

Scoil Mhuire Critical Incident Plan

Introduction:

The Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire aims 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's mission statement:

We, the staff of Scoil Mhuire, Maigh Cuilinn, are dedicated to the creation of a pleasant, relaxed, safe, controlled learning environment providing for the personal, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual development of each child.

We wish to enable each child to realize their maximum potential, to develop self-confidence, security and to develop as well adjusted human beings and responsible citizens.

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) have consulted resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie and www.nosp.ie including:

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- When Tragedy Strikes INTO 2000
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

The Board of Management through consultation with the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has formulated this Critical Incident Plan (CIP). A CIMT has been established to steer the development and implementation of the plan. Copies of this policy will be disseminated to staff, the Board of Management and the Parent's Association. The policy will be available to view/download from the school's website. The policy will be available in hard copy from the school office.

Critical Incidents

'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'. (NEPS/DES 2008). Critical Incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school or the local community such as, but not limited to, the following examples:

- The tragic death of a member of school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide
- Major illness or the outbreak of disease
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or pupil(s)
- A child protection issue
- The disappearance of student from home or school
- The unauthorised removal of student from school or home
- An intrusion into the school

- Serious damage to the school through fire, vandalism or flooding
- Criminal incidents
- Major accidents involving serious injury
- Fire, natural and technological disasters
- Civil unrest
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies

Aim

The aim of the CIP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Physical safety

- The school has a Health and Safety Policy
- The school has an Emergency Evacuation Plan
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked and serviced
- Fire alarm systems are regularly checked and serviced
- Morning supervision is in place in the school yard
- Yard supervision is in place at break times
- The school has a procedure for the management of injuries
- The school has a procedure for the early collection of children from school
- Staff are familiar with their duties as per Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures
- The RSE and Stay Safe Programmes are implemented in full

Psychological safety

The management and staff of Scoil Mhuire aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.

- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety

- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies: NEPS, NCSE, TUSLA
- Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published on 2007 for primary schools and 2010 for post primary schools. See also Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014). These documents are available on www.education.ie
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member i.e. support teacher), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

Management and staff of Scoil Mhuire have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of public statements.

Members of school staff will bear this in mind, and seek to ensure that students do so also, e.g. the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, *and* that the family involved 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 Incidents Management Team (CIMT):

Leadership Role: Mr. Terry Kavanagh, Principal. Ms. Louise McKiernan, Dep. Principal.

Record Keeping Role: Mr. Terry Kavanagh, Principal. Ms. Louise McKiernan, Dep. Principal.

Communication Role: Ms. Louise McKiernan, Dep. Principal. Mr. Terry Kavanagh, Principal.

Student Liaison/Counselling Role: Ms. Louise McKiernan, SPHE Coordinator, All members of the Teaching Staff

Family Liaison Role: Mr. Terry Kavanagh, Principal

Staff Health and Safety Rep.: Ms. Julie Ann Brown

Board of Management Health and Safety Rep.: _____

Chairperson, Board of Management: Mr. Christopher O'Neill

Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Martin Whelan P.P.

Parents' Association Rep.: _____

School Secretary: Mrs. Renee O'Reilly

School Caretaker: Mr. Pat Walsh

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined.

The second-named person assists and only assumes responsibility on the absence of the first-named.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Leadership Role:

Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Activate the CIMT
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Liaise with the Board of Management, Department of Education & Skills
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outline 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)
- Liaise with Parents Association Chairperson
- Report incidents to the Health & Safety Authority
- Communicate with the media

Postvention

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

Record Keeping Role:

- Keep a record of phonecalls made and received, letters and email sent and received, meetings held, persons met, materials used, etc.
- The school secretary will have a role in sending, receiving and logging telephone calls, emails, letters, etc.

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 including NEPS
- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils

Postvention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

Student Liaison/ Counselling 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 (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide counselling

Postvention

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

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 or provide appropriate support contacts
- Review and evaluate plan

Staff Health & Safety Representative/BOM Health & Safety Representative

Intervention

- Assessing the Health and Safety issue
- Liaising with other members of work in partnership with the CIMT
- Review and evaluate plan
- Assisting with reports of dangerous occurrences or accident for the Health and Safety Authority
- Reporting to Board of Management on any Health & Safety aspects

Postvention

- Work in partnership with CIMT
- Review and evaluate plan

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Intervention

- Liaising with Patron and Department of Education & Skills
- Liaising with Principal regarding incidents and issues occurring on the ground
- Consider legal & financial consequences
- Consult with Principal & CIMT in preparing a media statement

Postvention

- Work in partnership with CIMT
- Review and Evaluate Plan

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

Postvention

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

Parent's Association Rep.

Intervention

- Representing parents' concerns and wishes with regard to the school's response to the critical incident

Postvention

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

Secretary

Intervention

- Ring the emergency services immediately
- Ensuring that the Office is manned at all time's
- Liaising with other members of CIMT

Postvention

- Work in partnership with the CIMT
- Review and Evaluate Plan

Caretaker

Intervention

- Assist the CIMT in ensuring the safety of students, staff and visitors
- Liaise with the Emergency Services

Postvention

- Work in partnership with the CIMT
- Review and Evaluate Plan

Critical Incident Rooms	
Room 14	Main Room for Meeting Staff
Halla Mór	Meetings with Students
Halla Mór	Meetings with Parents
School Yard	Meetings with Media
SEN Room or Staffroom	Individual Sessions with Students
Staff Room	Meetings with other Visitors

ACTION PLAN

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

Ensure the safety of all students, staff & visitors

Contact appropriate agencies

- Emergency services
- Medical services
- H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
- NEPS
- HAS
- BOM
- PA
- DES

Gather accurate information (use Incident Report form)

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?

In-School Management

- Convene a meeting of the CIMT and delegate responsibilities
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate – Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- 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
- Identify high risk, vulnerable pupils
- Appoint people to assist Secretary & Caretaker in handling phone queries & manning Secretary's Office & school gates
- Arrange the supervision of pupils
- Organise a timetable for the day
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

Immediate contact with family/families

- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral 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
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Leader, Chaplain, Student Liaison person or Class teacher)

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Respond to the media – only the leader will speak to the media; all other staff will refrain from commenting
- Prepare a brief statement (CIMT)
- Protect the family's privacy

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

Funerals

Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service 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

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.

Ceremony within the school

CIMT Review

Review the events of the first 24 hours

Reconvene Key Staff/ CIMT 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

Support for Pupils/Staff

Establish contact with absent staff and pupils

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

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.

Hospital Visits

Plan visits to injured

Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital

LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor Pupils

- 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
- Consult with NEPS Psychologist

Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately

- What worked effectively?
- 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

New Pupils and Staff

Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate

Ensure new staff are aware of policy and procedures in this area

Ensure new staff are aware of pupils affected by recent incidents

Alert Principal of receiving school of incidents involving pupils transferring to the new school

Anniversaries

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

Plan a school memorial service

Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?

Update and amend school records

Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

This policy was formulated and adopted in 2020 in consultation with the staff and the Board of Management.

The CIMT will review the policy on the formation of a new Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation have regard for changing information, legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, staff and pupils. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

Appendix 1: Guidelines

School Response

The school's response to a critical incident should be informed by our ethos. The response must

- Reflect our ethos. WE PRAY FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY THIS INCIDENT.
- Be respectful and sensitive
- Reflect a sense of community and solidarity
- Provide a supportive forum for the sharing of views and concerns
- Explain the event in a clear, factual, appropriate manner
- Only be made after family members have been notified
- Only make simple, truthful and respectful reference to individuals
- Avoid anecdotes and speculation
- Stress that the school is working closely with all relevant authorities and that the health and safety of pupils is the main concern
- Focus on actions being taken to alleviate the situation.
- Prepare members of the CIMT who may be giving interviews. STAFF MUST NOT SPEAK TO THE MEDIA INDEPENDENTLY OF THE CIMT LEADER. THOSE SPEAKING TO THE MEDIA MUST USE THE SAME LANGUAGE AND WORK FROM THE SAME SCRIPT.

Staff Communication

Insofar as possible all staff will be given the same information, via. an Aladdin Message and subsequent staff meetings. Staff will be kept fully informed so that they are in a position to respond to pupils' anxieties and rumours.

Parent Communication

Parents directly involved will be contacted by the CIMT LEADER. Staff members must not make contact with these parents. Staff will be notified if and when making contact with these parents is appropriate.

Media

The media, particularly local broadcasters is an effective means of conveying accurate information and advice. It is essential that no new information is released via the media. The media should be used to get out information that the school wants to convey, e.g. pupils are safe and secure, and action is being taken. It is important to be as open and honest as possible and to adhere to clear, simple, factual language to prevent rumours from proliferating and discourage media intrusion. The school reserves the right to prevent journalists accessing the school premises.

Interviews

All interviews will be by prior agreement with the CIMT LEADER. None but the CIMT LEADER or an appointed member of the CIMT will speak to the media. The person appointed speak to the media should only do so when they are confident that he/she is in possession of the facts. He/she should ensure that he/she is briefed on questions, etc. by the media representative before any interviews are recorded.

Drafting a Press Statement

The media should be informed in advance that a statement is being prepared and will issue shortly. The Press Statement should then be the focus for all press inquiries.

The purpose of the press statement is to provide information and to counteract any rumours or other erroneous sources of information. The Press Statement should express the sympathies of the school to victims and their family.

Understanding Pupil Responses to Tragedy

Children respond to a crisis or tragedy differently. Some will show their feelings while others may show physical signs or changes in their behaviour. The stages of grief for those dealing with tragedy or significant loss are:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

Steps towards dealing with grief

1. Accepting the reality of loss
2. Experiencing the pain of loss
3. Adjusting to the new environment
4. Investing in new relationships

Identifying pupils in need of Support

Pupils may show sign of distress in different ways

Quality of schoolwork

Emotional sensitivity

Unusual behaviours

Physical symptoms of distress

Talking to Pupils following a Crisis or Tragedy

- Ascertain needs and relief mechanisms
 - Use age appropriate language; simple, open, honest, sensitive
 - Use actual rather than hyperbolic language
 - Create a shared sense of ownership and solidarity
 - Conveying a sense of shared shock and grief
 - Reassuring them that they are not responsible in any way for the tragedy
 - Showing patience as they adjust to the new reality
 - Allowing them to talk and express feelings
 - Keeping things as normal as possible
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- Do not advise pupils not to worry or be sad
 - Do not advise pupils what they should feel or do
 - Do not suggest that you know how pupils feel
 - Don't use phrases like "at least...."

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST	
AGENCY	CONTACT NUMBERS
Garda	Salthill 091 514 720 Moycullen 091 555122
Hospital	UCHG 091 524222
Fire Brigade	(091) 509 070
Local GPs	Dr Winters: 091 555200 Dr Rowan: 091 555588 Dr Grimes 091 555348
TUSLA West Galway Family Services	(091) 529390
TUSLA Child and Family Agency	091 546235
TUSLA Oughterard	091 552200
Child and Family Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	(091) 548 900
School Inspector Niamh Ní Fhoighil	Available from Office
NEPS Psychologist Fran Doolan	Available from Office
Clergy Fr. Martin Whelan	091 555106
Galway Diocesan Education Office	091 565066