

## **Critical Incident Policy**

St. Patrick's National School aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. We strive for excellence in meeting education needs of our pupils, to enable them to live full lives as children to equip themselves for further education and for life itself. We do this in a caring and pleasant environment in which the essential contribution of each member of the school community is valued. The values of human dignity, compassion, justice, equality and respect guide us in our work. We will always within the foregoing context, make every effort to maintain high standards in teaching while reflecting the changes in our society and educational development. St. Patrick's N.S. has taken steps to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The Board of Management, through Joe O'Connor and Nicki Cole, has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policies and plans. The school has also formulated a number of procedures to be followed to ensure both staff and students' psychological and physical safety at all times.

### **Review and Research**

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) should consult resource documents available to schools on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie), these include:

- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

Other useful documents may be found on websites listed on pages 95 and 96 of Responding to Critical Incidents (NEPS Guidelines)

### **What is a Critical Incident?**

The staff and management of St. Patrick's N.S. recognise a critical incident to be **“an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school”** (Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools – National Education Psychological Services NEPS).

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. Types of incidents include:-

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death.
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- A major 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

**Note:**

- *Students and staff have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in the incident and need to be sensitive to the consequence of any public statement.*
- *The term “suicide” will not be used without the consent of the people involved or until it has been established categorically that the person’s death was a result of suicide. The term “tragic death” or “sudden death” may be used instead.*

**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 students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the impact on students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

**Creation of a Coping, Supportive and Caring Ethos in the School.**

We have put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

**Physical Safety**

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Pre-opening in the school yard
- Doors – emergency open from inside
- Front gate closed during school hours
- School doors locked during class time (buzz release)
- Rules of the playground (reinforced by class teacher)



## Psychological Safety

The management and staff of St. Patrick's N.S. aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. Issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse are addressed in the SPHE curriculum. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy.
- Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware and vigilant to their needs.
- Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting primary school children.
- The school has developed links with agencies which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person (Joe O'Connor)
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published on 2007 for primary schools. These documents are available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. guidance counsellor or support teacher), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents/guardians are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency (a summary of this support is set out in R 23 from Responding to Critical Incidents NEPS)
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves. The provision of support for school staff members and clear information on how to access the Employee Assistance Service (Free phone 1800 411057).

## Critical Incident Management Team

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) **"is a group of individuals from the staff of the school who know the community, the students and each other well enough to make the necessary decisions called for when the incident occurs"**. (Mary Schoenfeldt)

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

## **Roles**

The roles are:-

- Team Leader
- Garda Liaison
- Staff Liaison
- Student Liaison
- Parent/Guardian Liaison
- Community Liaison
- Media Liaison
- Administrator

### **Team Leader – Joe O'Connor – Principal**

A person who carries out authority and can make decisions during a crisis (e.g. school closure, attendance at memorial services etc).

1. Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
2. Co-ordinates the tasks of the team
3. Liaises with the Board of Management, Department of Education and Skills (DES), NEPS(Naas office 0761108620; Head office 018892700), Education and Training Board (ETB)
4. Liaises with the bereaved family.

### **Garda Liaison**

- Is part of Team Leader's role.
- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

### **Staff Liaison – Nicki Cole (DP)**

A staff member that is known, trusted and liked by staff.

1. Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
2. Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
3. Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
4. Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
5. Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
6. Advises them of the availability of the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) 1800 411 057 and gives them the contact number.

7. Draws teachers attention to Teacher Wellbeing and Self Care during the Covid-19 school closure
8. Shares with staff any resources being forwarded to parents.

### **Student Liaison – Donagh O’Connell**

A trusted and familiar figure to the students.

1. Liaises with other team members to keep up-dated with information and progress
2. Alerts staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
3. Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder).
4. Maintains student contact records (R1)
5. Looks after setting up and supervision of ‘quiet’ room where agreed (SEN room).
6. In accordance with school policy, some staff may decide to link directly with students via telephone, video link or email.
7. Reminds students that maintaining communication is important for wellbeing, and encourage them to keep in touch with close family and friends, whilst observing HSE guidelines. Remind students and staff that others are available to provide support.
8. Reassures students of their resilience and ability to cope. Encourages them to think of times and ways that they have coped in the past and to identify them.

### **Community/Agency Liaison – Anthony Brady**

Someone with good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community.

1. Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
2. Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
  - Key parents, such as members of the PTA and BOM
  - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
3. Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies
4. Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
5. Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies.
6. Reminds agency staff to wear name badges

### **Parent/Guardian Liaison – Principal/Averil Pearson**

Someone who is known to parents. This person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have skills to manage emotional reactions of individuals or groups of parents.

1. Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
2. Facilitates “questions and answers” meetings
3. Meets with individual parents
4. Manages the ‘consent’ issues in accordance with agreed school policy
5. Ensures that sample letters are prepared and available on the school’s IT system ready for adaptation

6. Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)
7. Sets up room for meetings with parents
8. Maintains a record of parents seen
9. Resources for parents sharing sad news with their child is attached at the end of the policy.

### **Media Liaison – Principal**

Someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media by phone or in person. A person who is able to set limits without being offensive.

1. In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc.)
2. In the event of an incident, liaises where necessary with the Communications Sections in the DES/INTO/Church of Ireland Primary Schools Management Association (CIPSMA).
3. Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

### **Administrator – School Secretary**

1. Maintenance of up to date lists of contact numbers of:-
  - Parents/Guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency support services.
2. Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response
3. Ensures that templates are available on the schools IT system and ready for adaptation
4. Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts
5. Photocopies materials as needed
6. Maintains records

### **Letter Templates**

See sample letters attached in Appendix.

### **Record Keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters, emails and texts sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, materials used etc.

The school secretary, Judi Magee, will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials etc.



**Confidentiality and good name considerations**

The management and staff of name of school 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. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do so also. For instance, the term ‘suicide’ will not be used unless there is confirmed information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases ‘tragic death’ or ‘sudden death’ may be used instead. Similarly, the word ‘murder’ should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term ‘violent death’ may be used instead.

**Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident:

Staff room/GP Hall - will be the main room used to meet the staff

Classroom(s)/GP Hall - for meetings with students

GP Hall - for parents

School Garden - for media

SEN rooms/Principal’s office - for individual sessions with students

Principal’s office – for individual parents/other visitors

**Consultation and communication regarding the plan**

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

Our school’s final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.

Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by (Nicki Cole)

**Ratification & Communication**

This policy was ratified on 13/09/2006.

This policy was ratified on 15/9/2020.


This policy was reviewed and ratified on 28/09/2021

**Monitoring the implementation of the policy**

The implementation of the policy shall be monitored by the Principal, staff and the Board of Management

**Reviewing and evaluating the policy**

The policy will be reviewed and evaluated after 2 years. On-going review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information or guidelines legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, students, school staff and others. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning

Signed:  .....For and behalf of BoM  
Date: Ratified 29 SEP 21 .....

## Appendix

My name is Joe O'Connor and I am the principal of St Patrick's N.S. We learned this morning of the death of ***(one of our students or name of student)***. This is a terrible tragedy for family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with ***(his/her or name)*** family and friends.

***(Name of student/s)*** was a ***(5<sup>th</sup> class boy/girl)*** and will be greatly missed by all who knew ***(him/her)***.

We have been in contact with ***(his/her)*** parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school has implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) ***(and other information if relevant)*** have been with us all day supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time.

The teachers have been helping the students to deal with the tragic event.

**The school has been open to parents to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.**

We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you.

Joe O'Connor  
Principal



Scoil Phádraig  
Baile Mhuiris  
Droichead Nua  
Co. Chill Dara  
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Principal: Joe. O'Connor

Deputy: Nicola Cole

Dear Parent / Guardian

The school has experienced (*the sudden death, accidental injury etc*) of (*name of student/s*). We are deeply saddened by the death/events.  
Our thoughts are with (*family name*).

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy (*elaborate*).

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is age appropriate.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to express feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or be fearful, anxious or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reactions. Over the course of the coming days, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

**(Optional)**

An information night for parents is planned for (*date, time and place*). At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given.

We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.

Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school (*details*).

Joe O'Connor  
Principal

Scoil Phádraig  
Baile Mhuiris  
Droichead Nua  
Co. Chill Dara  
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Principal: Joe. O'Connor

Deputy: Nicola Cole

Dear Parent/Guardian

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened.

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, the sister/brother of (*name of student*), a student here at the school, was killed as a result of (*a violent attach, violent incident in the street etc*) earlier this week. We are all profoundly saddened by his/her death.

We have shared this information and had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened. School staff members have been available for students on an on-going basis today. Other support personnel (*including psychologists etc. according to actual arrangements*) are available to advise staff in their support of students.

The death of any young person is tragic, but a violent death is even more difficult. It is hard to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to accept that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it.

This death may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Some children/young people may be afraid for their own life and for the lives of those they love. Take time to listen to their fears and reassure them that what has happened is rare.

We have enclosed some additional information that may be useful during this time.

The media are in the vicinity of the school and may approach you or your children. You need not respond to their questions if you are approached. We will not allow the media to interview your child at school and our general advice is that you should not let your children be interviewed. They are not mature enough to judge what to say and may say something they will regret later.

In these times, young people tend to turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive about what your son/daughter might post to others.

Our thoughts are with (*family name*) and with each of you.

Sincerely

Joe O'Connor