

Dalystown National School

Critical Incident Policy

Introduction

In Dalystown National School, we aim to protect the well-being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

The Board of Management, through the principal and staff, has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

The roles designated to the C.I.M.T members are important and they must be respected. The C.I.M.T members will follow the protocols set out below and it is expected all staff will do likewise. A calm, measured reaction alongside clear communication is vital in the event of any critical incident.

Definition of a Critical Incident

As per Dept. of Education Guidelines Dalystown National School recognises that “A critical incident is an incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school” (Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2008).

Critical incidents may involve pupils, staff, and other members of the school or local community.

Types of incidents may include:

- A serious accident or tragedy in the school community.
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding, vandalism etc.
- A physical assault on a pupil or staff member.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, suicide or illness.
- Intrusion into the school.
- Unexpected evacuation of the school. (e.g. bomb threat)
- Unauthorized removal of pupil from school or home.
- Closure of the school because of infectious diseases.

Aims

Recognising that the key to managing critical incidents is planning, Dalystown National 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.

The Board of Management places no obligation on any staff member to intervene in a critical incident situation if by so doing he/she is placing him/herself or others at risk.

The Board of Management has a Health and Safety Statement in place, which is reviewed regularly. Measures are in place to address both the physical and psychological safety of the pupils and staff. Among the measures to ensure physical safety include:

- Health and safety statement for the school.
- Regular fire drills and evacuation procedures.
- Regular checking of fire exits and extinguishers.
- Exit doors kept closed during school time.
- Yard gates kept closed during yard times.
- School yard rules and Code of Behaviour in place and regularly discussed with children.
- Pre-opening supervision in the school yard in the Senior Building.
- Sign-out procedures for pupils.
- Updated contact details for staff, and in case of emergency numbers (in secretary's computer folder)
- Updated contact details for parents/guardians.(folders in secretary's office and saved on Aladdin)
- Record of pupils who may have specific medical needs.
- First Aid Boxes maintained in the staffroom.

A number of policies and strategies also support the psychological safety of the pupils and staff.

- The Child Safety Statement and Risk Assessment
- Social, Personal and Health Education Programme, addressing areas such as grief and loss, communication skills, conflict management, substance misuse etc. Particularly Stay Safe, Walk Tall, Zippy's Friends etc
- Access to resources and support e.g. Employee Assistance Service, NEPS: 'When Links with outside agencies e.g. National Anti-Bullying Centre, DCU, NEPS, Primary Care Psychology.
- The Anti-Bullying Policy.
- NEPS 'School Refusal' guidance
- The School Code of Discipline.

External Resources

In the event of a critical incident the school may contact NEPS, Barnardos, the Irish National Teachers Organisation, the Catholic Primary School Management Association and other support agencies/organisations as necessary to access support.

Critical Incident Management Team

1. Team Leader: Charlie Moore, Principal
2. Media Liaison/Communication: Charlie Moore, Principal
3. Pupil Liaison: Charlie Moore/Mairead Dunbar
4. Staff Liaison: Charlie Moore/Mairead Dunbar
5. Parent/Family Liaison: Mairead Dunbar
6. Chaplaincy Role: Fr. William Coleman
7. Administrative Tasks: Julie Coyle, Secretary

The team leader will normally be the Principal, or in his absence, the Deputy Principal. The members of the team at present are the Principal, the Deputy Principal, the Parish Priest and the School Secretary. (Support to the team will be provided by the school secretary and the BOM) The members of the team are listed and published in the school.

Membership of the team is voluntary.

The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team will have a dedicated critical incident folder containing a copy of the plan and any other relevant materials. Remote access is also possible and the primary team members will be given administrative access to the Aladdin Schools system which enables contact to be made with all staff and families in the school.

All staff members will be given an email copy of the plan. There will be an option to co-opt members onto the team if this becomes necessary.

Contact Details of all staff and pupils are available in school, through the office folders. The Aladdin online administration system allows for 24 hour remote access to all staff and pupil contact details from within and outside of the school.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Team

Leadership Role

- Confirm the event.
- Activate the Critical Incident response team.
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services as appropriate.
- Liaise with the Board of Management, with the Department of Education and Skills and with any outside agencies involved as appropriate.
- Co-ordinate involvement of such agencies.
- Express sympathy with the family.
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)
- Organise and co-ordinate communication with staff members not present and with former staff who may be affected by the incident.
- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students.
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events.

Communication Role

- With Team, prepare a public statement.
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly.
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls.
- Designate mobile numbers for contact.
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

- Pupil Liaison
- Gathering information from class teacher/SET regarding the needs of the class or particular students as a result of the incident.
- Gathering information from class-teacher regarding child's friends, absentees and anyone who may need to be contacted.
- Alerting teachers other than class teachers to vulnerable students as appropriate.
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder and 'Ready to Go Pack').
- Disseminate appropriate information to pupils as necessary (See 'Ready to go Pack').
- Organise an assembly/ prayer service or Mass for the school community to congregate.
- Keep records of pupils seen by external agency staff. (e.g. NEPS).
- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students.
- Monitor class most affected.

Staff Liaison

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known.
- Give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions
- Outline the routine for the day
- Is alert to vulnerable members of staff and makes contact with them individually if deemed necessary.
- Provides relevant materials to staff from the 'Ready to Go' pack.
- Parent/Family Liaison
- Coordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal).
- Visits bereaved family with Team Leader.
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service.
- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident.
- Facilitates 'Questions and Answers' meeting where appropriate
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides materials for parents from the 'Ready to Go' pack
- Chaplaincy Role
- Visit home(s), if appropriate.
- Visit Classroom (s) to provide support, if appropriate.
- Lead prayer services if required.
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff.
- Work in partnership with the Critical Incident team.
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Administrative Tasks
- Maintain up to date lists of staff, staff next of kin and pupils.
- General administrative tasks e.g. phone calls, typing, letters etc.
- Assist with recording and record keeping.

Staff Responsibilities

At all times, school staff have a responsibility to

- Safeguard the welfare of pupils and colleagues
- Assist in identifying and supporting students at risk or in distress
- Maintain normal procedures
- Maintain confidentiality

Media Briefing/Communication

- A critical incident may on occasion necessitate dealing with the media. Only the Principal, Deputy Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Management will communicate with the media.
- The Dept. of Education and/or NEPS may also be consulted as necessary for guidance on media briefings.
- Members of the media must report to the reception office and identify themselves. They will not be allowed beyond the reception area except at the invitation of the Principal or Deputy Principal. The media will not be allowed to interview or photograph pupils on the school premises.

As necessary, the Principal /Deputy Principal/ Chairperson will prepare a brief media statement to include the following;

- Expressing sympathy for the affected /bereaved family.
- Stating that it is a difficult time for the school community.
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/ injured parties.
- The facts about the situation (following consultation with the families.)
- The term suicide will not be used; instead the term ‘tragic death’ will be used.
- Outline what is being done to support pupils and staff.

Record Keeping:

In the event of an incident each member of the team will document and record actions undertaken in their role, such as meetings held, phone calls made, text alerts sent, letters received or sent etc. The Team Leader will be responsible for forming a coherent record of actions taken by individual members and the team as a whole. The school secretary will be a key support in this.

Confidentiality:

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. Comments should not be made through any form of social media, by members of the school staff . All staff must bear this in mind and pupils will be reminded of the need for sensitivity and discretion at an age appropriate level.

Action Plan

Short-Term Actions (Day 1)

- Inform emergency services
- Account for all pupils, personnel and visitors.
- Immediate and ongoing contact (as appropriate) with family/families.
- Inform Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- Inform Chaplain.

It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident:

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?

Designate a spokesperson (Leader)

- Inform staff, and where appropriate former staff, and update on any arrangements as necessary. (Leader)
- Contact other appropriate agencies:
- H.S.E./Community Care Services/NEPS
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff.
- Prepare a brief statement (Team).
- Media briefing if appropriate (see above).
- Protect the family's privacy.

Medium-Term Actions (24-72 Hours)

- Preparation of students/staff attending the funeral.
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family.
- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school.
- Review the events of the first 24 hours.
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff as necessary.
- Decide on mechanisms for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Have a review of the Critical Incident Management Team meeting.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Hold support/information meetings for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened and give information on further support if required.
- There will be no compulsion on any teacher to participate in support meetings.
- Arrange individual or group debriefings/support meetings in consultation with outside agencies (with parental permission).
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc).
- Pupil Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured if and as appropriate.
- School closure (if appropriate).Request a decision on this from school management.

Long-Term Actions

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress. Communication with family is essential.
- Liaise with external agencies regarding referrals.
- Arrange for school memorial service/anniversary if relevant.
- Awareness by staff around significant days like birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.
- Ensure new staff is aware of policy and which pupils/staff were affected by an incident.

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?
- Consult with NEPS Psychologist as appropriate.
- 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.
- Update and amend school records:

All team members will keep written records of phone calls made, meetings, and interventions.

Records will be compiled and kept on file in the principal's office. The school secretary will log all phone calls etc.

Ratification and Review

This policy was reviewed in October 2024 and will be reviewed annually by the Critical Incident Team and brought to the Board of Management.

The policy will be disseminated annually to staff and will be available to all staff in the case of a critical incident.