

RESPONDING TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Based on Revised Guidelines issued by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

Glanmire Community College aims to protect the wellbeing of our students and staff, by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

Our Mission Statement: “Glanmire Community College strives to be a happy, safe, caring and inclusive Christian community, which promotes quality teaching and learning in an environment of mutual respect”.

The Board of Management, through Principal Mr Ronan McCarthy, has drawn up a *Critical Incident Management Plan* (CIMP) as one element of the school’s policies and plans.

A *Critical Incident Management Team* (CIMT) has been established to steer the development and implementation of the *Critical Incident Management Plan*.

The Staff and Management of Glanmire Community College recognise a Critical Incident to be “an incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school.”

The kind of critical incidents experienced by schools include suicide, or suspected suicide, death due to violence, accidental death including road traffic accidents and drowning, and death through illness.

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. Examples may include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, illness, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death.
- An intrusion into the school.
- An accident involving members of the school community.
- A major accident/tragedy in the wider community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.

We wish to extend our sympathy to our own school community, who has experienced tragic events over the years, and also to acknowledge the strength and courage displayed by students and staff during these difficult times.

THE ROLE OF NEPS IN A CRITICAL INCIDENT

The primary role of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is to advise, and support teachers and other adults who work daily with students and who know them well.

Best practise indicates that students need to be with people they know and trust. It is, therefore more beneficial if our school staff provide support for students as they will be in a better position to monitor our students over the days and weeks following an incident.

When a tragic event happens, NEPS response generally involves:

Planning: Helping school management to assess the significance and impact of the event, to draw up a plan, to mobilise the schools resources and to access other support systems.

Information and advice: Providing information and advice to management and staff, as they come to terms with the situation.

Support: Being available for consultation to school staff as they support the students. This may involve support meetings at the beginning and end of the school day.

Screening: Working with teachers to identify students who are most in need of support, and developing procedures for reviewing their needs and supporting onward referral, if necessary.

Response Level 1: the death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; the death of a parent/sibling; a fire in school resulting in serious injury; serious damage to school property.

For an incident requiring a Level 1 response, it may be sufficient to talk to the psychologist on the phone, who will talk you through the guidelines.

Response Level 2: the sudden death of a student or staff member

Response Level 3: an accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving a number of schools.

In the case of an incident requiring a Level 2 or Level 3 response, and depending on the incident, at least one psychologist will visit the school.

PREVENTION

Glanmire Community College attends to prevention by having systems in place which help to promote emotional health and wellbeing, and which build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events.

Mental Health Promotion is a vital element of this work.

Elements of the policies and practices that promote mental health and wellbeing among our students and staff in our school include the following:

- GCC strives to be a safe and inclusive school.
- The Provision of Effective Pastoral Care Systems.
- Clear Systems and Procedures for the identification of students at risk, and for referral to school personnel for screening and support.
- The work of the Guidance and Counselling Team in responding to the needs of vulnerable students.
- Links with external agencies and onward referral for those with more serious difficulties.
- Access to The Employee Assistance Service for staff members (Free phone 1800 411057)
- The integration of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a key element of prevention work, as it encourages students to develop their values and attitudes and helps provide the life skills they need to live healthy lives in the wider community.
- The creation of a physically safe environment, evacuation plan formulated, regular fire-drills occur, fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.
- Whole school focus on Wellbeing.
- Members of the school community are encouraged to speak openly about their problems and seek help when necessary.
- Wellbeing Module in Junior Cycle, as developed by NCCA.
- Staff members are familiar with Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and how to proceed with concerns or disclosures.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

Situations such as the sudden death of a student or a teacher can have a traumatic effect on a school. NEPS psychologists report that schools which have developed a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) are able to cope more effectively in the aftermath of an incident.

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team are selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. Members of the team meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Team Leader:

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC; CETB.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.

Garda Liaison:

- Liaises with the Gardai
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

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 the Critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of EAS and gives them the contact number. (Free phone 1800 411057)

Student Liaison:

- Co-ordinates information from Year Heads and Class Teachers about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from Critical incident folder)
- Maintains student contact records (*R1*)
- Looks after setting up and supervision of “quiet” room where agreed.

Community/Agency Liaison:

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

Parent/Guardian Liaison:

- Visits the bereaved family with the Team Leader
- Arranges meetings, if held. Facilitates such meetings and manages question and answer sessions
- Ensures that sample letters are prepared and available on the school’s IT system ready for adaptation
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from Critical Incident folder)

Media Liaison:

- 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 a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator:

- Maintains up to date telephone numbers of parents/guardians, teachers, emergency services, and displays these in the staffroom, the school office and the Principal's office.
- Ensures that a copy of the layout of the building is displayed in key places, with the exits highlighted.
- Identifies a dedicated telephone line, which will be kept free for important outgoing and incoming calls.
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response
- Ensures that templates are available on the schools IT system and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts
- Photocopies materials as needed
- Maintains records.
- Logs all offers of help - the name of the agency, what they are offering, a contact name and number. These agencies may be contacted later if appropriate.

Confidentiality and good name considerations

The management and staff of Glanmire Community College 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 confirmed 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

In the event of a critical incident,

DESIGNATED ROOM	PURPOSE
	Meeting with staff
	Meeting with students
	Meeting with parents
	Meeting with media
	Individual sessions with students
	Other visitors

Consultation and communication regarding the plan:

All staff members were consulted, and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

Each member of the critical incident team has a copy of the plan.

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

The plan will be updated annually during the month of May.

(See Checklist for Reviewing the Policy and Plan)

SHORT TERM ACTION PLAN FOR PRINCIPAL/TEAM LEADER

1. Gather accurate information about the incident.
2. Establish the facts. What has happened? When and how it happened? The number of students and staff involved. The extent of injuries. The location of those injured.
3. Contact the appropriate agencies. [See School's Emergency Contact List.](#)
4. Convene a meeting with key staff/Critical Incident Management Team to ensure the team is well prepared and has a plan for the school day ahead.

Agenda for meeting with Critical Incident Management Team

- Share full details of the event
- Agree on the facts which will need to be relayed to staff and students in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner
- Discuss what agencies have been contacted. [Emergency Contact List](#)
- Managing communication needs careful attention. Use of social media is a good medium for facilitating factual and appropriate communication
- Plan procedures for the day, including the possibility of school closure, but remembering that it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students. Teachers should give students opportunities to talk about what has happened.
- Discuss how to break the news to relatives and close friends. They must be told separately.
- Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students: preferably in class groups rather than large assemblies
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students
- Consider students of various nationalities and religions when organising prayer services, attendance at funeral etc.
- Plan a whole staff briefing (including ancillary staff). This may need to be done in two groups depending on the arrangements of supervision of students.
- Agree the text of a letter to be sent to parents. [See R2 & R3](#)
- Prepare a media statement [See R4](#). This can be placed on the school's website or used if an interview is requested.

- Delegate responsibilities to the members of the critical incident team
- Agree on rooms to be used
- Decide whether a quiet room should be made available for students. It is recommended that this is available for the week following the incident and that its use is reviewed. The room will be supervised. Students can sign in and out for a period of time. A similar room may be set up for staff.
- A record should be kept of all students seen by staff and external agencies. *See R1* (One person will collate these lists.)
- Agree the next meeting time for the Critical Management Team.
- Agree a time for a follow up staff meeting at the end of the day. This gives an opportunity for the Principal to update staff on any developments and allows time for preparation for the following day. It gives staff a chance to share their experiences and to wind down after the day.
- In the case of a major incident, meetings may be held in a location away from the school. Care will be taken that staff with appropriate experience and authority remain in place in school to facilitate an effective response.

MEDIUM TERM ACTION PLAN

The CIMT will continue to meet each day until the school returns to normal functioning.

Agenda:

- Review what has been done to date
- Make a decision about school closure
- Liaison with other agencies
- Contact with bereaved family
- Attendance and participation at funeral service
- Items to be addressed at staff meeting
- Review the schedule for the day
- Review of list of vulnerable students and staff and develop a plan for monitoring those identified over the next few weeks.

FOLLOW-UP ACTION PLAN

The goal of follow-up is to help the school community cope with the impact of the event in the longer term and to monitor those individuals with ongoing difficulties.

- Review the list of affected staff and students
- Discuss onward referral procedures to the relevant services
- Prepare for the return of the bereaved student *See R11*
- Discuss what the school will do in memory of the student(s)
- Discuss the management of exam results and, where applicable notify the SEC of the need to attend to issuing of results of the deceased.
- Return personal belongings to the family or families.
- Mark the school's calendar in advance with the anniversary date. Link with the family on any proposed commemoration.
- Evaluate the school's response to the incident and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan.

CHECKLIST FOR REVIEWING THE CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY AND PLAN

1. Has serious consideration been given to the school's approach to prevention?

2. Has the school defined a critical incident and given examples?

3. Have key roles been clearly identified and the assigned tasks outlined?

4. Have staff members been nominated to each of the assigned tasks/roles? _____
5. Are the personnel suitable? _____
6. Has each member of the team compiled their emergency pack (photocopies of relevant handouts)? _____
7. Has contact been made with external agencies?

8. Is the Emergency Contact List appropriate and complete?

9. Are letters and press releases readily available on school headed paper, for adaptation to suit the particular circumstances?

10. Are telephone numbers on contact lists up-to-date?

11. Has all the staff been consulted about the plan/policy?

12. Has a date been set for review of the plan? _____
13. Who will be given copies of the plan?

14. Where will copies of the plan be kept?

15. Have parents been consulted about the plan?

16. Have students been consulted about the plan?

Signed: _____ Date: _____