

Ballinamore Community School

School Policy on responding to Critical Incidents

Aims

The aim of this policy is to enable the school community to respond in a structured and effective manner to a critical incident.

Defining a Critical Incident

An incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school. For example:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, terminal illness or suicide.
- An accident on the school premises.
- A physical attack on one or more of the school community.
- An intrusion into the school.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, or vandalism.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident in the wider community.

Critical Incident Management Team

The Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Pastoral Care Team Year Head, Class Tutor and School Chaplain. This team will meet as soon as possible and address the following: gathering accurate information and deciding what will be passed on and to whom, deciding on the school routine for the first day and subsequent days.

Resource Documents

Resource Documents are attached to this policy and may be consulted by teachers for further guidelines in dealing with critical incidents including suicide.

SHORT TERM - DAY 1

Information

As much accurate information concerning the incident will be accumulated. This may come from the teachers, students, family, community, local clergy or Gardai. The families right to privacy must be respected and so any information will have to be assessed before being passed on to students.

Decision on school routine for first day and subsequent days

As far as possible, normal routines will be maintained. The Principal and Deputy Principal will inform the staff of the tragedy. The Year Head, Class Tutor and subject teachers of the student will meet and decide on procedures in detail. The Principal will inform each class of the incident. On the day of the announcement and on the next two days it may, at times, be preferable, to allow students to talk to each other, to listen to them and not to teach.

Individual and Class Trauma

The nature of the event will have an influence on how the students are informed. Friends and classmates of the deceased student may be in need of particular care and so the Career Guidance teacher, the Chaplain and subject teachers should be more available to them. It may be necessary to have individuals or a small group who are particularly upset meet with teachers in a private setting. Some parents may have to be contacted and the students brought home.

Contact with the bereaved family

The critical incident management team will advise on the most appropriate time and means of making contact with the bereaved family.

The Media

The main concern with any media interest is that the privacy of the bereaved family be respected and that their trauma not be increased. One person will be designated, as spokesperson and one written statement will be prepared. This will express sorrow of the school community at the death of one of its members. Sympathy will be extended to the family. The statement should be simple, factual and brief. All staff should be made aware of the statement.

Day 1

- An SMS text will be sent to all parents informing them of the incident.
- An additional text will be sent to parents of the year concerned informing them of the incident, that counselling will be offered to their students and offering them an opportunity for their sons/daughters to opt out of such counselling.
- For year group concerned the following changes to the timetable may be appropriate:
- Class 1 & Class 2 Talk of event and those involved with Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, Class Teacher in attendance.
- Class 3 Write feelings on paper and place in envelope to be sealed. class teacher in attendance.
- Class 4 & Class 5 Prepare mass, hymns, readings - class teacher in attendance
- Class 6 Mass
- Class 7 & Class 8 Normal Class
- Class 9 Group session with Guidance counsellor, Chaplain, and or other professionals. Class teacher in attendance.

MEDIUM TERM – DAYS 2-3

Day 2 For year group concerned - first 20 minutes prayer service/light candles. Thereafter class as normal as possible.

Social Media

Advise - don't post
- don't create page.

Review

The Critical Incident Management Team to review the previous 24 hours
Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students

Will support meetings be necessary?

Be sensitive as to how staff are coping on a personal and on a professional level.

Liaise with the family regarding removal and funeral arrangements

The students who were in the deceased student's year should be encouraged to attend the removal and funeral. A guard of honour on both occasions may be required. Some may wish to participate in the service, prayers of the faithful, singing, offertory procession. All this would have to be carried out in full consultation with the family.

School Closure

If it is felt that the school should be closed for a day then the school management will decide in consultation with the Department of Education and Science.

Counselling

Some students and teachers may be in need of professional counselling. If this is the case with a student the parents of the student should first be contacted and the circumstances explained. If parents feel that professional counselling is needed they may decide to arrange this themselves. The school may be able to point them in the direction of the services available from the Community Care Office of the North Western Health Board or from NEPS (The National Educational Psychological Service). The Pastoral Care Team may consider it necessary to obtain the assistance of this resource for the staff and/or for a particular class and to invite them to the school.

LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

If, over a prolonged period of time a student displays any of the following he/she may be in need of assistance: uncharacteristic behaviour, deterioration in work, inappropriate emotional reactions, increased absenteeism. Physical symptoms – e.g. weight loss/gain, deterioration in appearance, tiredness.

Anniversaries

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries and be sensitive to significant days such as birthdays.

Evaluation of the Critical Incident Management Plan

This involves an analysis by the Critical Incident Management Team of the actions taken. Staff, students and parents can be consulted in this process.