



Critical Incident Policy



CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

This Critical Incident Policy is divided into seven parts:

1. Aim
2. Definition of a Critical Incident
3. Organisational / Administrative Tasks
4. Critical Incident: Procedures to be followed
5. Critical Incident: Roles and responsibilities
6. Evaluation of Critical Incident response
7. Appendices

1. Aim

The aim of this policy is to provide a plan that enables St. Munchin's College to manage a critical incident and to cope effectively in the aftermath of such an incident.

2. Definition

A Critical Incident is defined as **any incident or sequence of events, which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the normal running of the school.**

Such an incident could involve

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness, assault or suicide.
- A serious accident involving pupils /staff on or off the school premises.
- Serious damage to the school building.

3. Organisational / Administrative Tasks

Tasks listed below to be undertaken / ongoing to facilitate an effective response in the event of a critical incident:

- Maintain a list of addresses and phone numbers of students.
- Class tutors to update information on their classes each term.
- Staff contact details available from Principal, Deputy Principal and office.
- Principal and Deputy Principal contact number available to staff.



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- Emergency contact list of all support services displayed in staff room and all offices
- Staff organising trips and tours to compile list of all students and staff involved. List to contain phone numbers and medical information of students involved. A copy of the list of students and relevant data should be left with the principal, Deputy Principal and in the office.
- Fire drills to be carried out twice a year. Evacuation procedures displayed in every classroom, office and hall.
- The school will provide opportunities for staff, members of the BOM and parent reps to attend training events on issues such as suicide, bereavement and first aid.
- Members of the critical incident team are as per Appendix 1.

4. Critical incident: procedures to be followed

Some or all of these actions will be necessary depending on the nature, location and time of the incident

Short Term Actions (1st day)

- Ensure the safety of students, staff and visitors.
- Convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Team and delegate responsibilities.
- Gather accurate information.
- Identify high risk students.
- Contact appropriate individuals and agencies to organize support where appropriate.
- Contact the DES and the BOM as necessary.
- Arrange for the supervision of students.
- Hold a staff meeting and distribute resource material.
- Organise a timetable for the day.
- Inform students and parents / guardians.
- Make contact with the affected / bereaved family.
- Report to the Health and Safety Authority, if necessary.
- Plan visits to those affected.
- *As far as possible the school will maintain its normal routine and schedule.*
- *See Appendix 4 for Possible Agenda for First Meeting Of Critical Incident Management Team*



Medium term actions (24-72 hours)

- Convene a meeting of the critical incident management team to review the events of the first 24 hours and to delegate responsibilities.
- Arrange support for students and staff.
- Update staff and students.
- Liaise with affected family.
- Plan visits to the injured.
- Plan for the reintegration of students and staff.

Long term actions

- Monitor students and staff for signs of continuing distress.
- Plan the long term counselling needs of individuals.
- Plan for anniversaries and memorials.
- Evaluate the school's response (*see Feedback Form – Appendix 11*)
- Ensure new staff are aware of Critical Incident Policy and are informed of which staff / students were affected in any recent incident.
- Report to The Trustees, BOM, Staff, Parents' Association, and the DES as appropriate.

5. Critical Incident: Roles and Responsibilities

Below are listed roles and responsibilities that will be normally undertaken in the event of a Critical Incident

The Principal and Deputy Principal will be responsible for:

- Communication with parents of students involved or affected.
- Liaising with media.
- The care of and communication with staff.
- Organising the supervision of students.
- Liaising with the administrative, caretaking and other non-teaching staff.
- Communicating with the Parents Council.
- Liaising with the external support agencies, the emergency services, the Board of Management, the Trustees and the Department of Education and Skills.
- Drawing up a letter informing all parents of the critical incident and schools response if necessary (*See Appendix 5 for sample letters*).

The year head(s) and class tutor(s) will be responsible for:

- The care of and communication with the students in their year group.
- Identifying and monitoring students at risk and making appropriate referrals.
- Gathering accurate information about the incident (*See Appendix 8 re breaking news to students/ classroom session*).



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The Guidance Counsellor and the chaplain will be responsible for:

- The care of students and staff immediately involved or affected.
- The care of distressed visitors.
- Providing rooms for debriefing parents, quiet rooms and counselling.
- Liaising with support agencies.

The administration staff will be responsible for:

- Ensuring the office is open and running at all times.
- Keeping a telephone line free for outgoing and important incoming calls.
- Liaising with the Principal, Deputy Principal and other members of the Critical Incident Team.

The caretaking staff will be responsible for:

- Controlling access to the school premises.
- Maintaining security procedures and services.
- Liaising with the Principal, Deputy Principal and other members of the Critical Incident Team.

The teaching staff will be responsible for:

- Supervising their own and colleagues classes.
- Assisting in identifying and supporting students at risk or in distress and making appropriate referrals to Guidance Counsellor and Chaplain.
- Maintaining normal procedures and schedules in as far as is possible.
- Being mindful of their role in creating a safe atmosphere where students are free to be upset.

Other non-teaching staff will be responsible for:

- Maintaining normal procedures.
- Assisting in and identifying and supporting students at risk or in distress and notifying Principal, Chaplain or Guidance Counsellors.

The student prefects will contribute by:

- Identifying and supporting students at risk or in distress by informing teaching staff, Chaplain or Guidance Counsellors.
- Representing students concerns and wishes re the schools response to the critical incident.



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The members of the Parents Council will contribute by:

- Representing parents' concerns and wishes re the schools response to the critical incident.

6. Monitoring, review and evaluation.

The critical incident policy will be reviewed annually. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, legislation, and feedback from parents / guardians, teachers and students. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review. See Appendix 11 for Evaluation/Feedback Form.

7. Appendices

- 1. Critical Incident Team
- 2. Year Head/ Tutor List
- 3. Teachers Phone Contact List
- 4. Possible Agenda for First Meeting of Critical Incident Team
- 5. Sample letter to parents / guardians.
- 6. Sample Statement to Media
- 7. Sample letter requesting advance parental agreement to child being seen by outside agency
- 8. Suggested Guidelines for teachers on breaking news to Students
- 9. Plan of a classroom Session following News of a Critical Incident
- 10. Information Sheet about Online Memorial Profiles
- 11. Feedback/Evaluation Form on Critical Incident Management



**Critical Incident Team
2023-24**

Leadership:

**Mr. David Quilter
(Principal)**

Communication:

**Ms. Lorraine Shiels
(Deputy Principal)**

Student Liaison:

**Mr. John O'Neill
(School Counsellor)**

Chaplaincy:

**Fr. Richie Davern
(P.P. St.Nicholas Parish)**

**Mr. Thomas Conneely
(School Chaplain)**

BOM:

**Mrs. Marion Cummins
(Chairperson)**



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Year Heads & Tutors 2023/ 2024

| Year | Year Head | Tutor | Tutor Time |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 1st | Ms. A. Bourke | Darwin 1-Ms. Brid O' Sullivan Glynn Edison 1-Mrs. K. Fahy Fleming 1-Mr. J. O' Neill Galileo 1-Mr. E. Rowley/ Ms. E. Behan | C5 C7 A3 C11 |
| 2nd | Ms.J. Ryan | Galvin 2- Ms. L. O'Donoghue Lawlor 2- Ms. O. Hayes Murphy 2- Mr. P. English O' Riada 2- Ms. R. Kinahan | B3 BComp B4 B2 |
| 3rd | Ms.B.Ni Fhlatharta | Hamilton 3 – Ms. N. Mullally Laffey 3 –Ms. K. Darcy Stokes 3– Mr. P. Horan Thompson 3- Mr. T. O' Connell | C9 B9 CComp ABIOL |
| 4th (TY) | Mr P. Whelan Mr A. Coleman | TY 1 – Ms. H. O' Sullivan TY 2 – Ms. O. Cumisky TY 3 – Mr. D. Hyland TY 4 – Ms. C. Collins | C8 B6 Demo Room B1 |
| 5th | Mr. K. Kelly | LC 1.1-Ms. J. Collopy LC 1.2-Ms. J. Fay LC 1.3-Ms. C. O' Connor LC 1.4-Mr. C. McMahon LCA 1- Ms. N. Clancy | B8 A2 C10 A1 Library |
| 6th | Mr. C. Barrett | LC 2.1- Ms. D. Collins LC 2.2-Ms. T. Collins LC 2.3-Ms. E. Quilter LC 2.4-Ms. S. McGeer LC 2.5-Ms. S. Galvin LCA 2-Mr. Kennedy | C6 B7 C2 BChem B10 A Comp |



Possible Agenda for First Meeting of Critical Incident Management Team

- Agreement re a statement of facts for staff, students, parents and the media.
- Delegation of responsibilities to the SST
- Discussion concerning what support services to contact.
- Preparation (Possibly written) of statement to staff.
- Preparation (possibly written) of statements to students.
- Preparation (possibly written) of statement to media.
- Contact members of BOM/VEC.
- Consider the issue of school closure.
- Organise the schedule/timetable for the day.
- Ensure that a phone line remains open for the day and available for enquiries.
- Appoint someone to handle phone enquiries (and deal with the media?).
- Organise a staff meeting (possible after school).
- Organise the supervision of students during any staff meetings.
- Prepare a letter for parents.
- Copy and print letters for parents.



Sample Letters to Parents/Guardians

Sudden / Accidental Death

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (*the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.*) of **Name of student(s)**. We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost).

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 that he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their age. You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings.

All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or to 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 reactions. Over the course of the days to come, 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.

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

Principal's signature



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Violent Death

Dear Parents,

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened. *(Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).*

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, who is the brother of _____, 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 have 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 and, where necessary, to talk to students. This support will continue to be available for *(if appropriate insert how long)*.

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.

(If planned) A support meeting for parents is planned for *(date, time and place)*. At that time we can talk further about how to help ourselves and our children.

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

Sincerely
Principal's name



Sample Statement for the Media

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 have 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



Appendix 7

Sample letter requesting advance parental agreement to child being seen by outside agency

This letter can be used as a template for schools which decide to seek advance parental consent so that a child may be seen by a NEPS psychologist (in a group or individually) in the aftermath of a critical incident. It is to cater for the situation where parents cannot be immediately contacted.

Dear Parent,

(..... *name of school*) has developed a plan for responding when a tragedy occurs.

When such an event happens, schools are offered support by psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), an agency of the Department of Education and Science.

If we feel it is necessary, we would like to be in a position to have your child seen by the psychologist who can offer advice and support. Before any child is seen by a NEPS psychologist parental consent is usually required. We will make every effort to obtain this. However, in the unlikely event of being unable to contact you, we are writing to seek your consent to your child being seen by a member of NEPS as part of our school's immediate response. This is to allow us to support your child in the best way possible.

Your child may be seen individually, in a small group or as part of a class group.

If you wish to discuss this, please contact me at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Principal's name

The school will assume your agreement if you do not return this slip stating that you **do not wish** to have your child seen by a NEPS psychologist. Please fill in the form below and return to.....

I have read this letter and **I do not wish** to be seen by the NEPS psychologist.

Parent / Guardian: _____

Date: _____



Suggested Guidelines for Teachers

- Only when the incident is confirmed by the family, can it be relayed to the students.
- The Class of the student who has died should be the first to be informed with the Chaplain, Counsellor and Tutor present.
- Other classes should be informed by their Year- Heads.
- Not every class is going to be traumatised as some students may not even know the deceased. It is important to acknowledge the loss for the whole college community.
- Tell the class you have sad news and that it is difficult for you to do this.
- Let them know the name of the person.
- Let them know the facts – rumours should be prevented as far as possible.
- Encourage them to ask questions.
- Let the class know the common reactions to tragic news.
- The initial reaction is shock and disbelief followed by sadness.
- Don't allow a student to leave the class in a distressed state unless they are supervised. Let them know that you support them.
- Let them know who else is available to support them (School Counsellor, Chaplain, Year Head, Tutor, Principal, Deputy Principal,...).
- Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news.
- Allow them time to mingle and talk to one another in groups.
- Explain how they can support one another.
- Be attentive to identifying those who are not coping well with the news.
- Let them know where the Crisis Response Team will be situated, possibly the Chaplain's Office, Prayer Room, Library, Designated Classroom etc.
- Arrange to have refreshments available (also boxes of tissues).
- A short prayer or time of reflection for the deceased is generally appropriate.
- A Year Group Assembly may be held later in the day.
- Some students may be able to go to class and may wish to carry on as normal.
- Some students will need to stay with a member of the Crisis Response Team for the morning.
- Encourage students to stay in school to support their friends. Some may need to go home – only if parents can collect them and ensure supervision at home.
- Those who go to class may not be able to concentrate on the work of the class.
- Subject Teachers will need to make allowances for them to talk in groups.



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 or the psychologist may work with them and 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 and 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 be 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: Empowerment
- Step 6: Closure
- Step 7: Free Time
- Step 8: Recovery

Step 1: Giving the facts and dispelling rumours:

Tell the students in a calm, low key and factual voice

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- When it happened
- The plan for the day



Sample Script

I have something very sad I want to share with you. The factual information agreed upon by the staff e.g. is: *(Name of Student)*, who attends our school and was missing, has been found. 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 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.

Step 2: Sharing Stories

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, or for students with learning difficulties, it may be helpful to allow them to express their feelings and recount their experiences in other ways. Writing stories or using art can be particularly helpful, especially for younger students. Give the students a choice as to how they want to represent their experiences. Have a box of tissues at hand.

Sample Script

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 remembered with *(name of 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.

Step 3: Normalising the reactions

Tell the children that they will all react differently to what has happened and that there is no right way. List some possible feelings and reactions.

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.

They may need to talk to someone about how they are feeling. Depending on the incident and the age of the students distribute handouts.

Step 4: Worries (for younger children)

Sample Script

You may be worried about *(name of deceased)* – that they might be sad or lonely or hungry or cold. When someone dies they don't feel cold or hungry or feeling like that anymore. 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.

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.



Step 5: Empowerment

Help the students to identify strategies that they might use to help manage their reactions. For example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep exercise 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.

Step 6: Closure

End the session by focussing 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.

Step 7: Free Time

After the discussion the teacher may want to allow the students some play time in the playground or free time in the classroom or an agreed area, depending on the age.

Step 8: Recovery

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.

Normal routines should generally be returned to as soon as possible.

- Students should be encouraged to resume sports and other extracurricular activities.



Online memorials

Public discussion following a sudden death, including death by suicide, can have both a positive and negative impact on those bereaved, including family members, friends and wider communities. Nowadays these wider communities extend beyond more traditional settings – like schools, colleges and workplaces to include online communities that the deceased may have belonged to and the communicated response in online settings has become an increasingly important area for consideration when someone dies.

Those affected following a sudden death can be increasingly vulnerable themselves to negative thoughts, depression and even suicidal ideation. In order to manage a safe and sensitive response to suicide deaths, it is recommended that any public communication regarding a suicide does not seek to glamorise the death in any way or provide details of particular suicide methods. In a general sense, this advice applies to online communication as well as in more traditional settings, even if managing online communications can seem like a daunting challenge, partly because of generational differences in familiarity with how online communications work.

Online communications include engagement on social networking websites with large groups of people and more private interaction, such as one to one instant messaging. Online communication has become a fundamental and everyday mode of relating to other people and online communication platforms can be seen as extensions of more traditional social spaces such as schools, colleges, workplaces and the family home. Of most concern when someone dies suddenly is social networking sites and both personal and memorial profiles because of their public accessibility.

A personal profile refers to an existing profile through which the deceased communicated with his online network while a memorial profile refers to a profile that is set up to honour and remember someone after they have died.

While there is a little definitive guidance available in the area of post-tension online, two available strategies include: 1) limiting and / or managing access to personal and memorial profiles on social networking sites and, 2) using personal and memorial profiles to highlight available support services for anyone negatively impacted by the death or the public discussion of the death. The most effective, responsible and sensitive strategy may be to combine both of these approaches by:

- Limiting and managing discussion on personal profiles and using memorial profiles to highlight support services.



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To illustrate the issues related to online memorials, and highlight practical steps you can take the example of Facebook profiles is particularly relevant at the moment. Currently, Facebook is the single largest social networking website in Ireland with an estimated 1.73 million users, over 70% of whom being under 35 years old (source: checkfacebook.com, accessed January 11th 2011).

Facebook is also global in its reach and it extends well beyond young audiences. As more and more people engage socially through Facebook and other social networking platforms issues related to personal profiles when someone dies become more and more relevant. For example, in the United States an estimated 375,000 users die every year, leaving behind both a digital legacy and potentially, an online outlet for the bereaved to remember and mourn. However, as in traditional settings, it is important to encourage safe, helpful and responsible conversation online following a death. Just as public discussion following a death is controlled in the context of funeral homilies, the conversation online can be managed too. In response, Facebook have put in place procedures that can be followed when a loved one dies.

How to manage a Facebook profile when someone dies:

Memorializing the account:

When a user passes away, Facebook can memorialize their account to protect their privacy. Memorializing an account removes certain sensitive information (e.g. status updates and contact information) and sets privacy so that only confirmed friends can see the profile or locate it in search. The Wall remains so that friends and family can leave posts in remembrance. Memorializing an account also prevents all login access to it.

Removing the account:

Immediate family members may request the removal of a loved one's account. This will completely remove the account from Facebook so that no one can view it. Facebook will not restore the account or provide information on its content unless required by law. If you are requesting a removal and are not an immediate family member of the deceased, your request will not be processed, but the account will be memorialized.

A memorial group can also be removed by Facebook if requested by a family member.



EVALUATION/ FEEDBACK FORM Critical Incident Management Plan.

What areas were managed well?

What areas of C.I management need improvement?

Can you make suggestions for improving C.I management in the future?

Return form to Principal / Deputy Principal / Counsellor / Chaplain