

Curragh Post Primary School

Introduction and Scope of this Policy:

This document sets out the policy of Curragh Post Primary School in respect of the procedures and practices that the school wishes to implement in responding to a Critical Incident in the school community.

Relationship to school's Mission / Vision / Aims:

Curragh Post Primary School's Mission Statement is as follows:

Our School values the gifts and talents of students and staff in their development in an atmosphere of equity, caring and mutual respect. Can we achieve this? Yes, we can. Is Feidir Linn.

This Critical Incident Policy is another important framework within which “the development of whole people, empowered to lead effective lives in the wider society” is enhanced in our school. The dignity of each student, staff member and parent / guardian is honoured and reflected in school policies and structures, including this policy.

This policy is informed by the school's Mission Statement which commits us to preparing all students for the challenges of adolescent and adult life and to respecting the dignity, worth and individuality of every member of the school community. The school's role in the development of young people supports and is enriched by the active participation of teachers and parents / guardians in many aspects of students' lives.

Rationale:

This Critical Incident Policy aims to ensure that appropriate opportunities and procedures are in place to enable the school

- to respond appropriately and consistently to “critical incidents”;
- to provide support and care to our students at time of personal and collective emotional difficulty;
- to ensure that the school staff are able, in as far as is practicable, to support students affected by the Critical Incident(s);
- to ensure that the school staff are supported in their personally and professionally and
- to ensure that parents / guardians are informed and supported / advised as fully as possible at the time the Critical Incident occurs.

Goals:

The school shall have in place appropriate means and processes

- to inform staff, students, parents / guardians and others as appropriate about the Critical Incident;
- to respond, as a school community, appropriately to the Critical Incident;
- to advise, guide and support the members of the school community at the time of the Critical Incident and in its aftermath.

School Policy and Practice:

It is the school's policy to handle all Critical Incidents with sensitivity and respect for all involved, either directly or indirectly, in the Incident or its aftermath.

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Critical Incident Response:

Curragh Post Primary School aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The key to managing a critical incident is planning. The Board of Management, through the Principal, has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan (C.I.M.P.) as one element of the school's policies and plans.

The school has appointed a Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T.) which will take responsibility for implementing this Critical Incident Policy and managing the situation as it arises.

What is a "Critical Incident?"

The staff and management of Curragh Post Primary School 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. Types of incidents might include

- the death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death;
- An intrusion into the school;
- An accident involving members of the school community;
- An accident / tragedy in the wider community;
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc and
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

Aim of the Critical Incident Management Plan:

The aim of the C.I.M.P. is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Review and Research:

The Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T.) reviews and notes, as appropriate, the resource documents provided to schools as well as the publications listed as follows:

When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools (I.N.T.O. / Ulster Teachers Union 2000)

Responding to Critical Incidents; guidelines for Schools (N.E.P.S. 2007)

Guidelines for Schools on How to Respond to the Sudden Unexpected Death of a Student (A.S.T.I. 1997)

Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (I.A.S., National Suicide Review Group 2002)

Creation of a Coping, Supportive and Caring Ethos in the School:

We have put systems in place to help to 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.

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Physical Safety

The school has a detailed Health & Safety Statement that is reviewed annually by the Board of Management and distributed to all staff members.

- An Evacuation Plan has been formulated and an information leaflet explaining how to leave the building and what escape route to use has been left in all rooms for staff, students and visitors to follow;
- Regular fire drills take place, at least one per term;
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked by external professionals as well as the school's caretaking staff;
- While the school opens at 8.15 a.m., parents / guardians are advised in writing at the start of each school year, by the Principal, on behalf of the Board, that pre school supervision begins at 8.30 a.m. and remains in place for twenty minutes after the end of the school day.

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of Curragh Post Primary School 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.

Some examples are:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as grief and loss; communication skills, stress and anger management; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role in S.P.H.E.
- The formal S.P.H.E. curriculum is taught to all Junior Cycle classes in one 40 minute period each week.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures. Handouts in relation to the above are distributed by the Principal at the start of each school year and reminders are given at staff meetings / briefings, etc.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the post primary school student are available through the school's Guidance Counsellor and Chaplain.
- Information is provided to staff on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and some are trained in interventions for suicidal students.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies – the local Gardai and the H.S.E.
- Talks to students by external personnel, such as psychologists, members of the caring / supportive professions / voluntary agencies, etc. are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content and the expertise of the providers.
- The Board of Management has devised and approved a clear Student Anti Bullying Policy and deals with bullying (and allegations of bullying) in accordance with this policy.
- The Board of Management has accepted and approved the nationally agreed Staff Anti Bullying Policy and deals with bullying (and allegations of bullying) in accordance with this policy.
- There is a pastoral care system in place in the school (Please refer to the school's Pastoral Care Policy for further information).

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- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. 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
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T.)

A Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T.) has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team are the Principal, Deputy Principal and Guidance Counsellor. The members of the team will meet regularly 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 plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Preparation of Critical Incident Management Plan (C.I.M.P.)

Roles

Particular members of the Critical Incident Management Team have been assigned roles. The key roles which need to be covered are as follows:

- Team Leader
- Garda Liaison
- Staff Liaison
- Media Liaison
- Student Liaison
- Administrator
- Community / Agency Liaison
- Parent / Guardian Liaison

Team Leader (School Principal)

The Team Leader (Principal) will carry out a number of roles such as:

- Alerting the team members to the crisis and convene a meeting;
- Co-ordinating the tasks of the team;
- Liaising with the Board of Management; D.E.S.; N.E.P.S.; S.E.C. and
- Liaising with the bereaved family.

Garda Liaison

The Team Leader (Principal) will

- Liaise with the Gardai and
- Ensure that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison

The Team Leader (Principal) will

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions and outlines the routines for the day;
- Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students;
- Provide materials for staff (from their Critical Incident folder);
- Keep staff updated as the day progresses;
- Be alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually and
- Advise them of the availability of the E.A.S. (Employee Assistance Service) and give them the contact number.

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Media Liaison

The Team Leader (Principal) will

- In advance of an incident, 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, liaise where necessary with the SEC; relevant teacher unions, etc. and
- If agreed by the C.I.M.T., draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management, in consultation with the Chairperson, Board of Management).

In the absence of the Team Leader (School Principal), the Deputy Principal will act as Team Leader.

Student Liaison

Under the direction of the Team Leader (Principal), the Deputy Principal will

- Co-ordinate information from Year Heads and staff members about students they are concerned about;
- Alert other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately);
- Provide materials for students (from the critical incident folder);
- Keep records of students seen by external agency staff and
- Look after setting up and supervision of “quiet” room where agreed

Administrator

Under the direction of the Team Leader (Principal), the Deputy Principal will

- Maintain up to date telephone numbers of
 - Parents or Guardians
 - Teachers and other Staff Members and
 - Emergency services;
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to;
- Ensure that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation;
- Send out letters, emails and faxes, the content of which will be approved by the Team Leader (Principal);
- Photocopy materials needed and
- Maintain records.

Community / Agency Liaison

Under the direction of the Team Leader (Principal), the Guidance Counsellor will

- Maintain up to date lists of contact numbers of :
 - Key parents / guardians, such as members of the Parents’ Council and
 - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources;
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral;
- Be alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support;
- Co-ordinate the involvement of these agencies;
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges and
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies.

Parent / Guardian Liaison

Under the direction of the Team Leader (Principal), the school Chaplain will

- Visit the bereaved family with the Team Leader;
- Arrange parent / guardian meetings, if held;
- Facilitate such meetings, and manage “questions and answers”. These meetings will be addressed by the Team Leader;
- Manage the “consent” issues in accordance with agreed school policy;

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- Ensure that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation;
- Set up room for meetings with parents / guardians;
- Maintain a record of parents / guardians seen;
- Meet with individual parents / guardians and
- Provide appropriate materials for parents / guardians (from the Critical Incident folder).

Record keeping

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

The school's secretarial staff will have key roles in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

Critical Incident Management

Short Term Actions – Day 1

| Task | Name |
|--|-------------|
| Gather Accurate Information – Who? What? Where? When? | |
| Convene a CMIT Meeting – specify time and place clearly | |
| Contact External Agencies | |
| Arrange Supervision of Students | |
| Hold Staff Meeting | All Staff |
| Agree Schedule for the Day | |
| Inform Students (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately) | |
| Compile a list of vulnerable students | |
| Contact / Visit the bereaved family | |
| Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media | |
| Inform Parents / Guardians | |
| Hold end of day staff briefing | |

Medium Term Actions – Day 2 and Following Days

| Task | Name |
|---|-------------|
| Convene a CMIT Meeting – specify time and place clearly – to review the events of day 1 | Team Leader |
| Meet External Agencies | |
| Meet Whole Staff | All Staff |
| Arrange support for Students / Staff / Parents and Guardians | |
| Visit the bereaved / injured | |
| Liaise with the bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements, etc. | |
| Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service, etc. | |

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|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Make decisions about school closure | Board of Management / V.E.C. |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|

Follow Up Actions – Beyond 72 Hours

| Task | Name |
|---|-------------|
| Monitor Students for signs of continuing distress | |
| Liaise with agencies regarding referrals | |
| Plan for the return of bereaved student(s) | |
| Plan for giving of a <i>Memory Box</i> to bereaved family | |
| Decide on memorials and anniversaries | |
| Review response to incident and amend plan | |

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

The management and staff of Curragh Post Primary School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind and will seek to ensure that students do so, also. For instance, the term “suicide” will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases “tragic death” or “sudden death” may be used instead. Similarly, the word “murder” should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term “violent death” may be used instead.

Critical Incident Room(s)

In the event of a critical incident, the Staff Room will be the main room used to meet the staff, while specific rooms will be used for meetings with students, parents / guardians, media, for individual sessions with students and or other visitors.

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

All staff were consulted 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 and plan 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 plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Deputy Principal.

The plan will be updated annually in the month of either September or October.

What can Parents / Guardians do?

The school is a supportive organisation in respect of the primary educators – parents / guardians. Our efforts to provide holistic education, in its various forms, are most meaningful and effective when parents / guardians both understand and support our aims and activities. Parents / guardians should work with the school and maintain open positive lines of communication and mutual support in order to provide advice and support to students at times of Critical Incidents and in their aftermath.

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEMPLATE FOR SCHOOL PLAN
Critical Incident Management Team

