

Procedures to be followed in the event of critical incidents:

(see attached critical incident management plan template)

Short-term actions (1st day)

Gather accurate information:

It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident, otherwise rumours will take over and add to the distress of those involved:-

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?
- What is the location of those injured and not injured?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?

Contact appropriate agencies:

- Emergency services
- Medical services
- HSE - psychology department/community care centre
- NEPS
- Board of Management
- DES/School Inspector

Convene a meeting with key staff/critical incident management team

A list of possible topics to be covered follows.

- Agreeing a statement of the facts for staff, students, parents and the media. If possible there should be a written version of this.
- Delegating responsibilities to the Critical Incident Management Team
- Appointment someone to handle phone enquiries and to deal with the media.
- Ensuring that a phone line remains open and available for enquiries
- Organising the timetable/routine for the day
- Organising a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Organising the supervision of students during any staff meetings.
- Deciding whether an outside professional be invited to the staff meeting

Arrange supervision of students

Hold staff meeting:

All staff should be asked to attend, including auxiliary staff, the areas which might be covered are listed below.

- An account of the facts as known
- An opportunity for staff to express their views and their feelings
- Discussion with the staff about how the facts will be shared with the students
- An outline of the route for the day
- Information for staff about which outside agencies have been contacted, or are involved and the supports that will be put in place for both students and staff.
- A procedures for identifying vulnerable students
- Distribution of relevant handout material

Organise timetable for the day:

As far as is possible maintain normal routines

Inform parents/guardians:

Children directly involved:

Parents/guardians should be contacted as soon as possible, and this first contact will need to be handled with great sensitivity. The steps involved are set out below:

- Agree who should share information with parents and how this should be done
- Make a list of parents/guardians who have been contact and those who still need to be told to avoid duplication of messages
- Give parents/guardians relevant and factual information
- Set a room aside for distressed students to meet their parents/guardians
- Provide support to parents who are on their own when they arrive at the school
- Give telephone numbers for enquiries

Children not directly involved:

The parents of other children in the school should be informed of the incident and that their child may be upset.

Send a letter to parents stating the facts and brief details of the incident. It may not be appropriate at this point to disclose the names of those involved.

Inform Students:

Careful preparation is important when meeting students to inform them of a critical incident. Consideration should be given to the age of the pupils and the optimum group size. It is best to do it in class groups or sub-groups. The suitability of the messenger should also be considered, remembering that it is generally thought that support is best given by the adults known to the child. Any outside expert might help by assisting the people undertaking this takes time to prepare for it and by providing ongoing advice and support as they manage it. The nature of the event will clearly have an influence on who students are involved.

The key points/actions in the process are listed below:-

- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours which can cause unnecessary stress.
- Allow pupils to ask questions, tell their story and express feelings.
- Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident.

Make contact with the bereaved family:

Dealing with the media:

Prepare a written statement to include:-

- The facts about the incident
- What has been done already
- What is going to be done
- Positive information or comments about the deceased person

Some points to remember if you are asked to give a live interview:-

- Consider assigning the task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with the media
- Take some time to prepare
- Remember that everything you say is on record and therefore **keep it simple, factual and brief**
- Decline if you are not ready or think it inappropriate.

Consider setting aside a room for the media. This may help to control their access to staff and students. Brief staff and students and advise them on dealing with the media.

Organise the reunion of students with their parents, if necessary:-

- Inform students that their parents/guardians will be collecting them as soon as possible
- Facilitate distressed students and their parents by providing a private room where they can meet following an incident. This could be a very emotional time.
- Where appropriate offer help with transport, especially for younger children.

Medium-term actions (24 to 72 hours)

Review the events of the first 24 hours

- Reconvene key staff/critical incident management team
- Briefly check out how each person on this team is coping
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review staff meeting with all staff if necessary. Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments.
- Be sensitive as to how all staff are coping on a personal and professional level.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Update media, if necessary

Arrange support for individual students, groups of students and parents, if necessary:

- Provide a suitable room
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students in order to clarify what has happened. Offer advice and reassurance. Inform them about support services and provide relevant handouts.
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of option out
- Arrange, in consultation with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings **with** parental permission.

Plan for reintegration of students and staff

- Name key person(s) to liaise with above on their return to school

Plan visits to injured

- Name key person(s) to visit home/hospital

Liase with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service:-

- Designate staff member to liaise with family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by 2 staff representatives within 24 hours if appropriate
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service:

- Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decision and in consultation with close school friends

School closure:

- Request a decision on this from school management and school inspector

Long-term actions

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress:

A referral to the HSE may be necessary. For example, if over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following he/she may need assistance from the HSE:

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms - eg weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- In appropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

Evaluate Response to incident and amend the critical incident management plan appropriately:

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Formalise the critical incident plan for the future:

- Consult with NEPS psychologist and/or your local HSE critical incidents team about this

Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by critical incidents where appropriate:

- Ensure that new staff are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, it would be useful to brief the principal of the new school

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (be sensitive to special days and events):

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family and liaise on any proposed commemoration
- Be sensitive to significant days like birthdays, Christmas, Mother's day, Father's day.

Reviewed and ratified by the BOM in January 2018

Signed: _____

Date: _____