



## **MERCY SECONDARY SCHOOL, INCHICORE**

### **Critical Incident Plan**

**Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore, inspired by the vision of Catherine McAuley, is a learning community which aims for excellence, while nurturing a living relationship with Christ through compassion for all.**

This sense of caring is experienced as a lived reality in our communal response to the tragedies that are encountered in life. The Critical Incident Plan is designed to provide guidance for those whose task it is to manage such incidents and ensures a considered response that will be of benefit to all members of the school community. This policy was devised in consultation with the staff, parents and students of Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore and takes cognisance of “Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools (DES, 2007)” and “Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools (DES, 2007)”.

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

A critical incident may be defined as any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the normal running of the school. The following list is not exhaustive.

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, permanent injury, terminal illness, suicide.
- An accident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises.
- Intrusion into the school.
- A serious attack on staff members or students.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident / tragedy in the wider community.

Other scenarios may be deemed Critical Incidents at the discretion of the Principal.

## **Aims**

The aim of the policy is to help the 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 and staff.

It will also help the school to return to normality as soon as possible and limit the effects of the incident on staff, students and their parents/guardians.

## **Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school:**

Systems are in place to 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**

The Health and Safety Policy outlines in detail our approach to ensuring the physical safety of both students and staff.

## **Psychological Safety**

We 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.

- SPHE is integrated into the work of the school. Psychological Safety is covered in the curriculum by addressing 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. The promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines (2011) and procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Staff are informed on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- There is a Student Support/Care Team in place in the school.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies such as NEPS, Lucena and other support services.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with the anti bullying policy.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the School Counselling Service. Concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents/Guardians are informed and where deemed necessary, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.

- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

## **Key Administrative Tasks**

In order to ensure an efficient response to a Critical Incident, it is essential that the following key administrative tasks are undertaken.

- Student contact details are updated annually on VS Ware and are also available in hard copy from the General Office.
- Staff addresses and phone numbers are updated annually and are available in the General Office. A list of next of kin of all staff members with the appropriate contact numbers is kept in the General Office. The Principal and Deputy Principal have copies of this information on and off site.
- The emergency contact list is updated annually and is contained in Appendix E of this policy.
- Staff organising off-site trips are responsible for compiling a list of all students and staff involved in the trip. This information should be completed on the appropriate forms and will be retained in the General Office. A medical information form should be completed by the Parents/Guardians of any student participating in any overnight trip from school. Medical forms are retained by the organising teacher for the duration of the trip.
- The Health and Safety Statement is updated on an annual basis.

## **The Critical Incident Management Team**

The response to a Critical Incident is coordinated by the Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T.).

The members of the C.I.M.T. are as follows:

1. The Principal
2. The Deputy Principal & \*Guidance Counsellor (Caroline)
3. \*Head of SPHE department
4. /AP 11 Post Holders
5. \*R.E. Co-ordinator Lorcan Roddy
6. AP 1 Post Holders
7. Home School Community Liaison Teacher (HSCL)
8. \*Teacher Representatives on Student Support/Care Team Lisa Baker
9. Representative of the Board if appropriate.
8. School Secretary

**The Principal will act as team leader or in her absence the Deputy Principal.**

#### Role of the Team Leader:

- The team leader alerts team members to the incident and convenes a meeting of the team.
- Coordinates / delegates tasks of the other team members
- Liaises with the Department of Education and Skills and the Board of Management.
- In the case of bereavement, liaises with the bereaved family.

Record Keeping: All team members will keep written records of phone calls, letters or meetings

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

1. When a critical incident comes to the attention of a member of staff, he/she should **inform** the Principal/Deputy Principal immediately.
2. The Principal **gathers the facts**. Where an incident occurs on a school trip, this will involve liaising with the local authorities.
3. A **meeting of the CIMT** is called to agree an immediate plan of action which may involve:
  - Assigning tasks to the members of the team (see Appendix A)
  - Informing staff / students
  - Contacting parents (See appendix B)
  - Visiting the family/ families touched by the crisis.
  - Planning the Pastoral care response
  - Liaising with the various support groups.
  - Agreeing a factual and sensitive statement with regard to the crisis.
  - Appointing a person to deal with telephone enquiries.
  - Preparing a statement for the media and appointment of a person to deal with media enquiries. (See appendix C)
  - Notifying members of the Board of Management, the trustees CEIST and the Chairperson of the Parents' Association.

In the event of an incident on a school trip, it will be necessary for the Principal/Deputy Principal to contact the parents/guardians of the group immediately with the facts. The dedicated phone line (01-4531262) will be given for enquiries and support for the teachers involved will be provided. This may involve arranging transport for supplementary staff.

#### **Mercy Secondary School Critical Incident Management Team.**

## Key Personnel

Name:	Position	Role
Michelle O' Kelly	Principal	Writing up of agreed statements and liaising with press/media/community
James Hanrahan	Deputy Principal	Organise supervision of students
Caroline McCorrison & Lisa Baker	Guidance Counsellor & Student Support	Contact NEPS, local outside agencies
Fiona Healy	Home School Community Liaison	Liaise with parents council and past pupils, visit affected families, contact LOCAL agencies for assistance where appropriate
Kathy Sheridan/Eleanor Larkin	School Secretary	Contact emergency services, assist with prep of crisis response rooms.
Sinead O'Sullivan & Frainc O'Broin (AP1)	Communications	Meet students to brief them on situation
Rachel Murphy	R.E. Co-ordinator	Organise prayer/healing service within the school with the Music Department. If appropriate liaise with local parish, and family re-arrangement and offering of liturgical support.
Nicola McFarland	Parent representative	

### Confidentiality:

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

## DAY 1

## **1. Informing Staff**

- Telephone/text alert all staff members informing them of the incident and the time of a brief staff meeting to be held as early as possible.
- Members of the C.I.M.T. outline to staff the plan for the day and the support available. As far as possible, maintain a normal school routine.
- The common statement of fact is read and explained.
- The Computer room and the Prayer Room will serve as the Crisis response room.
- Designated teachers inform classes. (See No.5)
- Deputy Principal or designated teacher arranges cover for teachers directly involved and frees the crisis response rooms.
- Plan another up-date staff meeting later. Receive feedback on issues that are arising. At that meeting we provide the latest facts as known and outline the schedule for the next day.

## **2. Informing Students (See Appendix D)**

- The statement should be communicated in a sensitive manner by those who have been assigned to this role at the initial C.I.M.T. meeting. Give the facts as they are known, highlight the supports that are available and indicate the actions that are planned.
- The class(es) of the student(s) involved in the incident should be the first to be told. All other classes should be told at the same time in their tutor groups. Particular sensitivity is needed around close friends of the student(s) involved in the incident and other vulnerable students.

### **Vulnerable Students**

- Close friends or relatives of the student(s) involved in the incident
  - Students who have been affected by critical incidents/bereavements in the past.
  - Students who have experienced a recent loss or separation
  - Students experiencing serious difficulties at home
  - Students with a history of mental health difficulties
  - Students with a history of substance use/ misuse
- Every class may not be traumatised but it is important to acknowledge the effects of the incident on the whole school community.
  - Opportunities will be provided where necessary for prayer/reflection and quiet time during the day.

## **DAY 2**

- Review what has been done to date.
- Update relevant parties.
- Decide on school closure if necessary.
- List tasks for the day and assign roles eg. media, contact with affected family(ies), in the event of a bereavement attendance and participation in funeral service including choir.
- Review the schedule on an ongoing basis.
- Assess how affected/vulnerable students are coping.
- Develop a plan for monitoring them over the following days/ weeks.
- Liaise with Parents' Association representatives regarding supports for parents/guardians.

### **Aftercare**

- Monitor students for signs of continuing stress and refer to appropriate bodies.
- Liaise with agencies regarding referrals.
- Plan for the reintegration of students/staff on their return to school prioritising those most closely affected.
- Return personal belongings to appropriate person(s).
- Decide on appropriate ways to mark anniversaries.
- Provide staff with Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
- Evaluate the Critical Incident Policy in the light of following the Critical incident plan as ratified by the board in a given year.  
How might it be improved? Amend if necessary.
- Continue to inform new staff where appropriate.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson)

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

**This policy will be reviewed after each critical incident and/or in September 2019**

## **Appendix A**

## **Roles of Critical Incident Team**

### **Team Leader (Principal)**

- Alerts the team leader to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Co-ordinates the task of the team.
- Liaises with the Board of Management, Parents' Association. Ceist, DES, NEPS, SEC and other outside agencies.
- Liaises with the bereaved family(ies) involved
- Liaises with the Gardai and media.
- Ensures that all information is accurate before being shared.

### **Staff Liaison (Deputy Principal)**

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff an opportunity to ask questions and outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the procedures for the identification of vulnerable children. (See Day 1, point 5)
- Keeps staff updated.
- Advises staff on the availability of the free Employee Assistance Service.

### **Year Heads**

- Will meet with students and advise them of the incident.
- Talk to the students and offer support.
- Be a link person for them

### **Student Support teacher (Guidance Counsellor and/or Head of SPHE Department)**

- Meet with student(s) involved in incident if appropriate.
- Meets students of affected class together with tutor.
- Coordinates information from tutors and Year Heads about students they are concerned about.
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students.
- Liaises with outside agencies for support and referral.
- Keeps records of students seen by external agencies.
- Collates record of internal student contact.

### **Home School Community Liaison Teacher**

- Manage parental consent issues and organise parental support
- Manage parental consultations.
- Liaise with LOCAL agencies for assistance where appropriate.



**Pastoral Care (R.E. Co-ordinator)**

- Organise and manage the Prayer Room.
- Maintain a record of students visiting room.
- Organise appropriate rituals – prayer on intercom/lunchtime service/quiet time.
- Liaise with the family/team leader regarding school involvement with related liturgical events.

**Year Head, Teacher Representative on Student Support Group and Representative of the Board (if appropriate)**

- Roles will be determined by the Team Leader depending on the nature of the incident.

**Secretary**

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of parents/guardians, teachers, emergency services. (Appendix E)
- Takes telephone calls and notes those who need to be responded to.
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails, faxes.
- Maintains records.

**Appendix B**

**Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians**

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

It is with profound sadness that the Management, Staff and Students of Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore, have learned of the tragic/sudden death of:

.....was a much loved member of our school community and she will be greatly missed by her class, her teachers and by her many friends.

Our sincere sympathy is extended to the family of .....at this time.

We are offering counselling and support for students affected by this tragedy. A Prayer Service has been held in school today and students will attend and participate in the funeral service in the coming days.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be very difficult for everyone.

I enclose some information which you may find useful in helping your daughter at this time.

An Information Seminar for parents is planned for (date, time, place). At that time, further strategies for parents will be discussed.

If you would like immediate advice, please contact the Guidance and Counselling Department at 4531262.

Yours sincerely,

.....  
Michelle O' Kelly  
Principal

## **Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians**

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Today there was an incident in the ..... group. It is now under control You may wish to talk to your daughter about the incident when she returns from school. She will need reassurance that the school and the student's parents/guardians are dealing with the issue.

Should the need arise we are offering counselling and support for students affected by this incident.

Classes will continue as usual.

I enclose some information which you may find useful in helping your daughter at this time.

An Information Seminar for parents is planned for (date, time, place). At that time, further strategies for parents will be discussed.

If you would like immediate advice, please contact the Guidance and Counselling Department at 4531262.

Yours sincerely,

.....  
Michelle O kelly  
Principal

## **Sample text to parents examples:**

Today there was an incident in the ..... group. It is now under control You may wish to talk to your daughter about the incident. You may wish to talk to your daughter about the incident when she returns from school.

Or

It is with profound sadness that the Management, Staff and Students of Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore, have learned of the tragic/sudden death of:

We are offering counselling and support for students affected by this tragedy. A Prayer Service has been held in school today

or

It is with profound sadness that the Management and Staff of Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore, have learned of the death .....our late colleague and friend. She was a much loved member of our school by her class, her teachers and by her many friends. many friends. Our sincere sympathy is extended to her family at this time.

Or

It is with profound sadness that the Management, Staff and Students of Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore, have learned of the tragic sudden death of ..... She was a much loved member of our school community and she will be greatly missed. Our sincere sympathy is extended to her family at this time.

Or

Earlier today there was a fire in one part of the building. It is under control and the danger has past. The Firebrigade was called and they have deemed the school building safe. No one has been harmed and school has returned to normal schedule.

### **Appendix C Sample Media Statement**

It is with profound sadness that the Management, Staff and Students of Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore, have learned of the tragic death of:

.....

Our sincere sympathy is extended to the family of:.....

On hearing the tragic news the school Critical Incident Management Plan was put into immediate action. The Critical Incident Management Team convened a meeting to ensure that students affected by their loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

The school is offering counselling and support for students affected by the tragedy. Prayer services have been held in school today and students will attend and participate in the funeral service in the coming days in consultation with the family.

At this sad time, our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this tragedy.

Yours sincerely,

.....  
Michelle O' Kelly  
Principal

## **Appendix D**

### **Guidelines on breaking bad news to Students**

- Tell the class you have sad news and it is difficult for you to do this.
- Let them know the name of the person the news is about and give them the facts as per agreed statement. Encourage questions.
- Let the class know of common reactions to bad news.
- The most common reaction is shock.
- Expect tears and outbursts.
- Don't allow students to be left alone. Students must be supervised in the school building while in a distressed state.
- Let them know that the school will support them, that all are upset by the news. Allow time to mingle and talk. Tea and coffee will be provided in a lunch area.
- Be attentive to those who are not coping well with the news.
- Remind students again of the support structures in place.
- When the students appear ready, gather the year group for prayer in the prayer room.
- Some students may be able to continue with the school day and go to class.
- Some will need to stay with the counselling team if present
- Some may need to go home but may do so only if they are collected by their parents. Parents should speak with a member of the counselling team if present or the head of the SPHE department.
- Those who return to class may not be able to concentrate, but may want to talk.

## Appendix E

### Emergency Contact List

<b>Support/agency</b>	<b>Contact Name (if available)</b>	<b>Contact Number</b>
<b>Gardai</b>		<b>999</b>
<b>Ambulance</b>		<b>999</b>
<b>Fire Service</b>		<b>999</b>
<b>Chair Person</b>	<b>Anthony Malone</b>	<b>[REDACTED]</b>
<b>Department of Education and Skills</b>		<b>(01)8896400</b>
<b>Employee Assistance Service</b>		<b>1800 411 057</b>
<b>General Practitioners</b>	<b>Inchicore Medical Centre</b>	<b>(01) 4734030</b>
<b>Hessed House</b>		<b>(01) 4549474</b>
<b>NEPS Psychologist Susan Conroy</b>		<b>(01) 8892700</b> <b>[REDACTED]</b>
<b>Youth Project</b>		<b>(01)4544791</b>
<b>Barnardos</b>		<b>(01) 4530355</b>
<b>Local Parish</b>		<b>(01) 4531660</b>
<b>Parents Council</b>		<b>(01) 8874034</b>
<b>SPHE Support Service</b>		<b>(01) 8057718</b>

<b>CAMHS</b>		<b>(01) 4166600</b>
<b>Special Education Support Service</b>		<b>1850200884</b>

**Prefix all local numbers (01) in case calls are being made from  
mobile phone**

**NEPS Critical Incident Document**

<https://assets.gov.ie/40700/21b5193521d147c890b4309fe4bfce9d.pdf>