

Gaelscoil Shlí Dála

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Critical Incidents Policy

August 2020

What is a Critical Incident?

Gaelscoil Shlí Dála recognises a critical incident to be an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school. Critical Incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school, or our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- **The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.**
- **An intrusion into the school which has an adverse impact on school community.**
- **An accident/tragedy in the wider school community.**
- **Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.**
- **The disappearance of a member of the school community.**
- **An accident involving members of the school community.**
- **A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s).**
- **An accident or tragedy outside the school community which impacts on school community.**

Rationale

Recognising that the key of managing critical incidents is planning, our school has developed this Critical Incident Management Policy and accompanying Plan. Our hope is that, in the event of an incident, these will help staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. They should also help us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited.

Creation of a Coping Supportive and Caring Ethos in the School.

We have put a system in place to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

Physical Safety.

These are dealt with under our Health & Safety Policy, Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy.

Some of the measures taken by the school to ensure the physical safety of the students include:

- Evacuation plan formulated and clearly visible in each room (Appendix 1)
- Annual fire drills occur
- Fully functional and regularly serviced Fire Alarm System
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- No child is left unsupervised in the school before and after school and during all breaks
- Code of Behaviour (with behavioural expectations for the creation of a safe environment) is signed by all parents/guardians on behalf of children / by children;

Psychological Safety.

Our school aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for them.

- SPHE programmes such as Stay Safe and Walk Tall are included in the curriculum to address issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, decision making and alcohol and drug prevention.
- The school has an Anti-Bullying policy.
- Staff are informed on a need to know basis of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware and vigilant to their needs, respecting individual privacy.
- Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school child.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies, including NEPS, HSE, SENO, Child and Family Services (CAMHS), TUSLA, Gardaí, Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), etc. These agencies may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students.
- Staff are advised to read about suicide awareness and interventions for suicidal students: Reach Out: National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention (2005) www.hse.ie/en/publications

Critical Incident Management Team

The school has set up a Critical Incident Management Team in line with best practice and will maintain this team in future. 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 once a year to review and update the plan. Each member of the team has a “Ready-to-Go-Pack” with relevant materials to be used in the event of an incidents.

Roles

Key Roles have been identified and assigned as follows:

- Team Leader – Róise Nevin – Principal
- Staff Liason – Teresa Kennedy – Deputy Principal
- Parent Liason – School Secretary
- Community Liason – B.O.M. Member
- Media Liason – Liam O’Neill – Chairperson – B.O.M.

In the event of a critical incident the responsibilities of each role-holder will be as follows:-

Team Leader – Róise Nevin

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management
- Liaises with the bereaved/affected family.

Staff Liaison – Teresa Kennedy – Deputy Principal

Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and outlines the routine of the day.

- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Provides materials to staff from “Ready-to-Go-Pack”

Community Liaison – School Secretary – Mary Nolan

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Up-dates team members on the involvement of external agencies
- Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies
- 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

Parent Liaison – Member– Parents’ Association

- Facilitates ‘questions and answers’ meetings.
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides materials for parents from the Ready to Go Pack
- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader.

Media Liaison – Liam O’Neill – Chairperson of B.O.M.

In preparing for the role, he will consider issues that may arise during the incident and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on premises etc.)

In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the Communications Section in the DES.

Administrative Tasks: - School Secretary, Mary Nolan

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 - Parents or guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency support 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 faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and records of phone calls made 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.

A letter will be sent to parents based on the sample one attached and will include:

- The sympathy of the School Community.
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured person(s)
- The facts of the incident
- What has been done
- What is going to be done

Confidentiality and good name considerations

The school has 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 see to ensure that pupils do also.

Critical Incident Room

In the event of a critical incident, the Lunch Room will be the main room used to meet the staff, students, parents and visitors involved – Subject to change.

Development and Communication of this Policy and Plan.

All staff were consulted and their view canvassed in the preparation of this policy. Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments. Our school's final policy and procedures in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.

Each member of the Critical Incident Team has a personal copy.

It was ratified by the Board of Management on _____

and will be implemented from August 2020

This Policy will be reviewed on a yearly basis.

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Dear Parents

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

*(*EDIT*Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).*

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.

Sincerely

**EDIT* Principal Name*

The Bereaved Child

- Prepare for the return of bereaved student(s), (see **R11**).
- See also Irish Childhood Bereavement Network Resources on www.childhoodbereavement.ie for resources
- Video [Listen with Eyes Ears and Heart](#)
- Remember [Rainbows](#)
- Bereavement Support e.g. Barnados, Irish Hospice foundation, In Light,