

# St Mel's College, Longford



## **Critical Incident Management Policy**

January 2026

School Roll No: 63750B

Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise



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## **1.Our School**

St. Mel's College, Longford aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. It is directly linked to our mission statement that all in the school should feel safe and cared for, and is mindful of other policies, such as Guidance, Code of Behaviour, Well-being, Anti-bullying. The Board of Management, through the principal, Mr. Malachy Flanagan, has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policies and plans.

St. Mel's College aims, through implementation of the pastoral care plan, well-being promotion, to prevent the occurrence of a critical incident. In preparation for the occurrence of such an event, a critical incident management plan has been drawn up and outlines the procedures to be taken in the event of a critical incident.

## **2.References**

*Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines for Schools* (NEPS 2016)

*Responding to Critical Incidents Resource Materials for Schools* (NEPS 2015)

*Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines* (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)

*Well-being in Post-Primary Schools-Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

*Suicide Prevention in the Community- A Practical Guide* (HSE 2011)

## **3.Critical incident**

The staff and management of St. Mel's College recognise a critical incident as "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelm the normal coping mechanism of the school".

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. Types of critical incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide, terminal illness, or unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- A major tragedy/incident in the wider community

## **4.Aim**

The aim of the Critical Incident Management Policy is to help the school community 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 also enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

The policy also aims to provide support to students from the teachers, in partnership with parents and to provide clear guidelines to all staff to ensure that they feel supported and part of a team.

## **5.Objectives**

The objectives of this policy are:

- To manage vulnerable students and students at risk in the event of a critical incident
- To define individual roles and responsibilities
- To outline step by step guidelines
- To establish lines of communication both within and without of the school
- To plan the debriefing process
- To provide after care services

## **6. Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in our school**

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

Wellbeing is a central and key aspect of school life in St. Mel's College. A Guidance Team, Student Support Team, SEN Supports, Mentor System are just some of the student support systems in our school. As we are a DEIS school teams addressing all of the pillars have been formed and this also forms parts of creating a supportive and caring environment in our school.

### **Physical Safety**

Physical safety is important, so supervision is provided for in areas of the school. St. Mel's College has a Health and Safety Policy and provisions in place to provide a safe environment for all such as:

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Fire drills
- Fire exits and extinguishers checked
- Pre-opening supervision in the school yard, locker area, canteen, assembly hall
- Back gate and side gate locked during school hours

### **Psychological Safety**

The management and staff of St. Mel's College 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 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 positive

mental health is an integral part of the provision. The school has obtained an Amber Flag, has Recharge Week, WellFest.

- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person, Mr. Malachy Flanagan. The Deputy Designated Liaison Person is Ms. Regina Dolan. Students are aware of this information.
- Staff are aware that teachers are mandated persons and know their duties. The Child Safeguarding Statement is prominently displayed in the reception area.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the post-primary student are available.
- Information is provided on mental health in general.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and we have two Guidance Counsellors.
- Posters promoting positivity, being kind are prominently displayed throughout the school.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies such as An Garda Síochána, NEPS.
- Speakers from various external agencies speak with students on a variety of issues. 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. (DES Circular 0023/2010)
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a care system in place using the Continuum of Support approach. Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools (2014) is also available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)
- Students with any issues or who are identified as being at risk are referred to the Guidance Team. 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 (Employee Assistance Scheme)

## **7.Critical Incident Management Team**

Malachy Flanagan, Regina Dolan, Jimmie Gacquin, Hazel Concar, Trudy Farrell, relevant Year Head.

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their role for at least one year. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

The CIMT consists of a team leader, garda liaison, staff liaison, student liaison, community/agency liaison, parent liaison, media liaison, administrator.

## **8.Roles and Responsibilities in the CIMT**

Team Leader: Malachy Flanagan

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting informing them of all the relevant facts.
- Delegates and coordinates the tasks of the team.
- Informs and liaises with the Board of Management, NEPS, DEY, the Gardai and media where appropriate
- Carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis e.g. school closure

In the absence of the principal, Regina Dolan, deputy principal, or Jimmie Gacquin, deputy principal, will take this role.

Staff Liaison: Malachy Flanagan /Regina Dolan/ Jimmie Gacquin

- Leads briefing meetings for 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.
- Material for staff (from critical incident folder) will be provided. Staff will be provided as appropriate.
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Advise staff of the availability of the EAS and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison: Relevant Year Head, Hazel Concar

- Informs students of the facts of the incident, coordinate information from subject teachers/tutors/year heads regarding students whom they are concerned about.
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students
- Provides materials for students from critical incident folder.
- Maintains student contact records.
- Keep records of students seen by external agencies, organisations.
- Looks after setting and supervision of 'quiet room'.

Parent Liaison: Malachy Flanagan, Relevant Year Head, Trudy Farrell, Guidance Counsellor

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parents meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensures that the sample letters are typed up, on the school's system ready for adaptation
- Sets up room for meeting with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (From their critical incident folder).

Garda Liaison: Malachy Flanagan/ Regina Dolan/Jimmie Gacquin

- Liaises with the Gardaí.  
Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Community/ Agency Liaison: Malachy Flanagan, Trudy Farrell

- Maintains up-to-date lists of contact numbers of
  - 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
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

Media Liaison: Malachy Flanagan / Fr. Liam Murray

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises etc.)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the SEC, relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator:

- Maintenance of an up-to-date telephone numbers of parents/guardians, teachers, emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts
- Logging events and calls and delegating appropriate rooms
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

### **9. Record keeping, Confidentiality and good name considerations**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, materials etc. The school secretaries, Ms. Nicole Rowley and Ms. Andrea Clarke, will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

The management and staff of St. Mel's College, Longford 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. The 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.

### **10. Nature of the Critical Incident Establishing Facts**

Upon an incident occurring, immediate action should be taken including all or some of the following:

- Establish contact with necessary organisations, e.g. Gardai, H.S.E. hospital, etc.
- Establish the nature of incident.
- Establish the name/s of the bereaved.
- Establish names and whereabouts of those injured.
- Establish extent of injuries.
- Establish names of those who are uninjured.
- Determine location of victims.
- Determine if there is any risk of further injury.
- Determine if those on the trip are in more than one location.
- Establish if emergency services have already been contacted.
- Establish the names and whereabouts of witnesses including teachers.
- Can teachers at the incident remove those unharmed from the scene?
- Contact other members of the critical incident management team.
- Meet team members and allocate any necessary jobs to be carried out.
- Initiate transport arrangements if necessary.
- Make individual contact with staff that may be directly involved or affected.
- Visit incident site if necessary.
- Visit hospital if necessary.
- Arrange to deal with enquiries by phone.
- Arrange transport if necessary if incident occurred on a school trip.
- Arrange area or rooms to facilitate reunion of pupils and parents.
- Special arrangements for those students whose parents are not available.
- Establish how well details of the incident are known.<sup>5</sup>
- Contact Parents' Association.
- Contact B.O.M.
- Ensure telephone is manned.
- Provide a script to those dealing with telephone queries.
- When dealing with families check, is there already a deceased parent/s, or a deceased sibling. Are the parents separated? If separated, consider how to deal with both parents separately, if they are unable to be dealt with together.
- Contact and visit family/ies checking first that they would welcome a visit. Ensure that at least one of the team that visits has a good relationship with the family. Every effort should be made to avoid the latter.
- Other students may be hearing news via social media. Consult with parents affected if they will give permission for the school to send a communication to other

parents. This may limit the number of students who may hear the news via social media and allow other parents to tell their child face-to-face.

- Discuss with the family what you have planned to take place in the school and consult with them what you would like to say for the good of the whole student body and what they want you to say.
- Remember, if the family have to be met a number of times try and limit the number of times they have to 'tell their story'.
- Determine how to deal with media if necessary.
- If there are a number of students involved, is a family room in the school needed?

### **Incident Abroad**

- Contact Department of Foreign Affairs
- Contact relevant Embassy or Consulate office.
- Provide list containing names and contact details of adults on trip.
- Try and contact teachers directly to get first-hand information on the ground.
- Names and contact details of these adults' families.
- Names of students on trip.
- Names and contact details of parents of these students.
- Determine if those on the trip are in more than one location.
- Details of any pre-existing medical condition of adults on trip and medication required.
- Details of any pre-existing medical condition of students on trip and medication required.
- Inform authorities if the school trip involved more than one school.
- Contact travel agency used.

Depending on the scale of the incident, other issues may need to be addressed by authorities.

- While the primary concern needs to focus on the deceased, injured and non-injured and their families, there is a body of students and parents at home who may be upset, particularly younger students or those very close to those affected. With this in mind, consult with authorities what can be, and what should be, communicated to other parents and students in the school. Information can have the effect of reducing anxiety. This can also prevent false rumours.

### **Violent Assault/Death**

A member of the school committee may have been involved in a violent incident. Be sensitive to the fact that the alleged perpetrator may have relatives and friends within the school or may even be a student in the school. These relationships need to be monitored and advice should be taken from Gardaí and others who may have more knowledge/experience of the relationships involved. It is the responsibility of parents to decide whether their child may be interviewed by Gardaí. Garda interviews of students should not generally take place on the school premises. There may be an ongoing Garda investigation, a trial, an inquest etc.

## **Family and Suicide**

When meeting with the family where a suicide has occurred, additional considerations arise.

The following may be addressed over a number of visits.

- The family may be willing to allow it to be stated by the school that the death was by suicide. Permission for this should be sought and not assumed.
- Before the family is asked for permission to divulge the cause of death, school representatives may anticipate that the family may be reluctant to let people know the cause of death. It therefore might be useful, before they are actually asked and say no, to point out that students are already speculating about suicide amongst themselves and that it can help the school and others if it can be spoken about publicly. Outline the benefits of this and maybe outline the difficulties faced if the cause of death is not acknowledged. This is particularly important if the students are already talking about suicide. It might also be useful to point out to the family that there are a number of vulnerable students in the school you are very worried about and it can help the school and others if permission is given to allow the cause of death to be stated publicly and that it might help prevent others going through such an ordeal.
- When a suicide occurs one of the issues that teenagers can focus on is *why?* This can become obsessive and unhealthy. If the deceased had a history of mental issues and was in the health system, it might be useful to obtain permission from the family to divulge this to others as it would be a healthy step in helping them let go of the *why?* Permission should be sought and this issue should not be discussed with the family if family issues have contributed to the difficulties the deceased had.
- The family may have found or been given a suicide note by the emergency services. Give the family an opportunity to discuss the contents with the school. This is particularly important if blame is apportioned to other students and/or teachers. Check with Gardai if they have searched the deceased's phone/tablet etc. and discuss any findings. If the Gardai have found a note and the contents of the note may cause a difficulty, consult with Gardai the best course of action. It might also be necessary to check if e-mails, photographs, or messages have been posted on social networks by the deceased. This may require the help of family or friends.

## **11. Communication Regarding Critical Incidents**

### **Staff Meeting**

- Hold a staff meeting which may include auxiliary staff and sports coaches.
- There may be a need for two separate staff meetings to aid supervision.
- Information should be given to staff before students.
- After delivering the news, give staff time to absorb the news and compose themselves.
- If staff are absent, inform these by phone, not text. Similarly, if the news breaks outside school time, inform staff by using a phone call, not text. Do not leave a voice message giving details of the news, rather, leave a voice mail asking them to return the call as soon as they get the message.
- Impress on staff the need for consistency in what the students hear from staff.

- Explain the plan for the day.
- Discuss vulnerable students and ask for input from staff.
- Invite/encourage staff to attend students' assemblies.
- Allow staff to share how they will address classes. If necessary, give staff suggestions as to how they might start their classes. Some staff who normally start the class with a prayer may expand on this to acknowledge the loss. Others who do not start the class with a prayer may choose their own words to mark the loss.
- Advise staff to use their discretion as to when to restart teaching. Returning to the routine of teaching may actually act as a comfort to students. However, this should not be done without some form of acknowledgment of the loss as this can cause offence. After the acknowledgement, teachers can, if they wish, ask the students what they would like to do next, e.g. talk about how they feel, talk about the deceased, or talk amongst themselves or return to teaching. When students are given the choice it may help them feel in control. It may not be a good idea for students to attend 8/9 classes in one day that consist entirely of a discussion around events that have happened.
- Particular attention should be paid to staff members who may be particularly upset, or had a recent bereavement, or who are simply finding the events difficult. It may be necessary to arrange supervision to support these teachers or it may be necessary for a member of management helping to start that teacher's class with him/her present. Consideration should also be given to trainee or newly qualified teachers who may not have the necessary experience to address a class grouping.
- Remind staff that if they are upset and anxious, students will become upset and anxious. If staff are calm and considered, the students are more likely to remain calm. Also, if they are comfortable, calmly share their feelings with the class.
- It might be necessary to hold a staff meeting at the end of the day to review events.

### **Breaking News to Students**

- Teenagers need to have whatever information is available so that they can dispel mistruths or speculation; otherwise they may not begin the grieving process.
- Remember that teenagers find it more helpful when adults are honest rather than 'pretending' to be more positive than they actually feel.
- Remember also that as a professional dealing with teenagers, you will have to confront your own reactions, your own shock, anger and sense of bewilderment. Get yourself grounded or it will be easy to get caught up in the teenagers' panic, pain and confusion.
- Your calmness will influence their reactions. If the adults are anxious and upset, they will become so. If the adults are calm and in control, it will promote calmness and stability.
- When breaking the news to students, whole school assemblies are not recommended, and best practice is that the news should be shared in small groups such as year groups.
- If the deceased was on a team or involved with a particular group within the school, do not treat this group separately when breaking the news.

- It may be necessary to take aside some individuals and tell them in private. It may also be necessary to phone these students' parents to come and collect them from school.
- Be conscious of the fact that teenagers, particularly those in the senior years, have friendships that cross other year groups. Therefore, if the student was in for example 5th year, speak to that year group first, then 6th years followed by 4th year. Then speak to the other year groups.
- Even if the deceased was in 6th year, it is still necessary to speak to 1st years as they will hear the news anyway and it is best that they hear it in a controlled way from school management. This will ensure that all students have received the same information and accurate information.
- It might also be useful if staff attend these assemblies so they will hear exactly what the students have been told ensuring continuity of message.
- When speaking to different year groups, the language may have to be changed so that it is age appropriate.
- Keep sentences short and avoid overly complicated medical terms.
- It is better to say to students "watch out for each other, if someone is having difficulties point them in the right direction to those that can help, and don't try and solves their problems."
- If the cause of death is genuinely not known, let them know this. Use this fact to reinforce that if they hear any rumours about the cause of death, these rumours cannot be true as the medics and family do not even know. This is relevant when there may be a genuine sudden death.
- Let them ask questions and if the answer is not known, state this. Be conscious of the fact that asking of questions may simply be reassurance seeking rather than driven by the need for facts. When answering questions do not promise anything you cannot fulfil.
- Give them details of the plan for the day. This provides necessary structure.
- Give details of funeral arrangements or when the details will be known. Get back to them when the dates/times and other arrangements (e.g. guard of honour, dress code) are known.
- It may be necessary to cancel classes for certain year groups for a time during the day or for the rest of the day. This should not be done without having an alternative structured activity in place. This activity should be adult led, structured and if possible, have a structure that is familiar to the students, e.g. a prayer service.
- This formal activity can be followed by an informal activity such as food in the school canteen.
- A quiet room should also be provided.
- Arrange extra supervision, in particular corridors/schoolyard/near toilets near the affected year group.
- Staff should be on hand to allow individual students talk in private.
- If, after the assembly, some students are particularly upset, it might be necessary to telephone parents to bring them home.
- Consider if it is appropriate to resume class (for structure-based reasons rather than academic reasons, even if teaching is not resumed).
- Consider obtaining the help of clergy with the delivery of the above or help with

constructing a script.

- Consider holding private meetings with, close friends of the deceased, school/class captains/prefect, and positive leaders (who may not have a formal title/job) in the year group. Such a meeting or number of meetings can help the students feel listened to, and that they have some sense of input and control over what is happening. In addition, these meetings can also provide useful feedback to management that may help shape the next few days/weeks.
- It may be necessary to consult with outside agencies. It needs to be remembered that students need to be with people they know and trust. If possible, it is better that teachers and other school staff provide support for the students. The external 'expert' should be primarily used to advise and support school staff.
- Consider if students with special needs may need an altered method of delivery of the news.
- If necessary, provide condolence books (one for each individual, if more than one) on school premises.

### **Breaking News to Students in the Case of Suicide**

If the death was by suicide, and if the family have given permission to inform others that it was a suicide, it is recommended that attention be paid to the phrases used. It is recommended that the word 'commit' is avoided as it has connotations associated with committing a sin or committing a crime.

The following phrases should **not** be used: Instead use phrases like:

- Commit suicide
- Suicide victim
- A successful suicide attempt
- A suicide
- Die by suicide
- Taking one's own life

In some cases, the wider student body may know that it was a suicide but are speculating about the method used. This can be very unhealthy if it is a topic of discussion, gossip, a distraction, a source of false rumour, and a block to normal grieving. Some argue that details of the method of suicide should not be provided while others state that it is okay to give the basic fact about the method in a short phrase as possible without giving graphic or excessive details or talking about it at length. However, extreme caution needs to be taken. This should not be done to satisfy curiosity, but rather to remove it as the main focus of conversation and to avoid it becoming an issue. Other factors that may determine the method of suicide being stated are the actual nature/method itself and the age of the affected year group/s. If it is to be spoken about perhaps it should only be done in smaller private groups or with the friends of the deceased only.

When a suicide occurs one of the issues that teenagers can focus on is *why?* This can become obsessive and unhealthy. If the deceased had a history of mental issues and was in the health system, and permission has been obtained from the family, it might be useful to others to hear this portion of the back story to the death. This might help to avoid speculation and help the students move on from the *why?* The back story should not be discussed if family circumstance contributed to the

deceased's difficulties. If there is no back story, and the suicide was '*out of the blue*' extra difficulties may be faced by the friends of the deceased. However, remember that best practice is not to include speculation over motives as it is always very complex. If the family have not given permission for the cause of death to be disclosed, this can be included in what is said to the students by stating that "the family have requested that the information not be shared" or "only the family have the right to tell people that information". It might be necessary to acknowledge to the students that there are rumours of suicide but also to state that rumours can be hurtful to family and explain the damaging impact of misinformation and rumour. It might be useful to use the terms 'tragic death' or 'sudden death'. Throughout all interactions with students be careful not to give the deceased attention in death that they may have been looking for in life. This can be done by shifting the conversation with teenagers from the topic of the deceased to their reaction to what has happened. This should result in students talking about themselves rather than the deceased. The most significant factor contributing to suicide contagion appears to be the glamorising or romanticising of suicide. When the person who died by suicide was highly regarded or their death is 'celebrated' others involved can see the outcome of suicide as rewarding e.g. ends pain, gains recognition. Therefore, avoid phrases such as the 'state of peace' the deceased may have found through death and avoid glamorising their lives or indeed any aspect of the funeral or any memorial. It is common for people to remember the positive things about someone who has recently died and focus less on the difficulties they may have been having prior to their death. While this may be well-meaning, it has the potential to encourage suicidal thoughts and behaviour in other vulnerable young people. Care needs to be taken not to give the impression that suicide has a positive outcome for the young person. Suicide rates go up following an increase in the frequency of stories about suicide. Moreover, suicide rates go down following a decrease in frequency of stories about suicide. Research shows that inappropriate media coverage can also contribute to suicide contagion. Therefore, if it is necessary, media guidelines for reporting suicide should be consulted.

### **Identifying Vulnerable Students**

After a critical incident occurs a lot of the students will be very upset and will want and need to talk about what has happened. For the majority of students this can be done in the classroom or group setting. It is helpful for students to hear others talking about how they are feeling. This normalises their reaction. If a student or group of students are particularly distressed it is advised to have them talk to someone, they know who will be available over the next days and weeks. If you are particularly concerned about a student, teachers are asked to refer this concern to the Student Support Team. It is necessary to identify vulnerable students; both the new vulnerable (as a result of the incident) and old vulnerable (as a result of previous history). This may involve consultation with other staff. A checklist to help identify students at risk is available here: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/checklist-students-at-risk.pdf> .

New and old vulnerable students may include:

- Close friends and relatives of the deceased,
- Students who experienced a recent loss, death of a friend or relative, family divorce or separation, break-up with a boyfriend/girlfriend,
- Students with a history of mental health difficulties,
- Students with a history of substance abuse,
- Students experiencing serious family difficulties, including serious mental or physical illness,
- Students who have been bereaved by a suicide in the past,
- Students with a history of sexual abuse,
- Students with a history of suicide attempts/self-harm,
- Non-communicative students who have difficulty talking about their feelings,
- Less able students,
- Siblings in the same school,
- Cousins in the same school,
- Other relatives who attend the school,
- Those injured,
- Eyewitnesses,
- Close friends in the deceased's school,
- Close friends in other schools (contact that school),
- Those who may have had contact with the deceased immediately prior to the death,
- Those who may have had a difficult relationship or negative interactions with the deceased,
- Those who have suffered a previous bereavement, loss, or separation,
- Other vulnerable students may not necessarily have been close friends with the deceased but may be particularly hard hit. These may include those who have had previous emotional issues and these events can cause additional stress. These types of students may not have even known the deceased. This type of student can be the 'quiet ones' who do not display any obvious signs of distress, or those who, because of their previous experiences, quite readily let others know of their issues.
- Very young students may only be beginning to realise the permanency of death, and their idea of life after death is still vague. They may have concerns about how the deceased is feeling or thinking in the grave. They may have a lot of questions about aspects of the death, e.g. how the person died, what they looked like, the funeral, heaven, coffins. They may think it is normal to die young or normal to take your own life and this needs to be corrected. Similar issues may arise with students with learning difficulties.
- Be careful to keep an eye out for contagion of grief. This is where a person becomes upset, not because they knew the deceased or have had a previous issue/s but become upset simply because others are. This can be a particular concern with younger years.
- If a death of a teacher has taken place, other vulnerable students may be those who had a particularly close relationship with that teacher or those who had a difficult relationship with that teacher including staff.
- If a particular class/group had been giving a teacher a difficult time, this class/group

may need particular attention in terms of group work to deal with such issues as guilt etc.

### **Communicating with the Parent Body**

Despite the fact that a number of parents may already be aware of the death of a student, there is still a need for the school to communicate formally to the whole parent body.

- Remove parents of deceased from text system/e-mail/postal address file.
- Consider if a general brief text needs to be sent out.
- Consider if the details of what will happen in the school needs to be passed on to parents.
- Consider if the details of what is said to the student body needs to be passed on to the parents.
- Consider if the funeral details need to be communicated to the parents.
- Consider if a more detailed letter needs to be sent to the parents, including the above and any additional information not suitable for a text.
- Consider if the letter sent to the parents of the year group of the deceased needs to be different than the letter sent to other year groups and decide if each year group should receive a different letter addressing the needs of that particular year group?
- Consider if parents need to be called into the school for a meeting.
- If a meeting is to be held for, for example, 5th years, consider if an invitation should also be given to parents of students in 4th and 6th year. This might be necessary if the deceased's friendship circle overlap these years. It may happen that the parents from these other years may not actually turn up – only those whose teenagers were close to the deceased. This might be suggested in the invitation. Consider if the invite should be for all year groups.
- Consider if the parents' night can be addressed by management only or if an outside speaker needs to be call in e.g. from NEPS, Samaritans.
- If necessary, provide literature or hand-outs on death/ loss/ grieving.
- At such a meeting, management should give an outline of the facts known and outline what the school has done. Outline the plan for further actions. Outline what has been said to the students. Outline supports that are available within the school. Allow for questions to be asked. Provide tea afterwards to allow them to mix.
- Impress on parents that students may wish to gather together in houses. If this happens parents should not provide alcohol at such an emotional time.
- Consider meeting the Parents' Association.

When individuals lose a close friend or loved one, it is normal to share their grief with others who knew the deceased equally well. In the past a teenager may have experienced the loss of an aunt, uncle, or grandparent. Because the parents knew that person equally well and are experiencing the same grief, it is normal for teenagers in such situations to share their grief with their parent/s. The situation where a teenager loses a friend can be different. When teenagers suffer the loss of a friend, they may turn to their peers more than their parents, sharing thoughts and feelings with them because they are mourning the same loss. Therefore, at a time like this some teenagers are more likely to want to spend more time with, and talk

more to, their peers rather than their parents. In doing this, they are not trying to shut parents out, they are simply surrounding themselves with others who are going through the same experience and who knew the deceased as well as they did. They may also believe that their peers have a greater understanding than their parents who may not have known the deceased well. This is perfectly normal, and teenagers need to be given the space to do this.

For a young person, the loss of a friend, and the subsequent feelings around grief and bereavement, can be very traumatic. Over the coming weeks the young person will experience numerous emotions including shock, guilt, anger and sadness.

For parents, it can be difficult to know what to say or do. There is no simple straightforward way in which to respond to a young person who is grieving. However, if a parent's partner had lost a close friend, their natural instincts would automatically tell them what to say and do. They would empathise, listen, give them hugs, and give them space when they need it. For the young person it will be very similar but maybe with slightly different language. When a teenager is experiencing pain, it is a parents' natural instinct to want to fix things and make the pain go away. However, with grief, this is exactly what should not be done.

If the incident was a suicide the facilitator of the debriefing session held with the students should inform parents that the issue of suicide was dealt with stating the impact of the suicide and that it does not get rid of the pain but instead, multiplies it, passes it on to others, who have to live with it for the rest of their lives. When the death of a friend occurs, it is not uncommon for friends to want to have a memorial to the person who has died. However research shows, that a non-family memorial in cases of suicide can have unintended consequences regarding other young vulnerable people. Parents should be asked that if their teenager mentions to them any such memorial, they might encourage them to consult with the school before consulting with their peers.

## **12. Timing of Critical Incidents**

### **During School Holidays**

If a death occurs during holiday time extra issues arise that may not occur if the school was open. The school should be opened. An invite should be sent out to the affected year group/s to invite them into school. A structured, familial and adult led activity should be provided. This provides comfort and familiarity and some degree of certainty for grieving teenagers. Such an event might be a prayer service. This might be followed by an informal gathering in the school where food can be provided. The school should be open in the days to follow for students to access. Remember also to inform staff by telephone not text. If a voice message is to be left for staff who cannot be contacted, it should be "ring me back when you get this message". If the death occurs in the early part of a holiday period, e.g. June, it may be necessary to repeat some of the formal events that took place immediately after the death when the school reopens in September.

## **During State Examinations**

If a death occurs during the State Exams, immediately contact the State Exams Commission and NEPS. Discuss alternative arrangements and what supports they can provide. In the event of the death of someone close to a student sitting state exams, the following procedures should be put into action:

- Ring SEC to alert the Exam Manager for your school.
- In the event of the death of a parent/family member, staff may visit the student's family to determine if it is appropriate for the student to be encouraged to finish their exams.
- If desired by the affected student, a separate exam centre should be assigned with staff to manage it. With the agreement of the SEC Exam Manager, a student may be given extra time during their exams.
- If the student would prefer to return to the main exam centre, the students should be informed of her return and given support and advice on how best to support their classmate.
- In the event of the death of a student before or during their state exams, normal procedures should be put in place regarding response to a death during term time.
- If it is deemed necessary, a separate exam centre can be set up to accommodate students who have been particularly affected by the loss of a close friend.
- Students who are particularly affected by any of the above may be spoken to separately after exams (with the agreement of parents); remaining students could be addressed in a group after the exams.

## **13. After a Critical Incident**

### **Debriefing Sessions with Students**

A debriefing session should be student-led and the facilitator should go to where the students are – rather than where the facilitator is or thinks they should be. It may be necessary to debrief some or all class/year groups adjusting the language as appropriate. A debriefing of students might explore some or all of the following:

- Shock and numbness
- Guilt
- Anger
- Guilt at being angry
- Sadness
- Frightened
- Hopelessness
- Hurt (for those very close)
- Why?

The discussion should help label these feelings and help the students understand why they feel these feelings. The discussion may also include reference to:

- How these feelings can come and go.
- How we may not feel all of them.
- How one feeling can last for a short period while others last for longer.
- How we can jump back and forth between these feelings.

- How these feelings may bring up previous losses in our lives and not just bereavements.
- What future events or circumstances may trigger these feelings.

In the case of suicide, the discussion may also touch on the consequences of the action in that it does not get rid of the pain but rather multiplies it and transfers it to others who have to live with it for the rest of their lives. When doing this it is useful to separate the act from the person. In the case of an unexplained suicide, it is common for people to search relentlessly for explanations and to find an answer to why. It would not be healthy to have a collective discussion about different whys. Instead, refer to the fact that suicide is not simple and is often the result of a range of contributing factors.

Providing permission and a safe place for young people to talk about their feelings and to understand their reactions helps reduce distress. Talking to young people about suicide will not put the idea into their minds – if a suicide occurs amongst their friends or peers, young people will probably already be thinking about it. Moreover, appropriate discussions regarding mental health and suicide can help to reduce the risk of suicide contagion. Be careful of what is termed ‘competitive grief’. This can manifest itself in statements such as ‘*they were my best friend – not yours*’. This can be destructive, and efforts should be made to speak privately to these individuals and defuse the situation. This can be done by (i) acknowledging why they are emotional and (ii) encouraging them to allow others to grieve as they wish and in a non-judgmental way. It may be necessary to follow up certain/vulnerable individuals soon after these sessions. This may involve one-to-one session or a telephone call to parents and may need to take place a number of times. To end the session, it might be useful to get the students to summarise what was done, i.e. label feelings and explain why we feel the way we do. Assuming the session has made them feel more at ease with themselves, this point can be used to highlight how useful and valuable it is to label and understand our feelings when times are difficult. This is a useful lesson for the future.

### **Debriefing Session with Staff**

It may be necessary to facilitate a debriefing session for staff, including auxiliary staff and the critical incident team. The latter can be included with the general staff or can debrief separately. This may be best facilitated by an outside organisation.

### **Funeral**

If it is acceptable with the family, the school should involve itself with the funeral arrangements and if necessary, speak to the undertakers and/or the clergy or humanist leading the service. Meet students who are very close friends of the deceased to discuss funeral arrangements. This will allow them to feel that they are involved in the arrangements. It is recommended that teenagers are encouraged to go to the funeral to mark the life and death of the person who has died. The later feelings of regret of not having gone may be difficult to deal with after the event.

Encourage parents whose teenagers express an interest to let them go and encourage parents to accompany the teenager. However, teenagers may prefer to

sit with their peers at the funeral and this should be allowed with parents watching on. It may be necessary to reserve seating for certain groups of friends from the deceased's school and any other school closely involved. It might be necessary to get teachers to direct groups to their seats and for teachers to sit with different groups. If the deceased had close friends in another school, it may be necessary for teachers from that school to attend and help. Discuss with the family the schools and students involvement in the funeral, e.g. a guard of honour, readings; bringing up of gifts, music, singing, etc. If there is a wake, the family may choose to have an open coffin. If young people are to attend the wake, an adult students should be alerted to this fact before getting sight of the body.

Again, if the deceased had close friends in another school, it may be necessary for a teacher from that school to attend and help.

People with different cultural backgrounds might have different customs and ways of dealing with death. Showing respect for this difference can help family members to cope with the death of a loved one. Therefore, sensitivity needs to be made towards different ethnic /religious/cultural beliefs amongst students and staff. For example, attendance at different religious services may not be acceptable to parents whose children are of different religious beliefs or of none. This may result in some students being excluded. If students of certain religious beliefs are to attend a service that they are unfamiliar with, it may be necessary to prepare them for the different practices. Consultation with parents may be necessary. Contact Garda if traffic management is needed around the school or funeral.

### **Memorial to the Deceased**

In the aftermath of a death it is not unusual for students to create a spontaneous memorial by leaving flowers, cards, poems, pictures, stuffed animals, clothing or other items in a place closely associated with the student, such as a locker, classroom seat within the school, or somewhere off school premises, or where the student died. This reflects a basic human desire to remember those we have lost. However, in the case of suicide, it is not recommended to have permanent memorials. If a spontaneous memorial arises, immediately dismantling it can cause hurt, resentment and anger among students. Indeed, prohibiting any kind of memorial can be taken by students as being hurtful and provoke anger and it might also be incorrectly interpreted as stigmatising suicide. If a spontaneous memorial arises it is recommended that a time limit be set on such memorials - no more than two weeks. The site should be monitored regularly, for example, cards and messages should be checked for negative comments or items or comments that romanticise suicide. If possible, the site should be 'squared off' so that flowers and other items added later are added on top of previous items, rather than allowing the site to grow in width and length. If the memorial is off school premises the school's ability to exert influence is limited. However, after a reasonable period has passed and in consultation with the family, it might be a good idea to arrange a small event where the family (if they wish) and close friends of the deceased dismantle the memorial. It is particularly important that those who helped assemble the memorial are involved in the disassembly. Family and friends can also keep mementos from the site. When arranging this, it might be important to remind people that it is best to remember the deceased in life rather than where or how they died. If there is time,

and no memorial has appeared, it might be advantageous to anticipate that one might be spontaneously created on the school premises, e.g. near the deceased locker, at a desk, in the canteen etc. These should be avoided. Instead, if a school suspects this may happen, an alternative might be introduced that is under the school's control, such as a condolence book that can be signed in a private secluded part of the school. It is recommended that memorials should not be in a communal area such as canteen or entrance. Students may wish to create and distribute t-shirts or bracelets or other images of the deceased or items that carry the deceased's name, which may, in the school's view, contribute to suicide contagion. This needs to be handled sensitively. It might be good idea to be honest with these students and explain the school's rationale to them by outlining the concern about other vulnerable students.

Creative alternatives can be suggested to students such as organising an event with a beginning, middle, and end, rather than a permanent fixture. If an event is organised it is recommended that it not be named after or to honour the deceased, but instead, called for example, 'a mental health awareness initiative'. It might be preferable to organise such an event later in the school year. If the students insist on doing something more tangible, alternative suggestions can be made that leave no permanent reminder such as releasing helium balloons or place flowers in a moving river. Suggestions can also be made around a dedication in next year's yearbook or allowing the students create a scrapbook that they can bring home.

In the case of a suicide, it is recommended that flags should not be flown at half-mast. If the family request a memorial on school grounds you might have to explain, without naming other students, the difficulty this will pose regarding vulnerable students in your care. It might be necessary to say you have taken advice from the professionals in this area and that you are really worried about the possibility of suicide contagion and that you do not want to have this on your conscience. The school might have to consider precipitating this conversation in advance with the family before they bring up the subject. This might avoid them asking in the first place and putting the school in the difficult situation of saying no. Despite the fact that permanent memorials following a suicide are generally to be discouraged the family may be determined to have a permanent memorial. If this is the case, it should be off school grounds. It needs to be remembered that if the school agrees to a permanent memorial such as a tree, bench, plaque or scholarship the school should be prepared to do so for future deaths past deaths and indeed recent past students who pass away. If the school decides to erect a memorial, it should be small, discrete and placed in an out of the way position in the school that is not used for day-to-day activities. Also, a plaque with words only may be more appropriate rather than one with a picture/image of the deceased.

### **Seeking Outside Help**

Outside help can be sought from agencies such as:

- National Educational Psychological Service.
- The Samaritans.
- Barnardos

- The HSE.
- CAMHS

It may be necessary to seek help if:

- There are multiple deaths,
- The death takes place in the school,
- The deceased is a very young student,
- If the death is a suicide and totally out of the blue,
- If the death is a suicide and blame is apportioned to other students and/or teachers.

While it may be necessary to consult with outside agencies, it needs to be remembered that students need to be with people they know and trust. If at all possible, it is better that teachers and other school staff provide support for the students. The external 'expert' should be primarily used to advice and support school staff.

### **Returning to a Different Normal**

At some point there will be a time when the right thing to do is to resume normal classes full time without interruption. Routine is very important at a time of tragedy. It provides a sense of security, especially for younger students. It helps students to see that, despite these awful events, the world remains largely unchanged and that life goes on. They will learn this over the next few hours, days, weeks. They learn this through seeing you cope with this event and seeing that the routine of life is continuing. It is important to maintain the normal routine as much as possible. In some cases, the resumption of normal classes may be enough for students to start moving on. However, other structured activities may be needed to restore a stronger feeling of normality returning.

Make sure the deceased's name is removed from all class rolls, and parents removed from text system, e-mailing list and postal list. Be extra vigilant with vulnerable students for a number of months. Be extra vigilant for absentees, particularly if these involve vulnerable students. Some students may experience abnormal reactions. The following is a list of some symptoms that may present themselves. Those that have previous experiences of bereavement may be particularly affected. Those who have their own emotional issues or special needs may also need particular attention.

### **The Return of Siblings**

Sometimes grieving siblings can find it very difficult to return to school. They can be consumed by anxiety about how they will be treated. They may fear facing their friends, being crowded out, others being 'in their face', or they may fear breaking down in public and being singled out. Visit the home and talk through the anxieties about returning. Give the sibling the option of a gradual/staggered return. Ask the sibling how they would like to be treated. Let them know that they can leave class if they feel overwhelmed and tell them there is an alternative room they can go to. Speak to the sibling's year group/friends. Help the friends with suggestions about what they might say to the sibling. The strongest worry the grieving sibling may have is the fear of breaking down in public when approached by others. The possibility of

this happening can be heightened by what is said to the sibling or how they are greeted. For example, if the sibling is asked “How are you?” they may get very upset. This is a question that puts the sibling under pressure to respond emotionally and more than likely respond in the negative way. Therefore, alternatives both students and teachers can use are “Welcome back” or “It’s good to see you”. These are statements and not questions and do not put the sibling under pressure to respond. After a brief acknowledgement with the sibling, encourage students to enter into normal conversation e.g. “Guess what happened in Maths class?”, “Did you see that match last night?”

With regard to teachers, one suggestion might be for the teacher to wait outside the classroom before class starts so that they can meet the sibling before they enter the classroom. Again, they might steer away from questions that require the sibling to give an emotional response or engaging in a long conversation that might make them feel under pressure to respond. This can be particularly difficult if the sibling has to endure such interactions from six teachers in one day. Teachers might simply say “It’s good to see you”. Teachers should not prompt or facilitate a long emotional conversation in a public area. Remember also that to ignore or not acknowledge the returning sibling can be very damaging.

As the academic year progresses, teachers may find themselves discussing topics in class that may touch on the experience the returning relative may have had. This can occur in obvious situations where mental health might be discussed or less obviously, e.g. in German class a video may be shown that mentions suicide, death or a car accident. The returning students should be spoken to in advance and given the option of opting out of that class. The above points are also worth remembering when teenagers return to school following the death of a parent. Suggestions regarding the reintegration of a bereaved child in school are offered here:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/reintegration-of-the-bereaved-child-in-school.pdf>

## **14. Other Aspects to Consider**

### **Events in the Future**

Future events can cause re-emergence of issues for grieving teenagers. It might be useful to re-read this document and plan ahead when such events are approaching and consult with family, close friends. These events may include:

- Month’s Mind
- Birthdays & Christmas
- Awards Day & Graduation
- Extra – curricular events such as a sporting event

### **Other Schools**

Most teenagers have friendship circles that cross school boundaries. This is particularly true for older teenagers. One other task that might be worth pursuing is to determine the name of the other school/s where the deceased friends attend. If

might be necessary to alert the principal/s of events. If the friends in the other school/s are particularly close, it might be appropriate to invite them into your school for any event that may be taking place. It might be necessary for teacher/s from the other school/s to attend the funeral and sit with their students.

### **Social Media**

Following the death of a friend, social media may help teenagers to share their grief. Indeed, the family, including parents, may take comfort from what is said by the deceased's friends on social media.

The school should remain vigilant to inappropriate comments or images that may be posted on social media and be prepared to act if necessary. This might be a topic for discussion at a meeting with close friends, and positive leaders in the year group affected.

### **15. Evaluation**

When time allows, the steps taken after the incident need to be assessed. The following questions may need to be asked. When reviewing this document, consult with all parties involved who may have an interest. In addition, the Critical Incident Management Team should meet once a year to review the plan even if there has not been a critical incident.

- Can the school lessen the possibility of reoccurrence?
- Do steps need to be deleted?
- Do steps need to be added?
- What worked?
- What did not work?
- What has been learned?
- Were there any circumstances that were unforeseen?
- Do policies need amendments?

### **16. Self-Reflection**

Dealing with a critical incident can be one of the most challenging and distressing events any professional working with young people has to deal with.

Consider actions should be driven by practical needs rather than heightened emotional state. Everything done will be for the best of intentions and will be done to have a positive outcome. Be mindful of follow up contact between the person dealing with a family and the family itself. Such contact should not develop into a dependent relationship where the person providing the assistance becomes a necessary part of the family's life. Finally, after events have settled down, it may be necessary to have a gathering of those in the school directly involved with the incident and/or a gathering of the whole staff. This should not be a debriefing session to assess what worked and did not work. Instead, the aim of the gathering should provide a 'therapeutic outlet' for emotions. This can be as simple as an informal social event such a meal out, or a more structured event facilitated by an outside expert. If the incident occurred during the school holidays, consider holding such a gathering as soon as possible, rather than wait for the next term to start. However, if the majority cannot attend due to holidays, it may be best to wait until the school term recommences so

that all can attend. It may also be necessary for the school to facilitate counselling (using the Department of Education Employee Assistance Programme) for teachers, if needed.

### **17. Critical Incident Rooms**

In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms are designated for the indicated purposes:

Room Name:	Designated Purpose:
Staff Room	Main meeting room for meeting staff
Guidance Office (Ms. Concar's)	Meetings with students
Assembly Hall	Meetings with parents
Principal's Office	Meetings with media Meetings with parents
Guidance Office (Mr. Lyng's)	Individual sessions with students
Library /Kitchen	Meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team

### **18. Consultation and communication regarding the plan**

Staff were consulted and their views were canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

Our school's policy and plan in relation to critical incidents has been presented to all staff. Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan. The plan will be updated annually.

### 19. Critical Incident Management Team

Role	Name and Email address	Phone Number
Team Leader:	Malachy Flanagan	
Garda Liaison:	Malachy Flanagan Regina Dolan	
Staff Liaison:	Malachy Flanagan Regina Dolan Jimmie Gacquin	
Student Liaison:	Hazel Concar Micheál Lyng Padraig O'Connell Trudy Farrell Padraic McWeeney Emma Dempsey Michael Galvin Regina Laffan Mary Hayden	
Community Liaison:	Trudy Farrell Malachy Flanagan	
Parent Liaison:	Malachy Flanagan Hazel Concar Micheál Lyng Trudy Farrell Relevant Year Head	
Media Liaison:	Malachy Flanagan Fr. Liam Murray	
Administrators:	Andrea Clarke Nicole Rowley Paula Geraghty	

## 20.Short term actions-Day 1

Task	Name
Gather accurate information	Malachy Flanagan
Who, what, when, where?	
Convene a CIMT meeting-specify time and place clearly	Malachy Flanagan
Contact external agencies	Malachy Flanagan Regina Dolan Jimmie Gacquin Trudy Farrell
Arrange supervision for students	Jimmie Gacquin Regina Dolan
Hold staff meeting	SLT
Agree schedule for the day	Malachy Flanagan
Inform students- (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	Hazel Concar Micheál Lyng Relevant Year Head
Compile a list of vulnerable students/staff	As above
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	Malachy Flanagan Fr. Liam Murray
Inform parents	Malachy Flanagan Hazel Concar Micheál Lyng Relevant Year Head
Hold end of day staff briefing	Malachy Flanagan Regina Dolan Jimmie Gacquin
Contact/visit the bereaved family	Malachy Flanagan Hazel Concar Micheál Lyng Trudy Farrell Relevant Year Head
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	Malachy Flanagan Fr. Liam Murray

## 21. Medium term actions- Day 2 and following days

Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Team Leader, Malachy Flanagan
Meet external agencies	Malachy Flanagan Trudy Farrell Hazel Concar Micheál Lyng
Meet whole staff	
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	Malachy Flanagan Regina Dolan Jimmie Gacquin
Visit the injured	Malachy Flanagan Relevant Year Head Guidance Counsellor
Liaise with bereaved family, regarding funeral arrangements	Malachy Flanagan
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	CIMT BOM
Make a decision about school closure	BOM

## 22. Follow-up-beyond 72 hours

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Hazel Concar Micheál Lyng Trudy Farrell Malachy Flanagan
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	
Plan for giving 'memory box' to bereaved family	
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BOM

## **Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident-Day One:**

Principal and Deputy Principals:

- Gather the facts of the incident (who, what, when, where)
- Contact appropriate agencies, if necessary (NEPS, Emergency Services, HSE, Community Care Services, DES, Board of Management)
- Convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team – 8 a.m. if overnight, within an hour if during the day
- Have administration staff photocopy appropriate literature
- Draft any media statements and any other letters re parents etc- liaise with DEY, if necessary

The CIMT will refer to pages 20 and 21 of 'Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines for Schools and will:

- Agree a statement of facts for staff, students, parents and media
- Inform all staff of incident- staff communication via short memo which includes details of staff meeting outside school hours (8:30 a.m. or 1:15p.m. or 4:05p.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 of what outside agencies have been contacted

All staff share factual information with student population in class groups of possible

Maintain the normal routine as far as possible for classes not immediately affected

\*Awareness of high risk students. (Students with SEN, neighbours, late arrivals, staff/students 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 or used Year Head.

Further procedures for Day One:

- A member 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
- Designated staff member to liaise with family/families involved in the incident. In the case of bereavement arrange with the family the school'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.

## **Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident-Day Two Three:**

Principal and Deputy Principals:

Convene CIMT at 8 a.m.

Convene staff meeting and decide who will contact absent staff

CIMT:

Review the events of the first 24 hours

Check how everyone is coping

Member of CIMT to hold information meeting with year head and class teachers to clarify what has happened

Arrange support for students, (page 27 of Guidelines) providing a suitable room for this to happen-subject teacher makes referrals CIMT to ensure there is supervision on corridors

Follow up -beyond 72 hours after the critical incident:

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Guidance Counsellors, Principal, Deputy Principals
Plan for return of bereaved student(s) Plan for siblings, close relatives, injured students etc.	Guidance Counsellors, Principal, Care Team, Year Head(s)
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BOM/CIMT

### **23.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 CIMT.

Review time will be allowed for after a critical incident takes place to review the overall policy and plan.

Checklist for Reviewing/Planning the Critical Incident Policy and Plan:

- Has serious consideration been given to the school's approach to prevention?
- Has the school defined a critical incident and explored clear examples?
- Have key roles been clearly identified and the tasks clearly outlined?
- Are the personnel suitable? What is their availability?
- Has each member compiled their emergency pack? Have you provided support and time here?
- Has contact been made with external agencies?
- Is the Emergency Contact list up to date and complete?
- Are letters and press releases readily available? On headed paper? Ready for adaptation?

- Has all staff been consulted about the policy / plan
- Set the date for review?
- Where will copies of the plan be kept – so that is easy to access?

#### **24.References to NEPS Resource materials for schools**

- 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 school
- 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 school plan
- R23 Emergency Contact List

#### **25.CIMT Emergency Contact List**

Agency	Contact Number
Local G.Ps	043 3348884 College Medical Centre 0433345055 Dr. Paul Trueick 0433345182 Camlin Medical Practice
Longford Garda Station	043 3346741 043 3350570 999 or 112
NEPS	01 8892700 Head Office
Longford Fire Station	999 or 112 043 3347136
HSE	1800 700700 01 2408787
Fr. Tony Gilhooley	043 3346465

## **26. Agenda for Meeting with CIMT/Key Staff**

- See Responding to Critical Incidents NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools
- Share full details of the event and agree on the facts. These will need to be relayed in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner by all staff to the students.
- Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional ones that should be informed (check Emergency Contact List Section 11, R21).
- Managing communication needs careful attention. Use of social media is a good medium for facilitating factual and appropriate communication.
- Discuss how to break the news to relatives and close friends and who should do this (remember that they must always be told separately).
- Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students. It is often best to do this with class groups, rather than large assemblies (See Section 11, R5).
- If there are students of various nationalities and religions in the school, this needs to be taken into consideration in organising prayer services, attendance at the funeral, etc. When a number of external agencies are involved in a response, co-ordination will be needed, and procedures will need to be agreed. An agency such as NEPS may take on this role.
- Consult students about what to do if there is an event scheduled such as a trip, concert, match, etc. This should reduce the likelihood of students being angry later on as a result of any school action or inaction.
- Discuss issues relating to school routine, including school closure. Remember it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. It is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students.
- Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what has happened and temporarily shelve all academic activities if necessary. See Section 11, R5 for further information.
- Plan procedures for the day.
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students.
- Parents of different religious or national groups may need to be consulted.



## Short Term Actions – Day 1

Task	Name
<input type="checkbox"/> Gather accurate information	
<input type="checkbox"/> Who, what, when, where?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly	
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact external agencies	
<input type="checkbox"/> Arrange supervision for students	
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold staff meeting	
<input type="checkbox"/> Agree schedule for the day	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Compile a list of vulnerable students	
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inform parents	
<input type="checkbox"/> Hold end of day staff briefing	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

## Medium Term Actions – Day 2 and Following Days

Task	Name
<input type="checkbox"/> Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet external agencies	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet whole staff	
<input type="checkbox"/> Arrange support for students, staff, parents	
<input type="checkbox"/> Visit the injured	
<input type="checkbox"/> Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	
<input type="checkbox"/> Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	
<input type="checkbox"/> Make decisions about school closure	

## Follow-Up – Beyond 72hrs

Task	Name
<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	
<input type="checkbox"/> Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family	
<input type="checkbox"/> Decide on memorials and anniversaries	
<input type="checkbox"/> Review response to incident and amend plan	

## 28. Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians – Sudden Death/Accident

(School Contact Details)

(School Crest)

Dear Parent/Guardian

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of Name of student(s). 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 she 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 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 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).

Sincerely  
Principal's signature

## 29. Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians – Violent Death

(School Contact Details)

(School Crest)

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened. A child/young person from the neighbourhood, the sister of (name of student), a student here at school, was killed as a result of (a violent attack, violent incident in the street etc.) earlier this week. We are all profoundly saddened by his death. We have shared this information and had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened.

School staff members have been available for students on an on-going basis today. Other support personnel (including psychologists etc., according to actual arrangements) are available to advise staff in their support of students. The death of any young person is tragic, but a violent death is even more difficult. It is hard to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to accept that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it. This death may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Some children/young people may be afraid for their own life and for the lives of those they love. Take time to listen to their fears and reassure them that what has happened is rare.

We have enclosed some additional information that may be useful during this time. The media are in the vicinity of the school and may approach you or your children. You need not respond to their questions if you are approached. We will not allow the media to interview your child at school and our general advice is that you should not let your children be interviewed. They are not mature enough to judge what to say and may say something they will regret later. In these times, young people tend to turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive about what your son might post to others. Our thoughts are with (family name) and with each of you.

Sincerely  
Principal's name

### **30.Critical Incident Resources for Parents**

Children's Understanding and Reaction to Death According to Age

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/children-s-understanding-and-reaction-to-death-according-to-age-r6-.pdf>

Stages of Grief <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/stages-of-grief-r7-.pdf>

How to Cope when Something Terrible Happens

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/how-to-cope-when-something-terrible-happens-r8.pdf>

Reactions to a Critical Incident

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/reactions-to-a-critical-incident-r9-.pdf>

Grief after Suicide or Suspected Suicide

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/grief-after-suicide-or-suspected-suicide.pdf>

Ways to Help Your Child Through This Difficult Time <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/ways-to-help-your-child-through-this-difficult-time-r12-.pdf>

### **31. Classroom Session Following News of a Critical Incident**

Normally, the class teacher, class tutor or other teacher who knows the students should be the person to inform them of the events and lead the classroom session. Students generally feel safe and secure with someone they know. If the teacher feels uncomfortable with this role another staff member may share the task. Teachers should have the opportunity to opt out of this work if they feel unable to handle it and other arrangements should be made for that class group. The aim of the session is to break the news to give the students an opportunity to discuss what has happened and to express their thoughts and feelings in a secure environment. The teacher needs to listen and be empathic. The session needs to be tailored to the age and developmental level of the class group.

The outline of the session is as follows:

**STEP 1:** Giving the facts and dispelling rumours

**STEP 2:** Sharing stories and allowing and encouraging the sharing of thoughts and the expression of feelings

**STEP 3:** Normalising the reactions

**STEP 4:** Worries (for younger children)

**STEP 5:** Advising about social media usage

**STEP 6:** Empowerment

**STEP 7:** Closure

**STEP 8:** Free Time

**STEP 9:** Recovery

\*See Pages 57-59 Responding to Critical Incidents NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools for suggested actions in relation to each step.

### **32. General Interview Guide for Guidance Counsellors/Chaplains**

An interview guide for guidance counsellors, chaplains and other designated staff for exploring a student's reaction to a critical incident is available here:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/interview-guide.pdf>

### **33. Class Notice of Critical Incident**

Please read the prepared student notice at this time. This document was prepared by the Principal, Deputy Principal(s) and members of the Critical Incident Team. This document was further discussed at this morning's staff meeting. We wish for all students to receive the same factual information, and for parents to receive the same factual information from siblings.

PLEASE DO NOT ALTER THIS DOCUMENT.

The Class of the student involved in the incident: Only if incident is confirmed by the family, can it be relayed as such to the students. The Class of the student who has died should be the first to be told with The Deputy Principal, Counsellor and Class teacher present.

### **34. Student Notice: To Be Read Out By Class Tutor**

On the \_\_\_date\_\_\_ at \_\_\_time\_\_\_ an event occurred that affected a member of our school community. \_Name of the person\_\_\_ was involved. The details are:

### **35. Sample Media Announcement**

(School Contact Details)

(School Crest)

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 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 (5th year) and will be greatly missed by all who knew him. We have been in contact with 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.

**36. Sample Letter Requesting Consent for Involvement of Outside Professionals**

(School Contact Details)

(School Crest)

Dear Parent/Guardian

Following the recent (tragedy/death of x) we have arranged specialist support for students in the school who need particular help. (X) is available to help us with this work. The support will usually consist of talking to the students either in small groups or on a one to one basis, and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your son has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with (x). If you would not like your son to receive this support, please sign the attached slip and return it to the school by-----.

If you would like further information on the above or if you would like to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip, or contact the school.

Principal -----

I/We do not wish our son to meet with \_\_\_\_\_

I/We understand that my son may meet x in an individual/group session, depending on the arrangements that are thought most appropriate.

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

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

### **37.Review and Evaluation of Critical Incident Management Plan**

Evaluation is a vital part of the process of maintaining a viable critical Incident Strategy. Crisis management can only develop with analysis of past incidents, feedback in the light of past responses and systematic evaluation of all protocols in place. What amendments need to be made to any further crisis management incidents in the light of the review of this incident?

Issues to be aware of in the light of effective evaluation include:

- The confidence of the Critical Incident Management Team in their roles in the event of an incident.
- Was internal communication effective between staff?
- Were all staff furnished with accurate facts and kept updated on a consistent basis?
- Was the overall communication strategy successful?
- Was information disseminated quickly to avoid speculation and rumour?
- Was there adequate and effective communication with the family involved?
- What lessons could be learned from an analysis of this strategy?
- Was feedback obtained from staff as to whether they felt sufficiently equipped to deal emotionally and physically with the incident?
- Was there sufficient guidance and support to individual teachers, staff and students?
- Were students adequately supervised during the Crisis Meeting?
- Was there sufficient Pastoral Care provided to deal with the incident?
- Was communication with the media effective?
- Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?
- Were external support agencies met with for feedback in the aftermath of the incident?
- Were all expenses incurred met and dealt with in a timely manner?



## Critical Incident Management Policy

The Board of Management reviewed this policy and ratified by the Board of Management on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

It will be reviewed in October 2026.

Signed: *J. A. Khan*  
Chairperson, Board of Management

Date: 04/02/2026

Signed: *M. Flanagan*  
Principal/Secretary to the Board of Management

Date: 04/02/2026