Incident Policy will be reviewed termly and annually by the CIMT. An overview of the Critical Incident(s) will be reported to the Board of Governors on an on-going basis.

PLEASE NOTE ALL APPENDICES NAMED WITHIN THIS POLICY ARE WITHIN THE DE GUIDE MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS.