

## **Critical Incident Policy Naomh Mhuire N.S., Walsh Island**



### **Introduction:**

In Naomh Mhuire NS, we aim to protect the well-being of our whole-school community – children, parents and staff – by providing a warm, inclusive and caring environment.

Our Board of Management has, through consultation with the parents and staff, drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team 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'. (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2007).

### **Some examples of a critical incident are as follow:**

- Death of a member(s) of the school community, i.e a pupil, staff member
- Death of a member of the wider school community
- Disappearance of a member of the school community
- A Child Protection issue

### **Other examples may consist of:**

- Major illness/outbreak of disease (COVID)
- Criminal incidents (e.g. Stabbing outside school in Dublin, Ashling Murphy case)
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. 'Navan bus crash')
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin-war in Ukraine/ Gaza)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster (e.g. school ceiling collapsing in Cork)
- Disappearance of student from home or school (e.g. Midleton incident in Cork)
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, tsunami

While our whole-school community obviously hopes we never experience a critical incident, it is important that we be prepared.

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### **Critical Incidents Management Team:**

Leadership Role: Caitriona Kerin (Principal)

Communication Role: Clare Fullam (Deputy Principal)

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Rachael Flynn (APII post holder)

Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Sean Hyland

Family Liaison Role /Parents Association Rep: Claire Keating

B.O.M. Rep: (B.O.M. member): Michael Nolan

The Principal, Caitriona Kerin, in her Leadership Role, has the responsibilities as defined below.

The Deputy Principal, Clare Fullam, in her Communication Role, assists and only assumes responsibility on the absence of Caitriona Kerin.

*In the event that neither Caitriona Kerin, Clare Fullam (nor the person assuming the principal's role) be able to carry out their duties due to personal impact of the critical incident, this policy names Elysia McCormack (Principal St Broughan's NS) as the person nominated to assume the Leadership Role, if contacted by the Board. Our Board sincerely thanks Elysia for accepting this responsibility.*

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Leadership Role – Caitriona Kerin**

##### *Intervention*

- Confirms the event
- Activates the Critical Incidents Management Team
- Liaises with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known
- Gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions,
- Outlines the routine for the day
- Expresses sympathy to family
- Clarifies facts surrounding event
- Makes contact with other relevant agencies
- Decides how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

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### *Postvention*

- Ensures provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitates any appropriate memorial events
- Reviews Plan

### **Communication Role: Clare Fullam**

#### *Intervention*

With the Critical Incidents Management Team:

- Prepares a public statement
- Organises a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensures telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designates mobile numbers for contact
- Liaises with relevant outside support agencies

#### *Postvention*

- Reviews and evaluates effectiveness of our communication response

### **Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Rachael Flynn**

#### *Intervention*

- Advises the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alerts staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outlines specific services available in the school
- Puts in place clear referral procedures
- Addresses immediate needs of staff
- Provides materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provides information
- Helps arrange for counselling with support of assigned NEPS Senior Psychologist

#### *Postvention*

- Provides ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitors class most affected

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- Refers as appropriate
- Reviews and evaluates Plan

### **Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Sean Hyland**

#### *Intervention*

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

#### *Postvention*

- Provides follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Works in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Reviews and Evaluates Plan

### **Family Liaison Role/ Parents' Association Representative: Claire Keating**

#### *Intervention*

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

#### *Postvention*

- Provides ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involves as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offers to link family with community support groups
- Reviews and evaluate plan

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### **Action plan**

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

- Immediate notification of the Critical Incident Management Team (Leader)
- Immediate contact with family/families (Leader)
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff
- Media Briefing (if appropriate)
- The Leader is designated the contact for any or all media
- Gather accurate information (Team)
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy (Team)
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident (Team)
- What happened, where and when?
  1. What is the extent of the injuries?
  2. How many are involved and what are their names?
  3. Is there a risk of further injury?
  4. What agencies have been contacted already?

#### **Contact appropriate agencies (Communication Role)**

1. Emergency services
2. Medical services
3. Midlands Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
4. NEPS: Mary Sherwin
5. DES/Schools Inspector: Stephanie Fitzpatrick

Caitriona Kerin leads the following procedures:

- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed

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- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- 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. (Student Liaison person and class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

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

- 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
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out

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- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Family Liaison person + 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
- School closure (if appropriate – advice to be sought from the Inspector, Stephanie Fitzpatrick)
- Request a decision on this from school management

### **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 from the HSE/Tusla/NEPS. 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?

## Critical Incident Policy Naomh Mhuire N.S., Walsh Island



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

Ratified by the Board of Management of Naomh Mhuire NS, Walsh Island February 2024.

Review Date: October 2026

*Sean Hyland CC*