

Critical Incidents Policy

Introductory Statement

This policy was revised by the staff and Board of Management of Knock National School in September 2015. This revised policy document was ratified by the Board of Management on March 2nd 2016.

Aims of Policy

The aim of this policy which includes a Critical Incidents Management Plan (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. This plan should also help to ensure that the effects of an incident on students and staff will be limited. It should enable the school community to return to normality as soon as possible.

Policy Content

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school. Examples include:

- Death of a member of the school community – through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide
- An accident involving pupil/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
- Kidnapping of child from the immediate locality
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community

Prevention of Critical Incidents

Management and staff of Knock National School will work as a team to promote emotional health and well-being to help all pupils and staff members to build sufficient resilience to cope with a range of life events. All staff and children will be encouraged and helped to take care of their mental health. Mental health has been defined as:

“a state of emotional and social well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can manage the normal stresses of life, can work effectively, and is able to play a role in her or her community” (WHO, 1999)

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is the key element of the school’s prevention work. SPHE supports the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development and well-being of all members of the school community. Every effort will be made by teachers to implement the SPHE programme effectively so that it will contribute significantly to the creation of a healthy, nurturing and safe school environment for pupils and staff.

The following key elements of good practice will contribute to the creation of a healthy and safe school:

1. Every effort will be made to ensure that a psychologically safe school environment is provided in the school for pupils and staff.
2. SPHE will be taught in all classes. Through formal and informal lessons, issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, resilience, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, bullying, decision making and use/misuse of alcohol and other drugs will be

- appropriately discussed and explored. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
3. The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
 4. As part of the school's Health and Safety procedures
 - a. A physically safe environment is created for pupils and staff.
 - b. Pupils and staff are familiar with the schools emergency evacuation plans.
 - c. Fire drills occur regularly.
 - d. Fire exits and extinguishers are checked regularly.
 5. The school has a clear child protection policy stating clearly that the school will follow the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools published by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 2011.
 6. Details of the Carecall Well-Being service for staff are posted on a notice board in the staffroom.
 7. Pupils and staff are encouraged and enabled to talk openly about their problems and seek help when necessary. Every effort is made to ensure that mental health problems are de-stigmatised.

Critical Incident Management Plan – Roles and Responsibilities of CIMT members

The names of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) along with the roles and responsibilities assigned to each are outlined below.

| CIMT Member | Critical Incidents Management Team – Assigned Responsibilities |
|---|---|
| James Jordan Chairperson of Board of Management | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet with the Principal to discuss the provision of support for pupils and staff 2. Call an Emergency Board of Management meeting if it is deemed necessary 3. Provide necessary information for all Board of Management Members 4. Provide a chaplaincy service in the school for pupils and staff |
| Máire Boyle Principal | CIMT – Team Leader, Garda Liaison, Administrator <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish the facts – Who, where, what and how – Ensure that information is checked out for accuracy 2. [If incident occurred at school] Immediately make contact with the affected family or families 3. Call a meeting of the CIMT and co-ordinate implementation of the Critical Incident Management Plan 4. Inform the chairperson of the Board of Management 5. Make a decision, in consultation with the chairperson of the BoM, to close the school if it is deemed necessary or appropriate 6. Co-ordinate the involvement of external agencies 7. Help the school secretary to liaise appropriately with the public e.g. requests from the press and other agencies for information in relation to the incident 8. Assist the school secretary with the timely provision of necessary information for parents/guardians e.g. text message to parents/guardians 9. Prepare for a media interview using the template in appendix 6 10. Write a letter to parents/guardians if it is deemed appropriate – Sample letters are include in appendix 2, 4 and 5 11. Make contact with the affected families and organise a home visit if this is appropriate |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 12. Advise staff and pupils in relation to making statements to the press |
| Shirley Horkan Deputy-Principal | <p>Pupil Liaison</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Co-ordinate implementation of the Critical Incident Plan if the Principal teacher is unavailable i.e. assume the additional roles of Team Leader, Garda Liaison and Administrator 2. Organise immediate support for pupils in most need at the time of an incident e.g. informing pupils who are directly related or connected to those involved in the incident e.g. children, siblings, cousins, friends, pupils of a deceased person 3. Organise necessary supervision arrangements so that all pupils and staff are supervised appropriately at all times e.g. when staff are briefed, supervision for classes where teachers are unable to return to their own classroom 4. Assist the principal with the process of sensitively informing the pupils in each class group of the incident. 5. Make contact with the affected family/families if the Principal Teacher is, for any reason, unable to do so in a timely fashion 6. Assist the Principal with home visits if such visits are deemed necessary 7. Assist the principal with the preparation of appropriate support from the school at a funeral service |
| Shirley Horkan | <p>Liaison for Vulnerable Pupils</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify and support vulnerable pupils e.g. pupils who have been bereaved, pupils with a history of mental health difficulties 2. Support children with special educational needs who may not fully understand what has happened and/or how to cope with it 3. Co-ordinate the provision of one-to-one and/or group support for pupils 4. Maintain a record of pupils who received one-to-one and/or group support from school staff and/or external agencies |
| Maire Boyle | <p>CIMT - Staff Liaison</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responsibility for supporting staff – provision of information for staff and co-ordination of available supports for staff 2. Photocopy and distribute suitable resource materials from Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools published by NEPS 3. Co-ordinate external supports for staff e.g. NEPS 4. Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils 5. Be alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually. Advise staff of the availability of the Care Call - Well Being service. |

Critical Incidents – Follow Up

Following a critical incident, it is expected that there will be ‘normal’ distress among a number of pupils, especially close friends or relatives. Within approximately six weeks, most pupils will have returned to normal functioning (DES, 2008). However, if pupils continue to show significant signs of distress a number of weeks after the incident, they may be referred to NEPS. In these cases, the principal teacher will seek advice from NEPS.

In the weeks after a critical incident, staff will be reminded of the Care Call Well-Being service which is available to them. The Critical Incidents Management Team (CIMT) will meet to evaluate the school's response and to amend this Critical Incidents Policy if it is deemed necessary.

Critical Incidents – Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, each member of the CIMT will keep records of:

1. Phone calls made and received
2. Letters sent and received
3. Meetings held
4. Persons met
5. Interventions used
6. Involvement of external agencies

These records will be stored in the critical incidents file in the principal's office.

Confidentiality

The management and staff of Knock National 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 statement. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do also. For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is solid 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

The table below outlines the purposes for which certain rooms will be used in the school for managing critical incidents.

| Room | Purpose |
|--------------|---|
| Staff-room | Briefing staff |
| Library | Meetings with individuals or small groups of students |
| Meeting Room | Meetings with parents/guardians |
| Staff Room | Visiting Professionals e.g. NEPS |
| LS Room | Media |
| Library | Other Visitors |

Communication of Policy

A copy of this policy document will be saved in the School Policies folder which is available in electronic form for all staff members. Staff will be advised that the policy was updated in January 2016. Parents/Guardians will be informed that a copy of the policy maybe requested through the school office. A copy of the plan will be made available to substitute and temporary staff members.

Ratification of Policy

This policy was ratified at a meeting of the Board of Management of Knock National School on March 2nd 2016.

Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed as required.

Appendix 1 – Emergency Contact List

| Name | Contact Number | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ambulance/Emergency | 112/999 | | |
| Gardai | 094 9364219 | Claremorris | |
| Hospital | 094 9021733 | Mayo University Hospital, Castlebar | |
| Fire Brigade | 094 9371111 | Claremorris | |
| Barnardos | 1850 222 300 | Children's Bereavement Services | 01 4732110 Mon-Thur 10-12p.m |
| Curam Family Centre | 094 9362096 | Claremorris | |
| Childline | 1800 66 66 66 | Text 50101 | |
| St. Vincent de Paul Virginia Brady | 094 9038016 | Knock | 097 6949460 |
| Inspector Dolores Brady | 098 41442 | Newport | 087 3298301 |
| SENO Maria Healy | 094 9038016 | Castlebar | 087 6949460 |
| INTO | 1850 708708 | | |
| NEPS Caitriona Whelan | 094 9028310 | Castlebar | 087 2025079 |
| Caretaker Seamus Hopkins | 087 9510435 | | |
| Electrician Keith Devaney | 087 9074781 | | |
| Plumber Glenn Judge | 087 6630045 | | |
| Employee Assist Service | 1800 411 057 | | |

Appendix 2 – Individual or Group Support Session

Dear Parents/Guardians,

You may already know that our teachers and staff have been providing support to our students following (specific reference to the incident).

Additional support is also being provided to our school by psychologist/s from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

The psychologist will be available, where necessary, to meet with individuals or with groups of students to help them during this difficult time.

The aim of such sessions will be to:

1. Provide information about dealing with grief and loss in a healthy way
2. Allow students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment
3. Allow students time to comfort and support each other, under the guidance of experienced staff from
4. Help students resume their normal routines as soon as possible.

If you would like for your son/daughter to participate in such a session and any follow-up meetings that might be scheduled, please give your consent by signing below.

You should return it to the school immediately.

If you have any questions, please contact the school directly on 094 9388435.

I give my consent for _____ (student name) to participate in a group/individual session.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Parent or Legal Guardian

Yours faithfully,

Máire Boyle
Principal

Appendix 3 – Seeking advance parent/guardian agreement to NEPS support

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The Board of Management and staff of Knock National School have developed a plan for responding when a tragedy occurs involving members of our school community.

If such an event happens, the schools will be offered support by psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), an agency of the Department of Education and Skills. If we feel it is necessary, we would like to be in a position to have your child seen by the psychologist who can offer advice and support.

Before any child is seen by a NEPS psychologist parental consent is usually required. We will make every effort to obtain this. However, in the unlikely event of being unable to contact you, we are writing to seek your consent to your child being seen by a member of NEPS as part of our school's immediate response. This is to allow us to support your child in the best way possible. Your child maybe seen individually, in a small group or as part of a class group.

If you wish to discuss this, please contact me at your convenience.

Yours faithfully,

Máire Boyle
Principal

Form for Parents/Guardians who do not want their child to receive support from NEPS following a critical incident involving a member of the school community.

The school will assume your agreement if you do not return this slip stating that you do not wish to have your child seen by a NEPS psychologist. If you do not want your child to receive support from NEPS, please complete the form below and return it to the school before Friday 28th February 2014.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4: Sample letter to parents/guardians following a sudden death or accident

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of *Name of student(s)*. We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost).

Our thoughts are with (family name).

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their age. You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or to 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 days to come, 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.

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

Yours faithfully,

Máire Boyle
Principal

Appendix 5: Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians – Violent Death

Dear Parents/Guardians,

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

(Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, who is the [e.g. brother] of _____, a student here at school, was killed as a result of (a violent attack, violent incident in the street etc.) earlier this week. We are all profoundly saddened by his death.

We have shared this information and have 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 and, where necessary, to talk to students. This support will continue to be available for (if appropriate insert how long).

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.

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

Yours faithfully,

Máire Boyle
Principal

Appendix 6: Sample Announcement to the Media

My name is _____ and I am the Principal of Knock National School. We learned this morning of the death of (one of our students or *Name* of student). This is a terrible tragedy for _____ family/families, our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (*Name*)family and friends.

Name of student/students was a (... class pupil) 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 have implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and (insert 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 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.

This can be used as a template by schools to be emailed, faxed or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the school.

In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals.