



SALESIAN COLLEGE CELBRIDGE CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

August 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Salesian College Celbridge aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The School Mission Statement is *“We care, develop and believe - together we achieve.* Salesian College will respond to crisis situations in a manner that ensures optimum safety for students and staff members. The Board of Management, through the Principal **Ms Brenda Kearns**, has drawn up a critical incident management policy as one element of the school’s policies and plans.

The principles underpinning this policy have been approved by the Board of Management and are in accordance with *“Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines & Resource Materials for Schools National Educational Psychological Service (2016)”* and reflects insofar as they are applicable to Salesian College the good practices and guiding principles and advice as set out in the guidelines.

RATIONALE

The goal of the Critical Incident Management Policy (CIMP) for Salesian College is to provide a caring, safe and supportive environment, which respects the whole College community, so that all those involved will emerge from any critical incident knowing that there are structures in place that will help them deal appropriately with the event. The aim of the CIMP is to help the management of the College and the 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 to affect a return to normality as soon as possible. Though the Principal obviously exercises a pivotal role in the College’s response to a critical incident, best practice recommends the formation of a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) composed of key College 4 personnel, in providing a supportive role. The role of NEPS in the event of a critical incident is to support schools through supporting students and staff. The rationale for this plan is to enable the College to identify risks and to have a communication plan in place that can be effectively put into action when an accident occurs in the College. It will be used in conjunction with all other College policies and procedures in promoting positive mental health and in creating effective care systems in the College.

Such policies would include:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Child Safeguarding Policy
- Student Support Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Guidance Policy
- S.P.H.E Programme

DEFINITION OF THE TERM ‘CRITICAL INCIDENT’

The staff and management of Salesian College recognise 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. Some examples of critical or stressful events that may occur in schools are:

- 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.
- A major accident/tragedy in the wider community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- A major accident/tragedy in the wider community.

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will take responsibility for putting a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) in place in the event of a critical incident.

AIMS

- The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident.
- It helps us to maintain a sense of order and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students, staff and families.
- To ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be minimized.
- To facilitate a return to normality as soon as possible.
- To provide support to students from the teachers, in partnership with parents.
- To provide clear guidelines to all staff to ensure that they feel supported and part of a team.
- To provide clear guidelines to the entire school community to ensure that they feel supported.
- To ensure that the response is consistent.
- To support students in coping with trauma that may be associated with the critical event.
- To provide support for students, teachers and parents/guardians.
- To help prevent the onset of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- To make students aware of what is a normal reaction to such an incident.

CREATION OF A COPING SUPPORTIVE AND CARING ETHOS IN THE SCHOOL

We have systems in place to help 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:

- Evacuation plan formulated.
- Regular fire drills occur.
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.

Psychological safety:

The management and staff of Salesian College aim to use available programmes and resources 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.

- Pro-active school guidance and counselling.
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. 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 mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Festival of Wellbeing.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person School Principal **Ms Brenda Kearns**.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the post-primary school student are available.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and through educational programme talks.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies.
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred through a Pastoral Care referral system to the designated staff member **Ms Mary Harris** school guidance counsellor, concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents/guardians are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.

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 and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

The key roles which need to be covered are as follows:

Role	Name and Email Address
Team Leader	Ms Brenda Kearns bkearns@salesianscelbridge.com Mr Martin Kerins MKerins@salesianscelbridge.com Mr. John Leonard JLeonard@salesianscelbridge.com
Garda Liaison	Ms Brenda Kearns bkearns@salesianscelbridge.com Mr Martin Kerins MKerins@salesianscelbridge.com Mr. John Leonard JLeonard@salesianscelbridge.com
Staff Liaison	Ms Brenda Kearns bkearns@salesianscelbridge.com Mr. John Leonard JLeonard@salesianscelbridge.com Mr Martin Kerins MKerins@salesianscelbridge.com
Student Liaison	Ms Mary Harris mharris@salesianscelbridge.com + Year Head of student

Parent Liaison	Ms Brenda Kearns bkearns@salesianscelbridge.com Mr Martin Kerins MKerins@salesianscelbridge.com Mr. John Leonard JLeonard@salesianscelbridge.com Ms Mary Harris mharris@salesianscelbridge.com Mr Mark Ryan mryan@salesianscelbridge.com
Community Liaison	Ms Brenda Kearns bkearns@salesianscelbridge.com Mr Martin Kerins MKerins@salesianscelbridge.com Mr John Leonard JLeonard@salesianscelbridge.com
Media Liaison	Ms Brenda Kearns bkearns@salesianscelbridge.com _Ms Brenda Kearns bkearns@salesianscelbridge.com Mr Martin Kerins
Administrator	Ms Liz Kane lkane@salesianscelbridge.com

Additional Roles:

Critical Incident Management Team 2024-2025	
• Principal	Ms. Brenda Kearns – Coordinator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for assigning duties. • Notification to Board of Management. • Keeping record of events. • Organising team & plan. • Adhering to and following Critical Incident Policy – depending on the situation that has presented itself, the school will adapt this policy to meet the needs of the students and staff.
• Deputy Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Martin Kerins –Coordinator (2nd, TY and 6th yrs) • Mr. John Leonard – Coordinator (1st, 3rd and 5th yrs)
• Mr. Mark Ryan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinator of Special Education Department. • Keeping overall track of agreed plan and schedule of events & contacting NEPS.
• Mr. Colin Cryan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of Pastoral Care Team. • Liaise with office for VS Ware notifications and Ceangail & Cinnirí Team leaders, E Cullen for Facebook, Instagram and web-site updates/information (Social Media liaison). • Preparation of letters.
• Ms. Mary Harris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance Counsellor & Member of Pastoral Care Team. • Contacting external agencies. • Coordinating counselling services & support. • Students at risk – evaluating/monitoring/advising appropriate action.
• Ms. Danielle Dolan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance Counsellor & Member of Pastoral Care Team. • Contacting external agencies. • Coordinating counselling services & support. • Students at risk – evaluating/monitoring/advising appropriate action.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fr. Jesmond Apap & • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fr. Jesmond Apap Chaplain & Member of Pastoral Care Team. • Coordinating appropriate services for students. • Pastoral Care & supporting students and where appropriate referring on for counselling. • Contact with Parents Association.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. David Cryan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of Pastoral Care Team & RE Department – will liaise with Mr. Brian Comaskey & Ms Julie Reilly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant Year Head & Tutor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be on team and will work with the team when duties assigned. • Liaising with Office personnel & staff communications.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office Staff & Caretaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring calls & visitors to the school. • Distribution of letters/communications. • Setting up of hall/school building/maintenance issues.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF CIMT

Team Leader:

A person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis (e.g. school closure, attendance at memorial services, etc.)

- 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; SEC;
- Liaises with the bereaved family.

It is important to consider who will take the lead in the absence of the team leader.

Garda Liaison:

- Liaises with the Gardaí.
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments are checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison:

A staff member known and trusted by the staff.

- 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 the EAS and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison:

A trusted and familiar figure to the students.

- At post-primary level, may co-ordinate information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about.
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately).
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder.)

- Maintains student contact records (R1).
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.

Community/Agency Liaison:

Someone with good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community

- 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.
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges.
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

Parent/Guardian Liaison:

Someone known to parents. This person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have skills to manage emotional reactions of individual or groups of parents/guardians.

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader.
- Arranges meetings, if held.
- May facilitate such meetings and manage 'questions and answers' sessions.
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy.
- Ensures that sample letters are prepared and available on the school's IT system ready for adaptation.
- Sets up room for meetings with parents/guardians.
- Maintains a record of parents/guardians seen.
- Meets with individual parents/guardians.
- Provides appropriate materials for parents/guardians (from their critical incident folder).

Media Liaison:

Someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media by phone or in person. A person who is able to set limits without being offensive.

- 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 the SEC, relevant teacher unions etc.
- 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/Guardians.
 - Teachers.
 - Emergency services.
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response.
- Ensures that templates are available on the schools IT system and ready for adaptation.

- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts.
- Photocopies materials as needed.
- Maintains records.

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 **Ms Liz Kane** 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 Salesian College 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 confirmed 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:

- The Staffroom will be the main room used to meet the staff.
- The New Staffroom will be used by NEPS.
- The Music room will be used by the Chaplains.
- The Year Head Office (assembly hall) will be used by Counselling Support and Mr Mark Ryan.
- The Guidance Counsellor will use her room for individual sessions with students.

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Policy:

- Staff will be consulted on an on-going basis and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.
- Our school's final policy in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.
- Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the policy.
- All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by **Ms Brenda Kearns / Mr Martin Kerins / Mr John Leonard**.
- The plan will be updated annually at the start of the academic year at the end of August.
- A copy of the Critical Incident plan will be emailed to all staff at the start of the academic year.
- A paper copy of the plan will be available to all staff in the staffroom on the day of a Critical Incident.

SHORT TERM ACTIONS – DAY 1:

Task	Name
Gather accurate information	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
Who, what, when, where?	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
Convene a CIMT meeting - specify time and place clearly	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
Contact external agencies	Mr Mark Ryan
Arrange supervision and short term support for students	Ms Mary Harris
Hold staff meeting	All staff
Agree schedule for the day	All staff
Inform students - (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	All staff
Compile a list of vulnerable students	Ms Mary Harris in consultation with all staff
Contact/visit the bereaved family	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with the media	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
Remove contact details from VS Ware of families/persons directly affected by the Critical Incident before sending out details.	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard/Ms Liz Kane
Inform parents/guardians	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
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	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
Meet external agencies	CIMT
Meet whole staff	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins Mr. John Leonard
Arrange support for students, staff, parents/guardians	CIMT
Visit the injured	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	Ms Brenda Kearns/Mr Martin Kerins/Mr. John Leonard
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	CIMT
Make decisions about school closure	CIMT/BOM

FOLLOW-UP BEYOND 72 HOURS:

Task	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers

Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Ms Mary Harris/Mr Mark Ryan/CIMT
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	Ms Mary Harris/Mr Mark Ryan/CIMT
Decide on memorials and anniversaries and other	CIMT
Review response to incident and amend plan	CIMT/Staff/BOM

ACTION PLAN FOR PRINCIPAL/TEAM LEADER:

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

Day 1

INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE INCIDENT

<p>STEP 1 What type of response is needed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Response Level 1: the death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; the death of parent/sibling; a fire in school not resulting in serious injury; serious damage to school property. •Response Level 2: the sudden death of a student or staff member. •Response Level 3: an accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving a number of schools.
<p>STEP 2 Should a psychologist be involved?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Consider the nature of the event and how your school is coping. What support do you need from NEPS and/or other agencies?
<p>STEP 3 How do I assess the needs of the school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Is there a feeling of being overwhelmed by this event? •Has there been a previous incident? How recent? What kind of incident? <p>If more than one, how many? (If the school has experienced a recent incident or a number of incidents staff may be exhausted or distressed. On the other hand, they may feel more experienced and better able to deal with the situation).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Is there a critical incident plan/team in place? •Is there a good pastoral care system in the school? •Is there significant media interest in the incident? •Are other agencies already involved?

<p>STEP 4: What action do I take?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •For an incident requiring a Level 1 response it may be sufficient to talk to the psychologist on the phone. Locate your Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools (2016). The psychologist will refer to these and talk you through relevant sections. It is also available on www.education.ie by following the links to NEPS. •In the case of an incident requiring a Level 2 & Level 3 response, make contact with NEPS. Depending on the incident at least one psychologist will visit the school.
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Exchange mobile numbers with the psychologist so that immediate contact will be possible at all times.

INITIAL ACTION PLAN

- Gather accurate information: It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident; otherwise rumours may take over and add to the distress of those involved.
- Establish the facts: What has happened? When it happened? How it happened? The number and names of students and staff involved; are there other schools involved? The extent of the injuries; and the location of those injured.
- All staff asked to contact principal/deputy principals as soon as they hear of any critical incident
- Principal/ deputy principal will also get official confirmation (from family/guards) and where appropriate liaise with the family around official communications from the school.
- Once the critical incident has been officially confirmed principal/deputy principal to contact all staff by text. In the event a spouse/staff family member on staff is involved in the CI, they may be excluded from text.
- Contact appropriate agencies (see school's Emergency Contact List: Section 11, R21)
 - EMERGENCY SERVICES
 - MEDICAL SERVICES
 - BOARD OF MANAGEMENT
 - NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE
 - HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE
 - TEACHER UNIONS
 - STATE EXAMINATIONS COMMISSION
 - PARISH PRIEST/CLERGY
- Convene a meeting with key staff/Critical Incident Management Team as soon as possible. Depending on the incident a meeting will be arranged in the evening or early morning to ensure that the team is well prepared and has a plan in place for the school day ahead.
- The Year Head will also be requested to attend this meeting if their year group is involved in the CI.
- All critical incident team to have contact details including phone numbers for each other.
- If the critical incident happens overnight on a school day a meeting will take place for all staff at 8.30am in the school for a briefing and instructions following an earlier meeting of the CIMT.
- Locate copy of the CI policy and NEPS Guidelines RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS.
 - All staff should have a copy of the CI policy and NEPS Guidelines.
 - This will be given to staff in advance at a staff meeting, emailed out in the event of a CI and hard copies will also be given to all staff members in school.

- No meeting will take place with staff until the CI meeting has taken place and no assemblies/ services etc. to take place without the CI team discussing first so the CI team can discuss appropriate responses.
- If the CI happens on a school day, the CI must first be confirmed officially before communicating the CI. However, all staff would be emailed and updated as appropriate as the CI was occurring for example a road traffic accident with possible fatalities.
- If the CI happens on a school day, where possible the school should remain open and follow the normal school day in so far as possible.
- If the CI happens on a weekend/holiday etc. staff should be contacted as above and the CI team if possible, should meet. The school may be opened with a view to supporting the school community if appropriate (for example if sufficient staff numbers were available).
 - If a CI occurred at the weekend during term time or during a short break/holiday from school the school may open.
 - If a CI occurred during the summer holidays, the date the CI occurs will be reflected in the decision to open or not open the school.
- If the school opens, it will not be for individual support/one on one meetings rather a brief service from the chaplaincy team in the gym for staff/parents/guardians/students etc.
 - If the school opens a message will be sent out to the school community and will ask that parents/ guardians do not leave vulnerable students unaccompanied either on their way to, during and after the service. Following the service teachers/staff will be on hand to talk informally with students/ families and identify those who are particularly affected by the CI.
 - Staff to contact home after the service if there are concerns about individual students.
- M. Ryan to contact NEPS and M. Harris will liaise with a view to inviting other supports/agencies into the school.
- Outside supports (such as local guidance counsellors or local organisations) would be called on if needed but M. Harris and M. Ryan would liaise and supervise this work at all times.

Students should not be let out of class unsupervised under any circumstances. The aim will be to keep students in school, however where necessary students will be allowed home with parent's/guardian's permission. Teachers will have guidelines from NEPS on supporting students.

Agenda for meeting with critical incident management team/key staff

- Share full details of the event.
- Agree on the facts. These will need to be relayed in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner by all staff to the students.
- Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional ones that should be informed (check Emergency Contact List Section 11, R21).
- Managing communication needs careful attention. Use of social media is a good medium for facilitating factual and appropriate communication.
- When a number of external agencies are involved in a response, co-ordination will be needed and procedures will need to be agreed. An agency such as NEPS may take on this role.
- Plan procedures for the day.
- Discuss issues relating to school routine, including school closure. Remember it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. It is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students. Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what has happened and temporarily shelve all academic activities if necessary. See Section 11, R5 for further information.

- You may wish to consult students about what to do if there is an event scheduled such as a trip, concert, match, etc. This should reduce the likelihood of students being angry later on as a result of any school action or in-action.
- Discuss how to break the news to relatives and close friends and who should do this (remember that they must always be told separately).
- Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students. It is often best to do this with class groups, rather than large assemblies (See Section 11, R5).
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students (see page 25).
- If there are students of various nationalities and religions in the school, this needs to be taken into consideration in organising prayer services, attendance at the funeral etc.
- Parents/Guardians of different religious or national groups may need to be consulted.
- Plan a whole staff briefing (including ancillary staff). This may need to be done in two groups depending on the arrangements for the supervision of students.
- Agree the text of a letter to be sent to parents/guardians, (See Section 11, R2 and R3).
- Discuss how to deal with the media. Prepare a media statement and place it on the school's website, if appropriate (see Section 9 and Section 11, R4). This can be emailed to media representatives who make contact with the school. It may also be used if an interview is requested.
- Delegate responsibilities to the appropriate critical incident team member or key personnel
- Discuss which room(s) will be available to external agencies.
- Decide whether a quiet room should be made available for students. This is a place that students can go if they are having difficulty remaining composed in the classroom. It should have tissues, cushions, drawing and writing materials and information leaflets from the Resource Materials section appropriate to the age of the students. It is generally recommended that this is available for the week following the incident and that its use is then reviewed. Students should sign out of their regular class and sign into the quiet room for a certain time. The room should be supervised to ensure student safety. A very distressed student may need individual support. This might be offered by the guidance counsellor, chaplain or other staff member. A similar room could be set up for staff.
- A record should be kept of all students seen by school staff and agencies external to the schools, (see Section 11, R1). One person should be appointed to collate the lists regularly.
- Agree the next meeting time for the Critical Management Team/key staff.
- Agree a time for a follow up staff meeting at the end of the day. This gives an opportunity for the principal to update staff on any developments. It also allows time for preparation for the following day. Lastly, it gives staff a chance to share their experience and to wind down after the day.
- NOTE In the case of a major incident, meetings may be held in a location away from the school involving key personnel from schools and other agencies. Care should be taken that staff with appropriate experience and authority remain in place in the school to facilitate an effective response. The principal might consider delegating someone to go to such meetings as, if they decide to go themselves, they may not be available for critical decisions in their own school.

Meeting with a Staff Group

The purpose of this meeting is to relay facts to staff and to plan the schedule for the day. It is generally the principal who leads this meeting. On occasion, this duty may be delegated to another member of the team. It is crucial that the teachers have accurate facts and are kept updated. This will help to dispel rumours which may begin to circulate. It may be useful for NEPS to give a brief input.

REMINDER: The staff may need to be seen in two separate groups in order to facilitate supervision of students.

SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR PRINCIPAL

“You may have already heard that two of our students were involved in a car accident last night (give details of where). (Name of students) who were driving together, both died as a result of their injuries. As more information becomes available, including funeral arrangements, I will speak to you again. This is a terrible tragedy for the school and community and our thoughts are with the families.

It is important to make every effort to maintain regular classroom routines in accordance with the timetable. However, for many of the students this will be difficult. I understand that this may be a very difficult time for you also and we need to be here for each other. The psychologist is now going to talk to you about how we can support each other and the students in the coming days and weeks. Thank you.”

REMEMBER

Students need to be with people they know and trust so, if at all possible, it is better that teachers and other school staff provide support for the students. The external “expert” should be primarily used to advise and support school staff.

(The following is optional)

I can see that a number of people are very upset and would like to give you a few moments to say a few words or to ask questions if you would like.

Why routine is so important:

Routine is very important at a time of tragedy. It provides a sense of security, especially for younger students. It helps students to see that, despite these awful events, the world remains largely unchanged and that life goes on. They will learn this over the next hours, days, weeks. They learn this through seeing you cope with this event and seeing that the routine of life is continuing. It is important to maintain the normal routine as much as possible. So, after this meeting, it would be best if you could go to your classes and be with the students.

It is ok to be upset:

Remember this is an upsetting time for you as well as the students and it is ok that the students know and see that you are upset. In fact, it may be reassuring for them.

How to share the facts with students:

It is important that close friends of the deceased are told first and separately. Some of you may feel uncomfortable about relaying this information to the students. It is important to remember that the students know you and trust you and that it is better if they hear this tragic news from someone they know and that this happens in a safe and familiar environment. Remember also that you are here for the longer term. You will be the ones to whom the students will look for guidance and support in the next hours, days, weeks and months.

It is important to stick to known facts and to be alert to rumour. Rumours can proliferate at these times and be very upsetting for students.

For teachers who feel unable to meet with classes:

If a teacher is particularly upset or feels unable to cope, (which could be for any number of reasons), make sure that s/he is offered support and that their class is covered. If any of you feel unable to address the students, please stay behind at the end of the meeting. We will help you prepare what to say or it may be possible to make alternative arrangements.

Provide literature:

"I am going to distribute some hand-outs that you may find useful over the next few days."

These are all available in the Resource Materials section of this publication.

Select as appropriate from:

- R5 A classroom session following a critical incident.
- R6 Children's understanding and reaction to death according to age.
- R7 Stages of grief.
- R8 How to cope when something terrible happens.
- R9 Reactions to a critical incident.
- R10 Grief after suicide (use only when it is clear that the death was due to suicide and where parents/guardians have acknowledged this. This must be handled with the greatest care to avoid potential difficulties).
- R17 Frequently Asked Questions – Teachers.
- R23 Teachers helping students in a crisis or emergency.

Go through these briefly and allow for questions.

Identifying vulnerable students:

A lot of the students will be very upset and will want and need to talk about what has happened. For the majority of students this can be done in the classroom or group setting. It is helpful for students to hear others talking about how they are feeling. This normalises their reaction. If a student or group of students are particularly distressed it is advised to have them talk to someone, they know who will be available over the next days and weeks. If you are particularly concerned about a pupil, please talk to me about this. This will be for only a small number of students. Remember at times of loss students will be comforted best by people they know and trust, rather than by a stranger.

Students who need to be closely monitored as they may be more vulnerable than others are:

- Close friends and relatives of the deceased.
- Students who experienced a recent loss, death of a friend or relative, family divorce or separation, break-up with a boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Students with a history of mental health difficulties.
- Students with a history of substance abuse.
- Students experiencing serious family difficulties, including serious mental or physical illness.
- Students who have been bereaved by a suicide in the past.
- Students with a history of sexual abuse.
- Students with a history of suicide attempts/self-harm.

- Non-communicative students who have difficulty talking about their feelings.
- Less able students.

Quiet Room:

It can be useful to have a designated room available for students for a period, perhaps a week, following a tragedy. It offers people a quiet space to be if feeling overwhelmed.

NOTE: Staff should be clearly informed about procedures for the running and monitoring of the quiet room.

Advise of the availability of other literature and leave copies in the staff room:

"I am going to leave additional information here, which you may wish to read."

R7 Stages of grief.

R9 Reactions to a critical incident.

R23 Teachers helping students in a crisis or emergency.

Support for each other and vulnerable staff members

Some of you may be particularly vulnerable due to a recent loss or previous experience of (suicide or road traffic accident etc.) or you may have known the student well. It is important that you talk to each other and support each other during this difficult time. If you are aware that a colleague may need support arrange to meet them after school or give them a call.

Restate the schedule for the day:

I think that it would be useful to meet for about 30 minutes at the end of the day. This will give us an opportunity to update on how things have developed during the day. It will also allow us to plan for tomorrow and will provide an opportunity to talk things through with others after a difficult day.

Cultural sensitivity and awareness

The school's response should be sensitive to different religious beliefs and different traditions amongst students and staff. For example, attendance at a Christian service may not be acceptable to parents whose children are of other religious beliefs, or of none. This may result in some students being excluded. It is also important to be mindful of different cultures, and of differing religious beliefs and rituals that exist around death. If students are to attend a funeral rite of a religion or denomination other than their own, it may be helpful to prepare them by exploring the rituals and beliefs particular to that religion. The school could ask the parents' advice in relation to these matters.

Students with learning difficulties

Students with general learning difficulties will be at a different developmental level to their peers. Their understanding of death will be in accordance with their developmental age (see Section 11, R6). They should be told the news separately so that the information can be given according to their level of understanding. The information should be given in short simple sentences. They may repeatedly ask the same questions and therefore teachers should be ready to go over the information a number of times. This will require patience and sensitivity.

Clear information should be given on the following topics:

- What happens when a person dies.
- What a funeral is and what usually happens on the day of the funeral.
- How they and other people might feel when someone dies.
- How different people show their feelings in different ways.
- It is important that students are reintegrated with their peers as soon as possible.

The use of nonverbal approaches, such as picture books or artwork, may be helpful. Pictures may help them to explore their feelings and provide them with an opportunity to talk and to ask questions.

End of day session with teachers

Inform staff at full staff meeting to ensure consistent information:

- Staff to meet at 4pm for debriefing at the end of the day. Based on the day's events a plan should be formulated for the whole school.

Sample script for principal

- *"Thank you all for staying. I know that it has been a difficult day and you may all be tired. I thought it was important for us just to take a bit of time to check in with each other and to make sure that we are all doing ok"*
- Provide update on the latest facts as known and outline the schedule for tomorrow.
- Is anyone concerned about anything or anyone? (Remind them about compiling a list of students about whom they have particular concerns).
- If you are feeling very distressed and would like to talk in confidence to someone, you can access support through the Employee Assistance Service (EAS). The Department of Education and Skills has contracted an agency to provide this service for teachers. It is staffed by a network of trained counsellors and therapists.
- A number of sessions may be availed of and it is confidential.
- You make the contact yourself. The Freephone number for the EAS is 1800 411057.
- If the psychologist is offering an end-of-day support meeting, let staff know where it will take place and at what time.
- *"Thank you all for your great work and support today".*

Contact with Affected Family or Families

- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.
- Plan visits to those who are injured - name key person(s) to visit home/hospital.
- Liaise with the family. regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.
- Designate a suitable staff member to liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and to clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in the funeral/memorial service.
- Decide on the school's role in the funeral service following consultation with parents/guardians, school management and close school friends.
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST FOR PRINCIPALS: DAY 1

	Task	Complete
1	Gather the facts - what has happened, when, how, where, and who is injured or dead	
2	Consult Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools (available on the DES website www.education.ie)	
3	Is it an incident requiring a NEPS Response at Level 1, 2 or 3?	
4	Who do I need to call (see Emergency Contact List - R21)?	
5	Meet with the other Critical Incident Management Team	
6	Meet with other agencies, if involved, to agree roles and procedures	
7	Have administration staff photocopy appropriate literature	
8	Arrange for the supervision of students	
9	Agree content of communication for school social media site, if appropriate	
10	Address the staff meeting	
11	Identify vulnerable students	
12	Draft a media statement (R4)	
13	Prepare for a media interview, (see Section 9)	
14	Draft a letter to parents (R2, R3)	
15	Meet with the CIMT to review the day and arrange an early morning meeting for the following day	
16	Meet with the staff group	

MAINTAIN THE NORMAL ROUTINE IF AT ALL POSSIBLE

ACTION PLAN FOR PRINCIPALS:

Medium-term actions

Day 2 and following days

It is sometimes the case that the first day following an incident is quite calm as people may be in shock. Day 2 may be a day when more support is needed as the news begins to sink in. It is advisable that the CIMT continues to meet each day until the school returns to normal functioning.

MEETING WITH THE CIMT AND OTHER AGENCIES

The principal or critical incident team leader normally conducts the meeting.

SUGGESTED AGENDA

- Review what has been done to date.
- Make a decision about school closure
- List tasks for the day and assign roles:
 - Media
 - Liaison with other agencies
 - Contact with bereaved family
 - Attendance and participation in the funeral service
- List items to be addressed by the principal at the staff meeting.
- Review the schedule for the day.
- Go through the list of students and staff who may be vulnerable and review how they are doing.
- Develop a plan for monitoring students over the next few weeks, especially those identified as vulnerable.

MEETING WITH WHOLE STAFF

- The principal outlines the schedule for the day and updates staff on any information from the family, funeral arrangements etc.
- A representative from another agency may address the staff, if appropriate.
- Sample script for a principal
- *“Yesterday was a difficult day for you, as well as for many of your students. You did really well in keeping the routine going as much as possible despite everything. Yesterday there was a sense of numbness and quietness in the school. Today people may begin to feel the reality and pain of the loss. It may be a difficult day for everyone but I’d like to just remind you again to give students and yourselves an opportunity to talk about (name of the deceased) and about what has happened.”*
- Update on any new information and outline schedule for the day.
- Give an opportunity for questions.

CRITICAL INCIDENT ON A SCHOOL TRIP

The Designated Group Leader will inform the Principal as soon as possible. The Principal will convene a meeting of all available members of the CIMT. The Principal and/or other members of the CIMT will make contact with families of all staff and students on the tour. The Principal will keep in regular contact with Group Leader and if necessary the Principal or another member of the CIMT will travel to the location of the tour. The Principal and/or another member of CIMT will stay in regular contact with Tour Organiser and Department of Foreign Affairs if relevant. The Critical Incident Plan as outlined above will be followed as appropriate.

SUICIDE/SUSPECTED SUICIDE

More people die by suicide in Ireland each year than in road traffic accidents. Currently, youth suicide rates in Ireland are the fourth highest in the European Union (WHO, 2013).

Note on use of the term ‘suicide’

NEPS strongly recommends to schools that great care should be taken in the use of the term ‘suicide’. It should not be used until it has been established with a good degree of certainty that the death was as a result of suicide. Families may be very sensitive about the use of the term. A staff member should contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family’s wishes about how the death should be described. The phrases ‘tragic death’ or ‘sudden death’ may be used instead.

When a death by suicide occurs in our schools it is usually in post-primary schools, but there have also been a small number of suicides/attempted suicides in primary schools. When a person dies through suicide, those who know the person experience a deep sense of shock. The unexpectedness of the death and the taboo associated with suicide can leave a school community feeling unsure of how to proceed. A wide range of reactions is experienced and close friends and relations may be especially upset. For some, it may bring back memories of other loss experiences. For a small number, especially those who may already be experiencing difficulties, it may raise the awareness of suicide as an option. There may also be a number of students who may not be impacted by the event.

Issues that may arise when a student dies by suicide/suspected suicide

FAMILY

- Sympathise with them and acknowledge their grief and loss.
- Organise a home visit by two staff members (checking first that the family would welcome such a visit).
- Consult with the family regarding the appropriate support from the school e.g. at the funeral service.

STUDENTS

- Give the facts as agreed with the bereaved family.
- Inform close friends and relatives separately.
- Create safe and supportive spaces for the students where they can share their reactions and feelings.
- Advise them on their possible reactions over the next few days, (see Section 11, R9).
- Avoid glorifying the victim and sensationalising the suicide. Carry out the same rituals or memorial services as you would for other student deaths, such as those due to road traffic accidents.
- Advise the students of the support that is available to them. Tell them that talking is positive and helpful.
- Take any talk of suicide seriously. Follow school protocols for dealing with this. Provide support, inform parents immediately and discuss onward referral options.
- Students may wish to seek support from each other rather than adults. Facilitate this if appropriate and if it is possible. However, information should be provided about how to access further help, if they, or their friends, should need it.
- Give hand-out R10 - Grief after Suicide or Suspected Suicide.

Talking about the death helps people to make sense of what has happened. People can cope with the truth, but suicide must never be represented as a valid option. There should be no criticism of the person who has died. Separate the person from the behaviour. It is important to talk about how a person can get to the point where suicide may seem to be the only option but emphasise that it is not a good option. Feeling low is usually a temporary thing, whereas suicide is permanent.

REMEMBER

With suicide, the intention may have been to change life circumstances rather than end life. There is always help available if a person can take the step of reaching out for it. Encourage students to seek help if they need it.

A booklet 'You Are Not Alone', published by NOSP provides guidelines on managing the immediate aftermath of a death by suicide, both from an emotional and a practical point of view. In addition a

publication entitled “Suicide Prevention in the Community - a Practical Guide” (HSE, 2012) provides comprehensive information on dealing with suicide. Both publications are available on www.nosp.ie

Note on care of students following a funeral:

It is important following the funeral of a student who has died by suicide that students and parents are encouraged to come back to the school for support. Schools often provide tea and coffee. This may be a particularly vulnerable time for students, especially if it is on a Friday. Parents/Guardians may be working or there may be no one at home. Groups of students may congregate and consume alcohol which is not advisable. Encouraging them to come back to the school until the usual finishing time can help to prevent this.

Parents/Guardians might also be advised to be particularly alert to their children’s whereabouts over the following days. They might encourage their children to gather in each other’s homes, rather than in the pub or street. The safety of all children is very important at this time.

Suicide Contagion

Significant care is needed in considering the response to a suicide in a school and each circumstance will be unique. For suicide postvention to be effective, individuals must be aware that emotional support is available and encouraged to take advantage of such assistance. School personnel should be aware in the weeks and months following a suicide that there is heightened risk for all students and in particular vulnerable students, (see Section 11, R13, 14, 15 and page 25 for guidance). The attendance patterns of students should be closely monitored at this time, and any absences followed up with parents.

Suicide contagion or copycat suicides occur when suicidal behaviour is imitated. Guilt, identification and modelling are thought to play a role in contagion. Although rare, suicide contagion can result in a cluster of suicides. Suicide clusters emerge when a number of apparent suicides, which may appear to be unrelated, occur in a particular area over a particular time period. However, defining any set of events as a cluster is difficult. Suicide clusters have occurred in schools across the world.

Underestimating the impact of a suicide can result in failure to provide needed coping assistance. Conversely, overestimating impact, and providing unnecessary postvention may serve to sensationalise the death. It may also be that reporting of suicides creates a perception the suicide is one of a range of problem-solving strategies available.

Insufficient evidence has been found to recommend universal (non-targeted) school based suicide prevention programmes or programmes applied to high-risk groups. For information see www.nosp.ie

ROAD TRAFFICS ACCIDENTS AND VIOLENT DEATHS: SOME ISSUES

It is not possible to address every type of incident that will happen but experience has given some indications of issues that might arise in the case of road traffic accidents and violent deaths. The general advice contained in these guidelines will be applicable but some particular issues arise in these two instances which are addressed in this section.

ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

Co-ordination with other agencies:

In the case of a major accident, meetings may be held involving key personnel from schools and other agencies. These meetings may take place away from the school. If the principal attends such a meeting, he/ she should ensure that a staff member with appropriate experience and authority remains in the school. He/ she should assign someone the task of making critical decisions and co-ordinating the response. It may be appropriate that the principal delegates someone to go to such off-site meetings rather than themselves.

Communication:

When a number of students, or students from different schools are involved, additional communication systems need to be put in place in order to co-ordinate actions. Co-ordination of funeral arrangements, attendance at funerals, and arrangements for transport of students or representatives to funerals need to be made. Appropriate and respectful use of social media will also help (see Section 11, R22).

Managing information:

If students are badly injured or on critical lists, this contributes to an ongoing sense of crisis. In such circumstances, the management of information becomes especially important. News about the condition and progress of people who are ill will need to be checked for accuracy so that unwarranted distress is not engendered. In particular, news of a further death must be fully checked with the most reliable source available before any announcements are made. If someone is on life-support, news that it is going to be switched off at a certain time should not be given. Such information can be incorrect.

It is very important that the family be given time to inform their own relatives of new information. Family members should not hear news through a network of rumour or gossip. It may not always be possible to control the spread of news, but inaccurate or untimely information should not be given out by the school or by NEPS.

Paying respects:

Victims may be badly injured and students may be afraid to go to the house to pay their respects. They may hear that the person looks terrible. This is often not the case as, where injuries do result in serious disfigurement, the remains are laid out in such a way as to minimize distress. It may be useful to have a representative from the school visit the home. They will be able to feedback accurate information to colleagues and students and advise accordingly. Pupils who pay their respects have often reported back that the deceased looked peaceful or that the rumours were incorrect. This may be a comfort to others, may help to allay anxieties and may enable some students to go themselves if they feel the need to do this.

Some students may need support before, during or after viewing the remains. This may be their first experience of death and the presence of a supportive adult may be very important.

Funeral arrangements:

If such a large scale incident happens during the State Examinations, church services might be arranged to facilitate those doing the exams, e.g. by having services in the evening, if the family is in agreement.

VIOLENT DEATH

The sudden death of a student or teacher is a tragic event and when the person has died as a result of violence it is even more traumatic. A violent death brings up concerns about personal safety. The perpetrator may be a member of the same community or come from the same family as the victim. If the death occurred as a result of family violence, children may worry that the same thing could happen in their own family. Parents/Guardians may wonder what to say in response to these worries.

Some issues that may arise:

- The idea that “it could never happen to us” or “it could never happen here” is shattered. Staff, parents/guardians and students may be afraid that it could happen again or that it could happen to them. It is important to reassure them that these events do not happen often.
- Be sensitive to the fact that the alleged perpetrator may have relatives and friends within the school community. It may be necessary to take steps to diffuse tensions between students.
- Some pupils may worry that they could have prevented what happened. It is important to stress that no one has control over another person’s actions.
- It is important to give the facts in a way that is appropriate to the age of the child. Do not give graphic details and discourage the circulation of speculation about such details.
- Advice should be offered to staff, parents/guardians and students about dealing with the media. It is better to leave this to a designated person, who has prepared for this element of the work.
- There will be an ongoing Garda investigation, a trial, an inquest etc. This can prolong the trauma.
- A member of the critical incident team should be identified as the Garda Liaison person.
- It is the responsibility of parents to decide whether their children may be interviewed by Gardaí. Garda interviews of students should not generally take place on the school premises.
- Although this is an intense event it is important to remind the school that any memorial should be the same as for other students who have died. It is important for the school to be mindful of not glamourising the event or the deceased person.

Witnessing an Event

There may be some students/staff who were involved in an incident but were uninjured, or who witnessed an accident or a violent incident. Reactions to this may be immediate or happen sometime after the event. Flashbacks and intrusive thoughts of the event, heightened body arousal causing the person to be jumpy and anxious, and a range of feelings from numbness to hysteria may occur. All of these are normal reactions to trauma. It may help them to talk through the events:

- WHAT THEY SAW?
- WHAT THEY HEARD?
- HOW THEY FELT?
- WHAT THEY THOUGHT?
- WHAT THEY DID?

Difficulties arise if these reactions are extreme or persist over a period of time. Onward referral should be made where needed (see note on onward referral in Section 6).

Breaking the News

The same principles that govern the breaking of news generally should apply here, (see R5). However, where the death has been violent there are some additional factors that need to be remembered. The death may be a murder or manslaughter but this will not be determined until after the court case so staff should be careful about the use of language. It is important to give students accurate information about what has happened in an age appropriate manner. If we don't give students accurate information, rumours will start and the details of these are often more extreme than the reality. Accurate information does not require that graphic details are included. Such information may play on the fears of children and young people and is not helpful. Tell students that an investigation of what exactly happened is the responsibility of the Gardaí and that the facts will emerge in due course.

Sample script for a principal

“Some students from our school have been involved in a road traffic accident. Some deaths have occurred and some are injured. Those who have died are..... The injured are.....They are being treated in..... There are.....who are very seriously injured, and others are ok, but are being checked out by medical staff. We are getting information on an ongoing basis and will let you know if there is anything important you need to know. Please be careful to stick to the facts and not to engage in spreading rumours about injuries or further deaths. This could be very distressing for others, especially if not accurate”

OR

“Sean was killed on Saturday night. It seems that he was walking home with two of his friends around midnight when he was attacked. Someone living on the street called the Gardaí. Sean was brought to hospital, where he died at 3 a.m. The Gardaí are investigating the details of what happened. The full facts will not be known for some time and there is no point in putting stories about which may not be true and which can be hurtful and upsetting, or may even give rise to further problems. We will let you know of any facts that we have as the situation becomes clear”

Parent/Guardian meetings

It is sad to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to let them know that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it. Parents/Guardians may seek assistance in knowing what to say to their children at this time. It is sometimes useful to hold a parent information meeting. This will allow parents/guardians to get information about how they can help their children through this difficult time. Meetings may be held during the day or in the evening or both. It may be useful to ask other agencies to be involved so that parents/guardians are informed about available services, how they work, and how to access support for their children.

Large group meetings for parents/guardians: what to say

The principal:

- Outlines the plan for the meeting and introduces the speaker/s.
- Gives an outline of the facts as known.

- Outlines what the school has done to date and the plan for the next few days, weeks etc.
- Outlines the in-school support systems available to students and how parents/guardians can request help e.g. from the guidance counsellor, chaplain, other available staff.
- Offers advice to parents/guardians about dealing with the media, if appropriate. In general, the advice should be not to allow their children to be interviewed. Children do not have experience of dealing with the media and may regret what they say later.
- Give guidance to parents/guardians on their children's use of social media at this time.
- Inform parents/guardians that tea and coffee will be available at the end of the meeting, and that speakers and some school staff will be available to answer any questions.

Drop-in Centres

If there is a sense that parents/guardians and young people in the wider community are especially distressed or in need of more support than can be offered in the large group meeting, external agencies may decide to set up a drop-in centre on one or two evenings. This allows members of the community, who may be traumatised by an event, to access services in a user-friendly way. It also gives working parents/guardians a chance to get advice and support. Pupils Students may come from a dispersed area and an 'out-centre' in a town or village may make services easier to access.

Both statutory and voluntary agencies might be involved, e.g. adult services, children's' services, adolescent counselling services and voluntary bereavement/support services, as well as school based services like NEPS. The involvement of a number of support services facilitates follow-up by the most appropriate agency. Support offered in this way can provide reassurance and information about normal reactions to trauma. If there are serious concerns or if parents or students are in need of additional help, they can be offered appropriate advice. Early appointments may be facilitated as a result of prior arrangements between the agencies.

If agreed, an announcement about the availability of such a drop-in service might be made at church services locally, as well as through the normal school channels.

SECTION 11 RESOURCES

CONTENTS

RESOURCES: RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS

- R1 STUDENT CONTACT RECORD
- R2 SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT
- R3 SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - VIOLENT DEATH
- R4 SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA
- R5 A CLASSROOM SESSION FOLLOWING NEWS OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT
- R6 CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND REACTION TO DEATH ACCORDING TO AGE
- R7 STAGES OF GRIEF
- R8 HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS
- R9 REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT
- R10 GRIEF AFTER SUICIDE OR SUSPECTED SUICIDE
- R11 REINTEGRATION OF THE BEREAVED CHILD IN SCHOOL
- R12 WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME
- R13 A GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS, CHAPLAINS, OTHER DESIGNATED STAFF
- R14 CHECKLIST - STUDENTS AT RISK
- R15 EXPLORING SUICIDE RISK
- R16 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – PRINCIPALS
- R17 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – TEACHERS
- R18 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – PARENTS
- R19 CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY & PLAN – FRAMEWORK
- R20 CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEMPLATE FOR SCHOOL PLAN
- R21 EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST/SCHOOL CONTACT LIST/USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS
- R22 GUIDANCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS
- R23 TEACHERS HELPING STUDENTS IN TIMES OF CRISIS OR EMERGENCY
- R24 USEFUL WEBSITES AND HELPLINES FOR ACCESSING RESOURCES

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a tragedy, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves (brief details of the incident and, in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost). Where text/social media are used for communicating with parents this content will help with drafting.

(School Contact Details)

(School Crest)

Dear Parent/Guardian

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of Name of student(s). We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events. 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 s/he may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is age appropriate.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to express feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or 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 reaction. Over the course of the coming days, 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.

Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.

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

Principal's signature

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - VIOLENT DEATH

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a violent death, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves. (Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).

Dear Parent/ Guardian

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened.

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, the sister/ brother of (name of student), 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 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 in their support of students.

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.

In these times, young people tend to turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive about what your son/daughter might post to others.

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

Sincerely

Principal's name

SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA

This can be used as a template by schools to be emailed, posted on the school social media site or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the school.

In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals.

This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the victim's family and the nature of the incident.

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 has 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.

A CLASSROOM SESSION FOLLOWING NEWS OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Normally, the class teacher, class tutor or other teacher who knows the students should be the person to inform them of the events and lead the classroom session. Students generally feel safe and secure with someone they know. If the teacher feels uncomfortable with this role another staff member may share the task. Teachers should have the opportunity to opt out of this work if they feel unable to handle it and other arrangements should be made for that class group.

The aim of the session is to break the news to give the students an opportunity to discuss what has happened and to express their thoughts and feelings in a secure environment. The teacher needs to listen and be empathic.

The session needs to be tailored to the age and developmental level of the class group.

The outline of the session is as follows:

- STEP 1 Giving the facts and dispelling rumours
- STEP 2 Sharing stories and allowing and encouraging the sharing of thoughts and the expression of feelings
- STEP 3 Normalising the reactions
- STEP 4 Worries (for younger children) STEP 5 Advising about social media usage
- STEP 6 Empowerment
- STEP 7 Closure
- STEP 8 Free Time
- STEP 9 Recovery

<p>STEP 1 Giving the facts and dispelling rumours</p>	<p>Tell the students in a calm, low key and factual voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has happened • Who was involved • When it happened • The plan of the day <p>Sample Script</p> <p><i>I have something very sad I want to share with you. The factual information agreed upon by the staff e.g. (name of student), who attends our school and was missing, has been found. You will probably be aware, through social media, that he is dead. Yesterday, the Gardaí found his body. They are investigating what has happened and will let us know as soon as they find out more information.</i></p> <p><i>I am feeling very sad about what's happened. Let's spend some time together now helping each other to talk about how we feel about what has happened</i></p>
<p>STEP 2 Sharing stories</p>	<p>Take some time for discussion. Students may wish to tell their story of the event. As a result they will feel less alone because of their common shared experiences. Assisting them to verbalise their experiences helps their recovery. For those students who find it difficult to verbalise their experiences, or for students with learning difficulties, it may be helpful to allow them to express their feelings and recount their experiences</p>

	<p>in other ways. Writing stories or using art can be particularly helpful, especially for younger students. A number of materials that can be used are suggested in Section 11, R24. Give the students a choice as to how they want to represent their experiences. Have a box of tissues at hand.</p> <p>Sample script</p> <p><i>To help us today, we are going to make a memory box for (name of deceased). You can draw a picture of a time you remember with (name of the deceased) or write a poem or a letter to him. If you like we can put these in a nice box and give it to (name of deceased) family sometime soon. This will help them to see how important (name of deceased) was.</i></p>
STEP 3 Normalising the reactions	<p>Tell the students that they will all react differently to what has happened and that there is no right or wrong way. List some possible feelings and reactions, (see R9). Explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Let the students know that the reactions or symptoms will go away in time. Tell them that if the symptoms haven't gone after a few weeks, they should let you or their parents know. In addition to conversations they may have with friends on social media they may need to talk to someone in person about how they are feeling. Depending on the incident and the age of the students distribute hand-outs R7, R8, R9, R10</p>
STEP 4 Worries (for younger children)	<p>Sample script</p> <p><i>You may be worried about (name of the deceased) - that they might be sad or lonely or hungry or cold. When someone dies they don't feel cold or hungry or feelings like that anymore.</i></p> <p><i>You may be worried that the same thing could happen to you or someone in your family. What happened to (name of deceased) doesn't happen very often.</i></p> <p><i>If the classmate has been ill, you could say. He was very sick and the chances of this happening to someone else you know are low.</i></p>
STEP 5 Advising about Social Media Usage	<p>Discussions may begin with an outline of the various social media currently being used by members of the group. The value of these as a way of keeping in contact with and supporting friends should be acknowledged. Students may be asked for experiences of ways in which such communication has helped them as well as examples of ways in which it has gone wrong. Media involving live communication such as Skype or Viber are generally more conducive to support and less open to misunderstanding than text-based means. Students will be encouraged to consider how much social media usage is too much, particularly late into the night. More guidance on social media use is contained in R22.</p>
STEP 6 Empowerment	<p>Help the students to identify strategies that they might use to help manage their reaction, for example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep, taking plenty of exercise and appropriate use of social media - may all help. If appropriate, students can share strategies that worked for them in other stressful situations or brainstorm ideas as to what might help. Overall, it is important to help the students regain a sense of control.</p>
STEP 7 Closure	<p>End the session by focusing on the future. Depending on the nature of the incident, help the class/group decide what they would like to do about various issues, e.g., what to do about the person's empty chair, about writing cards or letters. Reiterate the message that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances.</p>
STEP 8 Free Time	<p>After the discussion the teacher may want to allow the student's some play time in the playground or free time in the classroom or an agreed area, depending on the age.</p>
STEP 9 Recovery	<p>It may be useful to continue to do these activities at intervals during the days following and to intersperse them throughout the curriculum in the coming days.</p> <p>Normal routines should generally be returned to as soon as possible.</p>

- | | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students should be encouraged to resume sports and other extra-curricular activities• It is appropriate that the class curriculum is adjusted or adapted. For example, teachers should avoid presenting new learning material for a while following an incident as concentration may be impaired• Use opportunities which arise within ordinary class work, where coping and support can be reinforced• Students could be encouraged to discuss how to avoid future crisis and lessons learnt from their experiences. There will also be opportunities for structured discussion within the school's social, personal, and health education programmes. Social Personal & Health Education (SPHE) curriculum time is an ideal context in which to offer support. |
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R6

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND REACTION TO DEATH ACCORDING TO AGE

(This may be used with various groups and individuals)

Children's understanding and reaction to death will depend on their age and their developmental stage. The following are guides only as children will differ in their reactions and grasp of events for a range of reasons other than age alone.

AGES 0 – 2 YEARS

- Infants do not understand the meaning of death
- They may display anxiety when separated from a loved one
- They may appear upset, subdued and uninterested in their surroundings.

AGES 2 – 5 YEARS

- No understanding of the permanency of death
- May search for the missing person from a loved one
- May feel responsible for the death in some way
- May become apathetic and depressed
- May regress to an earlier stage of development e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting, tantrums or may become clingy
- May develop fears of going to sleep
- May worry that other loved ones may die.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Continuity of normal routine e.g. mealtimes and bedtime
- Offer physical comfort
- Explain the death in clear, simple language, using words like "dead" and "died" - Do not use terms like "gone to sleep" or "passed away"
- You may need to repeat the same information again and again
- Permit them to ask questions and be consistent in your answers
- Reassure them that they had nothing to do with the death and of the wellbeing of other family members.

AGES 5 – 9 YEARS

- Beginning to realise the permanency of death, but their idea of life after death is still vague
- May have concerns about how the deceased is feeling or what he/she is thinking in the grave
- May have a lot of questions about aspects of the death e.g. how the person died, what they looked like, the funeral, heaven, coffins
- The reaction of their peers is important, they may feel 'different' to them
- Their peers may be awkward about the death and avoid contact
- They may become the target of bullying.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Encourage the child to talk and cry about the deceased if they wish to, otherwise respect their silence
- Answer questions and provide as much factual information about the death as possible
- Reassure them that thinking and feeling ceases after death
- Be vigilant in relation to bullying.

AGES 9 – 12 YEARS

- Understand the finality and universality of death
- Awareness of their own mortality and may worry about their own death
- May display psychosomatic symptoms i.e. physical complaints like tummy aches
- May wish to stay at home close to parents
- May display anger.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Dispel fears about their own health or the health of other loved ones by offering reassurance
- Encourage them to go to school
- Allow them to express their anger, offering appropriate ways to do so.

ADOLESCENTS

- Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults
- May have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
- Death adds to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents
- May appear to not care about the death
- May seek support outside of the family.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Offer them time to listen
- Allow them to express their grief in their own way
- Be prepared for mood swings
- Don't feel left out if they seem to value their friends more than their parents
- Children's use of social media should be monitored and supported by parents.

If parents are grieving themselves, they may be emotionally unable to support their other children. In this instance, another supportive adult in the child's life, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours may need to offer emotional support.

It should be remembered that for children with special educational needs, their understanding of what has happened will be in line with their developmental age.

STAGES OF GRIEF

(This may be used with various groups and individuals)

Grief is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Although there are distinct phases in the grieving process, people go through these stages in different sequences and at different paces. Generally the grieving process in adults is thought to take about two years, while with children and adolescents it may be over a more extended time-frame with different issues arising as they go through developmental milestones.

Denial, numbness, shock (up to 6 weeks)

- Death of the person may be denied
- Emerging feelings may be suppressed
- Refusal to talk about the death
- Bereaved keeps very busy to avoid thinking about the death
- Bereaved may show signs of confusion and forget everyday routines
- Children in shock may display either silent withdrawal or outbursts of crying.

Acute grief/searching and longing for deceased (6 weeks to 4 months)

- Acute sadness – crying
- Physical pangs of pain including loss of appetite and disturbed sleep Emotional pain accompanied by dejection, hopelessness, lack of concentration Fears of life after death, nightmares, ghosts
- Disorganisation
- Strong guilt feelings and questioning of self and others, particularly in the case of a sudden death Feelings of anger at the departed for leaving them
- Bereaved may reject offers to comfort them.

Adaptation to life without the deceased (6 months to 18 months)

- People begin to adjust to their lives without the person who is gone Sense of isolation
- Fearful of forgetting the deceased Less crying and irritability
- Exacerbation of existing personality problems. Children with low self-esteem may be at a greater risk of emotional/behavioural difficulties.

Normalisation of life

- Getting on with life
- Returned sense of humour and play
- Able to participate emotionally in new relationships

- Changed relationship with the deceased – able to think of the deceased without pain Reduction in physical/emotional symptoms
- Less guilt.

HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

- Reach out – people do care
- Talk to your friends, family and teachers - talking is the most healing medicine
- Remember you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy or mad
- It is acceptable to cry
- It is acceptable to smile
- If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently
- When the stress level is high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings perhaps with alcohol and drugs, this complicates matters rather than bringing relief
- Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?
- Spend time with people who have a positive influence on you
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even if you're not sure
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful
- Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk
- Sticking to your “normal” routine helps. Structure your time – keep busy
- Take time out – go for a cycle or kick a football
- Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen – like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc. Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits
- Use of social media can help but do not rely on it as your only source of support
- Useful websites: www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.

R9

REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

FEELINGS	BEHAVIOURAL
Fear Insecurity	Nightmares
Guilt Mood swings	Social withdrawal
Shame Shock	Over reliance on use of social media
Regret Yearning	Irritability
Anger Numbness	Loss of concentration/forgetfulness
Tearfulness Confusion	Physical/Verbal aggression
Loneliness Isolation	Misuse of drugs, including alcohol
Anxiety	
PHYSICAL	THOUGHTS
Tiredness	Disbelief
Sleeplessness	Denial
Headaches	Sense of unreality
Stomach problems - Bowel/Bladder problems	Preoccupation with images of the event/person
Loss or increase in appetite	

R10

GRIEF AFTER SUICIDE OR SUSPECTED SUICIDE

Remember there is no right or wrong way to react when someone you know dies. People will have many different reactions to what has happened.

- Know that you can survive, even if you feel you can't
- You may feel overwhelmed and frightened by your feelings. This is normal. You're not going crazy; you are grieving
- You may not feel a strong reaction to what has happened. This is normal
- You may experience feelings of guilt, confusion, forgetfulness and anger. Again these feelings are all normal
- You may feel angry at the person who has died, at yourself, at God, at everyone and everything. It is ok to express it
- You may feel guilty about what you did or did not do. Suicide is the act of an individual, for which we cannot take responsibility
- You may never have an answer as to "why" but it is ok to keep asking "why" until you no longer need to ask or you are satisfied with partial answers
- Sometimes people make decisions over which we have no control. It was not your choice
- Feeling low is temporary, suicide is permanent. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If you are feeling low or having a difficult time, ask for help
- Allow yourself to cry, this will help you to heal
- Healing takes time. Allow yourself the time you need to grieve
- Every person grieves differently and at a different pace
- Delay making any big decisions if possible
- This is the hardest thing you will ever do. Be patient and compassionate with yourself
- Spend time with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk and who also understand your need to be silent
- Seek professional help if you feel overwhelmed
- If you are thinking of trying to kill yourself, you must talk to a trusted adult
- Avoid people who try to tell you what to feel and how to feel it and, in particular, those who think you should "be over it by now"
- Ask in school about a support group for survivors that provides a safe place for you to express your feelings, or simply a place to go to be with other survivors who are experiencing some of the same things you're going through
- Allow yourself to laugh with others and at yourself. This is healing
- Useful websites: www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au

R11

REINTEGRATION OF THE BEREAVED CHILD IN SCHOOL

Some suggestions are offered here which may help prepare the school and the bereaved child for their return to school. They will help to ensure that the individual, the other students and the staff feel more comfortable and at ease.

- Visit the bereaved student at home to see what s/he would like to happen when they return to school.
- Talk to the student's class about how people are affected by grief and encourage them to share their own feelings. Ask about how they have coped with bereavement in their own lives and what has helped.
- Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to come back to school. Ask how they would like to be treated if they were returning to school after a death. This might be done in pairs or small groups, thus encouraging all to be involved. It will also ensure that a range of preferences are expressed, reinforcing the fact that different people will have different preferences as to how they are treated. Some people may want to discuss what has happened, while others may want to be left alone. In general bereaved students say that they would like others to treat them as before rather than being 'over-nice' to them. However, it is a delicate balance as they don't want people to behave as if nothing has happened at all
- It may help if, in advance of the student's return to school, classmates have sent cards or notes or drawn pictures for the bereaved classmate. This will let her/him know that they are in their thoughts
- When they return, acknowledge their loss "I'm sorry that (name of deceased) died. I know that you are sad. It is ok to cry". (In Post-Primary schools, check that this is done in the first class of the day and not in every class
- Teachers can express their own sympathies separately once the general re-entry to class has been managed
- When the student returns, they may have difficulty concentrating or joining in class activities. Be understanding
- Allow them access to a 'quiet room' where he/she can go to be alone. You might suggest: "We can set up a signal for you to use if you need to leave the class at any time". (Ensure supervision)
- Link the student in with the guidance counsellor for support if needed
- Listen when they want to talk: "If you need to talk at any time, I am here to listen"
- Carry on normal routines and normal approaches to discipline
- They may have difficulty completing homework and assignments: "If you are having difficulty doing your homework it is ok to do as much as you can for a while"
- Allow them as much time as they need to grieve.

R12

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

- Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal
- Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, and be more nurturing and comforting
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them
- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, taking exercise, or talking
- Help them to understand that defiance, aggression and risk behaviour is a way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and or fear they are feeling
- When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back
- If you are out for a long time, telephone and reassure them
- Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light
- Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen
- Work with the school support services and other available services
- As well as advising your child about appropriate use of social media, monitor their use, particularly during this vulnerable time. Useful website: www.webwise.ie

R13

A GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS, CHAPLAINS, OTHER DESIGNATED STAFF

This can be used to help explore a student’s reaction to a critical incident and how it is impacting on them. It can help the student to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions in a safe environment with a caring adult.

STUDENT’S NAME BIRTH DATE AGE SEX M/F CLASS
/ YEAR

We are concerned about how things are going for you. Our talk today will help us to discuss what’s going well and what’s not going so well. If you want me to keep what we talk about between me and you, I will do that

– Except for those things that I need to discuss with others in order to help you. For example, if you or someone else is at risk in any way, I could not keep that confidential. My job is to help and I will need to do something about it.

In answering, please provide as much detail as you can. At times, I will ask you to tell me a bit more about your thoughts and feelings.

- Where were you when the event occurred?
- What did you see or what did you hear about what happened?
- How are you feeling now?
- How well do you know those who were hurt or killed?
- Has anything like this happened to you or any of your family before?
- How will your life be different now?
- How do you think this will affect your family in the days to come?
- What bothers you the most about what happened?
- Do you think anyone could have done something to prevent it? Yes No Who?
- What could you/they have done?
- Thinking back on what happened;

	Not at all	A little	More than a little	Very much
How angry do you feel about it? 1	2	3	4	
How sad do you feel about it? 1	2	3	4	
How guilty do you feel about it? 1	2	3	4	
How scared do you feel?	1	2	3	4

- What changes have there been in your life or routine because of what happened?
- What do you usually do when you need help with a personal problem?
- Which friends and who at home can you talk to about this?
- Do you use social media to keep in touch with friends?
- What are you going to do when you leave school today?
- If you are uncertain, let’s talk about what you should do.

R14

CHECKLIST - STUDENTS AT RISK

This checklist may be used as an aid by school staff who are concerned about a student. It should be remembered that the checking of a number of items for any one student may point to other problems. Indication of a number of these factors in any one student should always be followed up.

Unexpected reduction of academic performance	
Talking about suicide	
Ideas and themes of depression, death and suicide in their work	
Making statements about hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness	
Change in mood and marked emotionally instability	
Significant grief or stress	
Withdrawal from relationships	
Break up of an important relationship	
Discipline problems, being in trouble in school	
Withdrawal from extra-curricular activities	
Giving personal belongings away	
Loss of interest in things one cares about	
Neglect of physical appearance	
Physical symptoms with emotional cause	
High risk behaviours	
Alcohol or drug abuse	
Bullying or victimization	
History of suicidal behaviour e.g. cutting or overdose risk behaviours	
Family history of suicide/attempted suicide	
Over use or reliance on social media	

R15

EXPLORING SUICIDE RISK AND GUIDANCE IF STUDENT EXPRESSES SUICIDE IDEATION

A student may express ideas or exhibit behaviours suggestive of suicide ideation while in schools or information may be reported by another student or parent. The school has a responsibility to make an assessment and take action. The term 'risk assessment' is used in quite a specific sense and such an assessment needs to be carried out by a trained professional. This note is intended to help those professionals (designated school staff, such as guidance counsellors or chaplains) most immediately available to the student, to make a judgement as to whether a student is at risk. Where there is a serious concern about a student, then a referral should be made immediately. It is not easy to gauge the seriousness of such behaviour. The school is not responsible for deciding on the seriousness of the risk. Generally, all threats or reported threats should be taken seriously even if it may appear to be 'attention-seeking'.

WHAT SHOULD A TEACHER DO?

Listen. If a student seeks out a teacher to discuss their concerns about suicide, they have an idea that the teacher may be a help to them. Indicate concern and a willingness to help. There may not be time to discuss it properly when the student first approaches. Arrange a time to talk and prepare for the meeting.

Review available information: Review any significant changes observed in the student over recent weeks. The list of warning signs in R14 should be used to guide a review discussion with concerned staff.

Don't be afraid to use the word "suicide". Getting the word out in the open may help the student feel that his/her cry for help has been heard.

Have a sensitive but direct and open discussion with the student. If a student has been reported to be talking about suicide, they should be asked openly, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" This will offer the student the opportunity to talk about their feelings and their thoughts. If they confirm that they have been thinking about it, then this should be explored by raising the following issues with the student:

Previous attempt

Has the student attempted suicide before? You might ask, "Have you ever tried to harm yourself before?" If the answer to this is "Yes", then the risk increases.

Personal/family history

The level of risk increases with the number and seriousness of personal/family difficulties e.g. relationship breakdown, loss of friendship, problems with the law, parental separation, recent bereavement, serious illness etc. "How have things been going for you recently; has anything significant happened in your life recently?"

Physical/emotional history:

A student who has experienced major personal difficulties, whether as a result of physical (recent hospitalisation, chronic illness) or significant emotional difficulties (depression, loneliness, guilt, anger etc.) is

more at risk. “How have things been going for you? Have you been ill? Has anything significant happened to you recently?”

Plan

Does the student have a plan? If ‘yes’, ask “How do you intend to do it?” Does he/she have a particular day in mind? “When are you thinking of doing it?” Has he/she written suicide notes? The more concrete the plan the more serious the threat.

Means

Does the student have the means and a place to do it? Ask “How do you intend to do it?” Are the means available lethal? Have they access to a rope or pills? “Where would you do it?” Will the student be in a place where they can be rescued? For example, do they intend to carry out the action when both parents are out and their siblings also?

ONWARD REFERRAL

The greater the number of “Yes” answers, the higher the risk and the greater the need for immediate onward referral. Parents should be informed and asked to bring the student to their GP or to another service and report what the student has said. Advise about use of Accident and Emergency Services if parents have concerns about accessing a GP out of hours.

Do not send the student home alone if there are concerns. Release the student to the parents if concerns for safety exist. Explain to the student that you have to take action and let them know what action you are taking. If a student is under 18 years teachers are obliged to inform the parents even without the student’s consent.

Record the information and the actions taken. Share this with the relevant person in management. Share information as considered necessary with other staff members (e.g. student support team, class/subject teacher) taking into consideration the student’s right to confidentiality.

RETURN TO SCHOOL

A plan for reintegration of the student will be the responsibility of a designated person from the student support team. Consider the timing of the student’s return if there has been an absence from school. Discuss the return with the parents and student. Should the student be under medical supervision? Can the parents provide advice for the school from the medical team who assessed the student? How would the student like to have the absence explained?

Share information about the return as considered necessary (for example with management, student support team, class/subject teacher as appropriate) and with other staff members, remembering confidentiality. Monitoring in the first few days will be an important part of the plan. Have a staff member available to meet them on arrival. Ensure that all teachers know that the student has been through a difficult time. Let the student know which staff member is available if support is needed. Keep routine as normal as possible. Ensure that there is a current family/guardian contact number available should difficulty arise.

Monitor the behaviour of friends and other students who may be providing support to the student to ensure that they are not taking on too much responsibility for the wellbeing of the student. Where a previous suicide has occurred in a school be aware of the possibility of copycat or suicide contagion which occurs when suicidal behaviour is imitated (see 7.6 in the Guidelines).

PREVENTATIVE AND PREPARATORY GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

School systems are not only responsible for the academic needs of students but also for their emotional, social, and physical wellbeing. A preventative whole school approach to supporting mental health schools should ensure implementation of the *Well-Being Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (2013/2015), available on the DES website. This includes ensuring that the SPHE curriculum is consistently delivered in the school. SPHE provides a framework for educating young people about their health and wellbeing in a planned and structured way. It is advised to ensure that mental health awareness is included in curriculum delivery at all levels in the school.

If the school does not have a Student Support/Care Team in place consider setting one up. The document *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools* (2014) is a useful resource and available on the DES website. It will provide a system for tracking and monitoring the students who have difficulties. Having such a system reduces anxiety for staff who have the concern as it shares the burden.

Schools are advised to have some members of staff trained in ASIST professional development provided by HSE. Information is available on www.nosp.ie

R16

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (PRINCIPALS)

The following is a summary of questions often asked by principals in the aftermath of a critical incident.

Q. What do I do first on hearing news of the incident/death?

A. If the source of the news is the affected family, express condolences and get as many facts as possible sensitively. If it is from another source, check for veracity; obtain the facts; the numbers injured etc. Ascertain who is to contact the next of kin. The Gardaí may have already undertaken this role.

Q. Whom do I contact for help?

A. If the school is closed (weekends/holidays) contact members of the Critical Incident Management Team with a view to setting up a meeting. Contact the Board of Management and/or outside agencies e.g. NEPS/Health Service Executive. If the State Examinations are in progress, contact the State Examinations Commission (SEC)

(0906 442700) as soon as possible, in order to alert the Examination and Assessment Manager (EAM) for the school.

Q. What should I do on the first morning back at school?

A. Call a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team. If the team is not available call a meeting of the BOM and Senior Management. Set up a team for the duration of the crisis.

Q. What should be on the agenda for this meeting?

- A.
1. A statement of the facts as known
 2. Delegation of responsibilities
 3. Preparation of what to say at a staff meeting
 4. Preparation of what to say to students
 5. Initial schedule for the day
 6. Preparation of a letter to parents/guardians
 7. Discussion of support services/agencies whose support may be needed and agreement about who will contact them
 8. Preparation of a media statement, if appropriate.

Q. How do I manage communication?

A. Schools will need to manage telephone and email contacts, as this can be stressful. Assign one or two suitable people to this task. Provide clear guidance on what to say or write. An agreed factual statement should be available. This can be placed on the schools' social media site.

Q. How do I keep staff up to date?

A. The staff room is a very important room for teachers on this day. Informal briefings can take place during the breaks, as well as more formal meetings at the beginning and end of each day.

Q. How do I dovetail the school's part in the funeral/religious ceremonies with the wishes of the parents/guardians?

A. The school chaplain or local clergy/parish priest may be the main link person here. Ensure that the parents' wishes are respected and that participation of any students or friends is agreed with them. Ensure that beliefs about death or particular customs about funerals of different religious or ethnic groups are understood and respected.

Q. How do I handle staff members who want to opt out?

A. All staff would be expected to attend meetings held to disseminate information. However, it should be made clear to staff at these meetings that opting out of support type work is possible if they feel quite unable to cope. Be aware that some staff may be particularly vulnerable and watch out for them.

Q. How do I handle the media? (See Section 9 – Dealing with the media)

A. Delegate one suitable person to deal with the media.

Prepare a media statement.

- State that it is a difficult time for the school community
- Emphasis should be on what is being done to support staff and students
- The ‘Media Guidelines for the Portrayal of Suicide’ suggest that the media can help prevent copy-cat suicides by not mentioning specific details of the suicide e.g. location and method used; not using colourful phrases to romanticise it; not citing causes of suicide and thereby indirectly suggesting suicide as an option. These guidelines should be adhered to by the school in any communication with the media
- Allow limited and controlled access to the media by providing a press room
- The SEC can help if the incident is during exam time. Teacher unions, trustees of schools and management bodies may also have press officers who are able to advise if appropriate.

Q. What/when should I tell staff/students about the incident?

A. Give the facts, as you know them. This is the best way to counter rumour and fantasy. It should be done as soon as possible to prevent staff and students hearing from other, sometimes inappropriate, sources.

Q. What if I feel upset myself and find it difficult to talk?

A. It is very important to let children know that it is natural and acceptable to be upset and to cry. It is better to share feelings with them than to hide them, so don’t worry if you get upset. It may help to create a safe and open atmosphere for grief. You should also seek and accept support for yourself while dealing with this difficult event.

Q. What if some students do not appear to grieve?

A. Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so. Don’t assume that because overt signs are absent, the person is not grieving. Each individual has his/her own personal way of grieving. It is important that these different individual ways are respected and seen as normal.

Q. How long does it take to come to terms with bereavement?

A. There is no definite answer to this. Each individual progresses at his/her own pace and there are enormous variations, (see R7).

Q. How soon should brothers and sisters or friends who are closely involved be encouraged to return to school?

A. They should usually return fairly quickly. They need the support of their peer group and the routine of school will offer them some sense of normality. Their presence at school will offer others an opportunity to express their grief. The sooner they return the easier it is for them to reintegrate. This advice should, however, be tempered by any particularly unusual circumstances and decisions will ultimately be made by parents/guardians.

Q. Where a lot of well-intentioned friends are calling to the house and perhaps staying out late at night, what should I advise a grieving family to do?

A. Encourage them to set clear limits, when friends can call and when they should leave. Often the bereaved adults need to be reminded that setting clear limits is good. Friends may stay too long because they do not know when or how to leave the house. School can help by suggesting time limits to the friends. This is especially important at exam time when rest is essential.

Q. What can I do about phone texting or social media use, especially if unreliable (or inappropriate) messages are being passed about?

A. A critical incident highlights the need for a well-established school policy on this issue (see R22). Students should be advised that they are being given reliable and up-to date information by the school. They should be encouraged to report to a teacher all social media communication received which are at variance with the facts as known, or which are a cause of worry or concern - especially about friends.

Q. How long do we leave the memory area in the classroom/corridor?

A. Sometimes out of respect for the deceased a space/table is set up with a picture, candles flowers, messages, cards, etc. This can offer a focal point in the initial days of grieving. The items can be brought to the funeral service as part of the offertory procession.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (TEACHERS)

The following is a summary of questions often asked by teachers in the aftermath of a critical incident.

Q. I would like to opt out of support type work for personal reasons. Is this OK?

A. It has been found that their teachers are the best people to support students in school in times of distress because they are with people they know and trust. Accordingly, all teachers and other school staff members are encouraged to help the students at these times. However, nobody should be obliged to do this work and people should be able to opt out of it if they feel they need to. This may be for a number of reasons, including recent personal bereavement, experience of a loss similar to that occurring in the particular incident or other circumstances. However, in order to stay in touch, they would need to be in attendance at staff meetings where information is disseminated in relation to the incident.

Q. I have no qualifications to help out in this area. Shouldn't the job should be left to the experts?

A. You probably have more skills here than you realise. Your experience, competence and skills as a teacher and as an expert in dealing with children and young people are invaluable. Most importantly, the students know you. Students need a safe environment in which to come to terms with what has happened. This security is often enhanced by being able to discuss the events with a familiar teacher in the first instance.

Q. What should I do in the classroom to be helpful?

A. You should acknowledge the situation and clarify the facts, as they are known. Honesty is essential. Encourage questions so that the students have a clear understanding. Try to establish normal routines as soon as possible – but balance this with allowing students opportunities to discuss the incident and to express their thoughts and feelings. Encourage them to resume extra-curricular activities and help them to identify where they can go to for support. Encourage them to be supportive of one another.

Q. What are the signs of grief that I may notice in students?

A. After bereavement students may have a wide range of different reactions – some may become quiet and withdrawn, while others may seem to be aggressive, irritable or angry. They may have mood swings or lack concentration. Try to handle all these 'normal' reactions with patience, do not seem surprised by them and do not get cross (see R6, R7 and R9). If students come from a background where there is family breakdown, serious illness, alcohol or drug related or other difficulties, then you need to take extra note of any behavioural changes.

Q. What if I think that some students are not grieving normally?

A. There is no such thing as a 'correct' way to grieve. Some people cry, some may laugh or become giddy, some show no reaction. The important thing is that all these different ways are natural and normal and you should try to help the student understand this.

Q. What skills do I have that are important?

A. Listening skills are probably the most important. People who have experienced loss or trauma generally feel that talking helps them to cope with their feelings. When you sense a student wants to talk, try to make the time. Be reassuring and patient while gently encouraging them to talk about the loss. Reassure the student that you are there to help.

Q. Is there any one important thing I should say?

A. Yes – emphasise that grieving is a normal healthy process following a traumatic incident. It is the person’s way of coping with the event. It is also normal for people to react in different ways – there is no ‘right’ way to grieve.

Q. Is it a good idea to organise a classroom session following a critical incident?

A. Some schools do and they have found this to be very effective. You will find notes on leading a class session after news of an incident in R5. An advantage here is that students may feel safer and more secure with their regular classroom teacher.

Q. What should I do if I feel that a student needs more professional support?

A. Discuss the issue with the principal or guidance counsellor. They, in turn, may wish to discuss it with the NEPS psychologist or other support services and with the student’s parents. The outcome may be a referral to the appropriate service.

Q. What is the overall message in helping bereaved children?

A. “You will get through this difficult time and we are here to help if you need support. Take care of yourself and look out for each other. If you need help, or a friend is in difficulty, it is best talk to us rather than relying totally on social media.”

Q. When should I get back to a normal teaching routine with a class?

A. It is important to give students sufficient time and space to share their feelings and to come to terms with what has happened. However, it is also important to move towards a normal routine as soon as possible. Getting on with the regular and familiar pattern of school life helps reduce stress. Avoid introducing new material in the immediate aftermath of an incident or bereavement, as grief and shock can interfere with concentration and motivation. It is often a good idea to consult the students themselves about returning to the normal routine.

Q. What do I do about the empty chair/a student’s belongings etc.?

A. A helpful strategy might be to involve students in a discussion about what to do about the chair. This might also present an opportunity to move to a new phase in the process. With regard to the student’s belongings, it might be useful to put together a folder or a ‘memory box’ of the student’s work for the parents. This can be given to them at an appropriate time.

Q. Is there a danger that by talking about suicide you make it appear to be an option for others?

A. Talking about the death helps people to make sense of what has happened. People can cope with the truth, but suicide must never be represented as a valid option. There should be no criticism of the person who has died. Separate the person from the behaviour. It is important to talk about how a person can get to the point where suicide may seem to be the only option but emphasise that it is not a good option. Feeling low is usually a temporary thing, whereas suicide is permanent. With suicide the intention may have been to change life circumstances rather than end life. There is always help available if a person can take the step of reaching out for it. Encourage students to seek help if they need it.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (PARENTS)

The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents after a critical incident.

- Q. This incident has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?**
- A. The school will inform students and parents of the core details of the incident insofar as they are known. It sometimes takes some time for the true facts to emerge. In the meantime, it is important to stick to the facts as known. Discourage rumour or gossip as it is often incorrect and can be distressing for the families and friends of those involved. Information on social media is not reliable and always needs to be checked.
- Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?**
- A. This will depend on the particular situation. The school will usually put a plan in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion or individual support for students who need it. If there is particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.
- Q. How can I help my child?**
- A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. Advise on and monitor safe use of social media.
- Q. How long will the grief last?**
- A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories of other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.
- Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?**
- A. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check-up.
- Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?**
- A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP/HSE Services.
- Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?**
- A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST/SCHOOL CONTACT LIST

(To be displayed in staff-room, school office and Principal's office etc.)

AGENCY	CONTACT NUMBERS
GARDA	
HOSPITAL	
FIRE BRIGADE	
LOCAL GPs	
HSE/Primary Care Team / Primary Care Centre / CAMHS / Resource Officer for Suicide Prevention	
SCHOOL INSPECTOR	
NEPS PSYCHOLOGIST	
DES/ETB	
INTO / ASTI / TUI	
PARISH PRIEST / CLERGY	
STATE EXAMS COMMISSION	
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SERVICE	1800 411 057

SCHOOL CONTACT NUMBERS		
CONTACT	NAME	
Principal	BRENDA KEARNS	
Deputy Principal	MARTIN KERINS	
	JOHN LEONARD	
Chairperson	KEVIN BYRNE	
Trustees	FR. PADDY HENNESSY	
School Secretary	LIZ KANE	
School Caretaker	RONNIE KANE	
1st Yr. Yearhead	ANTOINETTE O'CONNOR	
2nd Yr. Yearhead	ALAN CAROLAN	
3rd Yr. Yearhead	DAVID MAGUIRE	
TY Co-ordinator	AILISH O'TOOLE	
5th Yr. Yearhead	LIAM LANE	
6th Yr. Yearhead	COLIN CRYAN	
AP 1	MARY HARRIS	
AP 1	ANN KELLY	
Chaplain	FR JESMOND	
Coordinator of the Resource Department	MARK RYAN	
Parents Association	REBECCA GRIFFIN	
WillisTowersWatson Insurance Company	DONAL MURRAY	
School Psychologist	LIZ DE FORGE	
Junior Liaison Officer	AUDREY SHERIDAN	
Fire Brigade		
Gardaí – Celbridge		01-6012370
Hospital		
Pieta House		1850247247
HSE	Kildare/West Wicklow, Child Protection Social Work Team, St Mary's, Craddockstown Road, Naas, Co Kildare Tel:	(045) 882 400

Useful Contact Numbers

Please display this in the staff room and on the office notice board

Barnardos	01-4530355	
The Samaritans	1850 609090	
Childline	1800 666666	
Parentline	1890 927277	
Aware	01-6766166	
	1890 303302	
National Suicide Bereavement	024-95561	Support Network
Rainbows	01-4734175	
The Bereavement Counselling	01-8391766	Service - Dublin
Bereavement Counselling Service	01-6767727	
Emergency Contact List		
Garda	01 6288222	
Ambulance		
Fire Brigade	01 6289733	
Hospital Naas General	45897221	
Local GPs; Dr Vincent Walsh	01 6288084	
Dr Seán O'Brien	01 6272428	
Dr Gerard Waters	01 6271390	
Health Board/Child and Family Centre		
Chairperson of the Board of Management		
School Inspector	01 8896553/8892002	
State Examination Commission	090 6442700	
DES - Communications Unit	01 8896400	
NEPS Psychologist	01 8892700	
Clergy/Pastoral Care		
Local counselling services;		
Kildare Youth Service:	045 856968	

GUIDANCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Social media is now part of everyday communication and information sharing. Most students are avid and competent users. Social media messages speed up the rate at which information is shared. This can have a significant influence on the behaviour of young people during a critical incident. Some social media communication may occur without the knowledge of school staff that leads to distress among students or their parents/guardians.

The following information may help schools to consider issues related to social media use when dealing with a critical incident.

- It is essential that schools take account of the need to have competency in the use of social media among management and staff. If the members of the CIMT have particular concerns or fears about social media, they should consult those familiar with its use. Senior-students e.g. sixth-year members of the student council could also be asked for help. Normalising social media use by the students during a critical incident is very important.
- Schools should include social media literacy in the school curriculum. It is essential that school management, staff and students understand the role of social media, and its positive and negative aspects. A positive disposition to social media by the school may encourage thoughtful use by students during a critical incident.
- Agreement on appropriate use of social media during a critical incident should be included in the school's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). All school staff should follow agreed online professional protocols as prescribed by the New Code of Professional Conduct by Teachers i.e. "Teachers should ensure that any communication with pupils/students, colleagues, parents/guardians, school management and others is appropriate, including communication via electronic media, such as email, texting and social media etc." (The Teacher Council, 2012). The CIMT may also remind staff, students and other relevant community members about their AUP during times of crises.
- When dealing with a critical incident it is advised that schools act quickly and with caution. A message could be placed on the school website and on any other school social media account along the following lines:
 - 'You may be aware of a recent event within the school community. We ask you to respect the family's privacy and sensitivities by considering if you should post any comments, especially on social media. We will inform you through the normal channels of any relevant developments.'
 - School can use social media to provide up to date information for all concerned throughout the various stages of the incident. Positive messages and appropriate advice for young people and their parents/guardians can be provided. One important message would be to remind parents/guardians to discuss social media use with their children and monitor use more actively following a crisis. It is important that CIMT members are familiar with safe messaging guidelines and the document Media Guidelines for

Reporting Suicide and Self-harm. Safe messaging guidelines should be followed when sending messages to staff, students, community or the media following a death by suicide. Media personnel if making contact with the school during a critical incident should be provided with the guidelines. Should the need arise during a crisis, schools can contact the Department of Education and Skills Press Office for advice and support or in the case of Education and Training Board schools the Board head office.

- Young people often post Rest-In-Peace (RIP) messages on social media sites when tragedies occur. These posts can be heartfelt and emotional particularly in cases of death by suicide. Messages such as “I miss you and will see you soon” or “I will follow in your path” should cause concern and be followed up with the individual concerned. The death by suicide of an individual may influence others. Young people are especially prone to contagion. Those who are emotionally vulnerable may act on suicidal impulses.
- Activity on social networking sites during a critical incident can be a source of potentially important information, such as suicide pacts, identification of vulnerable groups or individual young people who may be at increased risk of suicide. Given privacy restrictions to people’s personal web pages, distressing information may be posted without the knowledge of parents or school management. It is likely that users will block access so activity of this nature will not be accessible to everyone.
- Monitoring sites raises issues of privacy and surveillance. Schools are not advised to engage in monitoring. However, should schools become aware of inappropriate posts by students, they could inform the parents/guardians and encourage them to request that it is deleted. The easiest way to have a post removed is for the person who originally posted it to delete it from their account or request its removal. Service providers will not usually remove posts unless content is contrary to their AUP.

The following advice for journalists is provided in the Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide and Self-harm.

The internet has created additional opportunities and challenges for journalists due to the speed and ease of accessing and publishing information. Points of view can now be presented more quickly and easily but sometimes without review or factual basis. It can be difficult for some readers to understand the distinction between what facts is and what is opinion. If you are posting your story on a news website or blog please consider the following points:

General tips

- Avoid linking to or mentioning the names of websites that encourage or glamorise suicide. Helpful websites offering support are listed at www.ias.ie and www.samaritans.org/ireland/links.
- Try to exercise care and judgment in the creation of news stories that will appear online, as they can often be surrounded by adverts and commentary which are outside the control of the author. Additional features on the page can create a negative context, allowing, for example, adverts promoting depression aids to appear alongside articles on mental health.
- Add hyperlinks to sources of support to ensure that people in distress can access useful resources quickly. Consider promoting www.samaritans.org within the UK and Ireland, or our worldwide equivalent, www.befrienders.org, beyond these regions.
- Webwise.ie is an internet safety initiative funded by the DES, focused on raising awareness of online safety issues and good practice among students, their parents/guardians and teachers. www.webwise.ie

Reader feedback

- The ability to comment on articles or blog posts gives readers the opportunity to glamorise suicide or present controversial opinions about suicidal tendencies and mental health. The relative anonymity of these comments can encourage debates that are inappropriate for a news website, and potentially damaging to other readers.
- Responsible websites ensure that the terms and conditions each commentator agrees to when contributing online are explicit in what constitutes inappropriate material, and how it will be dealt with. In addition, site owners and moderators should understand the implications of allowing these comments to be published on their website.
- Wherever possible, attempt to educate your audience to understand how to use the feedback section with full consideration for everyone's health, safety and wellbeing, and the right of the publisher to remove inappropriate content.
- Consider making it clear to users that feedback services are moderated, whether manually or electronically.

TEACHERS HELPING STUDENTS IN TIME OF CRISIS OR EMERGENCY

1. LISTEN 2.PROTECT 3.CONNECT 4.MODEL & 5.TEACH

THINK ABOUT your students' "DIRECT EXPERIENCE" with the event i.e. FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE of the event (physically experiencing or directly seeing it as it happens).

After the event, changes can happen in students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Your students may worry about family members, classmates, friends, or pets they care about, and may worry that it will happen again. Common reactions to crises and emergencies include trouble sleeping, problems at school and with friends, trouble concentrating and listening, and not finishing work. Your students may become more irritable, sad, angry, or worried as they think about what has happened, and as they experience recovery efforts after the event.

When students share their experiences, thoughts and feelings about the event, LISTEN for RISK FACTORS for adverse reactions.

Risk factors that may indicate a need for counselling referral for students include:

- loss of a family member, schoolmate, or friend observing serious injury or the death of another person
- family members or friends missing after the event, past traumatic experiences or losses getting hurt or becoming sick due to the event
- Home loss, family moves, changes in neighbourhoods/schools, and/or loss of belongings.

If a student has had any of these experiences, you may wish to consider referring her or him to the HSE services. Your NEPS psychologist will be available to provide support and advice. Now that you know what can affect your students after a disaster, school crisis, or emergency, you're ready to **Listen, Protect, Connect, and Model & Teach**

1. LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

The first step after an event is to listen and pay attention to what they say and how they act. Your students may also show their feelings in non-verbal ways, like increased behavioural problems or increased withdrawal.

Let your students know you are willing to listen and talk about the event, or to make referrals to talk to an appropriate professional, if they prefer it. Use the following questions to talk with your students. You can listen for clues that indicate when students are having a hard time. Write down a few examples that may be helpful to note:

- What might be preventing a student from coming to or staying in school?
- What might be preventing a student from paying attention or doing homework?
- What might be preventing a student from returning to other school based activities?

Listen, observe, and note any changes in:

- Behaviour and/or mood
- School performance
- Interactions with schoolmates and teachers

- Participation in school-based activities
- Behaviours at home that parents/guardians discuss with you.

LISTEN 2. **PROTECT**, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

You can help make your students feel better by doing some or all of the following:

- Answer questions simply and honestly, clearing up any confusion students may have about what happened
- Let your students know that they are not alone in their reactions
- Provide opportunities for your students to talk, draw, and play, but don't force it
- Talk to your students about what is being done by the school and community to keep everyone safe from harm
- Watch for anything in the environment that could re-traumatize your students Keep your eyes and ears open for bullying behaviours
- Maintain daily routines, activities and structure with clear expectations and consistent rules Make adjustments to assignments to be sensitive to students' current level of functioning Limit access to live television and the Internet that show disturbing scenes of the event Remember, what is not upsetting to adults may upset and confuse students, and vice versa
- Encourage students to "take a break" from the crisis focus with activities unrelated to the event Find ways for your students to feel helpful to your classroom, the school, and the community
- List other things you do that help your students feel better. Sharing this list with other teachers may increase ideas to help your students.

LISTEN, PROTECT **3.CONNECT**, MODEL & TEACH

Reaching out to people in your school and community will help your students after a school crisis or emergency. These connections will build strength for everyone. Consider ways to make some or all of the following connections:

- "Check in" with students on a regular basis
- Find resources that can be supportive to your students and staff
- Restore interactive school activities, including sports, club meetings, student projects, and student councils, coaches, etc.)
- Encourage student activities with friends, including class projects and extracurricular activities
- Empathise with your students by allowing a little more time for them to learn new materials
- Build on your students' strengths by encouraging them to find ways to help them use what they have learned in the past to help them deal with the event
- Remind your students that major disasters, crises, and emergencies are rare
- Discuss feeling safe and times they have felt safe

- List programs and activities that connect you and your students with the community
- Share your list with other teachers to create a larger list of activities and resources.

LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT **4.MODEL & TEACH**

As you help your students after a disaster, crisis, or emergency, your efforts may be more successful – and you may be less stressed – if you keep in mind:

- It is good to be aware of your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions, these can be seen and may affect your students
- How you cope and behave after an event will influence how your students cope and behave. Your students will be watching you for both verbal and non-verbal cues
- Monitor conversations that students may hear
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation, but demonstrate how people can come together to cope after such an event.

LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & **5.TEACH**

Talk to your students about expected reactions after a crisis (emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and physiological). There are “normal” reactions to abnormal events.

- Different people may have very different reactions, even within the same family
- After the event, people may also have different amounts of time they need to cope and adjust
- Encourage your students to identify and use positive coping strategies to help them after the event
- Help your students problem-solve to get through each day successfully
- Help your students set small “doable” goals and share in these achievements as “wins” for the students and your classroom
- Remind students that with time and assistance, things generally get better. If they don’t, they should let a parent or teacher know
- Over time, you, your students, their families, your classroom, can EXPECT RECOVERY.

Adapted by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) for Irish schools from Psychological First Aid materials developed by the American Red Cross (2014 and FEMA, see www.ready.gov). We acknowledge with thanks.

USEFUL WEBSITES AND HELPLINES FOR ACCESSING RESOURCES

NEPS has identified the following websites which schools may find helpful. However, all materials should be reviewed by school management to ensure that they conform to school ethos and policy before they are used.

TRAINING - www.nosp.ie

ASIST Training: ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) is a two-day interactive workshop in suicide first-aid. It is suitable for all kinds of caregivers - health workers, teachers, community workers, Gardaí, youth workers, volunteers, people responding to family, friends and co-workers. It is free of charge. If you'd like to make a difference in your community, you may wish to access ASIST training and learn how to help. Information can be obtained on the website of the National Office for Suicide Prevention.

Safe TALK: Safe TALK 'suicide alertness for everyone' is a half day training programme that prepares participants to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources. These specific skills are called suicide alertness and are taught with the expectation that the person learning them will use them to help reduce suicide risk in their communities. Participants learn how to provide practical help to persons with thoughts of suicide in only a few hours. Following a Safe TALK workshop you will be more willing and able to perform an important helping role for persons with thoughts of suicide.

WEBSITES

Barnardos provide resources and advice on www.barnardos.ie/resources, www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp

The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) is a multi-professional federation of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people. www.irishchildhoodbereavementnetwork.ie

Cruse Bereavement Care exists to promote the wellbeing of bereaved people and to enable anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

The Professional Development for Teachers (PDST) Health and Wellbeing Team provide support for teachers at primary and post-primary level in physical education (PE), social personal and health education (SPHE) which includes anti-bullying, child protection, mental health and wellbeing, relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and other SPHE related areas. Supports offered to schools include in-service for principals, co-ordinators, teachers of SPHE, whole staff groups; programme planning; school policy development; schools visits. www.pdst.ie.

The former SPHE Support Service has been integrated into the Health and Wellbeing team of the PDST. Visit www.sphe.ie for further information and to book post-primary SPHE courses.

The National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) was established to oversee the implementation of 'Reach Out' the National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention, and to co-ordinate suicide prevention efforts around the country. The NOSP works closely with the HSE Suicide Prevention Officers. Up-to-date contact details for suicide prevention officers can be found on the NOSP website www.nosp.ie

The Irish Association for Suicidology (IAS) sets out to be a forum for all individuals and voluntary groups involved in any aspect of suicidology for the exchange of knowledge gained from differing perspectives and experiences www.ias.ie

Irish Hospice Foundation - www.hospicefoundation.ie

Lifelines supports all people who are affected in anyway by self-injury within the United Kingdom and beyond. It supports people who self-injure, and their family and friends. www.selfharm.org

Winstonswish Foundation, help for grieving children and their families. www.winstonswish.org.uk

Resources and support for those dealing with suicide, depression or emotional distress, particularly teenagers and young adults. www.papyrus-uk.org

A national charity committed to improving the mental health of all children and young people. www.youngminds.org.uk

An Irish website covering all aspects of health, lifestyle, culture and craic. It's an online youth information centre, a magazine, a health clinic, a contact directory, a youth media forum a take action initiative, a community building place and lots more. www.spunout.ie

A site that focuses on issues relating to youth in Ireland today. www.youth.ie

An Australian site that helps young people through tough times. www.reachout.com.au

Mental Health Ireland aims to promote positive mental health and to actively support persons with a mental illness, their families and carers by identifying their needs and advocating their rights. The pro teen matters web magazine, which is created by young people for young people, has information about physical and mental health, frequently asked questions, competitions, jokes and stories. www.mentalhelathireland.ie

Non-judgemental information and support. www.gayswitchboard.ie

HELPLINES

Remind students that if they need someone to talk to, at any time of the day or night, they can ring either:

Childline: 1800 666 666 (free calls)

The Samaritans: 1850 60 90 90 (Local call cost)

CHECKLIST FOR REVIEWING THE POLICY AND PLAN

Has serious consideration been given to the school's approach to prevention?	
Has the school defined a critical incident and given examples?	
Have key roles been clearly identified and the assigned tasks outlined?	
Have staff members been nominated to each of the assigned roles/tasks?	
Are the personnel suitable?	
Has each member of the team compiled their emergency pack (photocopies of relevant hand-outs)?	
Has contact been made with external agencies?	
Is the Emergency Contact List (Section 11, R21) appropriate and complete?	
Are letters and press releases readily available on school headed paper, for adaptation to suit the particular circumstances?	
Are telephone numbers on contact lists up-to-date?	
Have all the staff been consulted about the plan/policy?	
Has a date been set for a review of the plan?	
Who will be given copies of the plan?	
Where will copies of the plan be kept?	
Have parents been consulted about the plan?	
Have the students been consulted about the plan?	