



# MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS POLICY

<b>Reviewed/Updated</b>	<b>Date</b>
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Review	August 2024

## Critical Incidents Policy

Despite preventative work, critical incidents, sadly, will always occur. We need to be ready and prepared to respond to these as they happen.

A Critical Incident can be defined as any incident which causes trauma within a school community. This may vary from school to school but there will be “evidence of a disruption to the normal equilibrium, a failure of one's usual coping mechanisms, signs of distress and significant functional impairment”. (Mitchell and Everly, 1999; Gibson, 1998).

While each school's response to each of their critical incidents will differ according to the circumstances and their own response style, there are good practice guidelines which should be considered. This information has been provided by EA Psychology Section who should be contacted in the first instance.

### **This Policy contains the following:**

- (i) Crisis Intervention - Action plan for schools (Summary)
- (ii) Explanation of Action Plan
- (iii) How pupils may react to bad news/traumatic event
- (iv) How staff can support pupils at a time of crisis

## **USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Phone Number</b>
CEO EANI	Sara Long	028 9056 4000
Chair of Board of Governors	Mrs Julie Stuart	07905 323339
Local Police	PSNI Ards	999 / 101
Hospital	Ulster Hospital	028 9048 4511
Critical Incident Response Team Jim Weir	Education Authority	02837512515
Crisis/Bereavement Service EA-SE	Deirdre McHugh Pam Docherty	028 9056 6200 028 9056 6924
School Psychologist	Mrs Julie Connell	028 9056 6200
Education Welfare Officer	Ms Jenny Wilson	028 9056 6200
Social Services	Gateway Team	0300 100 0300
NSPCC	Childline	0808 800 5000

# CRITICAL INCIDENT ACTION PLAN FOR SCHOOLS

## DAY 1: INFORMATION – Receiving and communicating to others

- (i) Central information point – designated person and place (under normal circumstances- principal and principal's office)
- (ii) Action committee – adopt roles (SLT)

<b>PHONE CALLS (Out and in)</b>	<b>STAFF BRIEFING + DEBRIEFING</b>	<b>PUPILS</b>	<b>(i) PARENTS (ii) MEDIA</b>
Contacts list (see above) Dedicated lines (outgoing calls) Parents (as appropriate)	Each morning and afternoon	Siblings Close friends Year group Whole school	Letter/basic details. Follow up later. Prepared statement?

## DAY 2: ONGOING/FOLLOW-UP ACTION +SUPPORT

- (i) Funeral plans?
- (ii) Monitoring pupils and staff

<b>STAFF</b>	<b>PUPILS</b>	<b>PARENTS</b>	<b>MEDIA</b>
Briefing/debriefing Support	Talking Action: card/ memory book Debriefing/counselling Board's Support Service (see over)	Information /via letter: - Acknowledge event - Funeral - Reactions (normal for event)	Follow-up statement

## **EXPLANATION of ACTION PLAN**

### **DAY 1**

#### **INFORMATION – RECEIVING AND COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS**

The Senior Leadership Team should strive to get a structure in place – well in advance of an incident occurring - which will facilitate the tasks which need to be done at the time of a critical incident. It is helpful to have considered and put in place the following:

**(i) A central information point** – staffed by a key person; ie Principal (or in absence Vice – Principal). All information is relayed to and sent from this person so that central co-ordination of all information is maintained. It is helpful also if this person remains in the same place during the day so that they can be readily accessed.

**(ii) An action committee** – all members of which have been assigned tasks/roles within the school's response plan to a critical incident. Then, at the time of a critical incident, they will adopt their pre-assigned role. Members of this committee may be the school's Senior Leadership Team and/or other staff members.

#### **1. CONTACTS LIST**

When a critical incident occurs it is necessary for the school to inform key people of the event that is/has taken place. These may include the emergency services, members of the school's Board of Governors, relevant Board Officers, etc. It is useful to have a list of relevant names with current phone numbers on an A4 laminated sheet of paper – including key holders, kitchen supervisors, etc.

#### **2. STAFF BRIEFING**

A whole staff response is necessary for an effective school response to a critical incident. The EA's Coordinator for Crisis Intervention and Bereavement Support Service for Schools and the School Psychologist are available to support the school and its staff at such a time.

The school staff, (i.e. teaching and non-teaching staff), are the key to supporting the pupils and in keeping some order and structure in school at the time of a crisis. They are in regular and close contact with the pupils. It is therefore important that they are valued and that this is acknowledged to them. They need to receive information from the Principal/Senior Leadership Team on what has occurred, how it will be handled and how they can contribute to the response within the School Leadership Team structure/good practice guidelines.

In order to do this it is useful to have a staff briefing as soon as possible and then a debriefing at the end of the school day.

Staff should also be told that there will be a debriefing after school and that there will be time then to discuss issues further - including their own needs.

Ensure that the debriefing takes place and that staff are listened to. Provide refreshments. Ask staff what they have had to deal with, how they handled it, what was difficult, etc. Affirm them in what they are doing.

Inform them of the tasks which need to be addressed in relation to the next day and inform them that there will be a meeting again in the morning.

Ensure that staff are told of how they can be supported at this time, e.g. talking to colleagues, SLT, Staff Care Support Services (re specific personal issues), Educational Psychologist/ EA's Crisis Coordinator - re how to support pupils.

Monitor staff to see how they themselves are coping. Staff should be encouraged to remain calm and to listen to the pupils. They should not feel that they need to have all the answers to pupils' questions - as they will not - and it may not be appropriate to give out detailed information. Theirs is a listening, supportive and containing role.

Some staff may need immediate support - this should be discussed with them and options offered such as Staff Care, Educational Psychologist/Co-coordinator Crisis Intervention and Bereavement Support Service for Schools.

### **3. PUPILS**

#### **a. Breaking the news to pupils**

This will likely be done in small groups, e.g. siblings, close friends, class group, year group, sibling/s year group/s etc.

Pupils may have heard rumours - via text messages, word of mouth etc. It is important, that the broad facts of the event, once verified, are communicated to the pupils in an appropriate manner (calm, caring, sensitive, containing - i.e. in control). This will help minimise rumour, provide an opportunity for the pupils to talk, express their reactions, and help to prevent hysteria developing.

As some pupils will likely be in shock, the small group setting will also act as a 'safe container'.

Staff members need to be able to respond in a calm, caring, compassionate and containing manner. They need to know that they will be supported / reaffirmed in their efforts to maintain this level of containment.

#### **b. Sending pupils home**

There are some occasions when a pupil/pupils may need to go home from school during the school day. These might include:

- (i) when an incident occurs in school,
- (ii) when an incident occurs on a school trip,
- (iii) when a relation of a pupil is seriously injured or dies as a result of a critical incident.

If this decision is taken some member/s of staff should be deputised to phone the parent/s. If there are a lot of calls to be made, a 'set script' for staff to use might be helpful and save time and something like a phone tree could also be employed.

Staff should remain with the pupils reassuring them and comforting them until such time as they are collected by their parents.

Some pupils may be more vulnerable than others and will require monitoring.

If an incident occurs when pupils are on a school trip and circumstances are such that they are not able to be returned to school, getting pupils and staff to a central 'collection' spot would need to be considered.

#### **4. CONTACTS WITH PARENTS**

Parents will play an important role in how their children are supported at the time of a crisis. It is helpful for the school and parents to have a link in respect of support for the young people, as a unified approach will make things simpler to manage.

When a critical incident occurs the parents need to be informed. Parents of pupils directly involved should be telephoned. Other parents also need to be informed; this is most likely to be done by letter. The letter might contain information re what has occurred and the school's response/intended response. In all cases giving them some information on how young people react to a traumatic event will be helpful and reassuring. (e.g. pupils may be anxious, lack concentration, be restless, not able to sleep, etc.). Giving them some practical and constructive suggestions on how to support their child will also be helpful - (i.e. make time for your child - let them talk, do not leave them unsupervised - as bad news may cause them to become anxious and unsettled, keep them with familiar adults, keep a structure for them).

When the death of a pupil occurs other than in school, the school should make prompt contact with the family to express sympathy, offer support, talk about what they might be able to do including how to support other members of the family who are at the school.

When the death or injury of a parent occurs as a result of a critical incident it is also important for the school to make prompt contact with the family and the pupil/s to express sympathy/ offer support, etc. Eventually the pupil/s will have to be reintegrated back into school and early contact with the family will prepare for these discussions at a later stage.

Where there are vulnerable pupils, some parents may need to be contacted personally.

#### **5. MEDIA**

It will be useful to have a prepared response/statement to release to the media if necessary. This could contain some of the following:

We are sorry to learn of the tragic.....of

.....

We have not yet been able to come to terms with this shocking event/dreadful incident.

We hope the school will be given the privacy needed to support our pupils at this difficult time, etc.

#### **Possible additions:**

Positive comment about the injured/deceased pupil/s, their contribution to the life of the school, social and otherwise, and how they will be sadly missed.

(NB: If the Principal wishes to comment about a pupil/s, they may want to gain permission from the family/families).

#### **Comments could be made about:**

Sporting achievements

Musical talents

Academic success

Personal attributes

## **EXPLANATION of ACTION PLAN**

### **DAY 2**

#### **1. BRIEFING OF STAFF**

- ◆ Brief staff before class.
- ◆ Arrange to debrief staff again at the end of the school day.
- ◆ Monitor staff's own reactions and see where support may be needed.

#### **2. FLEXIBLE TIMETABLE**

The operation of the timetable will be required to be flexible for the next few days.

While a structure needs to be maintained to contain pupils one must also acknowledge the event that has taken place and give it respect within the timetable.

The sensitivity with which the staff are able to handle this crisis will almost certainly affect the pupils' responses to the staff, to each other, and to how they respond to and cope with future events.

It is also important that the staff do not expect too much from the pupils for the next few days. The pupils (and the staff members themselves) will likely be affected by the event and their concentration may not be good.

Homework may be reduced, or not set at all.

Expect them to function - but maybe not at the same intensity as before the event.

Within a few days the timetable will revert to a more familiar routine. Remember though that pupils - and staff - are all affected by the event and that it may take a long time for some to accommodate to the new situation.

#### **3. PUPILS**

##### **a. Further talking**

- ◆ How are you?
- ◆ Sleep/eating/concentration?
- ◆ Reminders that these are normal responses to events.
- ◆ Answer any questions.
- ◆ May require some repetition of what went the day before.

Give information about what will happen next re incident, if appropriate, e.g. funeral arrangements, school/pupil involvement, police inquiry, school timetable over the next few days, etc.

Monitor progress of individual pupils.

##### **b. Action for pupils**

- ◆ Make sympathy card for family if appropriate.
- ◆ Make get well cards if appropriate.
- ◆ Prepare for funeral/involve pupils in rituals.
- ◆ Discuss memory book for the deceased pupil (if appropriate).
- ◆ Discuss the deceased's belongings - decisions will be made later re what to do with these (do not rush decisions at a time when people are in shock).
- ◆ Indicate there will be discussions later re a School Memorial.

### **c. Assessment of pupils who may require support**

Are there vulnerable pupils who require close monitoring (e.g. those who have had other traumatic experiences, have suffered a loss, suffer from anxiety, depression, other mental health issues, have limited family support, etc.)?

Close friends of deceased/injured pupil/s.

Discuss with vulnerable pupils who they might feel comfortable talking to within the school.

Is there a need for a pupil/group of pupils to talk to someone with more specialist training?

## **4. PARENTS**

### **a. Further information by letter**

Follow on from last bulletin/letter with an update if appropriate. This will likely be to do with funeral arrangements if known and how the school will be responding. This could involve closing the school for a morning or afternoon.

### **b. Calling a meeting (of parents)**

If this is required SLT need to decide when to do this, discuss it with staff, decide who (if appropriate) should be invited to address parents (this will depend on the event). The purpose of this meeting would be:

- ◆ To share information.
- ◆ To discuss the school's response.
- ◆ To discuss how best to support their children at this time.
- ◆ To discuss any other relevant information.
- ◆ To hand out written information (if appropriate).

### **c. People to be invited may include:**

- ◆ Police/Emergency Services/other Agencies who were involved in the incident.
- ◆ Chair of Board of Governors.
- ◆ PTA representatives.
- ◆ CEO of EA.
- ◆ Co-ordinator of Crisis Intervention and Bereavement Support Service for Schools.
- ◆ Relevant Health Service Agencies if appropriate.

## **HOW PUPILS MAY REACT TO BAD NEWS/TRAUMATIC EVENT**

Young people, like adults, will react to bad news in a variety of ways. No two people react in the same way. Their own personality, their family support, their life experiences to date and how they have been treated by others will all have a bearing on their responses.

What we do know is that by not talking about these events or even by trying to shield pupils from events (to protect them) is to do them a disservice.

It is important to walk beside young people, to listen to them, to share their grief and shock and to help contain it for them. It is even helpful for them to see that you too can be upset ~ but not out of control. By being yourself, by allowing them to see that adults too can and do grieve, you are 'normalising' their reactions and letting them see that they are not alone in their responses. You are modelling a response for them and helping them to develop their coping skills.

Never underestimate the positive effect that concern and support from a caring adult can have on a young person.



### First reactions may be:

- ◆ Disbelief
- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Panic
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Crying
- ◆ Talking: repeating what they have experienced/heard
- ◆ Inability to process information well (and so they may not hear/take in what has happened or what has been said to them).
- ◆ Regression - We all regress when we hear bad news. We want to be looked after and protected.
- ◆ Saddened
- ◆ Withdrawal
- ◆ Aggression

### INTERVENTION TEAM AND CENTRAL POINT

No matter how prepared we think we are, death is often traumatic and unexpected. Therefore a considered, planned and organised response to an event is much more effective than acting on impulse. It is for this reason we have created an Intervention Team in Kircubbin Integrated Primary School, based in the Principal's office.

#### Intervention Team and Roles:

Key Member	Principal. The first point of contact and is responsible for liaising with all parties concerned and affected.
Deputy	Vice-Principal. Would temporarily deputise for the Key Member in the running of their routine day to day tasks.
Media Spokesperson	Key Member or Deputy who may (if the need arises) liaise with the media and decide what information should be released. They may also need to liaise with the police.
Member of Board of Governors	Chair of Board of Governors in a crisis may need to come into school to liaise with Key Member and Deputy.
Others Head of KS	Liaise with members of staff, key member, deputy and Counsellor.
Head of Pastoral Care / DT	Offer support, consultation and guidance to the team and the bereaved should they required it. Make contact with Bereavement Support team if required.
School Secretary	School phone line will be busy. Secretary should be briefed by Principal on information to be released. Keep records of all phone calls made and information given. Ensure a separate telephone line ~ one that is not accessible for incoming calls.

## **PRO FORMA LETTER (for parents)**

'With great regret, we have learnt of the death/deaths of ..... and we extend our deepest sympathy to the family circle.

(information about funeral etc)

NB: Included with the letter to parents could be leaflets from Crisis Intervention, Bereavement Support Services for Schools, Psychology Section, EA.

## **ACCIDENTS/PRINCIPLES OF EMERGENCY FIRST AID**

### **Essentials staff should know**

#### **What to do in an emergency**

##### **Location of:**

1. Emergency exits
2. Fire alarms
3. Assembly points
4. Telephones
5. If off site, school mobile phone.

#### **Have specific knowledge of provision of first aid in the school**

##### **1. Names of First Aiders:**

Caroline McFarland, Nicola Magee, Joanne Gilmore, Susan Ritchie and Emma Anderson

##### **2. Location of First Aid provisions**

Teachers' stores/ Office.

#### **Accident Report Forms**

- ◆ Accident Report Forms are kept in the Secretary's Office.
- ◆ Always complete an Accident Report form in detail immediately after the incident.

#### **What is expected of you?**

- ◆ You may not be sure that you want the responsibility of giving help in accident and emergency situations: you may be afraid of seeing blood or severe injuries; you may feel someone can cope better than you.
- ◆ A First Aider should be contacted immediately as well as the Principal or Vice Principal.
- ◆ In any situation you can only do your best.
- ◆ A First Aider's aim is to preserve life and limit the effects of the condition on the casualty.
- ◆ Promote the casualty's recovery if possible.

#### **First Aider**

In any incident the First Aider has a five-point Action Plan:

1. **Assess the situation**  
Take in what has happened quickly and calmly look for dangers to yourself, the casualty and others. Never put yourself at risk
2. **Make the area safe**  
Protect casualty, bystanders and yourself from danger. Be aware of your limitations
3. **Assess the casualty/all casualties**  
Give emergency first aid.  
Assess each casualty; treat those with life threatening conditions first.

4. Get help
  - ◆ other First Aiders
  - ◆ Principal
  - ◆ emergency services
5. Deal with the aftermath  
After casualty has been treated, complete an accident report form.

**The teacher (who is not a First Aider) should**

1. Deal with points 1 and 2 above, i.e. assess the situation and make the area safe.
2. GET HELP.
3. Talk to the casualty and find what the reaction is. Only in minor injuries ie grazes, slight cuts should you move them, otherwise do NOT move them. Get the nearest First Aider.
4. Use the telephone or a pupil to go and get help. Do not go yourself.
5. Reassure the casualty that help is on the way.

**To summarise**

- » **Assess the situation**
- » **Make the area safe**
- » **Get help**
- » **Reassure only ~ do not move the casualty**
- » **Complete Accident Report form.**

**Principal**

- ◆ Ensure procedures are being followed.
- ◆ Assess situation personally.
- ◆ Contact parents/guardians.
- ◆ Instruct Vice Principal to organise teaching cover to help with children who are distressed. Organise pupils who witnessed the accident/incident to go to another room.
- ◆ Meet doctor, emergency services on arrival to brief them and direct them.
- ◆ After casualty has been dealt with, investigate accident/incident.
- ◆ Check on well-being of pupils and staff involved ~ offer necessary support/advice.

**Vice Principal**

Support Principal in carrying out procedures and with alternative class cover arrangements if necessary. Contact parents of children who are very distressed. Organise support for affected pupils and members of staff.

**Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be monitored regularly by the Senior Leadership Team and the issues arising reported by the Principal to the Governors. The policy will be reviewed by the Principal and the Board of Governors.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Principal

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Chair of Board of Governors

Date: \_\_\_\_\_