



Scoil Náisiúnta Mhuire
Ballyleague
Co Roscommon
Roll Number 18061T
Tel: 043 3321906

May 2024

Whole School Plan for
CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

SCOIL MHUIRE, BALLYLEAGUE

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Introductory Statement: This policy has been formulated by the Principal in consultation with the B.O.M. and staff in response to the perceived necessity of a comprehensive strategy should a critical incident occur.

Rationale: The purpose of the policy is to protect the well being of pupils and staff through the provision of a safe nurturing environment.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School: Scoil Mhuire is concerned with the spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual development of the child, values diversity and respect, in a supportive environment, in partnership with parents, parish and community.

Critical Incident:

- A critical incident is recognised as “an incident” or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms 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 the following:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide, suspected suicide or 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

Aim: The aim of the Critical Incident Policy is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident to enable the maintenance of a sense of control, to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff, to minimize distress, to facilitate return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping Supportive caring Environment in the School: Are addressed through the implementation of physical and psychological measures within the school community.

Physical Safety: Physical safety is addressed via the following measures.

- Classroom supervision
- Yard supervision
- Code of Behaviour
- Health and Safety Policy
- Fire Drill and Evacuation Plan
- Fire extinguishers and fire exits checked regularly
- Risk Assessment & Child Safe Guarding Policy

Psychological Safety: Psychological safety is addressed via the following programmes 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.

- Religion – Alive O Programme
- S.P.H.E. is integrated into the work of the school, addressing such issues as loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem solving, seeking help, bullying, decision making, alcohol and substance misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral ongoing part of the provision. Stay Safe and R.S.E. programmes are implemented respectively every second year.
- Staff members are familiar with “Children First” guidelines and procedures on how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures of child abuse.
- The school implements a code of behaviour.
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy.
- The school will express concerns to parents where appropriate
- The school will liaise with the H.S.E, N.E.P.S., and Dept. of Ed & Sc., and other trained professionals

Management of Critical Incident Policy: The principal and vice principal will have over all responsibility for the implementation of the plan. However, every teaching staff member will be provided with a folder, containing the details of the plan. The policy will be available also to staff on computer. Parent and child contact details are reviewed annually at the start of the school year.

Roles and Responsibilities: The principal will assume the role of team leader, garda liaison, staff liaison, community liaison, media liaison initially. The principal will communicate with the Chairman of the B.O.M. and the vice-principal immediately. As the situation unfolds roles may be delegated among staff and Board of Management. The principal where necessary will also liaise with pupils and parents. However, the class teacher may be best placed to liaise with the pupils and parents in her care depending on the nature of the situation.

- **Team Leader:** Alerts the Chairman and Vice Principal of the crisis and convenes a meeting as soon as possible
- Liaises with the Gardai to verify accuracy of information
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with B.O.M., D.Ed. & Sc., N.E.P.S., H.S.E.
- Liaises with the bereaved family

In the absence of the team leader, the Vice-principal or next most senior member of staff will take on this role.

Staff Liaison:

- Briefs staff meetings on facts as known
- Gives staff an opportunity to discuss/ask questions/outline routine for the day
- Ongoing updates as day progresses at break time/lunch / or as necessary
- Is alert to vulnerable staff and makes contact with them individually if necessary.
- Advises them of Employee Assistance Scheme

Community Liaison: Student contact numbers are updated at the start of each school year on Aladdin.

- Contact details are also loaded on Text-a-Parent.
- Emergency numbers are displayed in staff room and on office notice board and in teacher’s class contact folder.

- Liaises with agencies in the community and onward referral
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinates the involvement of external agencies
- Updates staff/parents / B.O.M. members on involvement of external agencies.

Parent Liaison: Appropriate sample letters will be pre-printed as part of the critical incident policy, and available in the office.

- Visits the bereaved family and the team leader
- Manages the “consent” issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Sets up room if necessary for parents
- Meets the parents

Media Liaison: The principal in consultation with the Chairman of the Board of Management will discuss with the Chairman how best to handle media issues. An agreed statement will be prepared, to minimize media intrusion.

Administrator:

- Parental records are updated annually by the secretary, and maintained in the office.
- Emergency numbers are also displayed in the office, staff room and in each classroom folder.
- The secretary/principal will take phone calls and note those which need a response
- Up to date templates are held in the office on the computer
- The secretary / principal will prepare and send out letters, emails, Text-a-Parent, photocopy as required
- Records will be maintained by the principal / secretary in the office.

Record Keeping: In the event of an incident each member of the staff will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, materials used. Staff are advised to use the “Incident Book” in the office.

Confidentially and Good Name Considerations:

The management and staff of Ballyleague N.S. have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in an incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements.

- It is important to note that the term “suicide” cannot be used until after the findings of the coroner’s report have been arrived at. It is important to tell children the truth in a non sensational manner. For instance, a tragic event has occurred but we don’t know all the details yet. Or yes, sadly, ----- was involved in a serious crash but that’s all we know at the moment. It is important to put children at ease and allow them to become engaged with “normal routine” as soon as possible.
- In the event that the Principal and Board of Management consider that the Critical Incident has overwhelmed the coping mechanisms of the school to the extent that professional assistance is required the National Educational Psychological Service will be contacted. Where possible verbal or written permission will be sought from parents in advance. Parents will be contacted via Text-a-Parent. If the situation warrants immediate action the school will proceed immediately and seek follow up from parent as soon as is practicable. Please refer to Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools (1-3 Consent)
- Records will be kept of the children who have had recourse to psychologists in the wake of an incident

- The Board of Management and members of the school staff will endeavour to be sensitive to the needs of the situation at all times.
- Please refer to sample letters included in this policy:
Individual or Group Support Sessions
Sudden Death / Accident
Violent Death
Sample Announcement to the Media

Resources:

Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools
Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools
When Tragedy Strikes – Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident
Management in Schools
Infection in School – A Manual for School Personnel
Contact Lists – Parents, Staff, Emergency Services.

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan: Following ratification this policy will be implemented with immediate effect and reviewed as appropriate.

Ratified by Chairperson of Board of Management Brenda Reynolds

Date: 7th May, 2024

SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA

My name is (*Name*) and I am the Principal of (*Name*) School. We learned this morning of the death of (one of our students or *Name* of student). This is a terrible tragedy for _____ family(ies), 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 (5th year boy) and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

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.

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS - VIOLENT DEATH

Dear Parents

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 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.

(If planned) A support meeting for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time we can talk further about how to help ourselves and our children.

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

Sincerely
Principal's name

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS – SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT

Dear Parents

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. *(Elaborate)*.

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.

(Optional) An information night for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given.

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

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school. *(Details)*.

Principal's signature

SAMPLE CONSENT LETTER - INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP SUPPORT SESSION

Dear Parents

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:

- a) Provide information about dealing with grief and loss in a healthy way
- b) Allow students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment
- c) Allow students time to comfort and support each other, under the guidance of experienced staff from
- d) 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 **(Name and phone number of contact person)**.

I give my consent for _____ to participate in a Group/Individual Session

Parent or Legal Guardian
Sincerely

Date

School Principal

STUDENT CONTACT RECORD

This form can be used by school staff or external agency staff to record the details of students seen following a critical incident. This information should be collated centrally.

Name of staff member: _____

Date	Student's Name	Class/Year	Outcome (include need for follow up)