



BLESSINGTON EDUCATE TOGETHER NATIONAL SCHOOL

Critical Incident Policy

Ratified by Board of Management:		
Date:		
Signed:		
Principal	Chairperson, Board of Management	

Introduction:

At BETNS we aim to protect the wellbeing of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment as outlined in our school philosophy statement.

The BoM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

What is a Critical Incident?

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school'.

Examples:

- Death, major illness.
- Suicide.
- Criminal incidents (e.g. school shooting)
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. school bus crash)
- Civil unrest, war (in Ireland or a pupil's home country)
- Fire, natural disaster (e.g. storm, flooding)
- Disappearance of student from home or school.
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.

Key Roles and Responsibilities of the CIMT

- Team Leader/Principal
- Garda liaison
- Staff liaison
- Student liaison
- Parent liaison
- Community liaison
- Media liaison
- Administrator.

The Following are the Key Responsibilities of Each Role

Team Leader/Principal

- Alert the team members to the crisis and their roles and arrange a meeting
- Co-ordinate the tasks of the team
- Liaise with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC
- Liaise with the bereaved family.

The Deputy Principal will assume this role in the absence of the team leader.

Garda Liaison

- Liaise with the Gardaí
- Ensure that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions and outline the routine for the day
- Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students

- Provide materials for staff (from the Critical Incident Folder)
- Keep records of students seen by external agency staff
- Look after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Community/Agency liaison

- Maintain up to date lists of contact numbers - members of the Parents Council, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinate the involvement of these agencies
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies

Parent Liaison

- Visit the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arrange parent meetings if held - Facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Set up room for meetings with parents
- Meet with individual parents
- Maintain a record of parents seen
- Manage the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensure that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Provide appropriate materials for parents (from their Critical Incident Folder)

Media Liaison

- 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 relevant teacher unions etc
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator

- Maintenance up to date telephone numbers of:
 - Parents or guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to
- Ensure that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepare and send 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 BETNS 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 largest classroom for meetings with students
- The largest classroom for parents
- The Principals Office for other visitors

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

All staff were consulted and regard was given to their views in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments. 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 access to a personal copy of the plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by a Staff Liaison member.

Promotion of wellbeing after Critical Incident

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan
- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate

Action plan in the event of a death:

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff

DES/Schools Inspector

- Convene a meeting with Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information.
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staff's responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, to clarify what has happened.
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission.
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc).
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
 - Principal/Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + to visit home/hospital
 - Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service.
 - Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes.
- School closure (if appropriate).
- Request an immediate decision on this from school management and relay information to all parents.

LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the Health Board. Constant communication with family is essential.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future:

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist.
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate.
- Ensure that new staffs are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school
- Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events).
- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time.
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family.
- Plan a school memorial service.
- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

Drawn up by the Board of Management of Blessington Educate Together NS on

Review Date: _____