

Claddaghduff N.S

Critical Incident Policy

Mission Statement:

Our school cherishes each child and, in partnership with the parents, aims to provide a safe and happy environment which promotes esteem for oneself, for other people and the value of life-long learning.

To this end Claddaghduff N.S aims to protect the well-being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

Claddaghduff N.S has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of staff and students, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

What is a Critical Incident?

As per DES / NEPS guidelines, Claddaghduff N.S recognises a critical incident to be “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school”. Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school, or our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- Outbreak of disease or major illness in school or community.
- Serious injury sustained by a member of the school community as a result of violence on or off school grounds.
- A threatening or violent intrusion into the school.
- An accident / tragedy in the school or wider community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- Unauthorised removal of student from school.

Aim

Recognising that the key to managing critical incidents is planning, St. Fiachra’s SNS has developed this Critical Incident Management Policy and accompanying plan. Our hope is that, in the event of an incident, these will help staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. They should also help us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put systems in place to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

Physical safety:

The following policies and strategies have been put in place in order to maintain the physical safety of all members of the school community.

- Health & Safety Statement.
- Evacuation plan formulated.
- Regular fire drills occur.
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.
- The Fire Alarm is serviced regularly, at least once a year.
- Playground gates are closed fully during school hours.
- Pupils leaving early will only be released by a member of teaching staff when an authorised adult arrives to accompany the child from the premises.
- Pupils are not released into the care of persons unknown to school staff without checking with a parent/ guardian.
- Pupils are reminded of playground rules by staff at regular intervals in the context of our School Code of Behaviour.
- Pupils are adequately supervised at all times especially during physical activity and break. Two members of the teaching staff supervise the children during breaktimes.
- First Aid box maintained and kept in 'The Recovery room' - supplies replenished as required

Psychological Safety

Claddaghduff N.S aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for same. The following strategies aim to support and ensure the psychological well-being of our pupils:

- SPHE is an integral part of the school curriculum and addresses issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, decision making, and alcohol and drug prevention.
- The Stay Safe programme is taught in its entirety as per guidelines.
- School Anti-Bullying Policy updated and reviewed annually
- Two teachers trained in Friends for Life programme

- Substance / Alcohol Misuse Policy.
- Child Protection Policy; Child Safeguarding Statement updated annually
- Staff have completed 'Introduction to Children First' programme and 'Child Protection Procedures for all School Personnel' PDST (March 2018)
- Staff are informed of difficulties effecting individual students and are aware of and vigilant in identifying their needs.
- Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties effecting the primary school child.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students.

These include: NEPS Mr. Fran Doolan, Túsla Child and Family Agency; CAMHS; Galway, Clifden Garda Station

Critical Incidents Management Team:

- Leadership Role: Laura Griffin (Principal) / Eileen O'Malley (Deputy Principal)
- Communication Role: Laura Griffin (Principal) / Eileen O'Malley (Deputy Principal)
- Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: All class teachers
- Chaplaincy Role: Canon James Ronayne
- Staff Health & Safety Representative: Laura Griffin
- Chairperson of Board of Management : Feicin Mulkerrin
- Secretary: Maura Nugent

Roles and Responsibilities of the Team

Leadership Role

- Confirm the event.
- Activate the Critical Incident response team.
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services as appropriate.
- Liaise with the Board of Management, with the Department of Education and Skills and with any outside agencies involved as appropriate.
- Co- ordinate involvement of such agencies.
- Express sympathy with the family.
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

- Organise and co- ordinate communication with staff members not present and with former staff who may be affected by the incident.
- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students.

Communication Role

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
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events.

Pupil Liaison

- Gathering information from class teacher/SET regarding the needs of the class or particular students as a result of the incident.
- Gathering information from class-teacher regarding child's friends, absentees and anyone who may need to be contacted.
- Alerting teachers other than class teachers to vulnerable students as appropriate.
- Provide materials for staff
- Disseminate appropriate information to pupils as necessary
- Organise an assembly/ prayer service or Mass for the school community to congregate.
- Keep records of pupils seen by external agency staff. (e.g. NEPS).
- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students.
- Monitor class most affected

Staff Liaison

- 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
- Is alert to vulnerable members of staff and contacts them individually if deemed necessary.
- Provides relevant materials to staff

Parent/Family Liaison

- Coordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal).
- Visits bereaved family with Team Leader.
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service.
- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident.
- Facilitates 'Questions and Answers' meeting where appropriate
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides materials for parents

Chaplaincy Role

- Visit home(s), if appropriate.
- Visit Classroom (s) to provide support, if appropriate.
- Lead prayer services if required.
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff.
- Work in partnership with the Critical Incident team.
- Make contact with other local clergy

Administrative Tasks

- Maintain up to date lists of staff, staff next of kin and pupils.
- General administrative tasks e.g. phone calls, typing, letters etc.
- Assist with recording and record keeping.

Staff Responsibilities

At all times, school staff have a responsibility to

- Safeguard the welfare of pupils and colleagues
- Assist in identifying and supporting students at risk or in distress

- Maintain normal procedures
- Maintain confidentiality

Media Briefing/Communication

A critical incident may on occasion necessitate dealing with the media. Only the Principal, Deputy Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Management will communicate with the media. The Dept. of Education and/or NEPS may also be consulted as necessary for guidance on media briefings. Members of the media must report to the reception office and identify themselves. They will not be allowed beyond the reception area except at the invitation of the Principal or Deputy Principal. The media will not be allowed to interview or photograph pupils on the school premises.

As necessary, the Principal /Deputy Principal/ Chairperson will prepare a brief media statement to include the following;

- Expressing sympathy for the affected /bereaved family.
- Stating that it is a difficult time for the school community.
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/ injured parties.
- The facts about the situation (following consultation with the families.)
- The term suicide will not be used; instead the term ‘tragic death’ will be used.
- Outline what is being done to support pupils and staff.

Record Keeping:

In the event of an incident each member of the team will document and record actions undertaken in their role, such as meetings held, phone calls made, text alerts sent, letters received or sent etc. The Team Leader will be responsible for forming a coherent record of actions taken by individual members and the team as a whole. The school secretary will be a key support in this.

Confidentiality:

The school has 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. Comments should not be made through any form of social media, by members of the school staff. All staff must bear this in mind and pupils will be reminded of the need for sensitivity and discretion at an age appropriate level.

Action Plan

Short-Term Actions (Day 1)

- Inform emergency services
- Account for all pupils, personnel and visitors.
- Immediate and ongoing contact (as appropriate) with family/families.
- Inform Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- Inform Chaplain.
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident:

What happened, where and when? What is 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?

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Inform staff, and where appropriate former staff, and update on any arrangements as necessary. (Leader)
- Contact other appropriate agencies: H.S.E./Community Care Services/NEPS
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff.
- Prepare a brief statement (Team).
- Media briefing if appropriate (see above).
- Protect the family's privacy

Medium-Term Actions (24-72 Hours)

- Preparation of students/staff attending the funeral.
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family.
- Facilitation of students/staff's 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 as necessary.
- Decide on mechanisms for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Have a review of the Critical Incident Management Team meeting.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.

- Hold support/information meetings for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened and give information on further support if required.
- There will be no compulsion on any teacher to participate in support meetings.
- Arrange individual or group debriefings/support meetings in consultation with outside agencies (with parental permission).
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc).
- Pupil Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured if and as appropriate.
- School closure (if appropriate). Request a decision on this from school management.

Long-Term Actions

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress. Communication with family is essential.
- Liaise with external agencies regarding referrals.
- Arrange for school memorial service/anniversary if relevant.
- Awareness by staff around significant days like birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.
- Ensure new staff is aware of policy and which pupils/staff were affected by an incident.
- 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?

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist as appropriate.
- 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.
- Update and amend school records:

All team members will keep written records of phone calls made, meetings, and interventions. Records will be compiled and kept on file in the principal's office. The school secretary will log all phone calls etc.

Ratification & Communication

The BOM officially ratified this policy in 16th February 2022 and is available to view in the office and on our website.

Review

This policy will be reviewed in three years.

Signed: *Ferian Reulker* Date: 16th February 2022

Chairperson Board of Management

Signed: *Rare Gill* Date: 16th February 2022

Principal