

COOKSTOWN HIGH SCHOOL



Critical Incident Policy & Procedures

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Definition

A critical incident can be defined as a sudden, unexpected and tragic event or sequence of events which causes trauma and confusion within a school community and which overwhelms or threatens to overwhelm its normal coping mechanism.

Rationale & Ethos

A critical incident may affect pupils, staff, parents and governors, may relate directly to the safety of the school community or may involve an incident beyond the school premises. The critical incident may occur during the school day or the evening, during the school holidays, at the weekend or on a school trip or educational visit.

As a critical incident is likely to have a severe impact upon the school, both in the short and longer term, it is vital to ensure that procedures are in place to safeguard the physical and emotional wellbeing of all members of the Cookstown High School Community and to assist recovery from the critical incident in an appropriate way.

The Critical Incident Policy and Procedures cannot cover every aspect of recovery from a critical incident. Circumstances may arise which cannot realistically be foreseen or considered. All responses to the critical incident however should be within the general principles set out in the policy and in keeping with the ethos of the school which values the uniqueness of each individual, personal responsibility and mutual respect.

It is essential that the Critical Incident Policy and Procedures can be easily understood and that it becomes operational as soon as possible following the critical incident. This policy is informed by 'A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools.'

Aims

1. To maintain a duty of care throughout the time of the critical incident;
2. To safeguard the wellbeing of all members of the school community particularly those who may be most intimately involved in or affected by the critical incident ;
3. To minimise educational and administrative disruption within school;
4. To enable normal working to be resumed in the shortest possible time;
5. To facilitate and enable recovery from the critical incident.

Implementation of the Critical Incident Policy & Procedures

The following must be remembered in relation to the Critical Incident Policy:

- That it is followed as closely as possible;
- That designated personnel understand their tasks and are competent to carry them out;
- That people do not take unilateral actions;
- That consideration and sensitivity are shown by all;
- That pupils, staff and parents are protected from press intrusion;
- That normal routines be resumed as soon as possible;
- There is a realisation that total recovery may take a long time.

The **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)** (see Appendix 1) has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion and to:

- Ensure that School responds in a sensitive, consistent and effective manner which helps to reduce confusion, panic and extreme emotion;
- Maintain and regularly review a **Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP)**, the details of which are familiar to all relevant parties (see Appendix 2);
- Have ready access to all relevant contact details (including outside agencies).

Examples of critical incidents

A critical incident is likely to involve death or serious injury to one or more members of the school community and/or their families either at school, journeying to or from school, participating in a school related activity, at home or in some other context.

This list is not exhaustive but may include:

In School

- The death of a pupil, member of staff or visitor through natural causes
- An accident involving a pupil, member of staff or visitor
- A deliberate act of violence affecting the school community
- A fire, flood or explosion

Out of School

- Deaths or injuries through accidents or natural causes
- Death by suicide
- Death resulting from civil disturbance

In some cases the critical incident may not involve a death but the impact may be so significant as to meet the criteria for a critical incident.

Guidelines for managing a critical incident

- The Headmaster, or in his absence his deputy will take charge of the school's response
- The Headmaster's Study will be the central liaison point
- The CIMT will assess immediate practical needs
- A delegated member of the CIMT only will contact next of kin of those directly involved if required
- The Headmaster or his designated deputy will contact the EA Critical Incident Response Team
- Depending on the circumstances the Headmaster or his designated deputy will contact the EA Press Office
- Depending on the nature of the critical incident it may be necessary to suspend the timetable for a short time. In the event of a death on the school premises it may be necessary to close the school. This will be discussed with the EA, agreed at the CIMT and communicated to parents ASAP
- A short simple statement of facts will be prepared by the Headmaster or his deputy (see Appendix 4)
- Depending on the circumstances contacts from the media will be dealt with by the Headmaster or through the EA Press Office
- No member of staff may speak to the media about the critical incident without the express permission of the CIMT
- Administrative staff taking incoming calls will use a statement agreed by the CIMT
- As soon as practicable a staff briefing will be held, members of staff will be guided in relation to informing pupils
- News of a critical incident will initially be broken in small group settings – ideally in Form class
- Teachers have a listening, supportive and containing role and will be encouraged to remain calm and listen to pupils
- Consideration will be given to how the news will be handled with vulnerable pupils
- The CIMT will determine the involvement of parents if appropriate
- Short and long term support will be offered to those affected
- There will be an evaluation of the way in which the incident was managed within six weeks of the incident (see Appendix 7)
- The CIMT will be reviewed annually

APPENDIX 1
MEMBERS OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM (CIMT)

The composition of the CIMT should depend on the nature of the incident but will include:

Headmaster
Vice-Principals
Office Manager
Other members of SLT as appropriate or expedient
Chair of the Board of Governors

It may also include,
Head of Year (if appropriate)
Buildings Supervisor (if appropriate)
Any other member of staff deemed appropriate

APPENDIX 2

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN (CIMP)

Initial Response

- The Headmaster should be contacted first (if not available then a Vice Principal)
- The Headmaster (or Vice Principal) should seek to clarify from reliable sources the nature and circumstances of the incident
- The CIMT will liaise at the earliest opportunity and agree on specific procedures for managing the critical incident (See Appendix 4)
- If the incident is on site, health and safety measures will be put in place (such as evacuating the affected area) and the emergency services contacted
- The EA Critical Incident Response Team will be contacted and the EA Press Office
- Contact will be made with a member of the clergy team
- The Headmaster will convene a staff briefing, give appropriate details and afford colleagues the opportunity to ask questions
- Members of the CIMT will outline the process which will be followed with pupils
- Consideration will be given to how to break the news to vulnerable pupils - such as those who may be impacted by emotions stirred up by the incident or those with SEN
- A prepared statement will be supplied to all Form Tutors
- Groups of pupils which may be particularly affected will be identified and spoken to separately
- A Special Whole School Assembly will be convened as soon as appropriate
- A Special Year Assembly will be convened if appropriate
- A member of the CIMT will be delegated to inform pupils who are away from school because of illness, educational visits or suspension
- The Critical Incident Management Guide will be maintained throughout the incident

Longer Term Issues

- School structures and routines will be maintained or re-established as soon as possible and appropriate
- Supportive strategies for pupils and staff will be implemented
- There will be ongoing contact with parents as appropriate
- Actions taken will be reviewed and policies amended if appropriate
- Parents will be encouraged to provide ongoing support to their children with relevant information sent home as appropriate
- The PSE and pastoral programmes will be reviewed as appropriate
- Staff will be mindful of anniversaries and other special dates
- The use of appropriate outside agencies is crucial to providing longer term support as is the use of appropriately trained members of staff who are known to those in need of help

Preventative measures

- Conduct regular reviews of relevant policies and procedures e.g. Safeguarding & Child Protection, Health and Safety, Pupil Care Protocol, Evacuation Procedures, Visitor Protocol
- Ensure appropriate staff are First Aid trained and the list of staff is made available
- Regularly review placement of defibrillators and ensure signage is adequate
- Ensure Fire Drill has been held and the process reviewed
- Ensure the PSHE Programme is a key part of the preventative curriculum

-All members of the Critical Incident Management Team must:

- Retain a copy of the Critical Incident Policy and Procedures
- Be aware of the roles of each member of the CIMT to ensure a swift and appropriate response
- Have contact numbers of each other for 24 hour contact
- In the event of a school trip or educational visit, have access to the emergency contact list for staff and pupils

APPENDIX 3 PROCEDURES FOR MANAGING A CRITICAL INCIDENT – KEY ROLES

Headmaster and / or Vice Principal*

- Seeks clarification about incident
- Initiates call to emergency services if appropriate
- Summons the CIMT to inform them of the incident
- Informs the Chairman of the BoG
- Prepares relevant statements and letters for the media, parents, pupils and office staff
- Consults with the EA Press Office
- Convenes a staff briefing
- Organises information to others as required
- Leads a special assembly to inform pupils and reflect on the individual(s) concerned

Vice Principal (Pastoral)*

- Maintains a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies
- Contacts external agencies including the EA Critical Incident Team for support
- Arranges contact with relevant parents
- Arranges Special Year Assembly (if required)
- Supports the physical and emotional wellbeing of pupils
- Ensures that adequate ongoing support is available to staff

Vice-Principal (Curriculum)*

- Arranges staff cover if necessary & appropriate
- Liaises with grounds and maintenance staff to ensure access for essential personnel
- Ensures health and safety measures are in place
- Ensures adequate supply of support materials for distribution to pupils and/or staff
- Coordinates production of letters to parents etc.

Office Manager

- Ensures phone lines are operative and all office staff are available
- Ensures office staff are aware of and adhere to the agreed statements
- Oversees the production of letters to parents etc.

Chair of the Board of Governors

- Makes themselves available in a support role to visit school and meet with staff
- Ensures that the Critical Incident Policy & Procedures is being implemented
- Ensures that adequate support is in place for senior staff
- Receives report of the review process within six weeks of the critical incident

**In the event that any of these posts is vacant at the time of the critical incident the role will be performed by a deputy appointed by the person in charge. The VP on site with the longest service will deputise for the Headmaster. Some of these tasks may be delegated to a Senior Teacher.*

APPENDIX 4 SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following are provided by the Department of Education and are for guidance only and should be amended as appropriate.

After a known fatality...

We are taking this time to think about **[NAME]** in Year **XX** who tragically died last night **[as the result of a road traffic accident [NAME] was travelling with his/her family to We do not know any details about the accident at this time except that the rest of the family is safe and no one is injured seriously].**

[NAME]'s funeral is being held at on

..... A funeral is a special time to remember a person who has died. The school will let your families know about the specific time and address of the funeral in a written note which will be sent home tomorrow.

[Add some specific comment about the pupil as advised by Head of Year or Form Tutor]

Let's take a moment of silence to think of **[NAME]**, to remember all the good things about her. Then I will close in prayer.

After a suspected suicide...

A tragedy has happened., a Year **XX** pupil, has died suddenly.

Details of **[NAME]** premature death will not be released to protect the privacy of family members. You will be given information about funeral arrangements as soon as possible.

This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You may experience many feelings within the next few days. Everyone deals with loss differently. It is important to respect the way others grieve. Counsellors are available in **[LOCATION]**. Feel free to arrange to go and talk to the counsellors. They want to listen to your feelings and concerns.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE 1

Date

School grieves sudden death of pupil

As reported by the PSNI, a pupil at School died tragically on **[DATE]**. The circumstances of **[NAME]** death are not known at this time and an investigation is currently ongoing.

This is a tragic loss to **[NAME]** family and to our school community. To assist in supporting our staff and pupils through this time of grief, additional trained staff from the EA's Critical Incident Response Team have been assigned to the school to provide support alongside the schools pastoral team. A letter has been sent by the school to parents, informing them of this incident and providing information on the support services available through the school.

A special assembly to remember **[NAME]** has been arranged for **[DATE]**

Contact: Headmaster,School at

PRO FORMA LETTER (for parents)

'With great regret, we have learnt of the death of **[NAME]** and we extend our deepest sympathy to the family circle.

PREPARED STATEMENT FOR MEDIA

The whole school community is sorry to learn of the tragic death of **[NAME]**.

We hope at this time the school would be given the privacy needed to support our pupils at this difficult time, etc

NB: If the Principal wishes to comment about the pupil, they may want to gain permission from the family to include:

Sporting achievements

Musical talents

Academic success

Personal attributes

**APPENDIX 5
SAMPLE LETTER TO ALL PARENTS**

[DATE]

Dear Parent or Guardian,

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you of the sudden death of **[NAME]**, **[a pupil in Year X/ a Teacher of...../ Classroom Assistant, etc]**. Pupils were told this sad news this morning by their Form Tutor and later by the Headmaster at a specially convened assembly.

[NAME] died of **[INSERT GENERAL CAUSE OF DEATH]** and pupils have been assured this is something that does not happen very often. Children and young people react differently to this type of news and your son or daughter may or may not want to talk about this at home and it is likely that he or she will need extra support from you in the days ahead. This does not mean that anything is wrong with them; only that this traumatic event has been too powerful for them to deal with on their own. He or she may be feeling anxious. Please take time to listen to them and try to provide a predictable routine at home. It is also advisable to try and avoid too many absences to start with.

We have enclosed an information leaflet for you which may be useful at this sad time.

Trained staff from the Education Authority's Critical Incident Response Team are helping to support us through this difficult time as are the School Counsellor, local clergy and members of our pastoral team. It is sometimes necessary for a member of the team to speak to a class or individual pupils who may be distressed. He or she will be guided by the Headmaster or Form Tutor in this. If you do not wish your child to receive such support from the team please contact us immediately.

The whole school community is deeply saddened by this great loss but are trying, for the sake of our pupils, to keep the school environment as normal as possible. Our thoughts are with **[NAME]** family at this tragic time and the school community sends them sincerest sympathy and support.

[NAME] funeral is on **[DAY/ DATE]** at **[TIME am/pm]** at **[Name of Church or Crematorium]**. We are in touch with the family regarding their wishes for the school's representation at the Service.

APPENDIX 6
KEY CONTACT NUMERS & INFORMATION

Education Authority Critical Incident Response Team: 028 3751 2515

Education Authority Press Office: 028 3741 5356

Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools (www.education-ni.gov.uk)

Esags.tv Critical Incident DVD

EA Critical Incidents (documents available on EA website)

Critical Incident File (resource material): Third drawer in Headmaster's filing cabinet

APPENDIX 7 REVIEW

A review process must be conducted within six weeks of the critical incident. The review process will be led by a member of SLT and reported to the Board of Governors. The review will be conducted by the CIMT. The review should address the following questions:

- What went well?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Were there any gaps (in our provision or that of the EA or other support agencies)?
- Were the designated roles appropriate?
- Was the plan 'user friendly'?
- Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?
- Has full consideration been taken of the needs of specific groups of pupils?
- Has full consideration been taken of staff needs?
- Has there been appropriate follow up contact with families affected?
- Is there any unfinished business?
- Have all records relevant to the Critical Incident been secured?
- Are there any identified training needs?
- Does the Plan need to be reviewed/changed/updated?
- Any other relevant issue.

Linked policies & procedures:

Safeguarding & Child Protection

Health & Safety

Pupil Care Protocol

Visitor Protocol

Evacuation Procedures