

Critical Incident Policy 2016-2017

The Abbey School aims to protect the wellbeing of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The school has taken a number of measures to create a caring, coping and supportive ethos in the school. The school has also 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 during the normal course of the school day and in the event of a critical incident.

Such policies would be contained in the Code of Behaviour, Anti –Bullying Policy, Anti-Cyber Bullying Policy, Guidance and Counselling Services, S.P.H.E. Programme, etc.

Definition of a Critical Incident

The Abbey School recognises a critical incident to be “an accident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school, and disrupts the normal running of the school”. Critical incidents may involve students, staff, the school or the local community.

Possible Critical Incidents

Examples of a critical incident may include;

- Family bereavements
- Suicide of a student, teacher or parent
- Death of a staff member or student
- School fire or explosion
- Severe physical violence in the school such as a knifing
- Accident on a school trip
- Accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Disappearance of a member of the school community

Aim of the Plan

The aim of the Critical Incident Plan is that in the event of such an incident as outlined above, the plan will help staff and management to react quickly and effectively and to maintain control of the situation. The plan will also help the school to return to normality as soon as possible and limit the affects of the incident on staff and students

A school which has a good network of relationships, where there is a concern for the whole person throughout the life of the school, will be in a better position to respond healthily to crises when they occur.

The core pastoral goals of the Abbey School are:

- Personal attention to value and develop every student
- Promoting an environment which meets student’s needs
- Priority given to the nurturing of teaching and learning relationships
- Recognition of talents and abilities
- Clear values that animate the school
- Strong collaborative leadership
- On-going monitoring of progress at every level for the student

The creation of a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school will be done in the following way:

- Creating a physically and psychologically safe school through the development of areas such as an anti-bullying policy, suicide awareness programmes, fire drills, equipment and building checks.
- Inclusion in the SPHE and RE programmes of areas such as communication skills, self-esteem, decision-making, bereavement, stress management and coping skills
- Regularly reviewing our pastoral care structures
- Developing links with outside agencies and procedures for referral
- Provision of the Rainbows Programme

The Policy

The policy is concerned with any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school.

Crisis Response Team:

The Abbey School has established a Crisis Response Team to manage its response to the death of a student or teacher or to any of the critical incidents listed earlier. The team consists of those available from among the following:

- Principal
- Deputy-Principal
- Relevant Year Head (s)
- Guidance Counsellor (s)
- Head of R.E.
- School Chaplain
- Secretarial Staff

John Kiely (Principal) will act as Team Leader or in his absence Pat Donovan (Deputy Principal).

The Chairperson of the Board of Management, the school Solicitor, school Doctor and/or NEPS Psychologist may be added to the team where necessary.

Response Plan

1. **Establish the Facts:** the members of the team will gather as soon as possible to establish the facts regarding the crisis – this may involve contacting others such as Hospitals, Gardai, Parents.

2. **An Outline Immediate Response:** The team will need to agree an immediate plan of action, which may involve:

informing students and staff

contacting parents

visiting the home of the injured or missing student

organising a school assembly and/or Prayer Service

alerting outside agencies such as NEPS, Samaritans, HSE

agreeing a common statement with regard to the crisis

3. **Inform**

It is vital that all those needing information receive it as soon as it is practicable. The team will agree a common statement. Such a statement will reduce the spread of rumour. All Staff will be alerted and informed in the first instance. Students will then be told as quickly as possible in no larger than normal class size groupings.

In the case where an accident has occurred on a school trip, the family members directly involved will be contacted in person by a member of the Crisis Response Team. Any practical help needed will be offered.

An agreed statement will be necessary in this case also to assist those who will telephone the parents of the other students on the trip so that they will be better able to respond when they make contact with their child.

In the case of a suspected suicide, great care should be taken not to use the term "suicide" until it has been established categorically that the student's sudden death was a result of suicide.

4. Liaising with the Press:

If there are to be enquiries from the press, Mr. John Kiely (Principal) is the only person to act as a liaison. In preparing a press statement, the following priorities will apply:

- the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis
- the non-release of names, addresses and telephone numbers
- the statement will only deal with known facts
- consider likely questions and a response to them

It is intended that this Press Statement be simple and brief. It should express the sorrow of the entire school community at the sudden death of one of their members and it should extend sympathy to the bereaved family. It should be adhered to-and not elaborated on-in all communications with the media and it should be familiar to every member of the school staff.

5. Others to be informed:

The Chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed by the Principal or Deputy-Principal and will decide whether an emergency meeting of the Board is necessary.

Contact may also be made with the HSE Crisis Service and, if appropriate, the school's insurance company and other concerned agencies will be informed.

6. Arrangements

Whether the school will remain open or will close as a mark of respect to the bereaved family will depend on the judgement of the Principal and management following consultation with the school staff. If the decision is to close the school, it will only be done after informing the students of the death and of the routine which the school will follow over the coming days, including involvement in funeral services. Parents will be formally notified of the school closure and other necessary details.

Record Keeping

All team members will keep written records of phone calls, letters, meetings, interventions, etc.

Confidentiality

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

This policy was adopted by the Abbey Board of Management on 13/10/2016. It will be reviewed in the light of experience and at least every two years.