St. Mary's Special School

Johnstown Educational Campus
Johnstown,
Navan,
Co. Meath
C15 PFK7

Critical Incident Policy for St. Mary's Special School September 2026

Introduction:

In St. Mary's Special School we aim to protect the wellbeing of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment as outlined in our school philosophy statement.

The BoM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Policy Statement

Emergency situations usually come with little or no warning and often result in confusion and devastation. The outcome of a Critical Incident is dependent on how well the people involved have planned and prepared for such occurrences. The purpose of this plan is to address basic emergency planning and response for a range of childcare emergencies

What is a Critical Incident?

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school'.

Examples:

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease (Covid 19 Pandemic)
- Criminal incidents (e.g. assaults, shootings, stabbings etc.)
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. road traffic accidents)
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster (e.g. school ceiling collapsing, school flooding etc.)
- Disappearance of student from home or school (e.g. pupil going missing)

- Unauthorised removal of students from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. natural disasters, wars, terrorism etc

Critical Incidents Management Team:

Leadership Role: Maria Corredor

Communication Role: Gemma Corr & Alana O'Donnell

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: William Priest, Bernie Muldoon & Alana O'Donnell

Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Kevin Heery

Family Liaison Role: Siobhan McKernan & Gemma Corr

Parents Association Rep: Julie Gorman / Ian Davy

B.O.M. Rep: Elizabeth Sheridan

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined.

The second-named person assists and only assumes responsibility in the absence of the first-named.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. **Leadership Role:** Ms Maria Corredor

Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day

- 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 ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

Communication Role: Gemma Corr & Alana O'Donnell

Intervention

- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

Postvention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: William Priest, Bernie Muldoon, Alana O'Donnell

Intervention

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils

- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide counselling

Postvention

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

4. Chaplaincy Role: *Fr.Kevin Heery*

Intervention

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

Postvention

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

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5. Family Liaison Role: Siobhan Mc Kernan *& Gemma Corr*

Intervention

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident

Postvention

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

6. BOM *Elizabeth Sheridan*

- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)

- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

Parent's Association Rep – Julie Gorman & Ian Davy

Intervention
Representing parents' concerns and wishes with regard to the school's response to the critical incident

Postvention
Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
Review and Evaluate Plan

8. **Secretary**

Intervention
Ring the emergency services immediately
Ensuring that the Office is manned at all times
Liaising with other members of Critical Incident Management Team

Postvention
Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
Review and Evaluate Plan

Contact Numbers & Emergency Information
The Secretary has responsibility for maintaining an up to date list of Contact numbers for pupils and their parents / guardians. Private and Confidential forms will be sent out in June to ensure all contact information is available from the first day of the new school year.

Caretaker:

Intervention
Controlling access to the school premises
Maintaining security procedures
Maintaining services such as heating, light, water and communication lines
Liaising with other members of Critical Incident Management Team

Postvention
Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
Review and Evaluate Plan

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ACTION PLAN

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with family/families *
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- 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?
6. Contact appropriate agencies
7. Emergency services
8. Medical services

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9. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
10. NEPS
11. Garda

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staff responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- 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 parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate)
- Request a decision on this from school management

LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

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

Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately

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

Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staffs are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area

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- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events)

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
- Plan a school memorial service
- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

Drawn up by the Board of Management of St. Mary's Special School on February 2019.

Review Date: March 2022

Review date: March 2023

Review: March 2024

Reviewed Jan 2024

Reviewed December 2024

Reviewed September 2025

Reviewed: September 2026

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