



# Critical Incident Policy

## Review Dates

- Reviewed Staff May 2023
- Reviewed Parents May 2023
- Reviewed BOM June 2023 (Ratified with Amendments)
- Next Review: October 2024

## Introduction

Tragedy and trauma are part of life; however coping with them is never easy. It is particularly difficult when it impacts on the lives of young people. This policy seeks to address the specific needs of the School community following any traumatic event(s) in the context of the ethos of the School. As critical incident management is an important part of normal school management practice, it must be carefully planned for. This policy sets out the procedures to be followed to ensure the safety and protection of the community of Pobalscoil Iosolde in the event of a critical incident. The guidelines set out in this policy will be used flexibly and in relation to each situation as no two incidents are exactly alike.

Pobalscoil Iosolde has an important role to play in any crisis situation for the following reasons:

- Significant part of a student's life and support system.
- School staff are important role models.
- Teachers facilitate development of coping skills (e.g. communication, self-esteem).
- Curriculum provides learning opportunities re. personal & physical safety, life skills, expression of feelings etc.

### Aims and Objectives of Critical Incident Management Policy

- To respond to a critical incident in an informed way.
- To create a positive, open, communicative climate where the needs of the School community are met in critical incident situations.
- To recognise which incidents are critical for the school community.
- To create a safe school environment where the physical, social and psychological health of students and staff are prioritised.
- To monitor and review the policy for dealing with emergencies.
- To promote active coping skills within the School curriculum.
- To establish positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident.
- The development of a Critical Incident Management Policy will contain and limit the impact of an incident on the school community.

### Awareness of Critical Incident Management Policy

- It is important that all stakeholders in the school – Board of Management, staff, students and parents – are informed and regular updates provided.
- The Critical Incident Management Policy will be presented to all staff including new members of staff.
- The policy will be available on the school's website.
- Students will be informed of the policy as part of their induction programme.
- The Critical Incident Response Team will have copies of emergency packs.

### Definition of a Critical Incident

Critical incidents may involve one or more students, staff or the school community. Critical incidents may occur in the school, during extra-curricular activities, school trips or within the wider school community. **In the context of Pobalscoil Iosolde, we define that a critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school.** These incidents may:

- be sudden or unexpected
- contain a real and intensive threat to life, health, property, security etc.
- cause severe disruption
- cause trauma to anyone

### Different Types of Critical Incident

The list below outlines potential situations that can arise and impact on the school community. However, for the purposes of this policy, this list is not exhaustive.

- Death of a student or member of staff
- Major illness
- Outbreak of disease
- Criminal incidents (Gardaí involved)
- Major accidents
- Serious injury
- Death of a student or member of staff by suicide
- Sexual / physical / psychological abuse
- Fire and natural disasters
- Disappearance of student from their home or the school
- Unauthorised removal of a student from their home or the school
- Hostage situation
- Major physical fight
- Traumatic accidental death
- School tour accident
- Poisoning
- Assault on staff member or student
- Flooding

## Incident Response

### Immediate Response

- Contact the Principal/next available member of the Critical Incident Response Team.
- Gather information - clarify accurate and factual information.
- Record and verify details.
- Alert the Critical Incident Response Team and convene a meeting. Specify the time and venue clearly.
- Assess the needs of the situation – evacuation, supervision etc.
- Notify the appropriate Emergency Services.
- Inform the Chief Executive Officer of ACCS
- Psychological Support Services, external agencies, media as appropriate.
- Arrange supervision for students.
- Create a calm, purposeful environment.
- Inform students and explain to students why activity on social media sites e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat etc. should cease. Ensure that there is no sharing of images or videos.
- Close friends and students with Special Educational Needs may need to be told separately.
- Mobilise the senior students to support the school authorities as appropriate.
- Hold a staff meeting to agree a schedule for the day. Ask staff not to respond to media or engage in social media activity in relation to the incident.
- Contact/visit the bereaved family.
- Prepare and agree a media statement and deal with the media.
- Inform parent(s)/ guardian(s).
- Hold an end of day staff briefing. Remind staff to not engage in social media activity in relation to the incident.

### Short Term Response

- Maintain a calm atmosphere and clear leadership.
- Assess the vulnerability and needs of different groups or individuals.
- Offer information/support collectively or individually to parents.
- Make a room available for students to gather.
- Organise staff support, providing opportunities for staff consultations.
- Be available for students, staff and parents.
- Arrange de-briefing sessions for staff.
- Liaise with relevant outside agencies.
- Visit and consult with the family or families affected
- Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service.
- Make decisions about school closure.

- Open a book of condolences.
- As far as possible, keep the school open
- If part or all of the school is cordoned off for the purpose of criminal investigation, work creatively with other agencies to explore the possibility of continuing to bring classes together in other locations until the school is operational. If this is not possible, contact will be maintained with parent(s)/guardian(s) for updates.

### Medium Term Response

- Continue to liaise with other agencies.
- Continue to note and monitor information about teachers'/ parents' concerns.
- Highlight opportunities through the curriculum or outside agencies for students to access support.
- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress.
- Plan for the return of bereaved or injured students.
- Plan for giving book of condolences etc. to the family.
- Organise talks, if appropriate, in relation to safety etc.
- Be alert to behavioural changes/anxieties/fears in students related to the event.
- Ensure that support is available for staff at a personal and professional level.
- If needed, arrange referrals to external agencies for individuals/groups allowing 4 – 6 weeks for normal bereavement process.

### Long Term Response

- Maintain on-going monitoring and review.
  - Support individuals still affected.
  - On-going assessment of the needs of the school community as it copes with the impact of the incident.
  - Deal with reminders of the event – impact of inquest, court proceedings etc.
  - Continue to support staff on a personal and professional level.
  - Continue with creative coping strategies via curriculum etc.
  - Commemorate anniversaries appropriately; acknowledge significant dates e.g. birthdays etc.
- Continue to work with outside agencies, if appropriate.  
Review response to the incident and amend plan accordingly.

### Critical Incident Response Team

At a time of crisis there are a large number of tasks to be carried out. By identifying key roles in advance of an incident, there is a clear statement of who will do what, when and how. It is important that no one is overburdened and that important elements in the response are not forgotten.

The Critical Incident Response Team includes:

- Principal
- Deputy Principals
- Guidance Counsellors
- Chaplain
- Senior Person in charge of Public Relations
- Teacher in charge of Health & Safety
- Year Head/Assistant Year Heads/Tutor/Programme Co-ordinator
- Caretaker
- Member of Administration Staff

Some staff members may be co-opted on to the team, as deemed appropriate, in response to the incident and equally being mindful that personal circumstance or experience may preclude any of the above at any time.

In the event of the Principal being absent from the school premises, she will be informed immediately of any critical incident. In her absence, the Incident Manager role will devolve to the Deputy Principals.

<b>Critical Incident Response Team</b>	
<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>
<b>Team leader:</b>	Geraldine Delaney
<b>Garda liaison</b>	Stephen Kelly
<b>Staff liaison</b>	Geraldine Delaney
<b>Student liaison</b>	Nicola Carey & Seán Lonergan
<b>Community liaison</b>	Paula Rave
<b>Parent liaison</b>	Catherine Cleary & Gary Creighton
<b>Media liaison</b>	Allen McConnell & Niamh Walsh
<b>Administrator</b>	Mary Mills & Carol Kavanagh

#### [Central Liaison Office for dealing with Critical Incidents](#)

The **Staff Room / Office**, whichever is appropriate, will become the central office for meetings etc. following the occurrence of any critical incident.

### Critical Incident Emergency Kit

- Ensure that appropriate contact numbers are available to all staff - emergency services; medical services (local GPs, hospitals, HSE personnel, Community Care Services etc.)
- Student telephone numbers
- Contact details for ACCS & NEPS - Psychological Support Service
- Contact details for the Board of Management
- Contact details for parent(s)/guardian(s), staff (including administrative and ancillary staff)
- Contact details for Department of Education & Skills
- First Aid kit
- Sample templates of letters to parents (re. tragedy, involvement of outside agencies)
- Sample templates for press releases
- Critical Incident Management Team names and numbers
- Evacuation plan
- Advice leaflets

### Critical Incident Management Plan

An annual audit of existing procedures and resources will take place on an annual basis:

- Existing emergency procedures
- Administrative systems
- Curriculum strategies
- Experience of past critical incidents
- Potential risks e.g. emergency information for school trips
- Existing material resources
- Existing staff resources (e.g. staff trained in CPR, First Aid, Defibrillator, etc.)
- Links with support services and other external agencies
- Personal skills and capabilities

### Teachers Supporting Students

- Tell students what you know about the incident (stick to the facts).
- Trauma reactions are normal. Student distress will be closely monitored and where appropriate, parents will be contacted.
- Models of dealing with crisis e.g. opportunity to discuss incident.
- Teachers know the pre-trauma behaviour of their pupils.
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know".
- Develop strategies for increasing social support between students in your class e.g. pair work, group work.
- Continue to communicate in the months after the crisis.
- Make sensitive arrangements for the return to school of students.
- Consider the "vacant seat".

- Alter class register to avoid further distress.
- Be alert to the possibility of unhelpful grief responses.
- Empowerment.

#### Critical Incident Response Team

- Key personnel
- Appropriate personnel and practical skills
- Assign roles and tasks clearly
- Ensure adequate staff training
- Share plan with staff and update regularly
- Meet annually – update and review

#### Critical Incident Response Team - Roles

- Leadership – Coordinating
- Counselling
- Family liaison person
- Chaplaincy/spiritual advisor – priests/ministers
- Communication officer– e.g. media and parents



## Appendices

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## Appendix 1

### Leadership Role (Principal)

Intervention	Postvention
Confirm the event	Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
Express sympathy to family	Facilitate memorial events as appropriate
Identify school contact person for family	
Clarify facts surrounding event	
Activate Critical Incident Response Team	

### Communication Role

Intervention	Postvention
Decide how news will be communicated to different groups	Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response
Prepare a public statement with Team	
Organise free telephone line for outgoing and incoming calls	
Liaise with relevant outside support agencies	

### Counselling Role

Intervention	Postvention
Outline specific services available in school	Provide on-going support to vulnerable students
Organise clear referral procedures	Monitor class/students most affected
Address immediate needs of staff: Information & Counselling	Refer on, as appropriate
Contact other relevant agencies	

### Chaplaincy Role

Intervention	Postvention
Visit home, if appropriate	Provide follow-up support to family – collaborate with Home-school Liaison teacher
Assist with prayer service	Collaborate with religious education team

Contact local Faith Leaders	
Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff and students	

**Family Liaison Role**

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Postvention</b>
Co-ordinate contact with families	Provide on-going support to bereaved family
Consult with family re. involvement of school (e.g. funeral service)	Involve family, as appropriate, in school liturgies/memorial services
	Offer to link family with community support groups

Appendix 2

**Pobalscoil Iosolde**

**Critical Incident Response Team**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Deputy</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Duties</b>

## Appendix 3

### INITIAL ACTION PLAN

- Gather accurate information: **It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident; otherwise rumours may take over and add to the distress of those involved.**
- Establish the facts: **What** has happened; **when** it happened; **how** it happened; the **number and names of students and staff** involved; are there other schools involved; the extent of the injuries; and the location of those injured.
- Locate the NEPS publications *Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools* and the accompanying *Resource Materials for Schools* (available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)).
- Contact appropriate agencies (see School's Emergency Contact List)
  - i. Emergency Services
  - ii. Medical Services
  - iii. Board of Management
  - iv. ACCS
  - v. Health Service Executive
  - vi. Teacher Unions
  - vii. State Examinations Commission
  - viii. Leaders from the Faith Communities
- Convene a meeting with key staff/Critical Incident Management Team. Depending on the incident it is advisable to arrange an evening or early morning meeting to ensure that the team is well prepared and has a plan in place for the school day ahead.

## Appendix 4

### AGENDA FOR MEETING WITH CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM/KEY STAFF

- Share the details of the event
- Agree on the facts. These will need to be relayed in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner by all staff to the students.
- Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional ones that should be informed.
- During major incidents phone lines may become jammed. Agree on which phone line is kept open for outgoing emergency calls.
- When a number of external agencies are involved in a response, co-ordination will be needed and procedures will need to be agreed.
- Plan procedures for the day.
- Discuss issues relating to school routine, including school closure. **Remember it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible.** It is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students. Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what happened and temporarily shelve all academic activities if necessary.
- You may wish to consult students about what to do if there is an event scheduled such as a trip, concert or match. This should reduce the likelihood of students being angry later as a result of any school action or in-action.
- Discuss **how to break the news to relatives and close friends and who should do this (Remember that they must always be told separately).**
- Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students. Class groups are often best, rather than large assemblies.
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students.
- If there are students of various nationalities and religions in the school, this needs to be taken into consideration in organising prayer services, attendance at the funeral etc. Parents of different religious or national groups need to be consulted.
- Plan a whole staff briefing (including ancillary staff). This may need to be done in two groups depending on the arrangements for the supervision of students.
- Agree the text of a letter to be sent to parents.
- Discuss how to deal with the media. Prepare a media statement, if appropriate. This can be faxed or emailed to media representatives who make contact with the school. It may also be used if an interview is requested. Ask staff not to respond to media or engage in social media activity in relation to the incident.

- Delegate responsibilities to the appropriate critical incident team member or key personnel.
- Discuss which room(s) will be available to external agencies
- Decide whether a quiet room should be made available for students. This is a place the students can go if they are having difficulty remaining composed in the classroom. Depending on the age of the students it should have tissues, cushions, drawing and writing materials and appropriate information leaflets. It is generally recommended that this is available for the week following the incident and that its use is then reviewed. Students should sign out of their regular class and sign into the quiet room for a certain time. The room should be supervised to ensure student safety. A very distressed student may need individual support. This might be offered by the guidance counsellor, chaplain or other staff member. A similar room could be set up for staff.
- Discuss the issue of consent for students who may need to be seen by the psychologist and arrange for the consent form to be photocopied and sent to parents.
- Where a request is made that a student be seen by a psychologist prior to having signed the consent form, telephone the parent or carer to obtain verbal consent. If it is not possible to make immediate contact, the Principal, in consultation with the psychologist, should then make the decision in the best interest of the student. This should take precedence over procedural matters. If a student is seen without consent, parents should be contacted as soon as possible by the school
- A record should be kept of all students seen by school staff and agencies external to the schools. One person should be appointed to collate the lists regularly.
- Each team member should keep records of all phone calls made during the incident management, as well as records of meetings, visits etc.
- Agree the next meeting time for the Critical Incident Management Team.
- Agree a time for follow up staff meeting at the end of the day. This gives an opportunity for the Principal to update staff on any developments. It also allows time for preparation for the following day. Lastly, it gives staff a chance to share their experience and to wind down after the day.
- In the case of a major accident, meetings may be held in a location away from the school involving key personnel from school and other agencies. Care should be taken that staff with appropriate experience and authority remain in place in the school to facilitate an effective response. The Principal might consider delegating someone to go to such meetings as, if they decide to go themselves, they may not be available for critical decisions in their own school.

## Appendix 5

### REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

Feelings	Behavioural
Fear	Nightmares
Guilt	Social Withdrawal
Shame	Irritability
Regret	Loss of Concentration
Anger	Forgetfulness
Tearfulness	Physical/Verbal Aggression
Loneliness	Misuse of Drugs, including alcohol
Anxiety	
Mood Swings	
Shock	
Yearning	
Numbness	
Confusion	
Isolation	
Insecurity	



<u>Physical</u>	<u>Thoughts</u>
Tiredness	Disbelief
Sleeplessness	Denial
Headaches	Sense of Unreality
Stomach Problems	Preoccupation with images of the event/person
Bowel/Bladder Problems	
Loss or Increase of appetite	

## Appendix 6

### GRIEF AFTER SUICIDE OR SUSPECTED SUICIDE

Remember there is no right or wrong way to react when someone you know dies. People will have many different reactions to what has happened.

- Know that you can survive, even if you feel you can't.
- You may feel overwhelmed and frightened by your feelings. This is normal. You're not going crazy; you are grieving.
- You may not feel a strong reaction to what has happened. This is ok.
- You may experience feelings of guilt, confusion, forgetfulness and anger. Again these feelings are all normal.
- You may feel angry at the person who has died, at yourself, at everyone and everything. It is ok to express it.
- You may feel guilty about what you did or did not do. Suicide is the act of an individual, for which we cannot take responsibility.
- You may never have to answer "why" but it is ok to keep asking "why" until you no longer need to ask or are satisfied with partial answers.
- Sometimes people make decisions over which we have no control. It was not your choice.
- Feeling low is temporary, suicide is permanent. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If you are feeling low or having a difficult time, ask for help.
- Allow yourself to cry, this will help you heal.
- Healing takes time. Allow yourself the time you need to grieve.
- Delay making any big decisions if possible.
- This is the hardest thing you will ever do. Be patient with yourself.
- Spend time with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk and who also understand you need to be silent.
- Seek Professional help if you feel overwhelmed.
- Talk to a trusted adult.
- Avoid people who try to tell you what to feel and how to feel it and, in particular, those who think you "should be over it by now".
- Ask in school about a support group for survivors that provide a safe place for you to express your feelings, or simply a place to be with other survivors who are experiencing some of the same things you're going through.
- Allow yourself to laugh with others and yourself. This is healing.
- Useful websites: [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie) & [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)

## HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

### Hand-out for Students

- Reach out- people do care.
- Talk to your friends, family, and teachers- talking is the most healing medicine.
- Remember you are normal and having normal reactions- don't label yourself as crazy or mad.
- It is ok to cry.
- It is ok to smile.
- If your feelings and reactions seem different to those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently.
- When the stress levels are high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings with alcohol and drugs. This complicates the problems, rather than relieving them.
- Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a letter or note to the family of the person who died or the person themselves? ☑ Spend time with people that have made a positive influence on you.
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat- answer them, even though you aren't sure.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal.
- Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk.
- Sticking to your "normal" routine helps. Structure your time- keep busy.
- Take time out- go for a walk or kick a football.
- Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen- like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc. Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits.
- Useful websites: [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie), [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie), [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au), <https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/>

*Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.*

## Appendix 8

### **STAGES OF GRIEF (may be used with various groups and individuals)**

Grief is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Although there are distinct phases in the grieving process, people go through these stages in different sequences and at different paces. Generally, the grieving process in adults is thought to take about two years, while with children and adolescents it may be over a more extended time frame with different issues arising as they go through developmental milestones.

#### **Denial, numbness, shock (up to 6 weeks)**

- Death of the person may be denied
- Emerging feelings may be suppressed
- Refusal to talk about death
- Bereaved keeps very busy to avoid thinking about death
- Bereaved may show signs of confusion and forget everyday routines
- Children in shock may display either silent withdrawal or outbursts of crying

#### **Acute grief/searching and longing for deceased (6 weeks to 4 months)**

- Acute sadness- crying
- Physical pangs of pain including loss of appetite and disturbed sleep
- Emotional pain accompanied by dejection, hopelessness, lack of concentration
- Fears of life after death, nightmares, ghosts
- Disorganisation
- Strong guilt feelings and questioning self and others, particularly in the case of a sudden death
- Feelings of anger at the departed for leaving them
- Bereaved may reject offers to comfort them

#### **Adaption to life without the deceased (6 to 18 months)**

- People begin to adjust their lives without the person who is gone
- Sense of isolation
- Fearful of forgetting the deceased
- Less crying and irritability
- Exacerbation of existing personality problems. Children with low self-esteem may be at greater risk of emotional/behavioural difficulties

## **Normalisation of life**

- Getting on with life
- Returned sense of humour and play
- Able to participate emotionally in new relationships
- Changed relationship with the deceased- able to think of the deceased without pain
- Reduction in physical/emotional symptoms
- Less guilt

## Appendix 8

### REINTEGRATION OF THE BEREAVED CHILD IN SCHOOL

Some suggestions are offered here which may help prepare the school and the bereaved child for their return to school. They will help to ensure that the individual, the other students and the staff feel more comfortable and at ease.

- Visit the bereaved student at home to see what he/she would like to happen when they return to school.
- Talk to the student's class about how people are affected by grief and encourage them to share their own feelings. Ask about how they have coped with bereavements in their own lives and what has helped.
- Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to come back to school. Ask how they would like to be treated if they were returning to school after a death. This might be done in pairs or small groups, thus encouraging all to be involved. It will also ensure that a range of preferences are expressed, reinforcing the fact that different people will have different preferences as to how they are treated. Some people may want to discuss what has happened, while others may want to be left alone. In general, bereaved students say that they would like others to treat them as before rather than being 'over-nice' to them. However, it is a delicate balance as they don't want people to behave as if nothing has happened at all.
- It may help if, in advance of the student's return to school, classmates have sent cards or notes for their bereaved classmate. This will let him/her know that they are in their thoughts.
- When they return, acknowledge their loss "*I'm sorry that (name of deceased) died. I know that you are sad. It is ok to cry*". (Ensure that this is done early on the day of the student's return and teachers can express their own sympathies separately once the general re-entry to class has been managed.)
- When the student returns, they may have difficulty concentrating or joining in class activities. Be understanding.
- Allow them access to a 'quiet room' where he/she can be alone. You might suggest:  
*"We can set up a signal for you to use if you need to leave the class at any time"*.  
(ensure supervision)
- Link the student in with the guidance counsellor for support if needed.
- Listen when they want to talk: "*If you need to talk at any time, I am here to listen*".
- Carry on normal routines and normal approaches to discipline.

- The student may have difficulty completing homework and assignments: *“If you are having difficulty doing your homework it is ok to do as much as you can for a while”.*
- Allow them as much time as they need to grieve.

## Appendix 10

### A Classroom Session following news of a Critical Incident

Normally, the class teacher, class tutor or other relevant personnel that knows the students should be the person to inform the class 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 may 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 to give the students the 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 the age and development 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 Advising about social media usage

STEP 6 Empowerment

STEP 7 Closure

STEP 8 Free Time

STEP 9 Recovery

<p>STEP 1</p> <p>Giving the facts and dispelling rumours</p>	<p><b>Tell the students in a calm, low key and factual voice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What has happened</li><li>• Who was involved ☒ When it happened</li><li>• The plan of the day</li></ul> <p><b>Sample Script</b></p> <p><i>I have something very sad I want to share with you. <b>The factual information agreed upon by the staff e.g. (name of student), who attends our school and</b></i></p>
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	<p><i>was missing, has been found. You will probably be aware, through social media, that 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></p> <p><i>I am feeling 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.</i></p>
STEP 2 Sharing stories	<p>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 helps their recovery. For those students who find it difficult 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.</p> <p><b>Sample Script</b></p> <p><i>To help us today, we are going to make a memory box for <b>(name of deceased)</b>. You can draw a picture of a time you remember with <b>(name of deceased)</b> or write a poem or a letter to him. If you like we can put these in a nice box and give it to <b>(name of deceased)</b> family sometime soon. This will help them to see how important <b>(name of deceased)</b> was.</i></p>
STEP 3 Normalising the reactions	<p>Tell the students that they will all react differently to what has happened and that there is no right or wrong way. List some possible feelings and reactions, (see R9). Explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Tell the students that the reactions or symptoms will go away in time. Tell them that if the symptoms have not gone away after a few weeks, they should let you or their parents know. In addition to conversations they may have with friends on social media they may need to talk to someone in person about how they are feeling. Depending on the incident and the age of the students, distribute handouts – see Appendices 6,7, 8 &amp; 9.</p>
STEP 4 Worries (for younger children)	<p><b>Sample Script</b></p> <p><i>You may be worried about <b>(name of deceased)</b> – that they might be sad or lonely or hungry or cold. When someone dies they do not feel cold or hungry or feelings like that anymore.</i></p> <p><i>You may be worried that the same thing could happen to you or someone else in your family. What happened to <b>(name of deceased)</b> does not happen very often.</i></p> <p>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.</p>

STEP 5 Advising about Social Media Usage	Discussions may begin with an outline of the various social media currently being used by members of the group. The value of these as a way of keeping in contact with and supporting friends should be acknowledged. Students may be asked for experiences of ways in which such communication has helped them as well as examples of ways in which it has gone wrong. Media involving live communication such as Skype or Viber are generally more conducive to support and less open to
	misunderstanding than text-based means. Students will be encouraged to consider how much social media usage is too much, particularly late into the night. More guidance on social media use is contained in Appendix 17.
STEP 6 Empowerment	Help the students to identify strategies that they might use to help manage their reaction, for example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep, taking plenty of exercise and appropriate use of social media – 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 students regain a sense of control.
STEP 7 Closure	End the session by focusing on the future. Depending on the nature of the incident, help the class 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 8 Free Time	After the discussion the teacher may want to allow the student’s some free time outside, in the classroom or an agreed area, depending on the age.
STEP 9 Recovery	<p>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.</p> <p>Normal routines should generally be returned to as soon as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students should be encouraged to resume sports and other extracurricular activities.</li> <li>• It is appropriate that the class curriculum is adjusted or adapted. For example, teachers should avoid presenting new learning material for a while following an incident as concentration may be impaired.</li> <li>• Use opportunities which arise within ordinary classwork, where coping and support can be reinforced.</li> <li>• Students could be encouraged to discuss how to avoid future crisis and lessons learnt from their experiences. There will also be opportunities for structured discussion within the School’s social, personal and health education programmes. SPHE curriculum time is an ideal context in which to offer support.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 12

### Guidance on Social Media Use & Critical Incidents

Social media is now part of everyday communication and information sharing. Most students are avid and competent users. Social media messages speed up the rate at which information is shared. This can have a significant influence on the behaviour of young people during a critical incident. Some social media communication may occur without the knowledge of school staff that leads to distress among students or their parents/guardians.

The following information may assist to consider issues related to social media use when dealing with a critical incident.

- It is essential that the School takes account of the need to have competency in the use of social media among management and staff. If not, the members of the Critical Incident Team should consult those familiar with its use. Senior students from the Student Council could be part of this process. Normalising social media use by the student body during a critical incident is very important.
- Social media literacy should be addressed in the curriculum. It is essential that School management, staff and students understand the role of social media, and its positive and negative aspects. A positive disposition to social media by the School may encourage thoughtful use by students during a critical incident.
- Agreement on appropriate use of social media during a critical incident should be included in the School's Acceptable Usage Policy (AUP). All staff should follow agreed online professional protocols as prescribed by the New Code of Conduct by Teachers i.e. **“Teachers should ensure that any communication with pupils/students, colleagues, parents/guardians, school management and others is appropriate, including communications via electronic media, such as email, texting and social media etc.” (The Teaching Council, 2012).** The Critical Incident Management Team may also remind staff, students and other relevant community members about their AUP during times of crises.
- When dealing with a critical incident it is advised that the School acts quickly and with caution. A message could be placed on the website and on any other school social media account along the following lines:

*“You may be aware of a recent event within the School community. We ask you to respect the family’s privacy and sensitivities at this time by considering if you should*

*post any comments, especially on social media. We will inform you through the normal channels of any relevant developments”.*

- The School could use social media to provide up to date information for all concerned throughout the various stages of the incident. Positive messages and appropriate advice for young people and their parents/guardians to discuss social media use with their children and monitor use more actively following a crisis.
- It is important that the Critical Incident Management Team members are familiar with safe messaging guidelines that should be followed when sending messages to staff. Should the need arise during a crisis; the School management can contact the Dublin & Dun Laoghaire ETB for advice and support.
- Young people often post Rest-in-Peace (RIP) messages on social media when tragedies occur. These posts can be heartfelt and emotional particularly in cases of death by suicide. Messages such as *“I miss you and will see you soon”* or *“I will follow in your path”* should cause concern and be followed up with the individual concerned. The death by suicide of an individual may influence others. Young people are especially prone to contagion. Those who are emotionally vulnerable may act on suicidal impulses.
- Activity on social networking sites during a critical incident can be a source of potentially important information, such as suicide pacts, identification of vulnerable groups or individual young people who may be at risk of suicide. Given privacy restrictions to people’s personal pages, distressing information may be posted without the knowledge of parents/guardians or School management. It is likely that users will block access so activity of this nature will not be accessible to everybody.
- The recording of footage during a critical incident may provide vital information. Students and staff need to be briefed on why live streaming of an incident is not appropriate as it can lead to great distress and bring chaos to an incident. However, such footage needs to be handled with the greatest care as it may contain distressing images. Likewise, with the sharing of images on social media messaging sites.

## Appendix 12

### SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS TO THE MEDIA

This can be used as a template to be emailed, faxed or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the school.

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 the *(Name)* family and friends.

*Name of student/students* was a *(name)* 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 has implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the 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.

School staff have been helping students to deal with the tragic event.

The school has been open to parents, to support them and offer them advice and guidance.

We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you.

## Appendix 13

### EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

#### Resource for Schools

(To be displayed in staff room, school office and Principal's office etc.)

<b>AGENCY</b>	<b>CONTACT NUMBERS</b>
GARDA	999
HOSPITAL	Tallaght: (01) 414 2000 Blanchardstown: (01) 646 5000
FIRE BRIGADE	(01) 222 4000
LOCAL GPs	(01) 626 5672
HSE/Community Care Team/Child and Family Centre/CAMHS	(01) 7956380
DES INSPECTORATE	(01)889 6553
NEPS	(01)889 6553
DES	(01)889 6400
ASTI/TUI	(01) 604 0160 / (01) 492 2588
LEADERS FROM THE FAITH COMMUNITIES	(01) 626 0900
STATE EXAMS COMMISSION	090 6442739
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SERVICE	1800 411 057

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Parents

**The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents after a critical incident.**

**Q. This incident has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?**

A. The school will inform students and parents of the core details of the incident insofar as they are known. It sometimes takes time for the true facts to emerge. In the meantime, it is important to stick to the facts as known. Discourage rumour or gossip as it is often incorrect and can be distressing for the family and friends of those involved.

**Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?**

A. This will depend on the particular situation. The school will usually put a plan in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion or individual support for students who need it. This support may be offered by school staff themselves, or by other staff of other agencies. If there is a particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.

**Q. How can I help my child?**

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and they should talk rather than bottle things up.

**Q. How long will the grief last?**

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories or other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.

**Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?**

A. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check-up.

**Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?**

A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP/Child and Family Centre/CAMHS .

**Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?**

A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten those feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.



## Appendix 15

### **RESOURCES SUITABLE FOR CONSULTATION OR WORKING WITH TEENAGERS**

- **Deliberate Self-harm in Adolescence**

Claudine Fox and Keith Hawton (2000)

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

- **When a Friend Dies-A Book for Teens About Grieving and Healing**

Marilyn Gootman (1994)

Publisher: Free Spirit Publishing

- **Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers**

Earl Grollman (1993)

Publisher: Beacon Press

- **Good Grief: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Over Elevens and Adults. A Holistic Approach.**

Barbara Ward and Associates (1996)

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

- **Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas**

Alan D. Wolfelt (2001)

Publisher: Companion Press

### **RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN WITH AEN**

- **Loss and Learning Disability**

Noelle Blackman (2003)

Publisher: Worth Publishing

- **Understanding Death and Dying. A Guide for Carers and Other Professionals**

(Part of a set of 3 booklets for people with learning disabilities)

Fiona Cathcart (1994)

Publisher: Worcestershire, British Institute of Learning Disabilities

- **Guidebook on Helping Persons with Mental Retardation Mourn. The Everlasting Things in Life and Death**

Jeffrey Kauffman (2005)

Publisher: Baywood Publishing Company

### **RESOURCES FOR PARENTS**

- **Beyond the Rough Rock: Supporting a child who had been Bereaved Through Suicide**

D. Crossley and J. Stokes (2002)

Publisher: Winstons Wish, Cheltenham

- **How do we tell the children: A step-by-step guide for Helping Children Cope when Someone Dies**

Dan Schafer and Christine Lyons (2002)

Publisher: Newmarket Press

- **When Parents Separate: Helping your Children Cope**

Sharry, John & Reid, Peter & Donohue, Eugene (2001)

Publisher: Veritas Publications, Abbey Street, Dublin

- **Caring for your Grieving child: Engaging Activities for Dealing with Loss and Transition**

Martha Wakenshaw (2002)

Publisher: New Harbinger Publications

### **RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS**

- **Guidelines for Schools on How to Respond to the Sudden Unexpected Death of a Student**

ASTI (1997)

- **Coping with a Major Crisis**

City of Dublin VEC Psychological Services

- **When Something Terrible Happens...**

City of Dublin VEC Psychological Services

- **Grief at School. A Manual for School Personnel**

Helen Fitzgerald, Kitty Kaczmarek (2003)

Publisher: Washington, D.C. American Hospice Foundation

- **Wise Before the Event: Coping with Crises in Schools**

Anne Gold, William Yule (1993)

Publisher: London, Calouste Gulbendian Foundation

- **The Hospice Pack: A Resource Pack for Teachers**

Hospice and Palliative Care for Citizenship PSHE/PSD (2003)

Publisher: London, Help the Hospices

- **Death and Dying: A Resource Pack**

Noirin Hynes and Margarita Synott

Available from the Marino Institute of Education

- **Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines**

National Suicide Review Group (2002)

Connaught Telegraph, Castlebar

- **When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools**

INTO/ULster Teacher Union (2000)

- **Death and Loss-Compassionate Approaches in the Classroom**

Oliver Leaman (1995)

Publisher: Cassell

- **Suicide Bereavement and Loss: Perspective and Responses**

Luke Monaghan (1999)

Publisher: IAPCE, Marino Institute of Education, Dublin

- **Childhood Bereavement-Developing the Curriculum and Pastoral Support**

Nina Job and Frances Gill (2004)

Publisher: National Children's Bureau

- **Echoes of Suicide**

Siobhan Foster Ryan and Luke Monaghan (2001)

Publisher: Veritas Publications, Dublin

- **A Student Dies, a School Responds**

Mid-Western Health Board (2001)

## **RESOURCES FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS**

- **Implementing Mental Health Promotion (2006)**

Barry, M and Jenkins, R.

Publisher: Elsevier, Oxford

- **Healing Children's Grief - Surviving a Parent's Death from Cancer**

Grace Christ (2000)

Publisher: Oxford University Press

- **Handbook of Childhood Death and Bereavement**

C.A. Corr & D.M. Corr (Eds.) (1996)

Publisher: New York, Springer

- **Someone to Talk to: A Handbook on Childhood Bereavement**

Pat Donnelly (2001)

Publisher: NCRC, Barnardos

- **Children and Disasters**

N.S. Gordon, N.L. Farberow & C.A. Maida (1999)

Publishers: Philadelphia, Burner/Mazel

- **Helping children deal with Disasters and Terrorism**

A.M. La Greca, W.K. Silverman, E.M. Vernberg & M.C. Roberts (2002)

Publisher: American Psychological Association

- **Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss**

Claudia L. Jewett (1997)

Publisher: Batsford

- **The Forgotten Mourners: Guidelines for Working with Bereaved Children**

Susan C. Smith (1999)

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

- **Someone very Important has just Died: Immediate Help for People Caring for Children of All Ages at the time of a Close Bereavement**

Mary Turner (2005)

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

- **Helping Bereaved Children: A Handbook for Practitioners**

N. Boyd Webb (1993)

Publisher: Guilford Press

- **Healing a Child's Grieving Heart for Kids: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends and Caregivers** Alan D. Wolfelt (2001)

Publisher: Companion Press

- **A Student Dies, a School Responds: A Guide for Post-primary Schools** Mid-

Western Health Board (2001)

#### **RESOURCES ON SUICIDE**

- **Living When a Young Friend Commits Suicide**

Earl A. Grollman and Max Malikow (1999)

Publishers: Brunner-Routledge, Philadelphia

- **Reach Out: national Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention (2005)**

**[www.hse.ie/en/publications](http://www.hse.ie/en/publications)**

- **Young People's Mental Health: A report of the results from the Lifestyle and Coping**

Survey (2004)

Publisher: National Suicide Research Foundation

- **Suicide Awareness: An Information Pack for Post-primary Schools**

South Eastern Health Board (2003)

- **You are Not Alone: Help and Advice on Coping with the Death of Someone Close**

Publisher: National Office for Suicide Prevention, Dublin (2007)

- **Mental Health Matters: A Mental Health Resource Pack**

Publisher: Mental Health Ireland (2001) Email [info@mhai.ie](mailto:info@mhai.ie)

- **Youth Suicide Prevention in Schools: A Practical Guide**

New Zealand Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (2003)

Publisher: Ministry of Youth Affairs, Wellington, New Zealand

[www.youthaffairs.govt.nz](http://www.youthaffairs.govt.nz)

## USEFUL WEBSITES

**The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN)** is a multi-professional federation of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people.

**[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)**

**Cruse Bereavement Care** exists to promote the well-being of bereaved people and to enable anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss.

**[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)**

The **Social, Personal and Health Education Support Service (Post-Primary)**, based in Marino Institute of Education, supports the implementation of SPHE at Post-Primary. An SPHE support team is located in each of the old Health Board areas. Supports are offered to schools include in-service for Principals, co-ordinators, teachers of SPHE, whole staff groups; programme planning; school policy development; school visits and support for on the development of a 'health promoting school'. For further information or assistance contact the SPHE support team in your region. Contact details can be found on **[www.sphe.ie](http://www.sphe.ie)**. This site also lists a wide range of resources for schools.

The **National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP)** was established to oversee the implementation of 'Reach Out' the National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention and trying to co-ordinate suicide prevention efforts around the country. The NOSP works closely with the HSE **Suicide Prevention Officers**. Up-to-date contact details for suicide prevention officers can be found on the NOSP website **[www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie)**

The **Irish Association for Suicidology (IAS)** sets out to be a forum for all individuals and voluntary groups involved in an aspect of suicidology for the exchange of knowledge gained from differing perspectives and experiences **[www.ias.ie](http://www.ias.ie)** Irish Hospice Foundation- **[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)**

**Lifelines** support all people who are affected in anyway by self-injury within the United Kingdom and beyond. It supports people who self-injure and their family and friends. **[www.selfharm.org](http://www.selfharm.org)**

Winstonwish Foundation, help for grieving children and their families. **[www.wistonwish.org.uk](http://www.wistonwish.org.uk)**

Resources and support for those dealing with suicide, depression or emotional distress, particularly teenagers and young adults. **[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)**

A national charity committed to improving the mental health of all children and young people. **[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)**

An Irish website covering all aspects of health, lifestyle, culture and craic. It's an online youth information centre, a magazine, a health clinic, a contact directory, a youth media forum a take action initiative, a community building place and lots more. [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

A site that focuses on issues relating to youth in Ireland today. [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)

An Australian site that helps young people through tough times. [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)

**Mental Health Ireland** aims to promote positive mental health and actively support persons with a mental illness, their families and carers by identifying their needs and advocating their rights. The pro teen matters web magazine, which is created by young people for young people, has information about physical and mental health, frequently asked questions, competitions, jokes and stories. [www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie)

Non- Judgemental information and support. [www.gayswithboard.ie](http://www.gayswithboard.ie)

## **HELP LINES**

**Remind students that if they need someone to talk to, at any time of the day or night, they can ring either:**

**Childline:** 1800 666 666 (Free Calls)

**The Samaritans:** 1850 60 90 90 (Local Call Cost)

**Pieta House:** 1800 247 247 (Free calls)