

Critical Incident Policy and Plan



St Benignus NS, Balscadden

1.0 Introduction

The key to managing a critical incident is planning. This policy and plan outlines the school's response in the event of a critical incident. The staff and management of St Benignus NS recognise a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school". In line with recommendations from NEPS this document outlines a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) which describes who will do what in the event of a tragedy.

2.0 Review and research

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) was established to take responsibility for putting our CIMP in place. Staff, parents and Board of Management were also involved in devising this policy and plan. The CIMT have consulted resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie and www.nosp.ie including:

- 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 Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

3.0 The policy's relationship to the school's mission statement and ethos

St Benignus NS aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and other people. We endeavour to equip each pupil with the skills and positive self-

esteem to empower them to contribute to their community and become lifelong learners. We believe that this policy and plan can ensure positive mental health in all members of the school community by minimising the impact of a critical incident on the psychological welfare of that community.

4.0 Our understanding of a critical incident

The staff and management of St Benignus NS, Balcadden 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.

5.0 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 students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible

6.0 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.

6.1 Physical Safety

The day to day physical safety of our school community is ensured through our Health and Safety Policy. These measures include but are not limited to:

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Fire drills
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Pre-opening supervision in the school yard
- Gates closed in school yard and front door intercom
- Supervision of pupils and playground rules

6.2 Psychological safety

The management and staff of St Benignus NS, Balcadden 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. This includes but is not limited to:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing 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. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision. Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Safeguarding Statement, Policy and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school pupil are available.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies such as NEPS, HSE social services etc.
- Inputs to pupils by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
- The school has a clear Anti-Bullying Policy and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- 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.
- Pupils who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (support teacher), 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.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

7.0 Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

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 CIMT 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. The members of the Board of Management should be informed about the occurrence of a critical incident at the earliest opportunity.

8.0 CIMT Roles

The key roles are as follows:

- Team Leader (Christopher White, Principal)
- Garda liaison (Christopher White)

- Staff liaison (Darragh McGonigle, Deputy Principal, Isobel Donnelly (AP2), Avril Murray (AP2), Conor Devlin (AP2).
- Student liaison (Christopher White, Darragh McGonigle, Relevant Class Teacher)
- Parent liaison (Darragh McGonigle, Isobel Donnelly, Avril Murray)
- Community liaison (Seán McEvoy, Chairperson, BOM and Phyllis Lawless, Secretary)
- Media liaison (Christopher White)
- Administrator (Phyllis Lawless)

8.1 Team leader (Christopher White)

Role

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Coordinates the tasks of the team.
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; HSE.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.

In the absence of the Principal, the Deputy Principal will act as team leader.

8.2 Garda liaison (Christopher White)

Role

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

8.3 Staff liaison (Darragh McGonigle, Isobel Donnelly, Avril Murray, Conor Devlin)

Role

- 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.
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder).
- 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 the EAS and gives them the contact number.

8.4 Pupil liaison (Christopher White, Darragh McGonigle, Relevant Class Teacher)

Role

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

8.5 Community liaison (Seán McEvoy, Phyllis Lawless)/Agency liaison (Darragh McGonigle)

Role

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of key parents, such as members of the Parents' Association, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources.
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.

- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support.
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies.
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges.
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

8.6 Parent liaison (Darragh McGonigle, Isobel Donnelly, Avril Murray, Conor Devlin)

Role

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader.
- Arranges parent meetings, if held.
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'.
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- 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).

8.7 Media Liaison (Christopher White)

Role

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. pupils being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise with outside agencies; relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

8.8 Administrator (Phyllis Lawless)

Role

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of parents or guardians, teachers and emergency services.
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to.
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation.
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts.
- Photocopies materials needed.
- Maintains records.

9.0 Record keeping

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

Phyllis Lawless (secretary) will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

10.0 Critical Incident on school tours or class trips

In the event of a Critical Incident occurring during a school tour or class trip, the supervising teacher will immediately contact the Team Leader. Refer to our School Tours and Excursions Policy. For this reason a supervising teacher should always have a mobile phone with them. The procedures described in this policy and plan then proceed as described.

11.0 Confidentiality and good name considerations

The management and staff of St Benignus, NS, Balscadden 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. Members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that pupils do so 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.

12.0 Critical incident rooms

In the event of a critical incident:

- Staffroom will be the main room used to meet the staff.
- Classroom/Hall for meetings with pupils.
- Hall/Support Room for parents.
- Hall for media.
- Principal's Office/Teacher Support Room for individual sessions with pupils.
- Teacher's Support room for other visitors.

13.0 Consultation and communication regarding the plan

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parent 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 the Team Leader. The plan will be updated annually.

14.0 Evaluation and Review

The success of this Critical Incident Policy and Plan will be evaluated on how it fulfils its function of helping the school community cope with a Critical Incident. It will be reviewed annually or more frequently if necessitated by issues arising in relation to the policy and plan. Reviewed October 2008, Reviewed April/May 2013, Reviewed April 2021, January 2023.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____ (date)

Signed: _____
Chairperson of the Board of Management

Signed: _____
Principal

Date: _____

Date: _____