



Knocknacarra Educate Together
National School

Critical Incidents Policy

This policy has been formulated by Knocknacarra ETNS to provide guidance for the management of critical incidents.

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Introductory Statement:

At Knocknacarra Educate Together NS we aim to protect the well-being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and caring environment. This policy endeavours to provide support to the school community when managing crisis situations to ensure this aim is achieved in the event of a critical incident occurring in our learning community.

Rationale:

The Board of Management, in consultation with the principal, staff and Parent-Teacher Association has drawn up a critical incident plan. A Critical Incidents Management Team has been established to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Definition of a Critical incident:

The staff and management of Knocknacarra ETNS define a critical incident as 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 may 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.; and
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.

Aims:

- To formulate a plan which enables school management and staff to respond quickly and effectively and maintain a sense of control in the event of an incident and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff.
- To ensure effects are minimised.
- To return to normality as soon as possible.
- To create a supportive and caring ethos in the school.
- To have systems in place to help build resilience in both staff and students, both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Key Principles:

National Education Psychologist Service (NEPS), in *Responding to Critical incidents: Guidelines* (pg. 19), has outlined an appropriate response to different levels of critical incidents as follows:

- **Response Level 1:** the death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; the death of parent/sibling; a fire in school not resulting in serious injury; serious damage to school property
- **Response Level 2:** the sudden death of a student or staff member
- **Response Level 3:** incident: an accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving a number of schools.

What action do I take?

- For an incident requiring a Level 1 response it may be sufficient to talk to the psychologist on the phone.
- In the case of an incident requiring a Level 2 & Level 3 response, make contact with NEPS. Depending on the incident at least one psychologist will visit the school.

Physical safety e.g. (see Health & Safety policy for further details)

- Evacuation plan formulated,
- Regular fire drills occur,
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked and
- Rules of the playground are established and maintained (see Code of Behaviour).

Psychological safety

The management and staff of Knocknacarra ETNS 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 through the following resources: Bí Folláin, Stay Safe, Walk Tall and other resources, which collectively address 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 members have training for their role in delivering the SPHE curriculum.
- Staff members are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies e.g. NEPS, HSE, Túsla, etc.
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- Pupils with emotional difficulties attend Resource/Learning Support Teachers, in accordance with the General Allocation system. These teachers work in collaboration with the principal and class teacher. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff can avail of support for themselves through Employee Assistance Service (freephone 1800 411 057).

Critical Incidents Management Team (CIMT):

A CIMT is established in line with best practice. The members of the team are selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet annually in the month of September to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team will have a copy of the critical incident policy and access to the appropriate resources.

Team Leader: Matt Wallen (principal)

Communication & Deputy Team Leader: Áine Ní Chuinneagáin

Garda Liaison: Vivienne Kelly

Staff Liaison: Matt Wallen

Family Liaison: Vivienne Kelly

Student Liaison: Áine Ní Chuinneagáin

Pastoral Care: Matt Wallen, Áine Ní Chuinneagáin and Vivienne Kelly

B.O.M. Rep: Paul Adams (or current chairperson)

Community/Agency liaison: Vivienne Kelly

Roles and Responsibilities:

Team Leader (Matt)

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting;
- Coordinates the tasks of the team;
- Liaises with the Board of Management, DES and NEPS;
- Liaises with the bereaved family; and
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff.

Garda Liaison (Vivienne)

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

Staff Liaison (Matt)

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions and 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 and
- Advises them of the availability of the EAS (Employee Assistance Service) and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison (Áine)

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students;
- Provides materials for students, as appropriate; and
- Looks after setting up and supervision of a 'quiet' room where agreed.

Community/Agency Liaison (Vivienne)

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral,
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies and
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

Family Liaison (Vivienne)

- 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; and
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder).

Media Liaison (Paul)

- 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) or delegate this task to another responsible party.

Administrator (Matt)

- 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,
 - Parents or guardians,
 - Teachers and
 - Emergency services;
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support;
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges;
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to;
- Ensures that templates are on the school’s system in advance and ready for adaptation;
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes;
- Photocopies materials needed; and
- Maintains records.

Pastoral Care (Matt and Áine)

- One-to-one meetings with individuals,
- Informing parents,
- Pastoral advice and
- Visiting families affected.

Record keeping (Everyone)

- 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 and materials used.
- The CIMT will collate all records after the event and these will be stored in the principal's office, in a secure locked cabinet.
- Templates of letters are on file and ready to be sent following an incident.

Confidentiality and Good-Name Considerations:

The management and staff of Knocknacarra ETNS 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:

The staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff and to host other visitors. An empty classroom will be the main room used for meetings with students. The hall will be the main room used for meetings with parents (depending on size of meeting) and for media. The principal's office will be the main room used for individual sessions with students.

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan:

All staff members 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 is reviewed annually. 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 at induction.

Timetable for Review:

The plan will be reviewed before 2025 or as the need arises and amended as required after the Critical Incident Management Team has met to review the policy.

Ratification:

The policy was originally ratified in 2015 and reviewed in 2019 and 2022. This revised policy was ratified by the Board of Management on the date below.

Paul Adams, chairperson

Date of ratification: 11th May 2022

Appendix A - Action Plan

The key resources available to the school referred to in the Action Plan are:

Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_critical_incidents_guidelines_schools.pdf

Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Materials for Schools

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_critical_incidents_resource_material_schools.pdf

Short Term Actions – Day 1

Task	Resources	Name
Gather accurate information	Guidelines for Schools, p. 20	Matt
Who, what, when, where?	Guidelines for Schools, p. 20	Mat
Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly	Guidelines for Schools, pp. 20, 21 and 22	Matt
Contact external agencies, including chairperson	See Emergency Contact List	Matt
Arrange supervision for students		Matt
Hold staff meeting and distribute relevant literature	Resource Materials for Schools: R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R19	Matt
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 & SEN teachers
Compile a list of vulnerable students	Resource Materials for Schools, R16	Class teachers & Áine
Contact / visit the bereaved family	Guidelines for Schools, p. 26	Matt & class teacher(s)
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	Guidelines for Schools, p. 43 Resource Materials for Schools: R6	BOM, Louise, Matt
Inform parents		Matt
End-of-day staff briefing (remind members of team to record events)		Matt
Send letter of consent to parents regarding NEPS	Resource materials for Schools: p. 43, R2, R3, R4, R5	Matt and class teachers

Summary Checklist for Principals: Day 1

1. Gather the facts – what has happened, when, how, where and who is injured or dead.
2. Is it an incident requiring a NEPS Response at Level 1, 2 or 3?
3. Who do I need to call (Emergency Contact List – R23)?
4. Meet with the Critical Incident Management Team.

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5. Meet with other agencies, if involved, to agree on roles and procedures.
6. Have administration staff photocopy appropriate literature.
7. Arrange for the supervision of students.
8. Address the staff meeting.
9. Identify vulnerable students.
10. Inform students.
11. Draft a media statement (see R6).
12. Prepare for a media interview (see Section 9).
13. Draft a letter to parents (see R2, R4 and R5).
14. Meet with the CIMT to review the day and arrange a meeting for the following morning.
15. Meet with the staff group.
16. Make contact with the affected family/families.

Medium-term Actions (Day 2 and following days)

Task	Resource	Name
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Guidelines for Schools, p. 27	Matt
Meet external agencies		Vivienne, Louise (or designee)
Meet whole staff		Matt
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	Resource Materials for Schools, R14	Áine
Visit the injured		Matt and class teacher
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements		Vivienne, Matt and class teacher
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service		Same as above
Make decisions about school closure		BOM

Follow-up (beyond 72 hours)

Task	Resource	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress		Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals		Vivienne
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	Resource Materials for Schools, R13	Class teachers
Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family		CIMT Team
Decide on memorials and anniversaries		BOM, staff, parents & students
Review response to incident and amend plan		Staff/BOM
Resources for children	Resource Materials for Schools, p. 43-50	Class teacher