

Critical Incident Policy

Introduction

Saplings Special School aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times, while striving for each individual to reach their full potential and participate as fully as possible in community life.

The Board of Management, 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 Critical Incident Management Plan.

Review and Research:

- ✓ *Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools (NEPS 2007)*
- ✓ *Responding to Critical Incidents Resource Materials for Schools (NEPS 2015)*
- ✓ *Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention*
- ✓ (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)
- ✓ *Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)
- ✓ *When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Management in Schools (INTO/UlsterTeachers' Union)*

Definition

The staff and management of Saplings Special School, Goresbridge recognise a critical incident to be *"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 community through serious illness, accident, violence,
- ✓ Suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death.
- ✓ An intrusion into the school
- ✓ A violent or physical assault on a member of the school community
- ✓ An accident involving a member or members of the school community
- ✓ A serious medical emergency within a classroom involving an adult or child
- ✓ An accident or tragedy in the wider school community
- ✓ A fire or other catastrophe in the school
- ✓ A vehicle accident involving the school which causes serious injury or fatality

Aim

The aim of the Critical Incident Management Policy 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, parents and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the school community will be limited. It should enable us to effect 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 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:

- ✓ A Comprehensive Health/Safety Plan is in place which is regularly reviewed
- ✓ Risk Assessments which are updated regularly.
- ✓ Organisational policies regarding child protection, anti-bullying, garda vetting etc.
- ✓ Evacuation plan formulated
- ✓ Regular termly Fire Drills occur
- ✓ Fire exits and fire extinguishers are regularly checked
- ✓ Adequate supervision provided during breaks
- ✓ Front door of main building locked during school hours
- ✓ Front gate of premises secured during school hours
- ✓ Visitor sign-in book

Psychological Safety:

The management and staff of Saplings Goresbridge 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 among staff, and regular practice of safety rules for the children.

- ✓ 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 problem-solving, asking for help, bullying, and decision making. Promotion of Mental Health and physical wellbeing is an integral part of this provision.
- ✓ Staff will have access to training for various aspects of SPHE
- ✓ All Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- ✓ Books/resources on difficulties affecting children with autism are available in the office.
- ✓ The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying allegations or incidents in accordance with this policy

Key Administrative Tasks for Teachers:

- ✓ Children who are able, should be taught to go to another adult to ask for help when so requested by a teacher.
- ✓ Each adult in the school should have the number of the nearest Garda station.
- ✓ Maintaining an up-to-date list of contact numbers
- ✓ Compiling emergency information for school trips
- ✓ Identifying roles to be fulfilled at the time of a critical incident
- ✓ If a teacher/first aider judges that a child is critically ill an ambulance should be rung immediately.

✚ 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 until the next review. Each member of the team has a copy of the policy and plan and are aware of their responsibilities in relation to an incident. The key roles and associated responsibilities, together with designated personnel are as follows:

Role	Personnel	Responsibility
Team Leader	Sandra Wickham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Alert team members to the crisis and convene a meeting. -Co-ordinate the tasks of the team -Liaise with BOM, NEPS, SEC -Liaise with the bereaved family
Garda Liaison	Sandra Wickham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Liaises with the Gardaí -Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared
Staff liaison	Stephanie Bowe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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.
Parent liaison	Mairead Ryan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Visits the bereaved family with the team leader -Arranges parent meetings, if held -May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers' -Maintains a record of parents seen -Meets with individual parents -Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)
Community Liaisons	Sandra Wickham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of Key parents, such as members of the BOM - 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 Liaisons	Sandra Wickham/Mairead Ryan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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.)

		<p>-In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with relevant teacher unions etc.</p> <p>-Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)</p>
Administrator	Susan Gunning	<p>-Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy</p> <p>-Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation (See policy appendices)</p> <p>-Sets up room for meetings with parents</p> <p>- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of</p> <p>- Parents or guardians -</p> <p>Teachers</p> <p>- Emergency services</p> <p>-Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to</p> <p>-Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation</p> <p>-Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts</p> <p>-Photocopies materials needed</p> <p>-Maintains records</p>

Critical Incident Management Policy:

Following an incident, each member of the 'team' will be contacted and meet at the school or another specified location if appropriate. The notification will inform them of the type of incident and the exact location of the incident. When the 'team' arrive at the scene they need to (where appropriate).

- ✓ Manage the incident scene where appropriate
- ✓ Remove people at risk
- ✓ Call the emergency services and alert first aiders etc
- ✓ Follow the instruction of competent personnel – Gardaí, Fire Personnel etc
- ✓ Help the external services if they assume control of the incident

If an incident happens during the night or at the weekends, the 'team' needs to respond in an appropriate manner. A judgement needs to be made of how best to deal with the event in the School and in the wider community. Critical Incident Team. Members can be contacted on mobile phone etc. Following the incident the Safety Officer will compile a report of the incident and the follow up response of the school. The 'team' may need to initiate actions to allow the School carry on its work in an appropriate manner. Consideration may be given to providing counselling facilities to people/pupils affected by the incident. If there are enquiries from the media, they will be dealt with by the Principal or by a person appointed by the Board of Management.

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, materials used etc. Susan Gunning 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 Saplings Special School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequence of any public statements. The members of the staff will bear this in mind and will seek to ensure that the other members of the school community 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 consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic/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 classrooms for meetings with students
- ✓ The blue room for parents
- ✓ The blue room for the media/other visitors
- ✓ Quiet room (Orchard) for individual sessions with students where applicable.

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan:

School staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parents were also consulted and asked for their comments. The school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to Critical Incidents will be presented to all staff once the policy has been ratified at Board level. Each member of the CIMT will have access to a personal copy of the plan together with appropriate materials. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by Stephanie Bowe (staff liaison).

Ratification and Review

This **Critical Incident Management Policy** was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management at Saplings Goresbridge on **11th March 2024**. It will be reviewed at the first Board meeting in the academic year 2024/25 or as experience dictates. All stakeholders will be informed of the review via agreed minutes and this policy will form part of the school plan which is located in reception.

Signed _____ Date _____

Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed _____ Date _____

Principal