

Critical Incident Policy

Gorey Educate Together N.S.

Gorey Educate Together NS aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. In doing so, we are conscious of the ethos of our school as one that is equality-based, co-educational, child centred and democratically run. The Board of Management, through Principal Raymond Swan, has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan as one element of the school's policies and plans.

Review and Research

The Critical Incident Management Team has 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)
- *Well-Being in Primary Schools – Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* (DES, DOH, HSE, 2015)

Examples of Critical Incidents:

The staff and management of Gorey Educate Together NS 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 students or staff members, or members of our local community.

Types of incidents might include:

- Death of pupil/staff/other member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident or tragedy in the wider school community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- Major illness (or outbreak of disease)
- A national or world event that may affect the pupil body and/or 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 students and staff. An effective plan aims to ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It will 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 supervision in school building (8:40 – 8:50)
- School gates locked during school time. Security codes only available to members of staff
- Glass panels in all classroom doors
- Playground and general school safety rules communicated frequently to students and staff
- Health and Safety checklists circulated monthly to staff

Psychological safety

The management and staff of Gorey Educate Together NS 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 that are addressed in the curriculum include 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
- A school Care Team is in place at GETNS. The core team is comprised of six members of staff and its purpose is to look after the overall general wellbeing of students in the school as well as to provide for students who have a greater need for a higher level of intervention from the school community. All staff members are familiar with the procedures for referral.
- A care system is in place using the 'Continuum of Support' approach (NEPS, 2007)
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member/Care Team, concerns are explored and the appropriate level of support and assistance is provided. Parents are informed and, where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are aware of how to access support for themselves
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- 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 student are available
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of anxiety
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies such as NEPS, CAMHS, and local health agencies.
- Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content and the expertise of the providers (DES Circular 0022/2010)
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy

Our Critical Incident Response Team (see Appendix 1):

Team Leader: Principal, Raymond Swan & Board of Management Chairperson

Parent/Family Liaison: Deputy Principal, Imelda Wright

Community/Outside Agency Liaison: Caitriona O'Neill

Student Liaison/Listening Support Role: Assistant Principal 1, Mairéad Jordan

Staff Liaison: Mary Foley

Media Liaison/Garda Liaison: Principal and Chairperson of BoM

Parent Teacher Association Representative: Chairperson PTA/Secretary PTA

Board of Management Representative: Patron's (Educate Together) Representative on the Board

Other members of Critical Incident Response Team: David O'Shea, Suzanne Keane

In the event of the absence of the person with a designated responsibility, the members of the Critical Incident Team will delegate this responsibility to another member of the team.

Principal to delegate his/her day-to-day responsibilities to another staff member during the response to the Critical Incident.

Contacts

Each member of the team has a telephone contact list (staff/Board of Management/PTA Chairperson/school buses/outside agencies, etc.). A list is also kept in the main school office.

Action Plan

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

1. Immediately following occurrence of critical incident, the principal will contact the members of the Critical Incident Team and a team meeting is convened (at the school if this is feasible).
2. Information is gathered and shared
3. Roles are defined and the responsibilities for each role are outlined and agreed upon
4. The team liaises with the Board of Management (and Department of Education, if necessary)
5. Appropriate agencies are contacted:
 - **Emergency services**
 - **Medical services**
 - **H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services**
 - **N.E.P.S. (National Educational Psychological Service)**
6. The principal/chairperson of the BoM leads a media briefing (if appropriate)
7. Relevant members of the Critical Incident Team inform the relevant parties: staff (meeting is arranged), pupils, parents, absentee staff and students.
8. Support/information meeting for parents/students to be held, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened (opt-out is available to staff members who may feel uncomfortable)

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Review events of first 24 hours: ongoing liaison between members of the Critical Incident Team
- Staff, parents and pupils are aware of their point of contact in the school if further support is required. Arrangements for support meetings are made if necessary. Mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students is decided upon.
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral or other service.
- Involvement of students/staff in a liturgy, if requested/agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staff responses, e.g. sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Organisation of ritual within the school if appropriate
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative, etc. Responsibility: student and staff liaison team members.
- Plan visits to injured
 - 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 parents' wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.
- School closure (if appropriate.) Request a decision on this from Chairperson, Board of Management.

LONGER TERM ACTIONS

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress (*see Appendix 1*). Responsibility lies with the Care Team/Critical Incident Team and the class teacher. Ongoing liaison with external agencies may be required.
- Ensure that staff members who may be experiencing ongoing anxiety or distress as a result of the critical incident are aware of their point of contact within the school and supported as necessary.
- Plan a school memorial service – Critical Incident Team/Care Team
- Determine the parent's/next of kin's wishes re care of deceased person's possessions – Critical Incident Team/Care Team
- Update and amend school records
- Inform new staff/new school pupils of past Critical Incidents, where appropriate. Ensure that new staff are aware of the school policy in this area. Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way – Critical Incident Team/Care Team
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal will brief the Principal of the new school

- Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events): Critical Incident Team. Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time. Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Be aware of significant days for example Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
 - Care Team to monitor and inform relevant staff members.

EVALUATION

After an appropriate period of time, the Board of Management will evaluate the response to the incident (with the Critical Incident Team, staff and, possibly, parental input) and amend the Critical Incident Plan appropriately.

- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Record Keeping

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

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

Confidentiality and good name considerations

Management and staff of Gorey Educate Together NS have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of public statements. Members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and seek to ensure that students do so also. Certain words/terminology e.g. 'suicide' 'murder' etc should not be used inappropriately and without legal evidence of same or consent of the family involved.

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted.

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 hard copy of the plan.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by Raymond Swan, principal or Mairéad Jordan, Care Team co-ordinator.

The plan will be updated annually.

February 2019

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Team Leader

Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Assemble the Critical Incident Response Team
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known; give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions; outline the routine for the day. Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

Postvention

- Ensure provision of on-going support to staff and pupils
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

2. Media Liaison Role:

Intervention

- With Team, prepare a public statement (if appropriate)
- Organise a designated room to address media (if appropriate)
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with Gardaí

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
 1. What happened, where and when?
 2. What is the extent of the injuries?
 3. How many are involved and what are their names?
 4. Is there a risk of further injury?
 5. What agencies have been contacted already?

Postvention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

3. Student Liaison/ Listening Support Role:

Intervention

- Advise staff on the identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available to the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, (& list of friends, etc.) or any other relevant information
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide listening support service

N.E.P.S. info booklet 'Responding to Critical Incidents' and notes on helping bereaved children/classroom session following news of a critical incident, etc. on top shelf in principal's office.

Postvention

- Provide on-going support to vulnerable students
- Monitor the class most affected by the incident
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate plan

If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the HSE or 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

4. Family Liaison Role:

Intervention

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal.) Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service, memorial service. Have regard for different religious & non-religious traditions.
- Assist with all communication: school – family.

Postvention

- Involve the family in school memorial service, as appropriate
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

5. Community/Agency Liaison Role

- Maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers of parent reps, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinates involvement of these agencies
- Provides agency staff with badges
- Updates team members of the involvement of external agencies

6. Staff Liaison Role

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outline the routine for the day
- Advise staff on procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provide material for staff (critical incident folder)
- Keep staff updated as the day progresses
- Alert to vulnerable staff members and make contact with them individually
- Advise them of the availability of support services and provide contact details