Holy Spirit Senior Primary School

Critical Incident Management Policy & Plan

	Date
Ratified by BoM	21st September 2026

Signed: Joanne Keane **Date:** 21st September 2026

Chairperson, Board of Management

Holy Spirit Senior Primary School

Critical Incident Policy

Holy Spirit Senior Primary School aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe, tolerant, nurturing and well catered for environment at all times, as outlined in our school mission statement.

The staff and management of Holy Spirit SPS have formulated a number of policies (for instance Anti-Bullying Policy, Health and Safety Policy and our Code of Behaviour) and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students, and the creation of a supportive and caring ethos in the school, in ordinary time as well as in the event of a critical incident.

The staff and management of Holy Spirit SPS recognise a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school"[1] and interrupts the running of the school. Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, terminal illness, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death.
- An intrusion into the school which has an adverse impact on the school community
- An accident involving members of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider school community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

Aim

The aim of the CIMP 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 return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school

[1] Source: Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools – NEPS (2016), p. 79 https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Responding%20to%20Critical%20Incidents.pdf

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
Holy Spirit SPS has already implemented the following:

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Rear gate locked during school hours
- Two access codes required for entry at front door
- Playground rules have been drawn up and are revised regularly
- A full supervision schedule in place

Psychological Safety
The management and staff of Holy Spirit SPS 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.
Some examples include:

- 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 alcohol and drug prevention. Promotion of mental health is included in 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 are familiar to all staff.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves. Inspire Well-Being contact details (1800 411 057) are on display in the staffroom and offices/
- Holy Spirit SPS is a Restorative Practice school where Restorative Practice is embedded throughout the school's approach to relationships and discipline, encouraging open dialogue, empathy, and repair of harm when conflict arises.

- Holy Spirit SPS, through their principal, deputy principal, HSCL teacher and others has developed links with a range of external agencies, including NEPS, Walkinstown Greenhills Resource Centre, therapists.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this plan.
- The school has a SCP which can be used to support children and staff.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (the Principal) and the HSCL 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.
- A Pastoral Care Team and Well-Being Committee are in place.
- The importance of overall well-being in Holy Spirit SPS is emphasised in the school's Well-Being Policy.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school student are available in school, namely:

Books

1. When Something Terrible Happens; Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief
2. Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion: Well-being in Primary Schools – also available at https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Well-Being-in-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion.pdf

Websites

1. www.mentalhelathireland.ie
2. https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Well-Beingin-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion.pdf
3. www.barnardos.ie/resources
4. www.irishchildhoodbereavementnetwork.ie
5. www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
6. https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Responding%20to%20Critical%20Incidents.pdf
7. https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Well-Being-in-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion.pdf

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team will have a dedicated critical incident folder. This will contain a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Roles and Duties

The key roles which need to be covered are as follows:

1. Team leader Elma Young

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management and Parents' Association (if appropriate)
- Liaises with the bereaved/affected family

2. Staff Liaison Elma Young

- Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and outlines the routine of the day
- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Provides materials to staff from "Ready-to-Go Pack"

3. Student Liaison Audrey Cooney

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Records details of students supported following a critical incident
- Provides materials for students (from the critical incident folder)
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

3. Community Liaison Aoife Lacey

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies
- Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of key parents such as members of the Parents' Association, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources

4. Parent Liaison Aoife Lacey

- Facilitates 'questions and answers' meetings (if deemed appropriate).
- Meets with individual parents (if deemed appropriate)
- Provides materials for parents from the "Ready-to-Go Pack" (if necessary)
- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader (if deemed appropriate)

5. Media Liaison Elma Young/Joanne Keane (Chairperson BOM)
In preparing for the role, she/he will consider issues that may arise during the incident and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on premises, etc). The dignity of those involved in the critical incident will be maintained. In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the Communications Section in the DES.

6. Administrator Joanne and Laura (School Secretaries)

- Maintenance of up to date lists of contact numbers. Parents and guardians will be reminded to inform school of change of address or phone number
- In the case of a critical incident, secretary might be called in over holidays

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used, etc. Our school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending emails, photocopying materials, etc. A script may be prepared by the Critical Incident Management Team to support with this, if deemed appropriate.

An email will be sent to parents based on the sample attached and will include:

- The sympathy of the school community.
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured person(s)
- The facts of the incident
- What has been done
- What is going to be done

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

The management and staff of Holy Spirit SPS 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 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 'tragic death' may be used instead.

Critical Incident Rooms

In the event of a critical incident:

- The staffroom will be the main room used to meet the staff

- The hall and classrooms will be used for meeting with students
- The hall will be used for parents
- HSCL office will be used for individual sessions with students
- The principal's office will be used for other visitors

Consultation and Communication regarding the plan
All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.
Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.
Each member of the critical incident team will have a personal copy.
The policy and plan will be updated annually.

Role	**Name**
Team Leader	Elma Young
Staff Liaison	Elma Young
Student Liaison	Audrey Cooney
Community Liaison	Aoife Lacey
Parent Liaison	Aoife Lacey
Media Liaison	Elma Young/ Joanne Keane
Administrator	Joanne and Laura (secretaries)

Members of the Team 2026-2027

E. Young, A. Cooney, A. Lacey, B. Kenneally, M. Farrell,O. Murphy, A. Daly, Joanne and Laura

Resources

Sample Checklist for Principal and Critical Incident Management Team

Gather and record the facts - what has happened, when, how, where, and who is injured or dead	
Consult Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools - https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Responding%20to%20Critical%20Incidents.pdf	
Is it an incident requiring a NEPS Response at Level 1, 2 or 3? (page 20 of Responding to Critical Incidents – see link above)	
Who do I need to call (see Emergency Contact List)?	
Meet with the other Critical Incident Management Team members in a suitable location. Please note that in some circumstances, the school may not be an appropriate place to meet.	
Decide on arrangements for the first day after the critical incident – e.g., Make a daily plan for staff for the first day and prepare a script for all staff. Ensure all staff receive this before the school day begins, including escort staff, SNAs, secretary and teachers.	
Check in with staff, in the staffroom, before school and during the day to keep up to date with what is happening in the school. Inform them of the supports of Inspire Well-being Services - 1800 411 057	
Meet with other agencies, if involved, to agree roles and procedures	
Organise photocopying of appropriate literature	
Arrange for the supervision of students	
Address the staff	
Identify vulnerable students and those who need to be told individually, e.g., close friends.	
Identify vulnerable staff members	
Draft a media statement/school website statement	
Prepare for a media interview, (see Section 9) of “Responding to Critical Incidents” - https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Responding%20to%20Critical%20Incidents.pdf	
Draft a letter to parents (R2, R3 – page 54 of “Responding to Critical Incidents” – see link above)	
Meet with the staff group again and check in with everyone. Encourage staff to come to you during the day to tell you how things are going. Remind staff to be compassionate and only talk of the facts, not speculation.	
Make contact with the affected family/families.	

Find details of the funeral (if such an incident has occurred) and communicate this to the staff and students. Make appropriate arrangements, e.g. school closure	
Meet with the CIMT to review the day and arrange an early morning meeting for the following day	
In time, think of how someone can be remembered, e.g., planting a tree, prayer service, etc.	

Maintain the normal routine if at all possible.

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Emergency Contact List

Agency	Phone Number
Emergency Services	999 or 112
Crumlin Garda Station	01 666 6200
Tallaght Hospital	01 414 2432
Tusla Duty Number	01 4686289
Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin	01 409 6100
Fire Brigade Services	999 or 112
INTO	018047700
Holy Spirit Parish Centre	01 4509191
Fr. Michael Kilkenny (Parish Priest)	087 9923755
Inspire Well-being Services	1800 411 057
NEPS	01-8650 421
School Inspector - Barbara Collins	Barbara_Collins@education.gov.ie

Sample Letter – Sudden Death/Accident

Holy Spirit Senior Primary School

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of Name of student(s)/staff member. We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events. Our thoughts are with (family name).

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy (elaborate).

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions s/he may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is age appropriate.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to express feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or be fearful, anxious, or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reactions. Over the course of the coming days, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

(Optional)
An information night for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given. We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time. Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with

them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school (details).

Yours sincerely,

_____

Principal

Sample Announcement to the Media/School Website

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 the family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (Name) family and friends. Name of student/students was a (e.g. 5th class boy) 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 National Educational Psychological Service (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. The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event. The school has been open to parents to support them and to offer them advice and guidance. We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time. Thank you.

Sample Script and Timetable for Principal and other Staff Members

The following scripts should be used at each level. Please do not deviate from this script insofar as possible. Ideally this session should be finished before break time.

8:50 am - Classrooms

Third class teacher:
I have something very sad I want to share with you. We've heard that _____ has died. It's a very sad day for the school losing _____. I am feeling very 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.

[If appropriate, suggest creating a memory box or writing a letter to ____ family]

Sometimes, when we hear someone has died, it reminds us of our loved ones that have died. Is there anyone you would like to remember? [Make a display for your sacred space/ light a candle (you can use the Prayer Space on the Grow in Love website for this)]

It is important to remember that we need to support each other through sad times. If you have any worries about yourself or a friend, please let an adult know at home or in school.
Here is a list of suggested activities [15 minutes]:
Lego
Knex
Draw a picture
Silent reading
Classroom games
Taboo (on Google Drive)

Fourth class teacher:
I have something very sad I want to share with you. We've heard that _____ has died. It's a very sad day for the school losing _____. I am feeling very 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.

[If appropriate, suggest creating a memory box or writing a letter to ____ family]

Sometimes, when we hear someone has died, it reminds us of our loved ones that have died. Is there anyone you would like to remember? [Make a display for your sacred

space/ light a candle (you can use the Prayer Space on the Grow in Love website for this)]

It is important to remember that we need to support each other through sad times. If you have any worries about yourself or a friend, please let an adult know at home or in school.
Here is a list of suggested activities [15 minutes]:
Lego
Knex
Draw a picture
Silent reading
Classroom games
Taboo (on Google Drive)

Fifth class teacher:
I have something very sad I want to share with you. We've heard that _____ has died. It's a very sad day for the school losing _____. I am feeling very 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.

Everyone reacts differently when they hear sad news like this. Some may feel shocked. Some may feel upset and some may feel confused. Others may feel numb. There is no right or wrong way to react. All reactions are normal responses to sad news and your reactions will go away in time. If they don't go away, be sure to talk to an adult about it. It is important to remember that we need to support each other through sad times. If you have any worries about yourself or a friend, please let an adult know at home or in school.

You may see something on Snapchat, Instagram or Facebook [on social media] about _____ but we ask you to be respectful and remember ____'s family may read these posts. Sometimes what we read online isn't always factual.

[If appropriate, suggest creating a memory box or writing a letter to ____ family]

Sometimes, when we hear someone has died, it reminds us of our loved ones that have died. Is there anyone you would like to remember? [Make a display for your sacred space/light a candle (you can use the Prayer Space on the Grow in Love website for this)]

When I feel sad, I talk to friends or family. What strategies do you use to help you feel better when you are sad?
Here is a list of suggested activities [15 minutes]:

Lego
Knex
Draw a picture
Silent reading
Classroom games
Taboo (on Google Drive)

Sixth class teacher:
I have something very sad I want to share with you. We've heard that _____ has died. It's a very sad day for the school losing _____. I am feeling very 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.

Everyone reacts differently when they hear sad news like this. Some may feel shocked. Some may feel upset and some may feel confused. Others may feel numb. There is no right or wrong way to react. All reactions are normal responses to sad news and your reactions will go away in time. If they don't go away, be sure to talk to an adult about it. It is important to remember that we need to support each other through sad times. If you have any worries about yourself or a friend, please let an adult know at home or in school.

You may see something on Snapchat, Instagram or Facebook [or social media] about _____ but we ask you to be respectful and remember ____'s family may read these posts. Sometimes what we read online isn't always factual.

[If appropriate, suggest creating a memory box or writing a letter to ____ family]

Sometimes, when we hear someone has died, it reminds us of our loved ones that have died. Is there anyone you would like to remember? [Make a display for your sacred space/light a candle (you can use the Prayer Space on the Grow in Love website for this)]

When I feel sad, I talk to friends or family. What strategies do you use to help you feel better when you are sad?
Here is a list of suggested activities [15 minutes]:
Lego
Knex
Draw a picture
Silent reading
Classroom games
Taboo (on Google Drive)

10.40am onwards

We anticipate that from break time onwards, you will attempt to have as normal a day as possible. Ensure the children have the routine of a regular day.

How to answer a difficult question:

E.g. Was ____ sick? Yes ___ but that is a private matter for her family and we are respecting the family's wishes.

Always revert back to the sentence, "That is a private matter for his/her family and we are respecting the family's wishes".

If children are concerned about death, allow them to voice their concerns. Light a candle at the sacred space. Talk to the children about Heaven. Ask the children what they think Heaven is like. [*Be mindful of the fact that some religions have different belief systems.]*

Do not mention the following words:

Suicide
Depression
Sudden
Unexpected
Tragic

General announcements:

- Minimal amount of homework to be given - spellings and reading.
- Principal will speak with teachers running extra-curricular activities

CHECKLIST - STUDENTS AT RISK

This checklist may be used as an aid by school staff who are concerned about a student. It should be remembered that the checking of a number of items for any one student may point to other problems. Indication of a number of these factors in any one student should always be followed up.

Behaviour	Observed
Unexpected reduction of academic performance	
Change in mood and marked emotionally instability	
Giving personal belongings away	
Ideas and themes of depression, death and suicide in their work	
Discipline problems, being in trouble in school	
Withdrawal from relationships	
Neglect of physical appearance	
High risk behaviours	
Talking about suicide	
Significant grief or stress	
Loss of interest in things one cares about	
Making statements about hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness	
Withdrawal from extra-curricular activities	
Break up of an important relationship	
Physical symptoms with emotional cause	
Alcohol or drug abuse	
Bullying or victimisation	
Over use or reliance on social media	
Family history of suicide or attempted suicide	
History of suicidal behaviour e.g. cutting or overdose risk behaviours	