



## Holycross National School

# CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

### Introduction

Holycross National School aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. In our school Mission statement we strive to provide a community where all pupils are equally valued and respected.

The Board of Management, through the school teaching staff has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policies and plans.

Our aim is to establish a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan. Should a Critical Incident occur, a Board of Management meeting will be called immediately.

### Review and Research

The CIMT consulted the resource documents below in devising the policy. These include:  
When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools (INTO/Ulster Teachers Union 2000)

Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools (NEPS 2007)

### Definition of a 'Critical Incident'

The staff and management of Holycross National School recognise a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms 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 incidents might include:

- *The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other 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*

### Aim

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

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

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

### **Physical safety** - Refer to the Health & Safety policy

- ❖ Regular Fire Drills occur
- ❖ Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- ❖ Pre-opening supervision in the school on days of inclement weather e.g. frost, rain, snow and school closure as a precaution
- ❖ General school rules under the school's behaviour policy to ensure all pupils have a safe environment

## ***Psychological safety***

The management and staff of Holycross National School aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- ❖ Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management, resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- ❖ Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE e.g. child protection training, R.S.E training
- ❖ Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- ❖ Books and resources on difficulties affecting primary school students are available
- ❖ The school has developed links with a range of external agencies – HSE, Accord, Psychologists, Speech therapists etc
- ❖ Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
- ❖ The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- ❖ A care system may be put in place in the school should an occasion arise
- ❖ Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (Class teacher in consultation with the SEN teacher), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency
- ❖ Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves through the EAS (employee assistance scheme through the VHI 1800 411 057)

## **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

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 roles for 4 years. 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.

## **Preparation of CIMP Roles**

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

- ❖ Team Leader
- ❖ Garda liaison/Media liaison/Community liaison
- ❖ Staff liaison
- ❖ Pupil liaison
- ❖ Parent liaison
- ❖ Administrator

Outlined below are some points on the key responsibilities of each role.

## **Team leader**

- ❖ Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- ❖ Coordinates the tasks of the team
- ❖ Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS
- ❖ Liaises with the bereaved/impacted family

It is important to consider who will take the lead in the absence of the team leader.

## **Garda liaison/Media liaison/Community liaison**

- ❖ Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared
- ❖ 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)
- ❖ Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of 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

### **Staff liaison**

- ❖ Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- ❖ Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- ❖ Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- ❖ Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- ❖ Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- ❖ Advises them of the availability of the EAS and gives them the contact number.

### **Pupil liaison**

- ❖ Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- ❖ Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- ❖ Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed (Learning Support Room)

### **Parent liaison**

- ❖ Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- ❖ Arranges parent meetings, if held
- ❖ May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- ❖ Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- ❖ Sets up room for meetings with parents
- ❖ Maintains a record of parents seen
- ❖ Meets with individual parents
- ❖ Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

### **Administrator**

- ❖ Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of:
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency services
- ❖ Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- ❖ Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- ❖ Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- ❖ Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- ❖ Photocopies materials needed
- ❖ Maintains records

### **Record keeping**

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, material used etc.

The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

**Confidentiality and good name considerations**

The management and staff of Holycross National School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do so also. For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

**Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident:

- ❖ The staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- ❖ The assembly room for meetings with students
- ❖ The assembly room for meetings with parents
- ❖ The parish hall for media
- ❖ The learning support room for individual sessions with students
- ❖ The assembly room for other visitors

**Consultation and communication regarding the plan**

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff. Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the principal.

The plan will be updated annually in September of each year.

**Ratification and Review**

This policy was formally ratified by the Board of Management on 19/9/24.

Signed:  Chairperson, BoM Date: 19/9/24

Signed:  Principal Date: 19/9/24