

# St Malachy's Boys' National School

## Critical Incident Policy

*'Building Confidence to realise potential'*

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### **Introduction:**

In St. Malachy's B.N.S. we aim to protect the well being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment as outlined in our school philosophy statement.

The BoM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

### **What is a Critical Incident?**

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school'.

### **Examples:**

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease (e.g. COVID -19, Foot & Mouth)
- Criminal incidents (e.g. Dunblane shooting, Shooting at first communion in Ballymun)
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. 'Navan bus crash')
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster (e.g. school ceiling collapsing in Cork)
- Disappearance of student from home or school (e.g. Midleton incident in Cork)
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies (e.g. 9/11, Tsunami)

### **Critical Incidents Management Team (CIMT):**

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet to review and update the policy whenever necessary. Each member will have access to the schools Critical Incident Management Folder which is located in the secretary's office and includes all of the following:

- A copy of the Critical Incident Policy including:
  - Critical Incident Management Team/and the Key Roles
  - duties of each team member
  - details of the Action Plan
- An emergency contact list/school staff contact list
- Relevant resources

### **St. Malachy's BNS CIMT:**

Leadership Role:	<b>Keith Farrell (Principal)</b>
Communication Role:	<b>Keith Farrell / Shane O'Connell (Website)</b>
Garda/Community Liaison:	<b>Joanne Farrell</b>
Student Liaison/Support Role:	<b>Stephanie McCann</b>
Family Liaison Role:	<b>Lisa Ronan</b>
Chaplaincy Role:	<b>Fr. David Barrins</b>
Administrator:	<b>Arlene Murtagh</b>
B.O.M. Rep:	<b>Mr. Thomas Clarke</b>

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### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **1. Leadership Role:**

##### **Intervention**

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

##### **Postvention**

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

#### **2. Communication Role:**

##### **Intervention**

- With CIMT, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

##### **Postvention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

#### **3. Gardaí / Community Liaison:**

##### **Intervention**

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about incidents is checked for accuracy before being shared.

##### **Postvention**

- Liaises with community for support and onward referral
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Updates team on involvement of external agencies.
- Review and evaluate plan.

#### **4. Student Liaison/ Support Role:**

##### **Intervention**

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide materials for staff

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- Provide information
- Provide support for students

### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

## **5. Family Liaison Role:**

### **Intervention**

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident

### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

## **6. Chaplaincy Role:**

### **Intervention**

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff and pupil(s)

### **Postvention**

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

## **7. Administrator**

- Maintenance up to date telephone numbers of:
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency services
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to
- Prepare and send out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

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### Action plan

#### SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

- \* It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident, such as:
  1. What happened, where and when?
  2. What is the extent of the injuries?
  3. How many are involved and what are their names?
  4. Is there a risk of further injury?
  5. What agencies have been contacted already?
  
- \* Contact appropriate agencies
  1. Emergency services
  2. Medical services
  3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
  4. NEPS (National Educational Psychology Services)
  
- \* Immediate contact with family/families
- \* Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- \* Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff
- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

#### Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy

#### MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- \* Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- \* Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- \* Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- \* Ritual within the school
- \* Review the events of the first 24 hours
- \* Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- \* Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- \* Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- \* Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- \* Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- \* Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary

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- \* Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- \* Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- \* Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- \* Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- \* Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- \* Plan visits to injured
  - Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
  - Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
  - Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- \* School closure (if appropriate)
- \* Request a decision on this from school management

### **LONGER TERM ACTIONS**

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the Health Board. Constant communication with family is essential.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

Evaluate response to incident and amend 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
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staffs 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, the Principal should 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
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day

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- Plan a school memorial service
- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

### **Record Keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the staff will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters, emails and texts sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions and materials used.

The Administrator (school secretary) will have a key role in receiving and logging phone calls, sending letters and photocopying materials.

### **Confidentiality and good name considerations**

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

### **Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident,

- Teacher's Meeting room/Staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff.
- Teacher's Meeting room/classroom/Assembly Hall for meetings with students
- Teacher's Meeting room/Assembly Hall for media
- Teacher's Meeting room/SET room for individual sessions with students
- Teacher's Meeting room/SET room/Staff room for other visitors.

Reviewed and ratified by the **Board of Management of St. Malachy's BNS.**