



Critical Incident Management Policy

Holy Cross Mercy School

June 2024

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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".

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

Examples:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- A major accident/tragedy in the wider community
- An accident involving members of the school community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- An intrusion into the school
- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death

Aim

Holy Cross Mercy School aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of Management has requested that this Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) be drawn up as one element of the school's policies and plans to ensure that this is achieved at all times.

The main aim of our Critical Incident 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 pupils and staff. Our plan should also help lessen the impact of a critical incident on pupils and staff and 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

- Regular fire drills occur
- Evacuation plan formulated
- Fire extinguishers are inspected and Health and Safety Audits are carried out on a regular basis.
- Pre-opening supervision is carried out in the School Hall and in the classrooms from 8:30 a.m.
- Safety rules of the classroom and playground

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of Holy Cross Mercy School aim to use available SPHE programmes and resources e.g; ‘Stay Safe’, ‘Webwise’, A.B.I. programme, and ‘Friends for Life’ to address the personal and social development of pupils. These programmes also enhance the sense of safety and security in our school and provide ample opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Examples of Procedures in Holy Cross Mercy School to Ensure Psychological Safety

- All staff are familiar with the Child Safety Statement (that is reviewed on an annual basis), the name of the Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person.
- Staff have regular access to continuous professional development for their role in Child Safeguarding and other areas of SPHE e.g; internet safety.
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is taught during discrete SPHE time and also on a cross-curricular basis throughout the school day. 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 positive wellbeing is an integral part of this provision. Books and resources on difficulties affecting our pupils are available to the staff.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves e.g. staff are advised of the availability of The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) at the beginning of our annual Child Safeguarding professional development input.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies –e.g; NEPS, CAMHS and KIDS etc.
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy, supported by our schoolwide Anti-Bullying Awareness Institute’s (ABI) programme.
- There is a care system in place in the school using the “Continuum of Support” approach.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. 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.

The Board of Management has established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the Critical Incident Management Plan.

Critical Incident Management Team:

Leadership Role: *Mrs Alice Davern (Principal)*

Garda Liaison Role: *Ms Anne Lucey (Deputy Principal)*

Communication Role: *Ms Judy O Mahony*

Student Liaison Role: *Class Teachers*

Chaplaincy Role: *Fr. Sean Jones*

Family Liaison Role: *Mrs Alice Davern*

Administrator: *Mrs Desirée Crowley (School Secretary)*

Parents Association Rep: *Parents representative on our Board of Management;*

Mrs Patsy Moynihan & Mrs Laura Moynihan

B.O.M. Rep: *Mrs Bridget Mc Guire (Chairperson of B.o.M.)*

N.E.P.S: *Ms Cáit O' Sullivan*

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined. The Deputy Principal assists and assumes responsibility on the absence of the first-named.

Roles and Responsibilities

Leadership Role:

Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team and convenes a meeting
- Liaise with the Board of Management; NEPS and the DES
- Liaise with the bereaved family; express sympathy to family
- Clarify the facts surrounding the event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Coordinates the tasks of the CIMP team
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outline the routine for the day.
- Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Provide materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advise staff of the availability of The Employee Assistance Service (EAS)
- Facilitate meetings, and manage 'questions and answers' sessions
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Maintain a record of parents seen
- Provide appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder).
- Keep staff updated as the day progresses

Follow-up

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

Garda Liaison Role:

(This may be also be seen as part of the team leader's role)

- Liaise with the Gardaí
- Ensure that information about deaths or other developments is verified before being shared

Communication Role:**Intervention**

- In advance of an incident, she will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. photographers on the premises, media seeking interviews etc.)
- Work with CIMP team to prepare a public statement.
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

Follow-up

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

Pupil Liaison/ Counselling Role:**Intervention**

- Outline specific services available in school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Alerts other teaching staff to vulnerable pupils (appropriately and where necessary.)
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide information
- Provide counselling
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Maintain up to date lists of contact details of emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Provides materials for pupils (from their critical incident folder)
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.

Follow-up

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

Administrator Role:

Intervention

Maintenance of up-to-date telephone numbers of:

- Parents or guardians
- Teachers
- Emergency support services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to.
- Ensures that letter templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for future adaptation.
- Prepare and send letters and e-mails
- Photocopy materials needed.
- Maintain contemporaneous records.
- Prepare room for meetings with parents

Chaplaincy Role:

Intervention

- Visit the bereaved family, if appropriate.
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

Follow-up

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

Family Liaison Role:

Intervention

- Coordinate 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

Follow-up

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

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, material used etc.

The school secretary, Mrs Desirée Crowley 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 Holy Cross Mercy 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' would 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' would be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' would not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' would be used instead.

Critical Incident Rooms

In the event of a critical incident;

The Staffroom - will be the main room used to meet the staff

The principal's office or adjoining meeting room- for meetings with pupils.

The principal's office - for meetings with parents

The assembly hall- for media

The meeting room adjoining the principal's office- for individual sessions with students

The meeting room adjoining the principal's office -for other visitors

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.
- Critical incident rooms will be made available as outlined above.
- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team (8.30 a.m.)
 1. Organise a staff meeting, if appropriate. (9.00 a.m.)
 2. Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed.
 3. Organize timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible).
 4. Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc. or any other relevant information and give to the Student Liaison person.
 5. Arrange supervision of pupils.
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.
 1. 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.
 2. Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate (principal and class teacher.)
 3. Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

Informing Pupils

- Inform close friends and relatives of the deceased first in a private location with two members of the Critical Incident Management team being present.
- Inform the class of the deceased with members of the Critical Incident Management team being present also.
- Inform each class group individually as opposed to a general school assembly format. A prayer for the deceased would be appropriate.
- Support is best given by adults known to the children.
- Although, an outside expert might help by assisting the people undertaking this task to prepare for it and by providing ongoing advice and support as they manage it.
- Ensure to give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours, which can cause unnecessary stress.
- Allow pupils to ask questions, tell their stories and express feelings.
- Help the children to realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident.
- Consult the School Chaplain re the organisation of a prayer service will be organised at some time during the day for the class of the deceased or for the entire school.
- Inform students that their parents/guardians will be collecting them as soon as possible.

Suicide

- The term 'suicide' will not be used until it has been established categorically that the student's or teacher's death was as a result of suicide.
- The phrase 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' will be used instead. We will contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family's wishes about how the death should be described.

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson. (Leader)
- Protect the family's privacy.

Gather accurate information

- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident.
- What happened, where and when?
- What are the extent of the injuries?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?
- Contact appropriate agencies ; Emergency services, medical services, H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services, NEPS, B.O.M., DES/Schools Inspector.
- Prepare a brief statement. (Team) We will prepare a written statement for the media that will include the facts about the incident, what has been done already, what is going to be done and positive information or comments about the deceased person. If the school is requested to give a live interview we will first seek the professional advice of the support agencies mentioned above e.g; NEPS,

DES or CPSMA etc. We will allocate the necessary time preparing for the interview.

- Keep the interview simple, short and factual. If we are not ready or if we think it inappropriate we will decline the interview. A room will be made available to the media and this may help to control their access to staff and pupils. Pupils and staff will be strongly advised not to facilitate the media.

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'/staffs' responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, book of condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school.
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
 1. Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team. (8.30 a.m.)
 2. Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
 3. Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
 4. Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting. (3.00 p.m.)
 5. Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary.
 1. Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened.
 2. Give any staff member who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out.
 3. Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission.
 4. Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc.)
 5. Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
 1. Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital.
 2. Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
 3. Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.
- School closure (as brief as possible 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.
 1. Uncharacteristic behaviour
 2. Deterioration in academic performance

3. Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
 4. Inappropriate emotional reactions
 5. Increased absenteeism.
- Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately.
 1. What were the strengths?
 2. Where were the areas requiring improvement?
 3. What was most/least helpful?
 4. Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
 5. Are there any further matters that need to be attended to?
 - Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future
 1. Consult with NEPS Psychologist
 - Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
 1. Ensure that new staff are made aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.
 2. Ensure that they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
 3. 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)
 1. Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time.
 2. Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
 3. Be sensitive to significant days like birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day as appropriate
 - Plan a school memorial service.
 - Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
 - Update and amend school records.

Sample Letters

Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As you may be aware, our school has experienced (the sudden death/injury) to one of our students/staff. We are deeply saddened by this death/injury (Brief details of the incident, and in the case of death, perhaps some positive remembrances of persons lost.)

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. (Elaborate) It is possible that your daughter/son may have some feelings that he may like to discuss with you. You can help your daughter/son by taking time to listen to him/her and encouraging him/her to express his/her feelings. It is important to give truthful information that is appropriate to his/her age. If you would like any advice or support you may contact the following people at school (Details) Principal.

Sample Letter Requesting Consent for Involvement of Outside Professionals.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Following the recent (tragedy/ death of x) we have arranged specialist support for students in the school who need particular help. (X) is available to help us with this work. The support will usually consist of talking to pupils either in small groups or on a one to one basis, and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your daughter has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with (X). If you would like your daughter to receive this support, please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by If you would like further information on the above or if you would like to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip, or contact the school.

Principal

Review and Research

The CIMT should consult resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie and

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Home-Page.html>

these include:

Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)

Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

All of the staff of Holy Cross Mercy School were consulted and their views sought in the preparation of this policy and plan.

Our 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 management team has a personal copy of the plan.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the plan by the principal.

This Critical Incident Management Policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Holy Cross Mercy School

Signed: _____ Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 17/6/24

This policy will again be reviewed in June 2026