

St Benildus College

Critical Incident Policy



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Introduction

St Benildus College will respond to crisis situations in a manner that ensures optimum safety for students and staff members. Crisis situations are defined as violent acts or emergencies causing serious injuries or actual, attempted or threatened suicide and sudden death situations. We are dedicated to a community in which the dignity of each student, staff member and parent is honoured and reflected in school policies and structures.

The principles underpinning this policy have been approved by the Board of Management and are in accordance with “Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines & Resource Materials for Schools (2016) National Educational Psychological Service(NEPS), and reflects, insofar as they are applicable to St Benildus College, the good practices and guiding principles and advice as set out in the guidelines.

Critical Incident Management Team

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) for 2023/24 is as follows:

Principal/Team Leader	Mary Brohan	mbrohan@stbenilduscollege.com
Deputy Principal	Lisa Barnes	lbarnes@stbenilduscollege.com
Deputy Principal	Alan Curran	acurran@stbenilduscollege.com
Deputy Principal	Aaron Haughey	ahaughey@stbenilduscollege.com
Guidance Counsellor	J. Beadle/Cassidy	jbeadle@stbenilduscollege.com
Guidance Counsellor	R. Mulvihill	rmulvihill@stbenilduscollege.com
Guidance Counsellor	N. Minnock	nminnock@stbenilduscollege.com
AEN Coordinator	S. Melvin	kfourie@stbenilduscollege.com
Student Support Team	J. Dobbyn	jdobbin@stbenilduscollege.com
Student Support Team	E. Fagan	efagan@stbenilduscollege.com
Yearhead	N. Maher	nmaher@stbenilduscollege.com
Teacher	S. Fahey	sfahey@stbenilduscollege.com
School Secretary	S. Cathcart	stbenildusoffice@stbenilduscollege.com

The following staff/agencies may be involved as the CIMT see fit:

- **Relevant Yearhead, NEPS, school secretaries and caretaker.**
- **Other staff members may be asked to be part of the team as deemed appropriate. In the event that a CIMT member is unavailable, another staff member may be appointed in lieu.**
- **The CIMT may, depending on circumstances, seek the support and participation, local medical personnel, local clergy and/or Guidance Counsellors from local schools. In addition, advice and support may be sought from the DES, Trustees (Le Chéile) and/or the JMB.**

Rationale

The goal of the Critical Incident Management Policy (CIMP) for St Benildus College is to provide a caring, safe and supportive environment, which respects the whole College community, so that all those involved will emerge from any critical incident knowing that there are structures in place that will help them deal appropriately with the event. The aim of the CIMP is to help the management of the College and the 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 affect a return to normality as soon as possible. Though the Principal obviously exercises a pivotal role in the College's response to a critical incident, best practice recommends the formation of a CIMT, composed of key College personnel, in providing a supportive role. The role of NEPS in the event of a critical incident is to support schools through supporting staff. The rationale for this plan is to enable the College to identify risks and to have a communication plan in place that can be effectively put into action when an accident occurs in the College. It will be used in conjunction with all other College policies and procedures in promoting positive mental health and in creating effective care systems in the College.

Such policies would include:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Child Safeguarding Policy
- Bí Cinealta/Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Guidance Policy
- S.P.H.E Programme
- Data Protection Policy

Defining a Critical Incident

A Critical Incident is any incident or sequence of events, which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the College and disrupts the running of the College. Should such an incident occur, the College's CIMT will meet to put a plan in place.

Examples of a critical incident might be:

- The sudden and unexpected death of a member of the school community.
- A serious accident or tragedy in the school community.
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- A physical attack on a staff member or student.
- A violent attack or assault on the school or members of the school community.
- Intrusion into the school.

Prevention

St Benildus College is committed to the welfare of its students. This is evident in the relationship between staff and students. Through our Wellbeing programme, RSE and through the TY programme and the Guidance and Counselling programmes the College addresses many of the major life issues faced by teenagers. In tandem with this, through a number of key school policies we promote and support a positive school environment and positive mental health. All staff members have been made aware of the Child Safeguarding Policy and 'Children First Guidelines and Procedures' and are aware that the Principal Mary Brohan is the DLP and Lisa Barnes, Deputy Principal, is the DDLP. The College's Student Support Team meet on a weekly basis. College policies are up to date and regularly reviewed in consultation with key stakeholders. Staff attend continuous professional development at regular intervals thereby ensuring recent developments in education and health and safety are complied with.

Objectives

1. A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) exists in St Benildus College. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the Critical Incident Policy and Plan.
2. St Benildus College will endeavour to communicate clearly and appropriately with all the relevant stakeholders in relation to its Critical Incident Policy and Procedures. (Le Chéile, Board of Management, Parents' Association, Staff).
3. The management and staff of St Benildus College have a responsibility to protect the privacy and name(s) of the person(s) involved in any incident and will be sensitive around the dissemination of any information.
4. St Benildus College will develop a good working relationship with the local media based on respect for all parties involved in the communication of events and crisis situations.

Aims

- The aim of a critical incident policy is to help College management and staff to **react quickly and effectively** in the event of an incident.
- It helps us to **maintain a sense of order** and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students, staff and families.
- To ensure that the **effects** on the students and staff will be **minimized**.
- To facilitate **a return to normality** as soon as possible.
- To provide **support** to students from the teachers, in partnership with parents.
- To provide clear guidelines to all staff to ensure that they feel supported and part of a team.
- To provide clear guidelines to the entire school community to ensure that they feel supported.
- To ensure that the response is consistent.
- To support students in coping with trauma that may be associated with the critical event.
- To provide support for students, teachers and parents.
- To help prevent the onset of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- To make students aware of what is a normal reaction to such an incident.

Responsibilities of the CIMT

- To meet annually.
- To review CIP annually and after any Critical Incident.
- To maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers for Staff, Parents/Guardians and Emergency Services.
- To develop an effective and efficient system of communication so that information can be disseminated speedily among staff should a critical incident occur outside of school hours.
- To keep written records of phone calls, letters, meetings, interventions etc.

Duties which may need to be discharged by the CIMT

- Contacting Emergency Support Services
- Briefing and advising the staff and noting their feelings and concerns.
- Organising the supervision of students in the school.
- Keeping staff updated on information/developments/progress.
- Meeting students to brief them on the situation.
- Taking care of "Vulnerable students/vulnerable teachers".
- Liaising with external agencies for support or referrals.

- Liaising with school organisations such as the Parents' Association and the Student Council.
- Meeting with individual parents or groups of parents.
- Visiting bereaved families or families closely associated with the incident.
- Preparing a press release and liaising with the media.
- Preparation of an Incident Room.

Confidentiality

The school is conscious of its responsibility under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements.

Planning/Preparation.

- The Board Room is selected as the Designated Critical Response Room.
- In the event of a death a Book of Condolences will also be available in the Board Room.
- Members of the CIMT will be prepared and available to provide support to students.
- The school may also contact the NEPS Psychologist.
- Guidelines for informing students of the situation has been prepared (Appendix 7)
- A Prayer Service for students most affected has been prepared (Appendix 5).
- Guidelines for Staff have been prepared (Appendix 2).
- An Advice Sheet for Parents has been prepared. (Appendix 1).
- A statement for informing parents/guardians of the situation has been prepared (Appendix 8)
- There is advice for students on Normal Reaction to a critical incident. (Appendix 3).
- There are guidelines for dealing with media and telephone queries have been prepared. (Appendix 6).

General procedures to be followed in the event of a possible Critical Incident

Establish the Facts

It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. The Principal will convene a meeting of the CIMT. The CIMT will establish the facts. The Principal in consultation with the CIMT will study the facts and decide on the status of the incident. In the event that it is deemed a "Critical Incident" the CIMT will agree a general statement in response to the crisis.

Immediate Response

The team will agree on an immediate plan of action which may involve:

- Informing the staff, Board of Management, DES, Le Chéile and the JMB.
- Informing students, parents/guardians.
- Alerting outside agencies such as NEPS, Gardaí, Emergency Services, etc.
- Drawing up a "Plan of Action" to cover the next and subsequent days.
- Assigning tasks within the CIMT.

Day 1

Principal and Deputy Principals

- Gather the facts of the incident (Who? What? When? Where?).
- Contact appropriate agencies, if necessary (NEPS, Emergency Services, Health Service Executive, Community Care Services, DES, Board of Management).
- Contact the Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- Contact the CIMT and convene a meeting in the Board Room – 07:00 a.m. the following morning if overnight or within an hour if during the day.
- Communication: in certain instances, text messages will be sent to inform the relevant members of the school community that an incident has occurred. In other instances, the members of the CIMT will make contact with the people on their list of contacts.
- Have administration staff photocopy appropriate literature.
- Draft any media statements and any other letters re parents etc.
- All staff will be issued with written guidelines to help support them in a crisis situation.
- Free up relevant staff from normal duties if appropriate (e.g., Yearhead).
- Agree a statement of facts for staff, students, parents and media (if appropriate).
- Inform all staff of incident - Staff communication via text which includes details of staff meeting outside College hours (08:00 a.m. or 12:10 p.m. or 2:50 p.m.)
- Delegate responsibilities to the CIMT members.

All Staff

- Decide on how, and what facts will be shared with students. Information will be provided by the CIMT in this regard.
- Inform staff in relation to the outside agencies that have been contacted.
- Staff share factual information with student population.
- Maintain the normal routine, as far as possible, for classes not immediately affected.
- Note: Awareness of high-risk students. (Children with SEN, neighbours, late arrivals, children who are absent, relatives and close friends informed separately by a member of the CIMT. If concerns emerge, students can be referred to the CIMT.
- Members of the CIMT will look for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Keep all staff up to date on developments.
- Contact absent staff - friend of absent staff member to make personal contact where appropriate.
- Designated staff member to liaise with family/families involved in incident. In the case of bereavement, arrange with the family the College's level of involvement in the funeral/memorial service.
- Those teachers who are uncomfortable with providing support will not be required to do so.
- Seek parental approval for support meetings with outside agencies.
- In the case of a bereavement, it is suggested that teachers could engage the students in group work in classes that are directly affected to avoid highlighting the empty chair.

Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident – Day 2/3:

Principal and Deputy Principals

- Convene CIMT at 07:30 a.m.
- Convene staff meeting and decide who will contact absent staff.

Critical Incident Management Team

- Review the events of the first 24 hours.
- Check how everyone is coping.
- Member of CIMT to update Yearhead and class teachers.
- Arrange support for students, **(page 27 Guidelines)** providing a suitable room for this to happen – subject teachers can make referrals.

All members of staff /school community will be informed to direct all media queries to the Principal. Individual members of staff\school community should not make any comments to media.

Follow-up – beyond 72 hours

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Yearheads and class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Guidance Counsellor, Principal, Deputy Principals
Plan for return of bereaved students (R13 Guidelines) Plan for siblings, close relatives, injured students etc.	Guidance Counsellor, Principal, Deputy Principals, Student Support Team
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Principal, Deputy Principals, Staff, BOM

Review

- All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan upon induction.
- The plan will be updated annually by the Student Support Team.
- After a critical incident takes place a review of the overall policy and plan will take place in light of the experience.

Post Intervention

- On-going support for vulnerable students will be provided by the Guidance and Counselling service.
- Bereaved peers will be monitored by School Management, the Guidance Counsellors, the Yearheads, Tutors and the Student Support Team.
- The Student Support Team will continue to monitor students for signs of continuing distress.
- The CIMT will evaluate the school's response to the incident and amend the Critical Incident Policy in light of the experience.
- The Principal and CIMT will ensure that new members of staff are aware of recent events, vulnerable students and the school's procedures.
- Anniversaries can trigger emotional responses and additional support may be needed at these times.

Critical Incident during School Holidays/Breaks

Should an event take place during the School Holidays which may be deemed as critical, the Principal will convene a meeting of all available members of the CIMT. The CIMT will establish the facts. The Principal, in consultation with the CIMT, will study the facts and decide on the status of the incident. In the event that it is deemed a "Critical Incident" the CIMT will agree a general statement in response to the crisis. The school will be opened, and the Canteen Hall will be available to students. Supports will be sought in the same way as during term time. The Critical Incident Plan as outlined above will be followed as appropriate.

Critical Incident on a School Trip

The Designated Group Leader will inform the Principal as soon as possible. The Principal will convene a meeting of all available members of the CIMT. The Principal and/or other members of the CIMT will make contact with families of all staff and students on the tour. The Principal will keep in regular contact with Group Leader and if necessary, the Principal or another member of the CIMT will travel to the location of the tour. The Principal and/or another member of CIMT will stay in regular contact with Tour Organiser and Department of Foreign Affairs if relevant. The Critical Incident Plan as outlined above will be followed as appropriate.

Roles and Responsibilities in the Critical Incident Management Team

Team	Responsibility
Team Leader	<p>Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting informing them of all relevant facts. Delegates and coordinates the tasks of the team.</p> <p>Informs and liaises with the Board of Management, NEPS, HSE, DES and with the local Gardaí, & Media (where appropriate).</p> <p>A person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis (e.g., College closure, attendance at memorial services, etc.)</p>
Staff Liaison	<p>Briefs staff at the earliest opportunity. Students will be supervised at these times. The facts, as known, will be disclosed to the staff members who will be given an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions. Staff will be briefed on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students. Materials for staff (from critical incident folder) will be provided. Staff will be updated as appropriate. The College text messaging service, App & email will be used as appropriate. All staff will be issued with written guidelines to help support them in a crisis situation.</p>
Student Liaison (Deputy Principals, Yearheads, Class Teachers)	<p>Inform students of the facts of the incident, coordinate information from subject teachers regarding students about whom they are concerned, alert other staff to vulnerable students, provide materials for students from critical incident folder, keep records of students seen by external agencies, organisation and supervision of 'quiet room' – Library/Canteen Hall.</p>
Parent Liaison	<p>Liaise with the family. Visits the family with the Principal. May arrange a meeting of parents. Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed College policy. Ensures that the sample letters are typed up and stored on the College system ready for adaptation. Sets up a room for meeting(s) with parents. Maintains a record of parents seen. Meets with individual parents. Provides appropriate materials for parents (From their critical incident folder). The College text messaging service, App & email will be used as appropriate.</p>
Garda Liaison	<p>Liaises with the Gardaí. Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked for accuracy before being shared.</p>
Community/ Agency Liaison	<p>Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council. • Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources. • Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral. • Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support. • Coordinates the involvement of these agencies. • Someone with good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community.
Administrative tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining an up-to-date list of contact telephone numbers. • Compiling emergency information for College trips. • Cancelling/postponing events where appropriate. • Having relevant templates to hand and disseminate information letters if appropriate. • Access to the critical incident policy and plan and resources. • Logging events and calls and delegating appropriate rooms. • Alerting Year Heads to late arrivals.

NEPS Resource materials

Ref No;	Content;
R1	Student contact Record
R2 – 5	Sample letters after a Critical Incident
R6	Sample announcement to the media
R7	A Classroom session following news of a critical incident
R8	Children’s understanding and reaction to death
R9	Stages of grief
R10	How to cope when something terrible happens
R11	Reactions to a critical incident
R12	Grief after suicide or suspected suicide
R13	Reintegration of the bereaved child in College
R14	Ways to help your child through this difficult time
R15	A general interview guide for Guidance Counsellors, Chaplains, designated staff
R16	A checklist – students at risk
R17	Exploring suicide risk
R18-20	Frequently asked questions
R21	Critical Incident Policy and Plan Template
R22	Critical Incident Management Template for College plan
R23	Emergency Contact List

Contact List

ASTI	01 604 0160
Aware (Over 18s)	01 661 7211, 01 524 0361, 1800 804848 Mon – Sun 10am to 10pm (Depression/Anxiety)
Barnardos	01 453 0355/ Helpline 01 4732110 (10am – 12pm)
Beacon Hospital	01 293 6600
Bereavement Counselling Service	0818 111 126 Carmel Crowe (Coord./Manager) carmel.crowe@pieta.ie Denis Sherlock (Suicide Bereavement Officer) 085 8706712 denis.sherlock@pieta.ie Maeve Douglas 086 0867366
Irish Hospice Foundation Bereavement Support Line	1800 807077 (10am – 1pm)
Childline	1800 666666 (Under 18s) – Free text: 50101
Community Garda	01 6665082 (Dun Laoghaire) 01 6665600 (Dundrum)
Dept of Education and Skills	01 889 6400
Dept of Social & Family Welfare	0818 405 060
DES Press Office	01 889 6400
Diocesan Advisor	01 8087532 (Sr Bernadette Carron) 01 8087525 (Sr Concepta Foley)
Employee Assistance Service (EAP)	1800 411 057
HSE Childcare	1800 700 700
The Childhood Bereavement Support Network	01 6793188
NEPS - National Educational Psychological Services	01 889 2700
Our Lady's Children's Hospital	01 409 6100
Parentline	01 873 3500
Pieta House	1800 247247 Open 24/7., Email mary@pieta.ie , 01 4585490 (Head Office) Text HELP to 51444 (Suicide prevention, self-harm, bereavement)
Rainbows	01 473 4175
St Vincent's Hospital	01 221 4000
Samaritans Ireland	01 671 0071 Open 24/7, Email jo@samaritans.org Dublin Branch 116123
State Examinations Commission	090 644 2700 entries@examinations.ie
Tallaght Hospital	01 4142000

Text About it	Free 24 hour chat service. It provides anything from a calming chat to immediate support for people going through a mental health or emotional crisis. Free text: HELLO to 50808 Open 24/7
TUI	01 492 2588
TUSLA - Child and Family Agency	01 771 8500, 0818 776 315
VHI Swiftcare Health Clinic Carrickmines	01 4482450

APPENDIX 1

ADVICE FOR PARENTS TO HELP SUPPORT YOUR SONS



As you are probably aware there have been a number of tragedies in the area in the recent past. We are concerned that these tragedies will be unsettling for the students and may have a very big impact on the student body. As always, we will endeavour to support them in any way possible. We know that you, the boys' parents / guardians are very concerned about this also. The following document outlines some guidelines/suggestions that may be useful as you support your son in the weeks/months ahead.

Tragic deaths will add to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents and will unsettle what may up to now have been a very secure and safe world from your sons perspective. Some will be impacted more than others and there are a number of ways in which they may react. It is often difficult, both for the young person themselves and for their parents, to separate grief reactions from normal teenage behaviour.

Some of the students may need counselling. Assure them that this may be helpful. Many teenagers are reluctant to go to counselling, feeling it labels them as 'different' or unable to cope. However, when they attend, they often find it very helpful. Young people need to know that they can attend counselling on a short-term basis. Peer group support can also help.

School can provide the continuity and security that a grieving student may need in a world which otherwise seems turned upside down Therefore a return to normality as soon as possible is the best way you can support your son.

- It is important to stick to routine as much as possible – to normalise day to day life.
- Answer questions simply and honestly.
- Let your son know that they are not alone in their reaction.
- Monitor your conversations with other adults/parents that students may hear.
- Students will watch for both verbal and non-verbal cues.

- Allow your son to talk – **all you have to do is listen**. Sometimes when we are not sure what to say we panic, so try to just be there – you really don't need to say much.
- Be careful not to inadvertently simplify or to glamorise what has happened.
- **Give facts – tell your son that life can be a struggle and some people suffer deep psychological pain but that that may not have been apparent to others.**
- **Remind them that sometimes people do things that we struggle to understand but that sometimes people become overwhelmed, unwell and unable to cope. Remind them of the importance of talking – it's ok not to feel ok.**
- Your son may have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
- **Being part of a group provides a sense of belonging, acceptance, and normalisation. Groups are a means of mutual self-help, and your son needs the support of his friends at the moment to help us all through this difficult time.**
- Create opportunities to remember - young people like to be given the option of remembering the deceased.
- Some teenagers who appear to be coping well may still be in shock and active grieving may take months to appear. The belief that everyone else has forgotten the deceased can be difficult for a teenager and creating opportunities to remember, like at anniversaries, can help them with this.
- Encourage behaviours that are considered constructive and that encourage them to face their grief, such as talking with trusted family members, adults or friends and expressing emotion.
- In the aftermath of a suicide, a teenager may show intense feelings of shock, sadness, loneliness, anger and rage.
- It is possible that teenagers may engage in destructive behaviours to enable them to “numb” their feelings, such as drugs, alcohol, reckless sexual behaviour, antisocial behaviour, academic problems – encourage them to avoid these behaviours.
- Feeling guilty and responsible about a suicide is very troubling for teenagers. Giving accurate information about stress, mental health and depression can be helpful in clarifying that there are many causes for suicide and that there are many other ways of overcoming problems.
- A teenager may have questions like ‘How could he have done it to us?’
- ‘Why?’ or ‘How could I have not noticed he was feeling so bad?’
- These are normal responses, but teenagers need to be able to explore them with caring adults.
- Speaking about the deceased and how they died is often difficult following a suicide, but not talking about it can deprive teenagers of adult support and guidance.
- Often teenagers are overwhelmed by the facts of a suicidal death. They may repeatedly re-enact an actual or imagined picture of the person's death in their own mind. These images are distressing, and professional help is often necessary to help reduce and manage the intrusive and frightening impact of them.

- When a suicide occurs, people connected to the deceased are often more vulnerable to thoughts and feelings about suicide. A teenager may worry that they too might take their own life. They will need support to manage these distressing thoughts and feelings.
As already stated, please contact your GP if you are worried.
- If a teenager's behaviour undergoes a dramatic change such as isolating totally from friends, staying in their bedroom, and/or are complaining about aches and pains which have no medical cause.
- If a teenager is still reacting in a way that indicates they are troubled by memories and thoughts (nightmares, sleep disturbances, restlessness and excessive activity, for example), withdrawing from others, avoiding anything that may remind them of what happened, or showing reactions which indicate an almost constant sense of danger (they are always on guard, are excitable, irritable and so on).
- A complete absence of feeling or emotion, or a strong sense of 'going blank/blinking out', can also indicate a traumatic response which a teenager may need professional help to understand and manage.
- If you are worried that a teenager may be at risk of self-harm or suicide, let him/her know that you are concerned about them and talk to them about your worries. Talking does not increase the risk but does reassure the young person of your care and concern.
- Let your teenager know that you will help them and make a plan together to get help.
- Using social media may help teenagers to share their grief however if use of the internet is not balanced with actually spending time with friends and engaging in activities or talking with a person they trust about their feelings and worries, then this needs to be addressed. The internet, while it can be an important tool for bereaved young people, should add to their resources rather than replace them.
- While there are many individual ways to express emotions, young men sometimes express their grief through anger and their sadness only shows in the aftermath of an angry outburst. It is important to talk through the whole sequence of an angry outburst so that the young person can understand their own responses and their own behaviour. Without this understanding, anger can feel frightening and shameful to them.

Useful Websites/ Services

Pieta House – 01-6010000 – www.pieta.ie, Email mary@pieta.ie, Text HELP to 51444

www.aware.ie (Over 18s)

www.spunout.ie

www.jigsaw.ie

www.barnardos.ie/training_and_resources/parenting

www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp Barnardos

Bereavement Counselling for Children Dublin Hyde Square, 654 South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Tel: 01 453 0355 Email: bereavement@barnardos.ie

Barnardos Bereavement Helpline Tel: 01 4732110 (Monday–Friday 10am-12noon)

The Bereavement Counselling Service Administration Office, Dublin Street, Baldoyle, Dublin 13 Tel: 01 8391766

Find a psychotherapist: Irish Council for Psychotherapy Tel: 01 2722105

www.psychotherapy-ireland.com

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Contact your G.P. Contact your local Health Board.

Teen Counselling www.crosscare.ie

Rainbows Tel: 01 4734175 Fax: 01 4734177 Email: ask@rainbowsireland.com

www.rainbowsireland.com

Parentline Tel : 1890 927 277 Email : info@parentline.ie www.parentline.ie

Samaritans Tel : 1850 60 90 90, Email jo@samaritans.org

Teenline Tel: 1800 83 36 34 www.teenline.ie

Text About it : Free Text: HELLO to 50808

APPENDIX 2

ADVICE FOR STAFF

HOW WE CAN BEST SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS:



There is no right or wrong way to support our students and the following are just some suggestions/guidelines.

XXXXXs death will add to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents so it is important that we support them in the best way that we can, and I know that this will happen having witnessed the supportive culture in St Benildus College over the last while.

NEPS advises us to LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL AND TEACH (see below for some phrases you might find useful). NEPS will speak to the staff in the morning and will be on hand to support us all throughout the day.

We will have a prayer service for 5th and 6th years at 10.05 tomorrow but full details and the plan for the day will be issued at the staff meeting in the morning. We have no funeral details yet but will let you know in the morning.

A return to normality as soon as possible is the best way we can support our students – they need us to remain calm but empathetic at the same time.

- It is important to stick to our routine as much as possible – to normalise the day.

- It might be a good idea to do group work or pair work to avoid a situation which might highlight the obvious absence of the deceased student.
- Many of the 5th and 6th students are in at the moment (the oratory will be open for them from 10:00-12:00) so we will try to keep tomorrow as normal as possible.
- **There is a book of condolences/memories in the oratory for any of you that may wish to sign it – please encourage the students to do likewise.**
- In class it is important to acknowledge what has happened and to allow some talk about what has happened especially in the 1st class of the day particularly with senior students – 5th and 6th years.
- Answer questions simply and honestly.
- Let the students know that they are not alone in their reaction.
- At the same time, we need to be mindful of conversations with one another that students may hear.
- Students will watch for both verbal and non-verbal cues – we are the adults and although it will be difficult, we need to model appropriate behaviour.
- **It is important to be aware of your own thoughts, feelings and reactions – let us know if you need support yourself.**
- It might be appropriate to start the class with a short reflection or prayer and then teach class as normal especially for 1st - 4th years.
- It will be difficult to teach 5th and 6th years today so, allow the students to talk – **all you have to do is listen**. Sometimes when we are not sure what to say, we panic, so try to just be there – you really don't need to say much.
- Students need to be informed about the plan for the day and about the plan for the funeral.
- The oratory will be open so 5th and 6th years may be late for class or may need to leave during a class - allow this to happen today but try to minimize it.
- Be careful not to inadvertently simplify or to glamorize what has happened.
- **Give facts – tell the senior students that it is likely that xxxx was struggling and in deep psychological pain but that that may not have been apparent to others.**
- **Tell Junior students that sometimes people do things that we struggle to understand but that xxxx was unwell and unable to cope. Remind them of the importance of talking – it's ok not to feel ok.**
- Students may have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
- **Being part of a group provides a sense of belonging, acceptance, and normalization. Groups are a means of mutual self-help and we as a school community are the group that the students and all of us need at the moment to help us all through this difficult time.**
- We will have to monitor 5th and 6th years carefully going forward.
- Encourage behaviours that are considered constructive and that encourage them to face their grief, such as talking with trusted family members, adults or friends and expressing emotion.

- Tell them that they may talk to anybody in the school who will refer them to the appropriate trained people – Guidance Counsellors.
- Model kindness and encourage the students to model kindness – staff to staff, staff to students and student to student.

GOING FORWARD

- ✓ In the aftermath of a suicide, a teenager may show intense feelings of shock, sadness, loneliness, anger and rage.
- ✓ Some of the senior students may engage in destructive behaviours to enable them to “numb” their feelings, such as drugs, alcohol, reckless sexual behaviour, antisocial behaviour, academic problems – encourage them to avoid these behaviours.
- ✓ Feeling guilty and responsible about a suicide is very troubling for teenagers. Giving accurate information about stress, mental health and depression can be helpful in clarifying that there are many causes for suicide and that there are many other ways of overcoming problems.
- ✓ A teenager may have questions like ‘How could he have done it to us?’
- ✓ Why?’ or ‘How could I have not noticed he was feeling so bad?’
- ✓ These are normal responses, but teenagers need to be able to explore them with caring adults.
- ✓ Speaking about the deceased and how they died is often difficult following a suicide, but not talking about it can deprive teenagers of adult support and guidance – SEE BELOW FOR SOME USEFUL PHRASES.
- ✓ Often teenagers are overwhelmed by the facts of a suicidal death. They may repeatedly re-enact an actual or imagined picture of the person’s death in their own mind. These images are distressing, and professional help is often necessary to help reduce and manage the intrusive and frightening impact of them.
- ✓ When a suicide occurs, people connected to the deceased are often more vulnerable to thoughts and feelings about suicide. A teenager may worry that they too might take their own life. They will need support to manage these distressing thoughts and feelings. LET US KNOW IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ANYBODY IN PARTICULAR.
- ✓ One way to help with this is for a young person to be open with someone they trust about the feelings of great pain and grief that they are experiencing.
- ✓ Using social media may help teenagers to share their grief however if use of the internet is not balanced with actually spending time with friends and engaging in activities or talking with a person they trust about their feelings and worries, then this needs to be addressed. The internet, while it can be an important tool for bereaved young people, should add to their resources rather than replace them.
- ✓ While there are many individual ways to express emotions, young men sometimes express their grief through anger and their sadness only shows in the aftermath of an angry outburst. It is important to talk through the whole sequence of an angry outburst so that the young person can understand their own responses and their own behaviour. Without this understanding, anger can feel frightening and shameful to them.

SOME PHRASES THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL- (say as much or as little as you are comfortable with- there really are no rights and wrongs in this)

I am so sad that this has happened to one of your friends.

I know that x death is very hard for you to comprehend – I find it difficult to understand too.

I am really sorry you feel so upset.

It is difficult to understand why this has happened.

It is important that we all support one another.

If a junior student asks what happened – perhaps just say “ xxx was finding life really difficult and just felt unable to go on” – don’t give any more details.

Sometimes we just don’t have answers and I am not sure what the best answer to your question is.

I am not sure why this has happened, but it is really sad, and I encourage all of you to talk to any of us if you are in pain

It’s ok not to feel ok, but it is really important to talk to somebody.

APPENDIX 3

Advice to students on Normal Reaction



Coping with a traumatic incident can be difficult and stressful. It can affect the way we feel, think and behave. The following information will help you understand some of the feelings and reactions you may experience within hours, days or weeks after the event. There are also some suggestions on what may help you during this time.

Physical and behavioural reactions:

It is quite normal to experience tiredness, sleeplessness, nightmares, headaches, loss or increase of appetite, bowel/bladder problems, loss of concentration, irritability. Sometimes people feel generally unwell.

Emotional and Cognitive Reactions (how we feel and think):

You may experience:

1. Shock – at what happened. Things may feel unreal. Shock sometimes causes people to deny what has happened. This does not mean you don’t care. You may feel like withdrawing, crying or becoming hysterical.
2. Fear – of the unpredictability of everything, especially life, of a similar incident happening again, or breaking down or losing control, of being alone.
- 3 Guilt – feeling responsible in some way for what has happened - for not being able to make things better or not being able to help others - for being alive and better off than others.
4. Shame – for not reacting as you thought you should, - for needing support from others.

5. Anger – at someone or something, wanting to blame someone or something for what has happened, - at the injustice of the event.
6. Confusion – about the event, how you should react, having mixed feeling about everything.
7. Pain – at the loss of the person, - of associating this with other incidents, bereavements or losses that you may have experienced before.
8. Left Out – that people are not acknowledging your involvement in the incident or your relationship with the person who is injured. It is important to ask questions and clarify what actually happened after an incident.

Rumours spread quickly and hearing different information can be confusing and stressful. Remember You need to look after yourself. You are normal and are having normal reactions to an abnormal event. There are people you can talk to. You may NOT experience any of the above feelings. If you do there is little you can do to avoid these uncomfortable feelings and thoughts, but there are things you can do to help you recover.

What can help?

1. Talk – Try to talk about the event and how you feel. Don't bottle things up. Sharing your experience with others who have had a similar experience may help. Let someone know if you are not coping well. If it is difficult to talk, keep a journal of how you are feeling or draw your experiences or emotions.
2. Thinking over the incident – you need to process the incident and allow it more into your mind over time. With time you may need to talk about it, write about it, dream about it over and over again to help you to eventually accept what has happened.
3. Going back - returning to where the incident has happened may help you deal with the incident.
4. Attending memorials – going to funeral services.
5. Helping others – doing things to help others may bring some relief.
6. Diet – try and eat a regular meal three times a day.
7. Exercise and Relax – alternate periods of exercise with relaxation and rest.

Following approximately one month after the event seek help if:

1. You cannot cope with overwhelming feelings.
2. You continue to have nightmares and sleeplessness.
3. Intrusive thoughts about the event persist.
4. You begin to have problems in school.
5. You use excessive drinking or smoking or other substances to help you cope with the event.

There are many people in the school who can guide you in relation to where best to get help.

APPENDIX 4

What to say

Sample of pre-prepared text for breaking the news to classes

This morning we heard the extremely sad news that ___ has passed away. We are all saddened and shocked by this news and would like to express our support to all his friends, class members and family. This is a difficult issue for all of us to deal with and causes a lot of emotional reactions including disbelief, tears and anger. If any of you feel that you need to talk to someone or talk through things with an adult, just ask your teacher or Year Head for help. We may over the course of the day arrange a special assembly where you can have the opportunity to learn more about the situation. We will now have a short prayer of reflection.

APPENDIX 5

Prayer Service

Play reflective instrumental music of your own choice.

Introduction- Principal

When the electricity goes out, we immediately look for the matches. We are not comfortable with darkness and with coldness. We don't like unfamiliar sounds, silence and lack of warmth. Since hearing of the news about _____ we have all experienced the same kind of feeling.

As a school community, we gather today to express our sadness and look for prayerful support. May our prayer and solidarity today assure _____ of God's eternal care and the love which links us as Christians in this life and in the next.

Opening Prayer

God, Our Father, you come to us in our darkest hour bringing peace and consolation to our hearts. Bless our sense of loss and our sacred memories and keep our loved ones in your eternal peace. May our remembering unite all of us forever in your love. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

First Reading

A reading from the Book of Wisdom

Even if they die before their time, good people will find rest. Life is not about how long we live, but how wisely we live. A good life is a long life. Good people try to please God and God loves them. Coming to perfection in a short while is the same as having a long life. Good people's lives are pleasing to God. Mercy and Grace are what God has ready for good people. God will protect them. *This is the Word of God.*

Minutes Silence

Prayers of the Faithful

Lord we pray for _____ who has gone before us. May _____ rest in peace. Lord hear us.

We pray for the family of _____. May God strengthen and console them. Lord hear us.

We lift up to the Lord those bereaved by the suicide of someone they love:

As they continue their journey may they meet Christ in the support of others.

We pray in hope for all:

May the Spirit of God open our ears to each other

and may the circle of light generated

shine in the dark places of our lives.

For all of us gathered in the school community, that we may console and support each other at this difficult time. Lord hear us. (Student)

Play reflective instrumental music of your own choice.

Reflection – Year Head

Music – appropriate piece.

APPENDIX 6

Liaising with the Media.

If there are enquiries from the media, it is important that only one person acts as liaison – this will usually be the Principal or in his absence one of the Deputy Principals or Chairperson of the Board of Management.

All staff and students should understand that all press enquiries are to be referred to the designated person. No other discussion with the press should take place and no interviews should be given without the approval of the Principal. In preparing a press statement, thought should be given to the following suggestions:

The press statement should be simple and brief

- It should express the sorrow of the entire school community and in the event of sudden death extend sympathy to the family/families.
- Priority should be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis.
- The names, addresses and telephone numbers of those affected should not be released.
- Likely questions should be considered, and a response prepared.
- A specific location and time for press briefings should be nominated in an ongoing situation.

The Critical Incident Management Team and/or relevant staff members will speak to the students about appropriate and responsible use of social media in the event of a critical incident.

The following public response will be used:

We are doing everything possible to support those affected and can say nothing further at the moment. Thank you.

Appendix 7

Guidelines for breaking the news to Students

1. The Critical incident team may decide to have an assembly to break the news to the Year Group who are most impacted and will read out the statement below.

2. Each teacher will read the following statement to all classes.

This morning we heard the extremely sad news that _____

We are all saddened and shocked by this news and would like to express our support to all _____ friends, class members and family.

This is a difficult issue for all of us to deal with and causes a lot of emotional reactions including disbelief, tears and anger. If any of you feel that you need to talk to someone or talk through things with an adult, just ask your teacher or tutor for help.

We will over the course of the day arrange a special assembly where you can have the opportunity to learn more about the situation.

We will now have a short prayer of reflection.

3. A prayer service will be held for the Year Group/Groups most affected.

Appendix 8

Statement for breaking the news to Parents

The following text will be sent to parents

'The school has experienced the sudden death of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by this loss and have our critical incident team in place to help your son cope with this tragedy. It is possible that your son may have some feelings that he would like to discuss with you. You can help you son by listening carefully, restating what you hear them say and by not overreacting. We will post some further guidelines on the App. If you would like assistance / advice you are welcome to contact the school at 01-2986539.'