

Critical Incident Response Policy

Athlone Community College is conscious that the key to managing critical incidents is planning, therefore it is important that we have a plan in place should a tragic event occur. This will prepare staff members to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. This plan will help to guide our response in the event of a tragedy occurring and consequently, have the effect of limiting the effects of the incident on students and staff and of ensuring that normality returns to school life as soon as possible. In applying our policy, we recognize that each crisis is unique, and the response required may vary. While this policy is not designed as a total plan of action for every crisis it outlines several general guidelines, applicable, with minor adjustment, to most situations. The nature of the incident and the person(s) involved will have a direct bearing on the subsequent chain of events.

This policy is based on the supposition that the critical incident occurs during the school day. Accordingly, we believe that students are best catered for within the school environment following a traumatic accident. If the critical incident occurs outside of school time it is normal for students to congregate in school. The school will be opened so that students can come together and avail of support.

Aim

The aim of this policy is:

- To help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of a critical incident.
- To enable Athlone Community College to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff.
- To help ensure, in so far as is possible, that the potential effects on the students and staff will be limited.
- To enable Athlone Community College to return to normality as soon as possible.

Definition

A 'Critical Incident' is an event that seriously affects members of the whole school community. It is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school. The Principal will decide where there is doubt, if a particular incident falls under the terms of this definition. The following events would be categorized as a Critical Incident:

- Family bereavement.
- Death, serious illness/accident involving a member of the school community.
- Suicide of a member of the school community.
- Serious damage to the school buildings through fire, flood, vandalism etc
- Serious emergency on the school premises.
- Serious violence or the threat of serious violence to a member of the school community.
- Serious injury or death of a student while involved in a school activity.

- An attack on staff member(s) and/or student(s) resulting in serious psychological and/or physical injury
- Intrusion into the school resulting in a traumatic effect on staff member(s) and/or student(s)
- Disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident or a tragedy in the wider community.

By allowing time to talk about and consider these issues within the school curriculum, we can give our students guidance about practical measures to alleviate the stress responses that may occur because of a critical incident. Provision of professional development such as the ASSIST programme for teachers and other support staff is also important to help them to cope with a critical incident.

Preparations for responding to a critical incident

To provide for a measured and proportionate response to any Critical Incident it is important to:

1. put in place, a policy which clearly outlines the procedures to be followed.
2. form a Critical Incident Management Team
3. prepare an Emergency Contact list

Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident occurring

In responding to a Critical Incident affecting the school community there needs to be

- (a) Short Term Actions (1st Day)
- (b) Medium Term Actions (24 -72 hours)
- (c) Longer Term Actions

a. Short Term Actions

When a staff member becomes aware of a critical incident involving a member of the school community, he/she should immediately (where possible/practical) inform the Principal / Deputy Principals. However, where it is apparent that an emergency exists, it may be necessary to call one or other of the emergency services in the first instance. The Principal will establish the facts of the case and will then inform the Deputy Principals and in consultation, will, if considered necessary, convene the Critical Incident Management Team.

The team at its initial meeting will agree an immediate plan of action which may involve:

- Informing the Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- Informing the Chief Executive of LWETB
- Assigning tasks within the team
- Liaising with those at an accident site
- Organising a staff meeting and deciding whether outside professionals will be invited to that meeting.
- Informing all staff, teaching and non-teaching and organising (see appendix 2)



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Retreat Road, Athlone, Co. Westmeath N37 Y985
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Príomhoide | Principal Ms. Lisa O'Kennedy
Leas-Príomhoide | Deputy Principal Ms. Gráinne Macken
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- Informing students (see appendix 2)
- Opening the school to receive students as the school is a neutral focal point for students and they will be comfortable (and safe) in these familiar surroundings. This may entail opening the school on a weekend or during a holiday period.
- Contacting parents
- Contacting the necessary agencies, e.g. emergency services, Gardaí, Medical Services etc.
- Liaising with and alerting relevant support groups e.g. NEPS, DES, etc.
- Preparing a statement for the media; the Principal or person designated by the Principal will be the only person to communicate with the media.
- Providing rooms for debriefings, meetings, counselling etc.
- Visiting affected family/families
- All staff involved will log telephone calls made and received, meetings held, letters sent and received, important information gathered and will contribute these logs to a central confidential file which will ultimately be held by the Principal in case of follow up after a long time has passed.

b. Medium Term Actions

- The Critical Response Management Team to review the events of the first 24 hours.
- Provide an update to staff
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students and parents, if necessary.
- Plan for the reintegration of students and staff affected by the critical incident
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial

c. Longer Term Actions

Follow-up is the work carried out in the weeks, months and years following a critical incident. The goal of follow-up is to help the school community cope with the impact of the event in the longer term and to monitor those individuals with ongoing difficulties. The aftershocks of some crises can linger for some time.

- The Student Support Team will be a useful resource in seeking to support students returning to school after a major accident or bereavement.
- Consider if a special day of reflection would benefit those affected by a tragedy.
- The dedication of a tree, special garden, piece of artwork, notice board to recall those who have died is also recommended.
- Consider holding an information evening for parents in the aftermath of a significant incident.
- A review of curricular provision, specialist staff training and links with outside agencies should also be considered.

Important Documents

The following documents should also be consulted when implementing the Critical Incident Response Policy:

- NEPS Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines
- Well-being in post primary schools. Guidelines for mental health promotion and suicide prevention.
- Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools: A Guide to Establishing a Team or Reviewing an Existing Team.

Dealing with the Media

It is important that all staff and students understand that only the Principal or designated person will deal with the media and that all inquiries are to be referred to that person. No other discussion with the media should take place and no interviews should be given without the approval of the principal.

Critical Incident Management Team Roles

Position	Name	Role
Principal	Lisa O'Kennedy	• Alerts the CIMT to the crisis and convenes a meeting • Co-ordinates the tasks of the team • Liaises with the Board of Management, DES, NEPS SEC, emergency services etc • Ensures that information shared is accurate • Leads briefing meetings for staff and outlines the routine for the day(s) • Considers issues that may arise and how they might be responded to • Get the prior approval from the family as to what they want known or released. • Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews • Visits the affected families (if relevant) • Liaise with the family re: school's involvement in the funeral service, in accordance with the family wishes.
Deputy Principal	Grainne Macken Amy Dervin Sharon Kelly	• Preparation of Critical Incident Management Folder • Assists the principal in the implementation of the Critical Incident Response Plan • Manages any arising issues in accordance with agreed school policy



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		• Liaise with guidance counsellors and year heads regarding support for students • Liaises and supports vulnerable staff members • Informs staff of the availability of Spectrum Life, the Employee Assistance Service • Inform parents of the incident. Invite parents to contact the school individually, by telephone or in small groups. Discourage large group meetings. • Visits affected families with principal • Liaises with agencies in the community for family support and onward • Setting up a "quiet" room where agreed • Maintains and monitors a Book of Remembrance if relevant • Liaises with Clergy if relevant
Guidance Counsellor	Cathy Cryan Nicola Burke	• Liaises with Deputy Principals and year heads regarding support for students • Identify students closely associated with the incident • Organise a system of referring students • Organise student support and counselling • If the incident relates to a suicide identify students at risk from contagion. Compile a list of students at risk of suicide ideation. • Checks credentials of individuals offering support and co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies
Year Head		• Liaise with Deputy Principals and guidance counsellors regarding support for students • Assist the Deputy Principals in their role • Liaises with Student Support Team regarding support for students
Class Tutor		• Liaises with year head regarding support for students • Assists the year head in his/her role
SENCO	Suzanne Casey	• Co-ordinates information from tutors and year heads about AEN students they are concerned about • Alerts other staff to vulnerable AEN students • Liaises with Deputy Principals to facilitate parent meeting of AEN students
Secretary	Josephine Gallagher	• Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of key personnel (see appendix 1)

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		• Takes phone calls and notes those that need to be responded to • Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts • Photocopies materials from the Critical Incident Management folder as needed
Facilities	BAM FM	• Assist the principal with management of the school building

Action Plan/Procedures for Critical Incident Management Team when critical incident occurs

1. Principal to review section 4 and 5 of NEPS "Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines and Resources for Schools" pg. 20
2. Principal convenes a CIM Team and ensures that all members of the team have a copy of the following documents:
 - a. Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines and Resources for School
 - b. Athlone Community College Critical Incident Response Plan
3. CIM Team meeting agenda is outlined in:
 - a. Section 4.3 pg. 22 of NEPS "Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines and Resources for Schools"
4. Staff Meeting – Section 4.4 pg. 24 of NEPS "Responding to Critical Incidents" – Guidelines and Resources for Schools"
5. Check summary pg. 28 of NEPS "Responding to Critical Incidents" –Guidelines and Resources for Schools at the end of the day

This policy will be reviewed in 2028.

Adopted by the Board of Management on 15th June 2026

Signed by Chairperson of the Board of Management

Date 15/6/26




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Appendix 1

Contact	Name and Address	Telephone
NEPS Western Region	Government Buildings Convent Road Roscommon Co Roscommon F42 VX53	0906634782
In Emergency		999 or 112
Regional Hospital Mullingar	Longford Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath N91 NA43	0449340221
Clonbrusk Primary Care	Clonbrusk, Athlone, Westmeath, N37 P8P8	0906424840
Local Fire Brigade	Beechpark West, Athlone, N37 VK22	999 or 112 0906472937
Gardai	Barrack St, Athlone, Co Westmeath	999 or 112 0906498550
TUSLA	Primary Care Centre, Harbour Road, Mullingar, Co Westmeath N91 V6R9	0449353999
LWETB	Marlinstown Business Park, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. N91 RW96	0449348389
State Examinations Commission	Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 TP65	0906442700
Chairperson of Board of Management	Cllr. Frankie Keena	0906472625
DES Press Office	Marlborough Street, Dublin 1, D01 RC96	018896400

Appendix 2

Protocol for Staff Briefing

1. The Principal or a person designated by the Principal will inform staff of the situation and allow time for reaction.
2. Staff will plan strategy for the coming day(s).
3. The Principal or delegate will assign tasks to staff members as appropriate.
4. Be aware and support members of staff who may have difficulty in dealing with the crisis.
5. Prepare year heads and teachers for briefing students.
6. We recognise that some staff members may not wish to be involved in direct crisis management but may wish to assist in other ways.

Protocol for Informing Students

1. Year Heads will assume responsibility for their year group and maintain routine in so far as possible.
2. The way the information will be conveyed to them will largely be determined by the age of the students.
3. Students will be informed in groups. It is helpful if an agreed statement is used as this may help reduce the spread of rumour. If at all possible, the students should be told at the same time and in groups no larger than normal class sizes. This may not be possible or even desirable.
4. The statement should give the facts, explain the school routine and highlight the support, which is available and indicate what actions, if any, are planned by the school.
5. The term suicide should not be used without the consent of the family. Instead use the term sudden death or tragic death.
6. Recognise and provide support for students who are having difficulty dealing with the crisis. If necessary, recruit assistance from NEPS.
7. Be prepared for many different reactions, tears, stunned silence, anger, etc. Be aware that in a large school some students may not know the students at the centre of the crisis. Encourage students to talk, to reminisce, to express their feelings. Reassure them that it is ok to feel shocked, numb, anger, etc.
8. Do not allow students to leave the classroom alone. Send for another adult to accompany them.
9. Avoid glorifying the situation or sensationalising the death.
10. Do not be afraid to tell them that you are also upset by the news.
11. Feel free to say a short reflection / poem if considered appropriate.

Protocol for Contacting Parents

- Notify parents using an agreed method of communications e.g. email, text message or Microsoft Teams.

