

Coláiste Cholmcille

Critical Incident Policy



2023-2024

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Coláiste Cholmcille aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of management, Principal, and the Student Support Team, has drawn up a Critical Incident Management plan as one element of the school's policy and plan.

The staff and management of Coláiste Cholmcille have 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, and the creation of a supportive and caring ethos in the school, in ordinary time as well as in the event of a critical incident. Such policies at Coláiste Cholmcille include the school's Admissions Policy; its Pastoral Care Policy; the Special Education Needs Policy; the school's Child Protection Policy; the Anti-Bullying Policy; the Health and Safety Policy and the school's Code of Behaviour. The staff and management have established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Context for development of the Policy and Plan

In drawing up this policy and plan the CIMT has consulted the following resource documents provided to schools:

- *Responding to a Critical Incident: Pack for Schools* (NEPS 2003)
- *Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools* (NEPS 2007)
- *Template for the development of a Critical Incident Policy and Plan* (NEPS)
- *Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines* (IAS, National Suicide Review Group 2002)

Definition of a 'critical incident'

The staff and management of Coláiste Cholmcille recognise a critical incident to be "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 might include but are not limited to:

- *The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other death*
- *An intrusion into the school*
- *An accident/serious incident involving members of the school community*
- *An accident/tragedy in the wider school community*
- *Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc*
- *The disappearance of a member of the school community*
- *A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s)*

Aim

The aim of the CIMP is to help school 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. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put systems in place to help 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.

1. Physical safety:

Some of the measures taken by the school to ensure the physical safety of the students include:

- Evacuation plan formulated and clearly visible in each room
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fully functional and regularly serviced Fire Alarm System
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Defibrillator located on site
- Health and Safety Plan (and rules) for all Practical rooms and laboratories
- Supervision in the school before and after school and during all breaks
- Scheduled First Aid providers
- Printing of the Code of Behaviour (with behavioural expectations for the creation of a safe environment) in all Homework Journals
- Induction for all new students
- Code protected/swipe card entrances to the school building

2. Psychological safety

The management and staff of Coláiste Cholmcille 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 issues and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Some of the measures taken by the school to ensure the psychological wellbeing of the students include:

- Social, personal and health education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed 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 alcohol and drug prevention. Promotion of mental health is included in this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures are familiar to all staff
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the post primary school student are available.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and interventions for suicidal students.
- A number of staff have received formal training in suicide prevention.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies including:
 - National Education Psychological Services (NEPS)
 - HSE

- Child and Family Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
 - Donegal Education and Training Board
 - Donegal Education Centre
 - Social Services
 - National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
 - National Education Welfare Board (NEWB)
 - Túsla
 - Special Education Needs Officer (SENO)
 - Education Welfare Officer (EWO)
 - SPHE National Coordinator
 - Speech and Language Therapists
 - Donegal Youth Services
 - Jigsaw
 - Garda
 - Foróige
 - Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
 - Aware
 - Rape Crisis Centre
 - AA
 - Donegal Women's Centre
- Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
 - The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
 - There is a care system in place in the school. The Student Support Team comprised of the Principal, Deputy Principals, the two Guidance Counsellors, the SEN Coordinator, the HSCLO and the relevant Year Head meet each week to review provision of pastoral care and to address specific cases.
 - Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the student support team, concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. **The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year.** The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. **Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident. Each member of the team has been assigned a key role in line with best practice.**

The key roles are as follows:

- Team leader
- Garda liaison
- Staff liaison.
- Student liaison
- Agency liaison

- Parent liaison
- Community liaison
- Communications Officer (media)
- Attendance Tracker
- Administrator

Outlined below are some of the key responsibilities of each role

Team leader

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC 2 Liaises with the bereaved family

Principal
Mrs Cora Fagan

Mr Darren Mc Guinness and Mr Hugh Mc Glynn the Deputy Principals, are the Deputy Team Leaders.

Gárda liaison

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths is checked out before being shared

Principal:
Mrs Cora Fagan

Staff liaison

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, 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 day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually. Advises them of availability of EAS and gives them the contact number.

Deputy Principals:
Mr Darren Mc
Guinness,
Mr Hugh Mc Glynn

Student liaison

- At post-primary level, may co-ordinate information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- **Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)**
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Guidance Counsellors:
Ms Mairead Mc Gurren
Ms Attracta Gallagher
Chaplain: Ms Breege
McLoughlin
HSCLO: Mr Sylvester
Maguire

Agency liaison

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of key parents, such as members of the Parents Association, Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert to need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

The Guidance Counsellors
and Chaplain

Parent liaison

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

Guidance Counsellors,
Chaplain,
HSCLO

Community Liaison

- Maintains an up to date list of contact names and numbers for local community organisations.
- Ensures that accurate information is provided to local community groups who are linked in with the school.
- Liaises with organisations in the community for support.
- Provides information on an on-going basis where appropriate.

Deputy Principal

Communications Officer

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

Principal

- Will coordinate the monitoring of communications relating to the incident.

Administrator

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 - ❑ Parents or guardians
 - ❑ Teachers
 - ❑ Emergency support services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopied materials needed
- Maintains records

School Administration
Staff

Attendance Tracking

- In the immediate aftermath of the critical incident special care will be paid to attendance of students
- All absences will be carefully monitored.
- Class Tutors, Year Heads, HSCLO and The Attendance Officer will monitor this.

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 Secretaries will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters/emails etc.

Confidentiality and good name considerations

The management and staff of Coláiste Cholmcille 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 staffroom will be the main room used to meet the staff**
- **Room 54 will be used for meetings with groups of students**
- **The Parent's Room for parents and for meetings with agency staff**
- **The Parent's Room will be used as a time out room**
- **Principal's office for press**
- **Chaplaincy Office & Guidance Offices for individual sessions with students and other visitors.**

Creation of a coping Supportive and Caring Ethos in the school

Systems are in place to address the physical and psychological safety of the school community through our health and safety policy, which includes;

- Evacuation plan
- Regular Fire Drills
- Fire extinguishers and exits regularly checked
- Supervision of students in the canteen, on corridors, and in the school grounds.
- Policy regarding attendance of students in class. (Code of Behaviour)
- VSware systems for recording and monitoring attendance
- Home School Community Liaison Officer

The management of Coláiste Cholmcille aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance the sense of safety and security in the school, and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

This is integrated into the work of the school. Issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and grief management, resilience, conflict management, problem solving and prevention of alcohol and substance misuse are topics that are an integral part of the SPHE curriculum. In addition, promotion of good mental health is a major part of the course at senior level.

The following provisions support this supportive and caring ethos:

- Staff has access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Coláiste Cholmcille is part of Jigsaw's One Good School programme.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Safeguarding Statements and related documents on how to proceed in the event of suspicions or disclosures.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with instances of bullying in accordance with this policy.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member, and where there are concerns the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed and, where necessary, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS – DAY 1 Team leader:

- 1 Initial assessment of the incident.
 - a. Types of response needed (type of incident, timing and relevant safety considerations)
 - b. Should a psychologist be involved?
 - c. How do we assess the needs of the school?

d. What action should be taken?

2 Gather accurate information.

(a) Establish the facts:

- (i) What has happened?
- (ii) When it happened.
- (iii) How it happened.
- (iv) The number and names of students/staff involved.
- (v) Are there other schools involved?
- (vi) The extent of injuries and location(s) of those injured.

3 Contact appropriate agencies (See School's Emergency Contact List)

4 Convene a meeting with the CMIT to plan the day ahead

5 Hold a staff meeting – crucial that teachers have accurate facts and are kept updated. It may be useful for NEPS to give a brief input. N.B. The staff may need to be seen in two separate groups in order to facilitate supervision of students.

6 Ensure that all staff and the Board of Management are fully informed on what has happened.

7 Agree a schedule for the day including cover of existing duties for the Critical Incident Team

8 Prepare a written statement to be communicated to the students. Decide when the information will be communicated.

9. Prepare a written statement to be communicated to all parents.

10. Furnish all teachers with guidelines for dealing with the classroom situation.

11. Make school policy and reference material on dealing with a critical incident available to all staff.

12. Compile a list of vulnerable students and staff.

13. A designated quiet room for students who need to be out of class. Ensure that students sign in to use this room.

14. Designate teachers to supervise the designated room.

15. Designate other rooms for use (see below)

16. Identify and call on those teachers willing to assist students, to supervise and those willing to provide an additional presence amongst the students at break times.

17. Contact/visit the bereaved family.

18. The HSCLO/ School Chaplain will link in with parents/guardians, those directly involved and the Parent Association where necessary.

19. The parents room will be available to parents who on hearing that an incident has occurred may want to be with their own child

20. Prepare an agreed media statement and deal with the media.

21. Hold an end-of-day staff briefing – provide an update on the latest facts as known and outline the schedule for the following day.

DAY 2 AND THE FOLLOWING DAYS

1 Convene a CMIT meeting to review the events of day 1 Review what has been done.

2 State tasks for the day and assign roles

3 Checklist of vulnerable students and review how they are doing.

4 Describe a plan to monitor students, especially vulnerable students.

5 Meet external agencies.

6 Meet the whole staff:

- (a) Outline a schedule for the day and update staff on any new information from the family.
 - (b) Inform staff of any further arrangements.
- 7 Arrange support for students, staff and parents.
 - 8 Visit the injured if appropriate.
 - 9 In the case of a death;
 - Liaise with the bereaved family re funeral arrangements.
 - Agree on attendance and participation at the funeral service(s).
 - Make decisions about school closures (BOM).

FOLLOW UP – BEYOND 72 HRS.

- 1 Monitor students and staff for signs of continuing distress.
- 2 Identify who will be responsible for follow up actions.
- 3 Discuss referral procedures and when an onward referral may be indicated.
- 4 Liaise with agencies regarding referral.
- 5 Plan for the return of bereaved and/or vulnerable students to school.
- 6 Plan for the giving of a memory box to the bereaved family (Notify secretary to manage exam results if applicable).
7. Decide on memorials and anniversaries. Additional support may be required on these occasions for staff and students.
- 8 Review the response to the incident and amend the plan accordingly.

LITURGICAL RESPONSE

This will be co-ordinated by the school chaplain.

Funeral

- Establish the family's wishes for the school's involvement in the funeral.
- Where appropriate plan guard of honour, music, prayers, reflections and so on, with the chaplain, the family, the students the local clergy, and where appropriate, other local organisations.
- In the event of an incident occurring during the holidays the Management will develop a procedure for contacting students in order to organise a student presence at funerals.
- Identify and confer with students who might participate in the liturgy.
- Provide students with a place to gather after the funeral if necessary. The school assembly area may be the appropriate. If the canteen is to be made available to the students, request the help of the Parents' Association and staff in providing refreshments.

School liturgy/prayer service

- Plan this in conjunction with a relevant group of students, allowing them the freedom to decide the form and the content.

Anniversary

- Liaise with the family to act in accordance with their wishes.
- Allow the students to prepare their own service of remembrance in co-operation with the chaplain and RE teacher.

APPENDIX 1 GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING THE CLASSROOM SITUATION

- Decide on a specific class period for informing students of what has happened. In that class period read statement from the School Response Team, using the deceased person's name.
- Acknowledge the deceased in that class and in each subsequent class. Say a prayer or have a moment's silence.
- Do not speculate with students about the death. Give honest answers. All students' questions should be acknowledged although questions of 'Why?' or 'How?' in the case of suicide should be diverted.
- The topic of suicide may arise and should be addressed, but teachers must keep the focus on suicide in general and not on the specific person's death. Do not get drawn into arguments with anyone who believes suicide is a brave or noble act. Focus on the loss and pain of survivors.
- Discuss normal grief reactions and what students might expect over the following days. Reassure students that anger, guilt and tears are all part of a normal response.
- Don't use 'I know how you feel' statements.
- Encourage students to be supportive of each other.
- The teacher should feel free to express her/his own feelings appropriately.
- Advise students of teachers who are available to them to help them deal with their fears and worries.
- A designated area may be provided for students to be together; students should be given the freedom to use this area where appropriate. Teachers would supervise the area but not intrude on students.
- Identify and notify School Response Team of vulnerable students or students who are very distressed. These students may need individual support.
- Parents/guardians of distressed students should be contacted and advised of the situation before the school day ends.
- On returning to school after the funeral teachers should be aware of how sensitive students will be to the empty chair recently occupied by their classmate and friend, to the student's belongings which may still be in the room and so on. A decision should be taken as to how best to return the deceased student's belongings to the deceased's family. All members of staff should be informed of the decision taken.
- Students and teachers should be sensitive to any student on their return to school after bereavement. A timely reminder to classmates to treat their fellow student with consideration may help ease the student back into the school routine.

- Continue to observe students in the subsequent days and weeks and be sensitive to those who may need professional help. Consult with the team to discuss your concerns.

APPENDIX 2 RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

The following are some general guidelines for dealing with the media.

- Designate one person, preferably the Principal, to deal with the media.
- Remind staff in general not to make statements about the incident.
- Prepare a written statement expressing sorrow at the student's death and stating that it is a difficult time for the school community and for the deceased's family. Ask that the deceased's family's privacy be respected. State what the school is doing to support students and staff.
- Be co-operative and respectful but always talk as if everything you say is on record.

APPENDIX 3 CONTACT NUMBERS

Restore
North Western Health Board
Community Services
Ballybofey
Co Donegal

074-9131391 087-7987883

Child and Family Mental Health
Services
Letterkenny General Hospital
Co Donegal
Referrals via GP

074-9123563
074-9125888 ext2588

NWHB Bereavement Counsellor
Millennium Court
Pearse Road
Letterkenny
Co Donegal

074-9123670

Suicide Resource Officer
Suicide Reduction Strategy
Ardaghowen
The Mall
Sligo

071-9149623

National Educational
Psychological Services(N.E.P.S.)
Westward Centre
Bridge Street
Sligo

071-9143218

Child and Family Mental Health

Service
Molloway House
The Mall
Sligo
Referrals via GP

071-9155108

Department of Psychology
Markievicz House
Barracks Street
Sligo

071-9155132

NWHB Bereavement Counsellor
Health Care Centre
Barrack Street
Sligo

071-9155108

NWHB Regional Information Help
Line

1850-636 313

e-mail: info@nwbb.ie

Dr McCurtin

(071) 9851600

Gardaí

(071) 9851102

Fire Brigade/Ambulance

999/ (071) 9851888

Sheil Hospital

(071) 9851300

Fr P. Dunne

(071) 9851295

Rev S. Richmond

(074) 9721113

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

The relevant staff 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 has been presented to all staff for review and agreement. Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy.

Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Principal

This policy will be reviewed and revised in light of any change in circumstances should such changes occur. Otherwise the plan will be updated annually (*September of each year*).

Signed:



Date: 25/4/23 Chairperson (BOM)



Date: 25/4/23 Principal