

# CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY for Bennekerry N.S.



## **Introduction:**

In Bennekerry N.S we aim to protect the well-being of our students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. Bennekerry N.S believes the efficient health and safety management supports form an important aspect of our function as a teaching community. We consider health and safety to be an integral part of what we do and will pursue continual improvements through annual reviews including hazard identification and risk assessment.

The Board of Management, through the safety officer has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policies and plans.

Our aim is to establish a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

## **Review and Research:**

The CIMT should consult resource documents provided to schools as well as publications listed in the resources section of this book.

These include:

When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools (INTO/Ulster Teachers Union 2000)

Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools (NEPS 2007)

Guidelines for Schools on How to Respond to the Sudden Unexpected Death of a Student (ASTI 1997)

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

## **Definition of a Critical Incident:**

The staff and management of Bennekerry N.S., recognizes 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:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence,
- Suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- Major 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
- World events that may affect the student body and /or staff members

## **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. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us 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 create a supportive and caring environment for both staff and students. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

## **Physical safety:**

Bennekerry N.S is committed to:

- Preventing accidents within the school confines
- Complying with statutory requirements
- Assessing and controlling the risks associated with all school activities.
- Providing a safe and healthy school environment.
- Developing and maintaining a positive health and safety culture through communication and consultation with the entire school community. (Please refer to Bennekerry's health and safety policy.)
- Formulating an Evacuation plan
- Practising regular fire drills
- Fire exits and extinguishers regularly checked
- Morning supervision in the school yard. Our official opening time is 9:20am. Morning supervision is provided by staff from 9:10-9:20, in order to allow time for children to enter the school premises safely. Please note that children are the responsibility of their parents before morning supervision begins.
- Evening supervision as the pupils exit the school grounds and up to 3:15pm at the school gate
- Ensuring the playground rules are adhered to
- Traffic Management. We advise parents use extreme caution at all times when dropping off and collecting their children.

## **Psychological safety:**

The management and staff of Bennekerry N.S. aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of feeling safe and secure 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. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing 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. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision. Programmes such as Walk Tall, Weaving Well Being, Stay Safe, Be Safe, 101 Ideas for Building Self-Esteem, Circle-Time, Fun Friends and Friends for Life are used.
- Staff has 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. Risk Assessment in this area is regularly revised and updated.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school student are available.

- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies; such as Tulsa, NEPS, and Employee Assistance Services (Inspire Well-Being)
- Inputs for students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers. (See Section 7 of Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools).
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the Designated Liaison person, Tonia Cleary. Concerns are explored, and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, if appropriate, and where necessary, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

### **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT):**

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Telephone Number</b>
Team leader/Garda and Emergency Services Liaison	Tonia Cleary	Available to staff only
Staff Liaison	Lourda Griffin/Aoife Rice	Available to staff only
Student Liaison	Each Class Teacher and SEN teachers and SNAs to provide additional support to pupils who may require it	
Parent Liaison/Community Liaison	Tonia Cleary/Fr. Tom Little Edmund Burke (Chairperson BOM)	Available to staff only
Media Liaison	Edmund Burke (Chairperson BOM)	Available to staff only
Administrator	Deirdre Mullins	Available to staff only

### **Key responsibilities:**

#### **Team leader/Garda and Emergency Services Liaison**

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; TUSLA
- Liaises with the bereaved family
- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

\*The Deputy Principal will lead in the absence of the principal.

### **Staff Liaison**

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of Inspire Wellbeing (previously Carecall) and gives them the contact details. ([dundalk@inspirewellbeing.ie](mailto:dundalk@inspirewellbeing.ie) Phone 028-9032-8474 )

### **Student Liaison**

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

### **Community/Agency Liaison**

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
  - Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council
  - Emergency support services and other external contacts and Resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

### **Parent Liaison**

- Visits the affected family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

### **Media Liaison**

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with INTO.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

### **Administrator**

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency services
  - TUSLA, HSA, HSE, DES

- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

Each member of the Critical Incident Team will have a dedicated folder containing a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role to be used in the event of an incident.

### Short Term Actions – Day 1:

Task	Name
Gather accurate information -Who?, What?, When?, Where?	Team Leader
Convene CMIT meeting -specify time and place clearly	Team Leader
Contact external agencies	Team Leader and Parent and Community Liaison personnel
Arrange supervision for students	Class teachers
Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	Team leader assisted by class teachers, SETs and SNAs
Compile a list of vulnerable students	CIMT liaise with Class Teachers
Contact/visit the bereaved family	Team Leader and CMIT members with closest links to the family
Prepare and agree media statement if necessary and deal with the media	CIMT and Media Liaison person (Chairperson BOM)
Inform parents by letter	Administrator and Team Leader
Hold end of day staff briefing	All Staff

### Medium Term Actions – Day 2 and Following Days:

Task	Name
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of Day 1	Team Leader
Meet external agencies	Team leader and Community and Media liaison personnel
Meet whole staff	CIMT
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	Students: Class teachers, SETs and SNAs Staff: Deputy Principal and Assistant Principal 1 Parents: Parent Liaison personnel

Visit the injured or bereaved	Team leader and staff members with closest links to the family
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	Team leader and Parent Liaison personnel
Make decisions about school closures	BOM

### Follow- Up- Beyond 72 hours:

Task	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers SETs and SNAs
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Pupils: Team Leader and Assistant Principal 2 with responsibility for SEN Staff: Deputy Principal and Assistant Principal 1
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	Class teachers, SETs and SNAs
Decide on memorials or services to mark incident or event if appropriate	BOM, Staff, parents and pupils
Review response to incident in relation to this plan and adjust the plan if required	Staff and Board of Management

### Longer Term Actions for CMIT:

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 staff are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area

- 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
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
- Plan a school memorial service if appropriate
- Care of deceased person's possessions if applicable. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records if necessary

### **Record Keeping:**

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

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

### **Confidentiality Considerations:**

The management and staff of Bennekerry N.S 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' will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

### **Critical Incident Rooms:**

In the event of a critical incident:

- Staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- Hall and classroom(s) for meetings with students
- Resource rooms will be used for parents
- The Hall will be used for media
- Resource rooms will be used for individual sessions with students
- A room for other visitors is to be decided
- Should the school be unavailable, the Team leader will inform the team of an alternative location as necessary

### **Critical Incidents Pack to Include:**

Booklets “Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools” and “Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools”

Letters on school notepaper:

- Consent Letter – Individual or Group Support
- Consent Letter – Seeking Advance Parental; Agreement to Child Being Seen by a NEPS psychologist
- Letter to Parents – giving information about a sudden death/accident
- Letter to Parents – Violent Death
- Draft Announcement to Media
- All relevant telephone numbers as outlined in policy

Classroom Resources following news of a Critical Incident

- Handout for Teachers (R7)
- Children’s Understanding & Reaction to Sudden Death According to Age (Handout: R8)
- Stages of Grief (Handout: R9)
- How To Cope When Something Terrible Happens (Handout: R10)
- Reactions To A Critical Incident (Handout for Students: R11)
- Grief After Suicide or Suspected Suicide (Handout: R12)
- Reintegration of the Bereaved Child in School (Handout: R13)
- Ways to Help Your Child Through This Difficult Time (Handout: R14)
- A General Interview Guide for Guidance Counsellors, Chaplains, Other Designated Staff (Handout: R15)
- Checklist – Students at Risk (Handout: R16)
- Exploring Suicide Risk – Guidelines for Schools and NEPS (Handout: R17)

### **Consultation and communication regarding the plan:**

All staff were consulted, and their views considered in the preparation of this policy and plan.

Our school’s final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff members. Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the principal.

The plan will be reviewed and updated when incidents occur or when required.

This policy was first ratified by the Board of Management of Bennekerry National School on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, 2014 and has been updated and amended on

Date: 22. 10. 2018

Chairperson BOM 

Principal : 