

Ballylifford Primary School



Critical Incidents Policy

Introduction

Ballylifford Primary School aims to protect the wellbeing of its pupils and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

The Board of Governors has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) as one element of the school's policies and plans within the Pastoral Care arrangements.

Our aim is to establish a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan. Until this is established the Safeguarding Team will be responsible for this.

The Governors and staff of Ballylifford Primary School recognise a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school". Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils or staff members, or members of our local community.

Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

Purpose:

This policy sets out the procedures to be followed to ensure the safety and protection of the whole school community in the event of a critical incident.

Definition:

A critical incident can be a physical incident or psychological trauma that has a severe immediate impact and likely long term effects on the individuals involved. These may include:

- Incidents that involve staff/student, staff/staff, or other person/staff/student.
- People-made disasters/emergencies
- Natural disasters/emergencies

Crisis management and recovery processes involve personal support, crisis intervention and a whole range of practical assistance.

The Principal has responsibility for emergency management, which involves bringing together the arrangements for identifying, minimising, preventing, preparing for, responding to and recovering from an emergency.

Related Documents:

- Critical Incident Planning for Schools -
<https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guide-to-managing-critical-incidents-in-schools.pdf>

Preparation:

- Identify Critical Incident Team - comprising Principal and Senior Management Team (Mrs Sweeney, Ms Hurl and Mrs Muldoon)
- The Critical Incident Team has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion and that if the Principal is the subject of the incident then the response mechanism should proceed effectively. If the incident subsequently involves legal action, a precise response to the incident should be known and be able to be verified by more than one person.

- Issue all staff with a Critical Incident Management Plan. (Appendix 1)
- Issue all staff with key responsibilities of critical incident team members (Appendix 3)
- Display a Communication line and contact phone numbers in the staff room and school office. (Appendix 2)
- Review the Critical Incident Management Plan at a staff meeting in Term 1 each year.

Initial Responses:

- Assess that all students are safe. Take all necessary action to establish safety.
- Contact the Principal.
- Ensure Vice Principal and/or Senior teachers are released from class to work with the Principal on Critical Incident Team.
- Build a profile of what happened. Who was most affected by the incident? How might it have affected them? Check for other information to see if any individuals or groups might need immediate attention. Decide on a range of supportive action that can be offered to those affected by the incident.
- Assess immediate practical needs.
- Evaluate what individuals/organisations need to be involved and what potential roles they may play. Take into account the importance of linking students to parents/carers and significant others to re-establish a sense of personal control.
- Contact the Chair of the School Board of Governors -Rev Fr Peter Donnelly
- Contact the EA Critical Incident Response Team
- Contact the CCMS and relevant emergency services.
- Decide how/what/when to communicate with the school community regarding the incident.

Some further support responses:

- The Critical Incident Team should meet with support personnel to finalise a plan of action.
- Establish an active Crisis Intervention Team including school personnel and outside agencies if necessary.
- Inform staff at a full staff meeting to ensure consistent information.
- Inform students in smallest groups possible, depending on decision of management team and nature of incident.
- Inform parents/carers of students involved in the incident
- Prepare a letter to school community, if appropriate.
- Identify 'at risk' students and staff for counselling.
- Provide closure.
- Debrief staff.
- Contact CCMS Communication & Liaison Section if media contact involved.
- If necessary contact EA Industrial & Legal Section for advice.

Immediate Actions for Schools Following a Critical Incident

Initiate use of the DE Critical Incident Management Guide

<https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guide-to-managing-critical-incidents-in-schools.pdf>

1. Assess the risk
2. Contact Emergency Services
3. Mobilise the School's Critical Incident Management Team
4. Contact other relevant services/authorities
5. Maintain structures and routines with flexibility as required
6. Collate accurate information
7. Brief staff
8. Arrange for appropriate information to be shared with pupils.
9. Set up recovery room. Provide opportunities for listening and support
10. Prepare for media interest
11. Identify vulnerable pupils and staff
12. Communicate with parents and organise debriefing for staff

Aim

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to pupils and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the pupils and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school.

Our curriculum and pastoral care arrangements aim to help and support both staff and pupils, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and emotional needs of the school community.

Physical Needs

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Public access doors are locked during school hours
- School doors are security locked during class time
- Rules of the playground are agreed and known by the school community

Emotional Needs

The Governors and staff of Ballylifford Primary School aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of pupils, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Further details can be found within other relevant policies such as Pastoral Care, Child Protection and Anti-bullying.

- Consultation has taken place with the whole school community as the Policy and Plan have been developed
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school pupil are available
- Emotional health and well-being is an integral part of the school curriculum
- The school may use a range of external agencies for support
- Inputs to pupils by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about pupil safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
- The school has a clear policy on anti-bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a comprehensive Pastoral Care System in place in the school.
- Pupils who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member, concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Members of staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. Members bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the team and were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet biannually and after an incident to review and, if necessary, update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy, a site plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Record keeping

In the event of an incident, records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc.

Confidentiality

The management and staff of St. Mary's 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 any public statements.

Critical incident rooms

In the event of a critical incident the following rooms will be used:

- the Staff Room - to meet the staff
- the School Hall - for meetings with pupils; parents
- the Principal's office for media (if required)

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

- All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parents were also consulted and their comments requested by the draft policy being made available

- An audit of the school's current arrangements was completed in preparation for formulating the policy and plan
- Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.
- All new and temporary staff (as appropriate) will be informed of the details of the plan by the Principal
- All teachers and support staff have access to a resource pack for supporting children in class
- The plan will be reviewed and, if necessary, updated bi-annually and after an incident

Immediate Steps in the event of a Critical Incident

The Critical Incident Policy will be amended and updated on a regular basis to meet the needs of an ever changing and developing school.

The following are steps to consider immediately upon hearing of a Critical Incident and are not in any order of precedence.

The Principal, members of staff & Board of Governors should take time to work out what steps will be appropriate in their particular circumstances and should aim to implement these steps efficiently and sensitively. Obtain as much **factual** information about the death as possible. This step is important as it will determine what is to be told to the pupils and how it should be told. Having factual information concerning the tragedy will prove useful in countering misinformation among pupils concerning the manner of the young person's death, which can contribute to an atmosphere of hysteria. At all stages, the rights of an individual &/or their family to privacy must be respected. E.g. great care should be taken not to use the term 'suicide' until it has been established categorically that a death was as a result of suicide.

1. The school routine in the immediate aftermath of an incident.

The school community should be informed of the incident at the earliest possible opportunity. In a relatively small local area, many pupils and teachers will already have heard shocking or distressing news prior to coming to school. If school is open or due to open, pupils & where possible parents need to be informed as quickly as possible (e.g pupils brought together for an announcement (see 3 below). Principal meets parents at the front door/gate and children are looked after with peers by familiar adults)

In the event of an incident occurring overnight, a weekend or holiday period, the school will contact families by phone to inform them and outline what support is available, should it be required.

When pupils return to school, there will be time allocated in assembly and in class initially to allow reflection and discussion together in a supportive environment. Stories may be used to approach the topic. Further activities/events/resources will be provided, for individuals, small groups or the whole school, depending on the specifics of an incident and the children's reactions both in the immediate aftermath and in the longer term.

Staff and parents will be made aware of any relevant support services which are available for them.

2. Decide on the school routine for the immediate future

The Principal and members of the school staff, in consultation with the Board of Governors &/or EA, should discuss and decide on a routine for the school to follow for the remainder of the day/week. In the event of a death, this will naturally extend up to the time of the burial.

This routine will reflect the decisions procedure for informing classmates and the wider school community including the role of the principal, class teacher, arrangements for external assistance for pupils from the Personal Development Services, other relevant school staff, Chair of Board of Governors.

In the event of a death, it will also reflect decisions taken concerning closure of the school &/or participation of staff/pupils in church services.

In the event of a death:

a. Decide on whether the school will remain open or closed

Whether the school will remain open or will close as a mark of respect to the bereaved family will depend on the judgement of Principal, Chair of the Board of Governors following consultation with the school staff. If the decision is to close the school, it is advisable to do so **ONLY** after informing the pupils of the Pupil's death and of the routine which the school will follow over the coming days. Parents should be formally notified of the school closure.

b. Decide on the arrangements for the participation of pupils in church services.

These decisions would be made by the board of Governors & staff in consultation with the bereaved family & pupils' families.

3. Informing the school community Principal should inform as many teachers as possible upon their arrival at the school and then proceed to the affected pupil/s class/es. The principal should be prepared to spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to the news. Class teacher/s and if possible EA support staff will be available if anyone wishes to speak to them individually.

4. Decide on a strategy for dealing with the media

It is likely that the local media will be interested in the event of sudden death. It is advisable that principals and school staffs be prepared for every eventuality and accordingly devise a strategy for handling media enquiries. Such a strategy is essential to protect the privacy of the bereaved family and to ensure that this trauma is not added to by speculative media stories. It is also important that the school and members of the teaching staff do not become embroiled in media commentary concerning the death. It is recommended that a simple statement be prepared, expressing the sorrow of the entire school community at the sudden death of one of their members and extending sympathy to the bereaved family.

This statement should be adhered to and not elaborated on in all communications with the media and should be familiar to every member of the school staff. It will also be advisable to remind students, staff & Governors that innocent remarks to the media concerning the death of their peer could be misconstrued and could lead to considerable distress for individual students and for the bereaved family.

5. Consider the counselling services which may be required in the school.

Consideration should be given to counselling services which may be required by pupils and teachers in the aftermath of the pupil's death. The Principal should discuss this matter with the Pupil and Personal Development Advisor at EA and the Chair of the Board of Governors.

6. Visit the family of the deceased.

As leader of the school community, it is appropriate that the principal (& some or all staff as appropriate to that context) visit the family of the deceased at the earliest opportunity. Everyone should be prepared for the fact that this visit will be difficult as the family will inevitably be distressed. Time & support should be available for school staff to debrief if they wish after such a visit.

7. Issues for Consideration in the Long Term

In the weeks following an incident, a concentrated effort should be made by the principal and the teaching staff to return to the normal school routine. At the same time, it may be appropriate to decide to initiate a review of aspects of school policies and that all staff are given encouragement to contribute to the review process.

8. Review of school's response to Critical Incident

The Principal and staff should meet to analyse their response in the aftermath of the incident. Consideration should be given to monitoring and assisting the pupils who are considered to be particularly affected by the incident.

9. Pupil Support

The pupils will continue with the PDMU programme providing them with information and by developing their self-esteem and their sense of self-worth so that they are empowered to take decisions which will contribute to their long term physical and mental health. Advice will be available from the Pupil Personal Development Service on issues such as mental health.

10. Review of home-school community relationships

The development of good communications with parents and responding to the needs of a local community are increasingly part of the school's role. In the aftermath of a tragic event such as the sudden unexpected death of a student, it is important to consider the school's relationship with the broader community particularly in terms of the quality of its communications with parents and the degree of familiarity of parents with the school services and policies. Parents also need to be reassured that the school is a caring place where the teachers are responsive to pupils needs and are concerned about pupil's welfare in the broadest sense.

11. Staff contact details

All school staff will be required to complete a contact details form for themselves in order that, should they personally be involved in a serious incident, their next of kin can be informed. (see Appendix)

These documents will be kept, in a separate file from pupil contact details, in the same drawer of the locked filing cabinet in the office. These are to be treated as **confidential**, only to be used in the event of an emergency and will be returned to staff in the event of them leaving their post. Staff have agreed.

Signed: _____ **BoG Chairperson**

Signed: _____ **Principal**

Approved by Governors: May 2019

Next Review: May 2021

Appendix 1

Ballylifford PS Critical Incident Management Plan

Immediate Actions for Schools Following a Critical Incident

- 1. Assess the risk and take necessary action (e.g. school evacuation/first aid/contact emergency services)**
- 2. Gather factual information regarding the incident**
 - a. Details of person/people involved
 - b. Confirmation of facts from the source -family, Police, hospital
- 3. Initiate the use of the DE Critical Incident Management Guide Records**
<https://www.deni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/guide-to-managing-critical-incidents-in-schools.pdf>
- 4. Mobilise the School's Critical Incident Management Team or the Senior Leadership Team**
- 5. Allocate tasks to School's Critical Incident Management Team/SLT**
 - a. Identify a school Critical Incident Coordinator
 - b. Contact the parents of pupils directly involved in the incident
 - c. Inform relevant key people and seek support as appropriate e.g. staff, BOG, EA Critical Incident Team, CCMS, Local Clergy etc.
 - d. Establish a central information point
 - e. Set up dedicated phone line
 - f. Calls and enquiries logged
 - g. School visitors logged
 - h. Contact impacted family/s to determine their wishes regarding public announcements and staff/pupil briefings
 - i. Contact with the media (support available from EA Communications Officer)

6. Arrange staff briefing (when incident is confirmed)

- a. Provide clear factual information and agree pupil briefing content
- b. Advise staff on how to inform and support pupils (in form groups/classes/small groups)
- c. Team working and practical arrangements e.g. cover, flexible timetabling, recovery rooms etc.
- d. Identify vulnerable staff
- e. Remind staff regarding confidentiality - media contact and guidelines
- f. Critical Incident Staff Leaflet

7. Inform pupils (when incident is confirmed) with accurate and agreed statement;

- a. Use clear language
- b. Provide age appropriate factual information
- c. Dispel rumours
- d. Offer support
- e. Identify vulnerable pupils
- f. Announcement to the pupils
- g. Critical Incident Pupil Leaflet

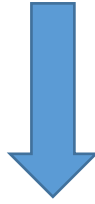
8. Maintain normal structures and routines with flexibility

9. Set up a warm, quiet and equipped recovery rooms with drinks, tissues, comfortable chairs etc.

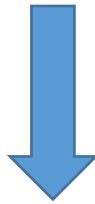
Appendix 2

Telephone Cascade for Critical Incident outside school time

Principal - Contacts Chairperson of Board of Governors & SMT



Principal contacts Teaching Staff Members, School Secretary, Caretaker & Head of Catering



Teachers contact Classroom assistants with whom they work on a daily basis in their class

In the event of a critical incident information should be kept factual and confidential.

No member of staff should speak to the media unless authorised.

Appendix 3

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM MEMBERS

TEAM LEADER

- Usually the Principal
- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Governors
- Liaises with the bereaved family

In the absence of the team leader, the Designated Teacher will assume the lead.

PSNI LIAISON

- Liaises with the PSNI
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

STAFF LIAISON

- 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
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Refers staff to materials from their critical incident folders
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of Staff Care Services and gives them the contact number

PUPIL LIAISON

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable pupils (appropriately)
- Provides materials for pupils (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of pupils seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

COMMUNITY/AGENCY LIAISON

- Maintains up to date lists of relevant contact numbers such as emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Coordinates the involvement of agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name/visitor badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

PARENT LIAISON

- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

MEDIA LIAISON

- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management). Will consult Communications Officer EA & CCMS.
- Where appropriate, may liaise with the EA Legal Services and relevant teacher unions.

ADMINISTRATOR

- Maintains up to date telephone numbers of
 - Parents or guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records of all correspondence