



Coláiste na Carráige

**Critical Incident
Management Plan**

Coláiste na Carraige aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The mission statement states that the school welcomes all members of the community and strives for excellence in delivering holistic educational services and supports based on the principles of respect, co-operation and partnership. The Board of Management, through the Principal, has drawn up the following critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policies and plans.

Definition

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school.

There are different critical incidents that may effect a school e.g.:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- An accident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, explosion, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.

Aim

The aim of this Critical Incident Management Plan is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident and to enable the school to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that the appropriate support is offered to students and staff. It is also aimed that this plan would help to ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited and that there would be a return to normality as soon as possible. In drafting this plan the school has used and consulted the National

Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) publication 'Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines for schools'.

Ethos

At all times this school aims to have a supporting and caring ethos. Measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community are in place eg:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Student Support Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Extra Curricular Activities Policy

A Critical Incident Management Team has been established. This includes the following:

- Principal,
- Deputy Principal,
- Student Support Co-ordinator
- SPHE Co-ordinator
- Guidance Counsellor
- Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
- Other member of the Student Support Team
- Caretaker
- School Administrator
- Chairperson of BOM
- Chairperson of Parents Association

This team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. In the absence of the Principal the Deputy Principal automatically assumes the role of Team Leader.

Roles

There are a number of roles which members of the team will undertake:

Team Leader - Principal

Garda Liaison – Principal
NEPS Liaison- Deputy Principal
Staff Liaison – Principal/Deputy Principal
Student Liaison – Guidance Counsellor
Parent Liaison – Principal/Deputy Principal
Community Liaison – Chairperson of BOM and Chairperson of
Parents Association
Media Liaison - Principal
Administrator

Tasks and Person Responsible

- Maintain an up-to-date list of contact telephone numbers. Administrator (See Appendix 1) This list needs to be easily accessible and regularly updated.
- Compile Emergency Information for school trips. Teacher in Charge
- Prepare templates for letters to parents(See Appendix 2) and media (See Appendix 3). Team Leader
- Administration in the course of an Incident. Deputy Principal and Administrator

Establish Facts

It is crucial that the school authorities/management/staff has the correct information regarding any crisis. Who? What? When? and Where? Therefore it is important that the Critical Incident Management Team gather to establish the facts, this may involve contacting others such as hospitals, Gardaí, parents.

Response Plan

The Critical Incident Management Team need to agree a plan of action, which may involve:

- Assigning tasks within the group eg Identifying High Risk Students.
- Alerting outside agencies.
- Appointing someone to deal with phone enquiries – Administrator.
- Organising timetable for the day – Deputy Principal.
- Agreeing a common statement with regard to the crisis.

- Liaising with those at an accident site (e.g. in the case of an out of school crisis).
- Organising the supervision of students.
- Informing staff.
- Informing students.
- Contacting parents.
- Visiting the home of the bereaved, if appropriate.
- Organising Support eg Prayer Service.

Inform

It is vital that all those needing information receive it as soon as is practicable. It is helpful if a common statement is agreed when informing students and others. Such a statement will reduce the spread of rumour. Attempt to alert and inform staff in the first instance. If at all possible, the students should be told at the same time in no larger than normal class size.

The statement should:

- be communicated in a sensitive manner
- give the facts as they are known
- highlight the supports that will be available
- indicate the actions that are planned

In the case where an accident has occurred on a school trip, a similar statement is needed to assist those who will be telephoning relatives. It is preferable to have a group of people involved so that all concerned are informed in or around the same time. One should be mindful of some or all of the following considerations, when contacting parents:

- ❖ enquire if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support
- ❖ carefully review with the parent that the information given has been fully understood
- ❖ offer any practical help needed - transport, phone numbers, contact names

Others to be Informed

When possible inform the ETB & chairperson of the Board of Management and decide whether an emergency meeting of the Board is necessary. Consider when, or if it is appropriate to inform the school's insurance company and other concerned agencies.

Liaising with the Press

Should there be enquiries from the press & radio, it is important that the school cater for this possibility by nominating **one person** who is competent to deal in this area. In preparing a press statement, thought should be given to the following suggestions:

- priority to be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis
- the non-release of names, addresses and telephone numbers
- rely on facts and avoid speculation
- consider likely questions and a response to them
- agree with the press a time for briefings if this is necessary in an ongoing situation
- nominate a specific location for press briefings – Meeting Room

Short-term Actions

The actions that are needed in the short term will be very dependent on the nature of the crisis. The following are suggested.

1. Students

- ❖ Try to sustain an atmosphere where it is 'okay' to talk about the experience. This will require the availability of staff and others. It will entail sensitivity to the time needed for such sharing. Care should be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.
- ❖ The Critical Incident Management Team needs to put in place a support system for students. This may involve: those staff who are willing to offer support, time and resources for staff to carry out this role, outside professionals if required, a method of supporting each

other in this role and a review of the effectiveness of the support system.

- ❖ Parents need to be able to contact the school if they have information that will help the school in any way in caring for their child.

- ❖ Attention needs to be given to the possible signs of distress being exhibited by students. It is important that staff can check-out signs with others before drawing conclusions.

- ❖ Students need to be asked their 'permission' regarding discussing their feelings and reactions to a crisis. The guidance counsellor is a key person in addressing the needs of individual students.

- ❖ Freedom to be upset is important for anyone responding to a trauma. The school needs to create a safe atmosphere for this to occur.

- ❖ Students, not directly involved, may also be affected. Allowing students to express their sympathy can be a catalyst for such students - writing a card, attending a service.

- ❖ Constant reminders will need to be given in relation to the supports that are available, that students will react in different ways and at different times.

- ❖ Focus on the friends of a bereaved student as they can be the best source of support. Often the bereaved student may not wish to speak to an adult and may rely heavily on friends. These friends may need support as they attempt to find ways to be of help.

- ❖ In the event of a funeral or other services, involvement of the school requires some planning. The families involved need to be consulted, the students invited to take part, time given to prepare for this participation and finally, a debriefing of those concerned. Students should be carefully consulted as to the nature of such a

service. Such an experience may also be of great benefit to staff and parents.

2. Staff

- ❖ Staff, following a trauma, will be given an opportunity to air their feelings and reactions at a debriefing meeting.
- ❖ Staff directly involved with a trauma will be offered support from the Student Support Team and professional help if required.
- ❖ Staff who feel that they are unable to be involved in the school's direct response to the trauma will be able to opt out.
- ❖ Those staff having any concerns about students or others in relation to the trauma will have access to personnel who can assist them.
- ❖ The guidance counsellor and other members of the pastoral care team will be the key resource in the short and medium term response. They will be facilitated, resourced and supported in their task. They will regularly meet with the principal to review progress.
- ❖ The principal will also need to ensure (s)he is receiving support.

3. Parents

- ❖ The school will have some role to play in supporting parents concerned with a trauma. This will vary depending on the nature of the crisis and the resources available to the school.
- ❖ The school will provide contact people for parents to liaise with, particularly in regard to monitoring the progress of their children.
- ❖ The school will put parents in contact with each other if it is appropriate.
- ❖ Discuss with involved parents and/or the parent's council what action can be taken to support those concerned.

- ❖ Involve parents in a school service following a tragedy.

Medium and Long-term Actions

The following are a selection of the possibilities worthy of consideration.

- ❖ Students returning to school after a major accident or bereavement cannot easily be categorised in terms of their needs. The student support team will be a useful resource in seeking to support each student appropriately. Care should be taken to monitor: the relationships with peers and teachers; falling behind in academic and other work; involvement in extra-curricular activities.
- ❖ Consider if a special day of reflection/retreat would benefit the class affected by a tragedy.
- ❖ Consider offering a workshop to students. Bereavement related groups may be a resource to the school in responding to the medium to long term needs of young people and adults in the school community most affected by a tragedy.
- ❖ The pastoral care team will benefit all in the school by constantly reviewing the needs of students, staff and parents in relation to issues of trauma.
- ❖ A review of curricular provision, specialist staff training and links with outside agencies in the area of change, loss, death and crisis issues should be considered.
- ❖ If a subsequent bereavement occurs in the school setting, take care to support those who were bereaved previously as this subsequent trauma may trigger deep emotional reactions.

❖ Consider having an annual remembrance service for all those connected to the school community who have died. Students, staff and parents can be encouraged to record the names of those they would like remembered.

❖ Consider the dedication of a tree, special garden, piece of artwork, notice board to recall those that have died.

Review

It is vital to review procedures in the light of experience. It is most helpful to take time to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and procedures subsequent to their application. It will also be supportive to contact other schools and professionals to assess courses of action both proposed and taken.

This Critical Incident Management Plan has been approved and ratified by the Board of Management of Coláiste na Carraige.

Signed:

Signed:

Chairperson

Principal

Date _____

Date _____

Review Date _____