



## **BORRISOKANE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**



## **CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE POLICY**



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## ***Borrisokane Community College***

### Critical Incident Response Policy

Borrisokane Community College is a State run, Multi-denominational, Co-educational ETB secondary school.

***'We seek to promote a caring and committed college community which will facilitate the education of our students and where each individual is valued as a unique human being.'***

***'Is ar scáth a chéile a mhairimid'***

The mission is realised through our core values of Excellence in Education, Care, Equality, Community and Respect.



This policy outlines the steps to be taken to facilitate our students to deal with trauma that may arise as a result of a critical incident. Having a Critical Incident Response Policy in place is in keeping with the caring ethos and commitment to a holistic education that is contained and outlined in our Mission Statement. The school has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students during the normal course of the school day and in the event of a critical incident.

### **Such policies would include:**

- Health & Safety Statement
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Behavior
- Whole School Guidance Policy
- S.P.H.E & RSE Policy
- Student Support Team

### **Context for Development of this Policy and Plan**

In drawing up this policy and plan the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) consulted the following resource documents available to the school:

- Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidance for Schools (NEPS 2023)
- HSE Training Documents

### **Definition of a Critical Incident**

Borrisokane Community College recognises a critical incident to be ‘a single incident or sequence of incidents which are usually sudden and unexpected that they may overwhelm usual coping mechanisms and may be traumatic to everyone and that disrupts the normal running of the school’.

### **Examples of a critical incident might be:**

- The death of a member of the school community, through sudden death, accident, suicide or terminal illness
- A serious accident or tragedy in the school community
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- A physical attack on a staff member or student
- Intrusion into the school.

### **What Type of Response is Needed?**

#### **Response Level 1**

The death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill, the death of a parent/sibling, a fire in the school not resulting in serious injury, serious damage to school property.

## **Response Level 2**

Sudden death of a student or staff member (NEPS).

## **Response Level 3**

An accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; and incident with high media profile or involving a number of schools. (NEPS)

## **Aims**

- To ensure that a response / process can be quickly put in place to deal with the critical incident.
- To ensure that a consistent response / process is put in place.
- To facilitate students to cope with trauma that may be associated with the critical event.
- To provide support for students, teachers and parents.
- To help prevent the onset of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- To make students aware of what is a normal reaction to such an incident.
- To identify students at risk.
- To have a plan in place to ensure that normality returns as soon as possible.

## **Critical Incident Management Team**

Borrisokane Community College has set up a Critical Incident Management Team consisting of the following personnel:

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Guidance Counselor (s)
- Student Support Team

***The Critical Incident Management Team may co-opt other members of staff to assist them, should they deem it necessary.***

The Principal will act as Team Leader or in her absence the Deputy Principal.

## **Role of Team Leader**

- The team leader alerts team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting of the team.
- Co-ordinates/delegates tasks of the other team members.
- Liaises with The Board of Management and the Department of Education.

- In case of bereavement, liaises with the bereaved family.

**Other areas of responsibilities, which may be delegated by the team Leader to other members of the team would include:**

- Contacting Emergency support services
- Briefing and advising the staff and noting their feelings and concerns
- Organizing the supervision of students in the school
- Keeping staff updated on information/developments /progress
- Meeting students to brief them on the situation
- Taking care of “Vulnerable students/vulnerable teachers”
- Liaising with external agencies for support or referrals such as NEPS
- Liaising with school organizations such as Parents Association, Prefects and the Students’ Council
- Meeting with individual parents or groups of parents
- Visiting bereaved families or families closely associated with the incident
- Preparing a Press release and liaising with the media
- Preparation of an Incident Room.

**This team will:**

- Meet annually
- Maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers for Staff, Parents/Guardians of students and Emergency Services
- Establish a system of communication among staff so that information can be conveyed one to another should a critical incident happen outside of school hours.

**Record Keeping**

All team members will keep written records of phone calls, letters, meetings, interventions etc.

**Confidentiality**

The school is conscious of its responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements.

## Pre Incident Preparation

- Crisis response Room
- Members of the Critical Incident Team are available to provide support to students. The school may also contact the NEPS Psychologist and / or the visiting counselor
- Digital Communication Protocols: The school will maintain official communication channels (website, email, SMS alerts) and monitor social media to prevent misinformation. Staff and students will be reminded of responsible use of social media during incidents.
- Mental Health Supports: Post-incident mental health screening will be offered to staff and students. Referral pathways include NEPS, HSE services, and external counseling agencies.
- Inclusivity & Accessibility: Communication will be available in accessible formats and translated where necessary. Additional supports will be provided for students with special educational needs.
- Training & Drills: Annual training for staff and simulation exercises will be conducted to ensure readiness for critical incidents.
- GDPR Compliance: All records related to critical incidents will be maintained in compliance with GDPR. Confidentiality and secure storage of sensitive data will be ensured.
- Updated Communication Templates: Templates for letters and announcements will include options for email and SMS notifications to parents and guardians.
- Pre prepared text for breaking news to students (see Appendix 1)
- Prayers/ Service/Reflection for students most affected by this bereavement
- Assemblies for classes, year groups and full school
- Guidelines for all teachers (see appendix 2)
- Prepared letters for parents (see Appendix 3)
- Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidance for Schools (see Appendix 4)
- Tipperary ETB Protocol for Critical Incidents (see Appendix 5)

### Key Roles Assigned by Team Leader

Name of Team Member	Role
Principal	Team Leader/Media Leader/Gathering Accurate Information/Contacting Appropriate Agencies/Convene Staff Meeting/Inform Parents/Inform Students/Contact bereaved family
Deputy Principal	Gathering Accurate Information/Contacting Appropriate Agencies/Arrange Supervision as required/Organise timetable/ Inform Parents/Inform Students
Guidance Counsellor	Arrange support for students & staff
Student Support Team	Check & connect – support to students, monitor students

#### Day 1:

Task	Name
Gather Accurate Information	Principal and CIMT
Contact Appropriate Agencies	Principal and CIMT
Convene a meeting with Key Staff	Principal
Arrange Supervision	Deputy Principal
Hold Staff Meeting	Principal and CIMT
Organise Timetable for Day	Deputy Principal and CIMT
Inform Parents	Principal
Inform Students	Principal, Deputy Principal, Year Heads
Make contact with Bereaved Family	Principal and staff member deemed most suitable
Dealing with Media	Principal

**MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS AND ROLES ASSIGNED 24 – 72 HOURS**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Name</b>
<b>REVIEW THE EVENTS OF THE FIRST 24 HOURS</b>	<b>CIMT</b>
<b>ARRANGE SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS</b>	<b>Deputy Principal and Guidance Counsellor</b>
<b>ARRANGE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS</b>	<b>Guidance Counsellor and Teachers</b>
<b>ARRANGE SUPPORT FOR PARENTS</b>	<b>Principal and CIMT</b>
<b>PLAN THE RE-INTEGRATION OF STAFF AND STUDENTS</b>	<b>CIMT and all staff</b>
<b>PLAN VISITS TO INJURED/FAMILY OF BEREAVED</b>	<b>Coordinated through CIMT</b>
<b>LIAISE WITH FAMILY REGARDING FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS</b>	<b>Principal</b>
<b>ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION AT FUNERAL SERVICE</b>	<b>CIMT to decide</b>

**BEYOND 72 HOURS**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Name</b>
<b>MONITOR STUDENTS FOR CONTINUING SIGNS OF STRESS</b>	<b>All staff</b>
<b>EVALUATE RESPONSE TO INCIDENT AND AMEND CRITICAL INCIDENT PLAN APPROPRIATELY.</b>	<b>CIMT</b>
<b>FORMALISE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE</b>	<b>CIMT</b>
<b>INFORM NEW STAFF AND PUPILS</b>	<b>Senior Management</b>
<b>DECIDE ON APPROPRIATE WAY TO DEAL WITH ANNIVERSARIES</b>	<b>CIMT</b>

## **Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident**

### **Day 1**

#### **Gather Accurate Information - Establish the Facts**

It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. The Critical Incident Management Team will establish the facts and agree a general statement in response to the crisis.

#### **Contact Appropriate Agencies - Outline Immediate Response**

*The team will agree on an immediate plan of action which may involve:*

- Informing the Staff, Board of Management, DOS TETB
- Informing students, Parents/Guardians
- Alerting outside agencies such as Gardaí, Emergency Services, and NEPS Psychologist etc.
- Assigning tasks within the Team
- Developing a crisis plan for the day
- Devising a process for dealing with telephone enquiries; logging telephone calls made and received, letters sent and received and important information gathered. These logs will be held by the Principal, in case of follow-up after time has passed
- Reviewing events of the first day to make plans for the following day.

#### **Inform**

It is vital that all those needing information, receive it as soon as is practicable. It is helpful if the agreed statement is used when informing students and others as this may help reduce the spread of rumour. If at all possible, the students should be told at the same time in groups **no larger than normal class size**.

The statement, communicated in a sensitive manner, should seek to:

- Give the facts as they are known, i.e. what happened, who was involved.
- Highlight the support that will be available.
- Indicate the actions that are planned.

Where a critical incident has occurred on a school trip, an agreed statement is needed to assist those who will be telephoning Parents/Guardians. It is preferable to have a number of staff involved so that all concerned are informed at or around the same time. Some further considerations in contacting Parents/Guardians:

- Offer any practical help needed – transport, phone numbers, contact names
- Enquire if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support

- Carefully review with the Parents/Guardian that the information given has been fully understood

### **Convene a Meeting of Critical Incident Team**

- Confirm the roles each of the Critical Incident Team will undertake during the day
- Ensure all members of the Critical Incident Team are familiar with the facts and prepared statements for staff meeting (and the supervision of student during this time)
- Confirm support arrangements from the relevant agencies (internal & external)
- Confirm contact with the bereaved/affected family. If appropriate the Principal or any other member of the Critical Incident Team will visit the family and during this or a subsequent visit will liaise with a relative regarding funeral arrangements and the school's possible involvement. This must be dictated by the wishes of the family.

### **Hold a Staff Meeting**

- All staff should be present.
- A brief statement will be given of the facts as known (previously agreed by Critical Incident Team)
- Staff should be given an opportunity to express their views/feelings
- Agreement should be reached on how the facts will be relayed to the students and how staff should respond to student queries
- *Staff will be informed of the timetable for the day*
- Staff will be informed about which outside agencies are involved and what supports are in place for both students and staff
- Procedures for identifying and dealing with vulnerable students should be outlined.

**All members of staff /school community should be informed as to how to respond to the media. Other than the Designated Media Contact Person on the Critical Incident Team all queries /comments must be directed to the school Principal.**

### **First Class Contact**

- It is important to remember that not every class is going to be traumatised. However, the loss for the school community as a whole must be acknowledged.

- The Year Group of the student who has died should be the first to be told in the presence of the Principal, Deputy Principal, and members of the Critical Incident Team, Year Head, Class tutors and teacher
- All other classes will be informed by their Teacher/ Year Heads during Period 1
- This should be done in a sensitive but clear way. If any teacher is uncomfortable with informing a class a member of the Critical Incident Team will accompany them and inform the class if necessary
- Students should be given the chance to talk among themselves
- Students should be informed of the supports available around the school (internal & external)
- Where it is appropriate to continue with work, it may be advisable to do revision rather than new work in order to relieve the pressure on students. A prayer/reflection may be recited before the start of class. Students should not be left to their own devices. They should either be in class or with friends in a supervised area

### **Contacting Parents of Distressed Students**

- Members of the Student Support Team / Year Heads should liaise with the designated member of the Critical Incident Team with regard to distressed students
- In some cases it may be necessary to inform the parents of our concerns and possibly suggest that the student might be better at home, with family support, for the remainder of the day
- The school should continue to maintain a calm, supportive environment and, as far as is possible, **continue with normal routine whilst allowing for flexibility**
- Staff should continue to stress the supports that are available throughout the day
- It is advisable that more staff than usual would talk with the students during breaks to act as support
- The Critical Incident Team will meet to evaluate the school's response, gather names of students which colleagues are concerned about and agree a plan for the afternoon.
- A brief staff meeting should be held at the end of the school day to discuss how the day went, identify vulnerable students, and plan for tomorrow and detail funeral arrangements if available.

## **Medium Term Actions 24 – 72 Hours after the Critical Incident**

The Critical Incident Team will meet again the following morning to:

- Check how members of the Critical Incident Team and other colleagues are coping
- Decide on an effective means of monitoring vulnerable students
- Confirm the family's wishes regarding school involvement in the funeral arrangements where appropriate. Other staff may need/wish to be involved.

### **A further Staff Meeting will also be called to:**

- Update staff on developments
- Take feedback from teachers about students they have concerns over
- Be sensitive to how colleagues are coping on a personal and professional level.

## **The Funeral**

- If necessary, the Principal will contact the relevant bodies with regard to closing the school on the day of the funeral as a mark of respect. (DE, Bus services etc) However, in most cases it will be the school's intention to remain open so as to allow for students to seek support throughout the day while also allowing for year groups who may not know the student involved to continue as best as possible with their studies.
- A member of the Critical Incident Team will coordinate student involvement in the funeral. Other staff will be invited to assist where necessary.

## **Beyond 72 hours**

Members of the Critical Incident Team and other relevant staff members should liaise with students who return from absence due to the incident. Students who are seen as vulnerable should be monitored and referred to counseling.

## **Aims**

- To provide students with a safe, confidential place in which to ask questions, tell their story and share their feelings
- To alert the school to individuals who are in need of more specific long-term support
- To prevent the onset of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- To enable the student body to get back to normal as soon as possible.

### **Long Term Action**

- The Student Support Team will continue to monitor students for signs of continuing distress
- Evaluate school's response to incident and amend our policy for dealing with sudden death of a student or member of staff
- Ensure that new members of staff are aware of recent events, vulnerable students the school's procedures
- Anniversaries can trigger emotional responses and additional support may be needed at these times.

### **Liaising with the Media**

If there are enquiries from the media, it is important that only one person acts as liaison – this will usually be the Principal or in her absence the Deputy Principal or any designated person authorised to speak in relation to the incident. All staff and students should understand that all press enquiries are to be referred to the designated person. No other discussion with the press should take place and no interviews should be given without the approval of the Principal.

In preparing a press statement, thought should be given to the following suggestions:

- The press statement should be simple and brief
- It should express the sorrow of the entire school community and extend sympathy to the family/families
- Priority should be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis
- The names, addresses and telephone numbers of those affected should not be released
- Likely questions should be considered and a response prepared
- A specific location and time for press briefings should be nominated in an ongoing situation.

The Critical Incident Team and / or relevant staff members will speak to the students about appropriate and responsible use of social media in the event of a Critical Incident.

**Suggested text or template for the Media**

On behalf of the staff, students, Board of Management and Parents Association, I would like to extend our sympathy to....., on their / his / her sad loss. We are all deeply shocked by this event and like everyone else are trying to come to terms with it. .... was a student at Borrisokane Community College for the past (number).....of years and during his / her time here we got to know ..... very well.

If appropriate, mention a point or two about his / her personality.

.....

or involvement in school life

.....

or achievements

.....

I would also like students and parents to know that the school is open and that we have a number of staff and counselling personnel (if appropriate) present to talk to any students or parent, either in groups or individually, if anyone wishes to avail of this service.

We are presently in touch with the family regarding funeral arrangements.

(With family's permission, can give these out)

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 1

### Sample of pre-prepare text for breaking the news to classes

This morning we heard the extremely sad news that \_\_\_\_\_ who is in \_\_\_\_\_ class, died last night. We are all shocked and saddened by this tragic news and would like to express our sincere sympathy to all \_\_\_\_\_ friends, class members and family.

Death is a difficult issue for all of us to deal with and causes a lot of emotional reactions including disbelief, tears and anger. At the moment we do not have the funeral arrangements but we will keep you informed over the course of the day.

If any of you feel that you need to talk to someone or talk through things with an adult, just ask your teacher or tutor for help.

We will over the course of the day arrange a special assembly where you can have the opportunity to remember \_\_\_\_\_ in a special way.

***We will now have a short prayer of reflection***

## Appendix 2

### Guidelines for all teachers

- Teachers go to staff room on arrival at school
- Teachers briefed on the facts as they are known by the Principal or Deputy Principal
- Funeral arrangement given if known
- Be prepared to undertake supervision, for example, Critical Response Team, Year Heads
- Be prepared for the possibility of emotional reaction
- Given information on schedule for the day as far as known
- Made aware that some students will not be affected by the incident
- Made aware of what provision is in place for one-to-one counseling if required
- Outline role of Critical Response Team

## Appendix 3

### *Prepared letter for parents (on School headed paper)*

The school has experienced the sudden death of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by this loss and have our crisis management team in place to help your children cope with this tragedy.

It is possible that your son or daughter may have some feelings that he or she would like to discuss with you. You can help your son / daughter by listening carefully, re-stating what you hear them say and by not overreacting. I have enclosed some information which you may find useful.

If you would like assistance / advice you are welcome to contact the school at 067-27268

Yours Sincerely,

---

Principal

## Appendix 4

NEPS Resources

[National Educational Psychological Service \(NEPS\) resources and publications](#)

## Appendix 5

### Tipperary ETB Protocol for Critical Incidents

#### Protocol for the support of Senior Management Colleagues in a Critical Incident:

- This protocol outlines the steps for requesting and integrating support from Senior Management Colleagues (Deputy Principals and Principals) during a critical incident
- Determine duration of support needed: Assess the severity and potential impact of the critical incident to identify the estimated number of days' support will be required. This initial assessment will guide the request for external assistance.
- Contact Director of Schools: Immediately contact the Director of Schools to explain the critical incident and formally request that Deputy Principals and Principals from other schools are contacted for assistance.
- Complete cover roster: Once the Director of Schools has confirmed which Deputy Principals and Principals are available for support, create a detailed cover roster. This roster should clearly outline:
  - The names of the assisting Deputy Principals and Principals
  - Their assigned roles and responsibilities during the critical incident
  - The specific days or periods they will be providing support
- Assign student liaisons: For each assisting Deputy Principal and Principal, assign a reliable Transition Year (TY) student. If the critical incident involves TY students, assign a reliable 5<sup>th</sup> year student instead. These students will serve as liaisons responsible for:
  - Bringing the assigned Principal/Deputy Principal to their designated classroom at the start of the support period
  - Collecting the assigned Principal/Deputy Principal from the classroom at the end of their support period

## Emergency Contact Details

Principal	Paula Molloy	0876409320
Deputy Principal	Caitríona Maher	0857307533
Caretaker	Gary Donnelly	0876156512
Hospital	Nenagh General Limerick Regional	067 34901 061 301111
Doctor	Dr Glynn	067 27106
Fire Brigade/Ambulance		999/ 112
Garda Station	Borrisokane Nenagh	067 27101 067 50450
ESB	Emergencies	1850 372999
Bord Gais	Emergencies	1850205050
Priest	Fr Tom O'Halloran	0877460444
TETB Offices	Nenagh Clonmel	067 31250 052 6121067
NEPS Psychologist		018650561