

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT POLICY

Ardagh National School

Ardagh NS National School aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of Management, through the principal, has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Policy as one element of the school's policies and plans.

Definition of Critical Incident

The staff and management of Ardagh NS 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
- ❖ Death / Major Illness / Outbreak of disease
- ❖ Unauthorised removal of student from school or home
- ❖ A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or parent(s)
- ❖ Natural Disaster (fire/flood/extreme weather events)
- ❖ Biological diseases (viral/bacterial infections)
- ❖ Chemical spill(s)

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

- Termly Fire Drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Arrival and collection of children policy
- Supervision Policy
- Code of discipline and behaviour
- School doors locked

Psychological safety

The management and staff of Ardagh NS 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 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 the primary school student are available
- 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. See DES Circulars 0022/2010 (Primary) or 0023/2010 (Post-Primary)
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published on 2007 for primary schools and 2010 for post primary schools. See also Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014). These documents are available on www.education.ie
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. learning support 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. Inspire Workplace Services: Free Phone 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 at least one school 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 plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Team leader: The Principal

Deputy Team Leader: Deputy Principal

Role

- 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; SEC
- Liaises with the bereaved family

Garda liaison Principal

Role

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

Staff liaison Principal

Role

- 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.

Student liaison Assistant Principal 2

Role

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Maintains student contact records (R1).
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Community/agency liaison The Secretary

Role

- 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

Parent liaison Deputy Principal

Role

- 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
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school’s system and ready for adaptation
- 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)

Media liaison The principal

Role

- 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 The principal

Role

- 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 templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

Record keeping The Secretary

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

Confidentiality and good name considerations

Management and staff of Ardagh National School 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. 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.

Critical Incident Rooms	
Room Name:	Designated Purpose:
Staff Room	Main room for meeting staff
Classrooms	Meetings with students
Principal’s Office	Meetings with parents, other visitors, media
Learning Support Room	Individual sessions with students

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

All staff will be consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parent/guardian representatives will be also consulted and asked for their comments.

Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents will be presented to all staff. Each member of the critical incident team will have 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 Term 2 or sooner if required.

Critical Incident Management Team		
Role	Name	Phone
Team leader:	Principal	
Garda liaison	Principal	
Staff liaison	Deputy Principal	
Student liaison	Assistant Principal 2	
Community liaison	The Secretary	
Parent liaison	Deputy Principal	
Media liaison	Principal	
Administrator	The Secretary	

Short term actions – Day 1

Task	Name
Gather accurate information – Who, what, when, where?	Team Leader
Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly	Team Leader
Contact external agencies	Team Leader
Arrange supervision for students	Person 3
Hold staff meeting	All staff
Agree schedule for the day	All Staff
Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	Class Teachers
Compile a list of vulnerable students	Person 2
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	Team Leader
Inform parents	Team Leader
Hold end of day staff briefing	All Staff

Medium term actions - (Day 2 and following days)

Task	Name
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Team leader
Meet external agencies	Team Leader
Meet whole staff	Team Leader
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	Person 3
Visit the injured	Team Leader
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	Team Leader
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	All Staff
Make decisions about school closure	BOM

Follow-up – beyond 72 hours

Task	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Team Leader
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	Staff
Plan for giving of ‘memory box’ to bereaved family	Person 3
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BOM

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

AGENCY	CONTACT NUMBERS
Garda	096-20560 or 999 or 112
Hospital (Mayo University)	094-9021733
Fire Brigade	999 or 112
Local GPs (Ballina Medical Centre)	096-22868
HSE	1850 24 1850 or (098) 25885
Community Care Team	094- 904 9250
Child and Family Centre	096- 75573
Child and Family Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	09637444
School Inspector / Kay Foley	kay_foley@education.gov.ie 087-6832657
NEPS Psychologist / Teresa Judge	094-9028310 / (0761) 108831 neps@neps.gov.ie
DES	076 110 8701
INTO/ASTI/TUI	01 804 7700
Clergy / Fr Pat Munnelly	087-0984568
State Exams Commission	090-644 2700
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057

APPENDICES

- R1 Student Contact Record
- R2 Letter to parents advising of death
- R3 Letter to parents of tragic death
- R4 Media communication
- R5 Communication to classroom of Critical Incident
- R6 Children's Understand and Reaction to Death / According to age
- R7 Grieving / Grief
- R8 How to cope when something terrible happens
- R9 Reactions to a Critical Incident
- R10 Grief after a Suicide or Suspected Suicide
- R11 Reintegration of the Bereaved Child at School
- R12 Ways to Help Your Child through this Difficult Time
- R13 FAQ – parents
- R14 Teachers Helping Students in Times of Crisis or Emergency

R1 Student Contact Record

The form can be used by school staff to record the details of students supported following a critical incident. This information should be collated centrally.

Name of staff member:

Date	Student's Name	Class	Outcome

R2

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (*EDIT* the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of Name of student(s). We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

(*EDIT* Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost).

Our thoughts are with (*EDIT* family name).

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

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

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or to 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 days to come, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.

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

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. (*EDIT* Details).

Yours Sincerely

Principal

R3

Dear Parents,

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened.

(*EDIT*Give accurate information about the incident, avoid using the word murder).

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 (*EDIT*including psychologists etc., according to actual arrangements) are available to advise staff. This support will continue to be available to advise staff in their support of students (*EDIT*if appropriate insert how long).

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.

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 planned) A support meeting for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time we can talk further about how to help ourselves and our children.

Our thoughts are with (*EDIT* family name) and with each of you.

Yours Sincerely

Principal

R4

My name is The principal and I am the Principal of Ardagh NS National School.

We learned this morning of the death of (*EDIT*one of our students or Name of student). This is a terrible tragedy for the (*EDIT* Family Name) family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with the (*EDIT* Family Name) family and friends.

(*EDIT*Name) was a (*EDIT*e.g. 5th class boy) and will be greatly missed by all who knew him/her.

We have been in contact with his/her parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school have implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and (*EDIT*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.

R5

A Classroom Session Following News of a Critical Incident

Normally, the class teacher 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 sharing of thoughts and the expressions 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

<p>STEP 1:</p> <p>Giving the facts and dispelling rumours.</p>	<p>Tell the students in a calm, low key and factual voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has happened • Who was involved • When it happened • The plan of the day <p>Sample Script</p> <p>I have something very sad I want to share with you. The factual information agreed upon by the staff e.g. (name of student), who attends our school and was missing, has been found. You will probably be aware, through social media, that he is dead. Yesterday, the Gardaí found his body. They are investigating what has happened and will let us know as soon as they find out more information.</p> <p>I am feeling very sad about what's happened. Let's spend some time together now helping each other to talk about how we feel about what has happened.</p>
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<p>STEP 2:</p> <p>Sharing Stories</p>	<p>Take some time for discussion. Students may wish to tell their story of the event. As a result they will feel less alone because of their common shared experiences. Assisting them to verbalise their experiences helps their recovery. For those students who find it difficult to verbalise their experiences, or for students with learning difficulties, it may be helpful to allow them to express their feelings and recount their experiences in other ways. Writing stories or using art can be particularly helpful, especially for younger students. A number of materials that can be used are suggested in Section 11, R24. Give the students a choice as to how they want to represent their experiences. Have a box of tissues at hand.</p> <p>Sample script</p> <p>To help us today, we are going to make a memory box for (name of deceased). You can draw a picture of a time you remember with (name of the deceased) or write a poem or a letter to him. If you like we can put these in a nice box and give it to (name of deceased) family sometime soon. This will help them to see how important (name of deceased) was.</p>
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<p>STEP 3:</p> <p>Normalising and Reactions</p>	<p>Tell the children that they will all react differently to what has happened and that there is no right or wrong way. List some possible feelings and reactions, (see R9). Explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Let the students know that the reactions or symptoms will go away in time. Tell them that if the symptoms haven't gone after a few weeks, they should let you or their parents know. In addition to conversations they may have with friends on social media they may need to talk to someone in person about how they are feeling. Depending on the incident and the age of the students distribute handouts R7, R8, R9, R10.</p>
<p>STEP 4:</p> <p>Worries (For younger children)</p>	<p>Sample script</p> <p>You may be worried about (name of the deceased) - that they might be sad or lonely or hungry or cold. When someone dies they don't feel cold or hungry or feelings like that anymore.</p> <p>You may be worried that the same thing could happen to you or someone in your family. What happened to (name of deceased) doesn't happen very often.</p> <p>If the classmate has been ill, you could say. He was very sick and the chances of this happening to someone else you know are low.</p>

<p>Step 5</p> <p>Advising about social media usage</p>	<p>Discussions may begin with an outline of the various social media currently being used by members of the group. The value of these as a way of keeping in contact with and supporting friends should be acknowledged. Students may be asked for experiences of ways in which such communication has helped them as well as examples of ways in which it has gone wrong. Media involving live communication such as Skype or Viber are generally more conducive to support and less open to misunderstanding than text-based means. Students will be encouraged to consider how much social media usage is too much, particularly late into the night. More guidance on social media use is contained in R22.</p>
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<p>Step 6</p> <p>Empowerment</p>	<p>Help the students to identify strategies that they might use to help manage their reaction, for example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep, taking plenty of exercise and appropriate use of social media - may all help. If appropriate, students can share strategies that worked for them in other stressful situations or brainstorm ideas as to what might help. Overall, it is important to help the students regain a sense of control.</p>
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<p>Step 7 Closure</p>	<p>End the session by focusing on the future. Depending on the nature of the incident, help the class/group decide what they would like to do about various issues, e.g., what to do about the person's empty chair, about writing cards or letters. Reiterate the message that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances.</p>
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<p>Step 8 Free Time</p>	<p>After the discussion the teacher may want to allow the student's some play time in the playground or free time in the classroom or an agreed area, depending on the age.</p>
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<p>Step 9 Recovery</p>	<p>It may be useful to continue to do these activities at intervals during the days following and to intersperse them throughout the curriculum in the coming days. Normal routines should generally be returned to as soon as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should be encouraged to resume sports and other extra-curricular activities • It is appropriate that the class curriculum is adjusted or adapted. For example, teachers should avoid presenting new learning material for a while following an incident as concentration may be impaired • Use opportunities which arise within ordinary class work, where coping and support can be reinforced • Students could be encouraged to discuss how to avoid future crisis and lessons learnt from their experiences. There will also be opportunities for structured discussion within the school's social, personal, and health education programmes. Social Personal & Health Education (SPHE) curriculum time is an ideal context in which to offer support.
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R6

Children's Understanding and Reaction to Death According to Age

Children's understanding and reaction to death will depend on their age and their developmental stage. The following are guides only as children will differ in their reactions and grasp of events for a range of reasons other than age alone.

AGES 0 – 2 YEARS

Infants do not understand the meaning of death

They may display anxiety when separated from a loved one

They may appear upset, subdued and uninterested in their surroundings.

AGES 2 – 5 YEARS

No understanding of the permanency of death

May search for the missing person from a loved one

May feel responsible for the death in some way

May become apathetic and depressed

May regress to an earlier stage of development e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting, tantrums or may become clingy

May develop fears of going to sleep

May worry that other loved ones may die.

How You Can Help

Continuity of normal routine e.g. mealtimes and bedtime

Offer physical comfort

Explain the death in clear, simple language, using words like "dead" and "died" - Do not use terms like "gone to sleep" or "passed away"

You may need to repeat the same information again and again

Permit them to ask questions and be consistent in your answers

Reassure them that they had nothing to do with the death and of the wellbeing of other family members.

AGES 5 – 9 YEARS

Beginning to realise the permanency of death, but their idea of life after death is still vague

May have concerns about how the deceased is feeling or what he/she is thinking in the grave

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

The reaction of their peers is important; they may feel 'different' to them

Their peers may be awkward about the death and avoid contact

They may become the target of bullying

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Encourage the child to talk and cry about the deceased if they wish to, otherwise respect their silence

Answer questions and provide as much factual information about the death as possible

Reassure them that thinking and feeling ceases after death

Be vigilant in relation to bullying.

AGES 9 – 12 YEARS

Understand the finality and universality of death

Awareness of their own mortality and may worry about their own death

May display psychosomatic symptoms i.e. physical complaints like tummy aches

May wish to stay at home close to parents

May display anger.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Dispel fears about their own health or the health of other loved ones by offering reassurance

Encourage them to go to school

Allow them to express their anger, offering appropriate ways to do so.

ADOLESCENTS

Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults

May have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.

Death adds to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents

May appear to not care about the death

May seek support outside of the family

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Offer them time to listen

Allow them to express their grief in their own way

Be prepared for mood swings

Don't feel left out if they seem to value their friends more than their parents

Children's use of social media should be monitored and supported by parents.

If parents are grieving themselves, they may be emotionally unable to support their other children. In this instance, another supportive adult in the child's life, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours may need to offer emotional support.

It should be remembered that for children with special educational needs, their understanding of what has happened will be in line with their developmental age.

R7

Grief is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Although there are distinct phases in the grieving process, people go through these stages in different sequences and at different paces. Generally the grieving process in adults is thought to take about two years, while with children and adolescents it may be over a more extended time-frame with different issues arising as they go through developmental milestones.

Denial, numbness, shock (up to 6 weeks)

Death of the person may be denied

Emerging feelings may be suppressed

Refusal to talk about death

Bereaved keeps very busy to avoid thinking about death

Bereaved may show signs of confusion and forget everyday routines

Children in shock may display either silent withdrawal or outbursts of crying.

Acute grief / searching and longing for deceased (6 weeks to 4 months)

Acute sadness – crying

Physical pangs of pain including loss of appetite and disturbed sleep

Emotional pain accompanied by dejection, hopelessness, lack of concentration

Fears of life after death, nightmares, ghosts

Disorganisation

Strong guilt feelings and questioning of self and others, particularly in the case of a sudden death

Feelings of anger at the departed for leaving them

Bereaved may reject offers to comfort them

Adaptation to life without the deceased (6 months to 18 months)

People begin to adjust to their lives without the person who is gone

Sense of isolation

Fearful of forgetting the deceased

Less crying and irritability

Exacerbation of existing personality problems. Children with low self-esteem may be at a greater risk of emotional/behavioural difficulties.

Normalisation of life

Getting on with life

Returned sense of humour and play

Able to participate emotionally in new relationships

Changed relationship with the deceased – able to think of the deceased without pain

Reduction in physical / emotional symptoms

Less guilt

R8

How to Cope When Something Terrible Happens

Reach out – people do care

Talk to your friends, family and teachers - talking is the most healing medicine

Remember you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy or mad

It is acceptable to cry

It is acceptable to smile

If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently

When the stress level is high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings perhaps with alcohol and drugs, this complicates matters rather than bringing relief

Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?

Spend time with people who have a positive influence on you

Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even if you're not sure

Recurring thoughts, dreams flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful

Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk

Sticking to your "normal" routine helps. Structure your time – keep busy

Take time out – go for a cycle or kick a football

Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen – like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc. Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.

R9

Reactions to a Critical Incident

Feelings	Behaviours
Fear Insecurity Guilt Mood swings Shame Shock Regret Yearning Anger Numbness Tearfulness Confusion Loneliness Isolation Anxiety	Nightmares Social withdrawal Over reliance on use of social media Irritability Loss of concentration / forgetfulness Physical / Verbal aggression Misuse of drugs, including alcohol

Physical	Thoughts
Fear Insecurity Guilt Mood swings Shame Shock Regret Yearning Anger Numbness Tearfulness Confusion Loneliness Isolation Anxiety	Nightmares Social withdrawal Over reliance on use of social media Irritability Loss of concentration / forgetfulness Physical / Verbal aggression Misuse of drugs, including alcohol

R10

Grief after a Suicide or Suspected Suicide

Remember there is no right or wrong way to react when someone you know dies. People will have many different reactions to what has happened.

Know that you can survive, even if you feel you can't.

You may feel overwhelmed and frightened by your feelings. This is normal. You're not going crazy; you are grieving.

You may not feel a strong reaction to what has happened. This is normal.

You may experience feelings of guilt, confusion, forgetfulness and anger. Again these feelings are all normal.

You may feel angry at the person who has died, at yourself, at God, at everyone and everything. It is ok to express it.

You may feel guilty about what you did or did not do. Suicide is the act of an individual, for which we cannot take responsibility.

You may never have an answer as to "why" but it is ok to keep asking "why" until you no longer need to ask or you are satisfied with partial answers.

Sometimes people make decisions over which we have no control. It was not your choice.

Feeling low is temporary, suicide is permanent. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If you are feeling low or having a difficult time, ask for help

Allow yourself to cry, this will help you to heal.

Healing takes time. Allow yourself the time you need to grieve.

Every person grieves differently and at a different pace.

Delay making any big decisions if possible.

This is the hardest thing you will ever do. Be patient and compassionate with yourself.

Spend time with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk and who also understand your need to be silent.

Seek professional help if you feel overwhelmed.

If you are thinking of trying to kill yourself, you must talk to a trusted adult

Avoid people who try to tell you what to feel and how to feel it and, in particular, those who think you should "be over it by now"

Ask in school about a support group for survivors that provides a safe place for you to express your feelings, or simply a place to go to be with other survivors who are experiencing some of the same things you're going through

Allow yourself to laugh with others and at yourself. This is healing

R11

Reintegration of the Bereaved Child at School

Some suggestions are offered here which may help prepare the school and the bereaved child for their return to school. They will help to ensure that the individual, the other students and the staff feel more comfortable and at ease.

Visit the bereaved student at home to see what s/he would like to happen when they return to school

Talk to the student's class about how people are affected by grief and encourage them to share their own feelings. Ask about how they have coped with bereavement in their own lives and what has helped

Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to come back to school. Ask how they would like to be treated if they were returning to school after a death. This might be done in pairs or small groups, thus encouraging all to be involved. It will also ensure that a range of preferences are expressed, reinforcing the fact that different people will have different preferences as to how they are treated. Some people may want to discuss what has happened, while others may want to be left alone. In general bereaved students say that they would like others to treat them as before rather than being 'over-nice' to them. However, it is a delicate balance as they don't want people to behave as if nothing has happened at all

It may help if, in advance of the student's return to school, classmates have sent cards or notes or drawn pictures for the bereaved classmate. This will let her/him know that they are in their thoughts

When they return, acknowledge their loss "I'm sorry that (name of deceased) died. I know that you are sad. It is ok to cry"

Teachers can express their own sympathies separately once the general re-entry to class has been managed

When the student returns, they may have difficulty concentrating or joining in class activities. Be understanding

Allow them access to a 'quiet room' where he/she can go to be alone. You might suggest: "We can set up a signal for you to use if you need to leave the class at any time". (Ensure supervision)

Listen when they want to talk: "If you need to talk at any time, I am here to listen"

Carry on normal routines and normal approaches to discipline

They may have difficulty completing homework and assignments: "If you are having difficulty doing your homework it is ok to do as much as you can for a while"

Allow them as much time as they need to grieve.

R12

Ways to Help Your Child through this Difficult Time

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal

Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting

Reassure them that they are safe

Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them

Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time

Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, taking exercise, or talking

Help them to understand that defiance, aggression and risk behaviour is a way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and or fear they are feeling

When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back

If you are out for a long time, telephone and reassure them

Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light

Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it

If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen

Work with the school support services and other available services

As well as advising your child about appropriate use of social media, monitor their use, particularly during this vulnerable time. Useful website: www.webwise.ie

Frequently Asked Questions (Parents)

The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents after a critical incident.

Q. This incident has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?

A. The school will inform students and parents of the core details of the incident insofar as they are known. It sometimes takes some time for the true facts to emerge. In the meantime, it is important to stick to the facts as known. Discourage rumour or gossip as it is often incorrect and can be distressing for the families and friends of those involved. Information on social media is not reliable and always needs to be checked.

Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?

A. This will depend on the particular situation. The school will usually put a plan in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion or individual support for students who need it. If there is particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.

Q. How can I help my child?

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. Advise on and monitor safe use of social media.

Q. How long will the grief last?

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories of other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.

Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?

A. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check-up.

Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?

A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP/HSE Services.

Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?

A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.

R14

Teachers Helping Students in Times of Crisis or Emergency

LISTEN 2.PROTECT 3.CONNECT 4.MODEL & 5.TEACH

THINK ABOUT your students' "DIRECT EXPERIENCE" with the event i.e. FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE of the event (physically experiencing or directly seeing it as it happens).

After the event, changes can happen in students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Your students may worry about family members, classmates, friends, or pets they care about, and may worry that it will happen again. Common reactions to crises and emergencies include trouble sleeping, problems at school and with friends, trouble concentrating and listening, and not finishing work. Your students may become more irritable, sad, angry, or worried as they think about what has happened, and as they experience recovery efforts after the event.

When students share their experiences, thoughts and feelings about the event, LISTEN for RISK FACTORS for adverse reactions.

Risk factors that may indicate a need for counselling referral for students include:

- loss of a family member, schoolmate, or friend
- observing serious injury or the death of another person
- family members or friends missing after the event, past traumatic experiences or losses
- getting hurt or becoming sick due to the event
- home loss, family moves, changes in neighbourhoods/schools, and/or loss of belongings.

If a student has had any of these experiences, you may wish to consider referring her or him to the HSE services. Your NEPS psychologist will be available to provide support and advice. Now that you know what can affect your students after a disaster, school crisis, or emergency, you're ready to Listen, Protect, Connect, and Model & Teach.

LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

The first step after an event is to listen and pay attention to what they say and how they act. Your students may also show their feelings in non-verbal ways, like increased behavioural problems or increased withdrawal. Let your students know you are willing to listen and talk about the event, or to make referrals to talk to an appropriate professional, if they prefer it. Use the following questions to talk with your students. You can listen for clues that indicate when students are having a hard time.

Write down a few examples that may be helpful to note:

What might be preventing a student from coming to or staying in school?

What might be preventing a student from paying attention or doing homework?

What might be preventing a student from returning to other school based activities?

Listen, observe, and note any changes in:

Behaviour and/or mood

School performance

Interactions with schoolmates and teachers

Participation in school-based activities

Behaviours at home that parents/guardians discuss with you.

2. LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

You can help make your students feel better by doing some or all of the following:

Answer questions simply and honestly, clearing up any confusion students may have about what happened

Let your students know that they are not alone in their reactions

Provide opportunities for your students to talk, draw, and play, but don't force it

Talk to your students about what is being done by the school and community to keep everyone safe from harm

Watch for anything in the environment that could re-traumatize your students

Keep your eyes and ears open for bullying behaviours

Maintain daily routines, activities and structure with clear expectations and consistent rules

Make adjustments to assignments to be sensitive to students' current level of functioning

Limit access to live television and the Internet that show disturbing scenes of the event

Remember, what is not upsetting to adults may upset and confuse students, and vice versa

Encourage students to "take a break" from the crisis focus with activities unrelated to the event

Find ways for your students to feel helpful to your classroom, the school, and the community

List other things you do that help your students feel better. Sharing this list with other teachers may increase ideas to help your students.

3. LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

Reaching out to people in your school and community will help your students after a school crisis or emergency. These connections will build strength for everyone. Consider ways to make some or all of the following connections:

“Check in” with students on a regular basis

Find resources that can be supportive to your students and staff

Restore interactive school activities, including sports, club meetings, student projects, and student councils, coaches, etc.)

Empathise with your students by allowing a little more time for them to learn new materials

Build on your students’ strengths by encouraging them to find ways to help them use what they have learned in the past to help them deal with the event

Remind your students that major disasters, crises, and emergencies are rare

Discuss feeling safe and times they have felt safe

List programs and activities that connect you and your students with the community

Share your list with other teachers to create a larger list of activities and resources.

4. LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

As you help your students after a disaster, crisis, or emergency, your efforts may be more successful – and you may be less stressed – if you keep in mind:

It is good to be aware of your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions, these can be seen and may affect your students

How you cope and behave after an event will influence how your students cope and behave. Your students will be watching you for both verbal and non-verbal cues

Monitor conversations that students may hear

Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation, but demonstrate how people can come together to cope after such an event.

5. LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

Talk to your students about expected reactions after a crisis (emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and physiological). There are “normal” reactions to abnormal events.

Different people may have very different reactions, even within the same family

After the event, people may also have different amounts of time they need to cope and adjust

Encourage your students to identify and use positive coping strategies to help them after the event

Help your students problem-solve to get through each day successfully

Help your students set small “doable” goals and share in these achievements as “wins” for the students and your classroom

Remind students that with time and assistance, things generally get better. If they don't, they should let a parent or teacher know

Over time, you, your students, their families, your classroom, can EXPECT RECOVERY.

This Critical Incident Management Policy was reviewed by the Board of Management of Ardagh National School and ratified on 22nd March 2021

FR PAT MUNNELLY (CHAIRPERSON)