



# Salesian Secondary College, Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick.

## Critical Incident Plan

### **Mission Statement:**

The mission of the Salesian Secondary College, Pallaskenry, is to provide the best possible education based on Christian/Catholic values in partnership with parents and within a caring community. This school incorporates the characteristics of Salesian Education as practised by St. John Bosco in his “Preventive System”.

In order to achieve this we aim to provide opportunities for students to:

1. gain skills, knowledge and understanding that will be of lasting value throughout their lives;
2. develop each individual's talents to the level of his/her personal potential for the benefit of Community and Society;
3. develop the characteristics appropriate to a member of a Christian community, including those of mutual respect and concern for others, irrespective of race, colour, gender or creed;
4. promote the physical and emotional well-being of students by developing self-esteem, personal responsibility and the ability to live and work with others;
5. work with staff committed to these ideals.

The references to “skills”, “respect and concern”, “physical and emotional well-being”, “self esteem and personal responsibility” have particular resonance in this policy on the Administration of Medications and Provision of First Aid to Students.

### **Preamble:**

Salesian Secondary College aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of Management has reviewed Critical Incident Management Plan in 2018.

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) steers the development and implementation of the plan.

### **Rationale:**

The staff and management of Salesian Secondary College 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:

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

Note: Circumstances may dictate that an incident, however troubling, may not be a “critical incident”, insofar as it is considered that it will not disrupt the normal running of the school. In these cases, elements of this policy may apply.

### **Aim:**

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react effectively and in a timely way 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 Salesian Secondary College:**

The work of Salesian Secondary College is underpinned by its pastoral care structure, which seeks 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. (See Appendix 1.)

### **Physical safety:**

- The school has a Health and Safety Policy Statement, which is constantly being updated.
- , the roles in which are clearly defined.
- An evacuation plan is formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person for Child Protection purposes are clearly identified
- Clear statements re collection of students / records re guardians exist
- There is supervision provided on corridors and in public spaces where staffing allows. The school has ratified a Substitution and Supervision Policy.
- There is a Health and Safety Officer in place
- Out of bounds areas are clearly identified
- The Main Office has a role in managing the arrival and departure of visitors and students
- There are defibrillators available for staff use and key staff are trained in their use
- Medical information is requested of all parents / guardians and this information is provided discretely for all staff. Responsibility for providing updated and accurate information rests with parents

- The school has a designated SNA team
- Tutor Time and SPHE, RSE, Guidance, PE, RE and CSPE classes are used to provide information about personal safety. The Guidance Department delivers seminars and one on one counselling around personal safety also.
- The school makes application to DES and SEC in relation to supports for students with SEN and with Health and Safety needs
- The school has 2 full time caretakers who can respond to concerns raised re health and safety

### Psychological safety

The management and staff of Salesian Secondary College 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 to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- The school has a Child Safeguarding Statement and other policies which underpin the physical, emotional security of the students eg Management of External Persons Policy, Medications and First Aid Policy etc.
- The school has ratified Guidance, Pastoral Care and RSE policies, all of which relate to pastoral support from students.
- Wellbeing Policy and Wellbeing Programme are in place.
- It has a recognised and well documented Pastoral Care Structure.
- The school has a ratified SPHE Policy. 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 prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff has access to training for their role in SPHE
- Staff is familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with concerns, observations or disclosures
- The Board reviews CP guidelines and procedures annually and Board members and management receive periodic CP training
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the post primary school student are available through the Guidance Department
- Information is provided through the Pastoral Care Structure on emotional and mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Periodic “Positive Mental Health” events occur through the Pastoral Care, Guidance and other Departments
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies –Gardai, Tusla, CAMHS, NEPS, local GPs and support agencies
- 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 ratified Anti Bullying Policy.
- The school has a ratified Code of Behaviour for Students.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. guidance counsellor or support teacher, Tutor etc), 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. (See Appendix 2.)

- Staff is informed about how to access support for themselves.

### **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.

While the composition of the CIMT may be planned here in advance of an incident, this policy recognises that individuals may have a key role as a situation develops: The Principal, Deputy Principals, Chaplain and Guidance Counsellor. Administrative and Caretaking Staff also work with the CIMT, as necessity demands.

### **Responding to a Critical Incident.**

The immediate response is to refer to this policy and to follow steps outlined here.

- Convene a meeting with key staff/Critical Incident Management Team. Depending on the incident it is advisable to arrange an evening or early morning meeting to ensure that the team is well prepared and has a plan in place for the school day ahead. See Appendix 3 for a proposed agenda for this meeting.

Establish the appropriate level of response (see below.)

See Appendix 4 for a guide to managing the short term, medium term and follow up actions which may be appropriate in response to a Critical Incident.

- Contact appropriate agencies (see school's Emergency Contact List: Appendix 5.)
  - Emergency services
  - Medical services
  - Board of Management
  - National Educational Psychological Service
  - Health Service Executive
  - Teacher Unions
  - State Examinations Commission
  - Parish Priest/Clergy

### **Response Level**

A classification of response levels is proposed, which is linked to a number of factors impacting on the situation. This classification in no way diminishes the seriousness of any particular event. It is intended to help

the school and psychologists assess what level of intervention is needed, including the additional supports a psychologist may need to request from colleagues and other agencies.

### **Step 1: What type of response is needed?**

Response Level 1:

- the death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill
- the death of parent/sibling
- a fire in school not resulting in serious injury/serious damage to school property.

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

### **Step 2: Should a psychologist be involved?**

Consider the nature of the event and how the school is coping. What support do we need from NEPS and/or other agencies?

### **Step 3: How do we assess the needs of the school?**

Is there a feeling of being overwhelmed by this event?

Has there been a previous incident? How recent, what kind of incident? If more than one, how many? (If the school has experienced a recent incident or a number of incidents, staff may be exhausted or distressed. On the other hand, they may feel more experienced and better able to deal with the situation). What precedent is there in terms of response? What have we learned from the past incident(s)?

Is there significant media interest in the incident?

Are other agencies already involved?

### **Step 4: What action do I take?**

For an incident requiring a Level 1 response it may be sufficient to talk to the psychologist on the phone. Follow “Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools” and the accompanying Resource Materials for schools.

It is also available on

[www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps\\_critical\\_incidents\\_guidelines\\_schools.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_critical_incidents_guidelines_schools.pdf)

In the case of an incident requiring a Level 2 and Level 3 Response, make contact with NEPS.

Exchange mobile numbers with the psychologist so that immediate contact will be possible at all times.

Sample letters to parents can be found in Appendices 7 and 8.

### **The Critical Incident Team : Role of Individual Members.**

#### **Role of the Team leader: The Principal.**

Determine whether it is necessary to activate the Critical Incident Plan.

Gather accurate information.

- What happened?
- Where?
- When?
- Extent of injuries
- How many involved?
- What agencies have been contacted already?

Convene and chair a meeting of the Critical Incident Team (CIT).

Contact and inform BOM.

Contact outside agencies as required.

Brief staff on a need to know basis at the earliest opportunity and keep them informed of developments as appropriate.

Make contact with the bereaved family (respect wishes of family).

Agree a specific time and location for media briefings (if required). Critical Incident Team Leader will deliver all statements to the news & media

Ensure that the school runs as normally as possible.

Access relevant training for the CIT on an ongoing basis.

Allow time for the CIT to review & update the Plan.

In the absence of The Team Leader, The Deputy Team Leader carries out the role of The Team Leader. The Deputy Team Leaders' role is delegated to the Deputy Principal Team.

Carry out regular Critical Incident Drills & Evacuation Drills.

Ensure staff are aware of EAS services.

#### **Role of the Deputy Team Leader: Deputy Principals.**

See that the school is running as normally as possible.

Make rooms available for counsellors, chaplains, parents, public & others.

Free up teachers who are:

- Members of the Critical Incident Team (CIT)
- Assisting with the work of the CIT
- Directly affected by the situation

Know what is happening. Know where it is happening.

Follow normal school routine as much as possible.

Link with Student Contact and Staff/Parent Administrator.

Organise for supervision of students.

Assign rooms / areas for counselling, chaplain, parents and students.

Assign a room for the media.

Assist in carrying out regular Critical Incident Drills & Evacuation Drills.

In the absence of The Deputy Team Leader, a Senior Staff Member carries out the role of the Deputy Team Leader.

Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually (shared with Guidance member)

Co-ordinates information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about

Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)

Role of Student liaison: A member of the Pastoral Care Team.

Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)

Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff (formal referrals are confidential and are held securely in the DLP's office.)

Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support

Visits the bereaved family with the team leader

Role of Community / agency liaison: A member of the Pastoral Care Team.

Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of key parents, such as members of the Parents Council and Emergency support services and other external contacts and maintains up to date resources

Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral

Coordinates the involvement of these agencies

Reminds agency staff to wear name badges

Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

#### Role of Parent liaison, in collaboration with the Principal and Deputy Principal: A seconded staff member

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)

#### Role of Media liaison (in collaboration with the Principal and Deputy Principal.): A seconded staff member

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 assist in drawing up a press statement and in giving media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

#### Role of Administrator (Member of the Admin staff.)

Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of Parents or guardians, Teachers and Emergency services

Arranges for the accurate recording of telephone calls and 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 as requires

Photocopies materials needed

Maintains records (health, contact details etc.)

Liaises with DP and P with regard to the arrival of visitors to the school

#### Role of Caretaker:

Have access to an inventory of all hazardous materials in the school & where they are stored.

Establish procedures for isolating hazardous areas.

In an emergency, survey damage and structural stability of the building and utilities and report to the Principal.

Work with members of the CIT, opening and locking rooms as required.

Be aware of all utility lines in or near the school.

Assist in carrying out drills and evacuation procedures.

Turn off utility mains if necessary.

#### Role of Board of Management Member:

If a Critical Incident occurs out of Term Time and the Principal is unavailable the Board of Management Representative will:

Contact family of student(s) concerned to find out facts of incident.

Inform the Principal of the incident.

Offer condolences to family on behalf of school.

Prepare a statement for media if required. (See appendices)

Attend the funeral services on behalf of the school.

Liaise with the Principal to determine if the school needs to take additional action.

#### 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.

Salesian Secondary College administration staff will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

All records will be filed centrally in a secure file in the Principal's / DLP's office.

### **Confidentiality , good name considerations and the Control of Information.**

The management and staff of Salesian Secondary 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 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.

Every effort will be made to ensure that language used, both within the school and outside, is discrete and respectful of the circumstances and people involved.

Information will not be shared unless verified for authenticity. It may be prudent to advise key stakeholders of speculation, but every care will be taken to control unverified information.

### **Critical incident rooms**

The choice of location for meetings following a critical incident will be made according to the nature of the incident and the size of group gathering together.

In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms may be allocated for use:

The staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff.

The library or designated meeting rooms, the Guidance or Management offices or RE Rooms may be used for meetings with students.

Designated meeting rooms, the Principal or DP offices, the Guidance offices, Teachers' Work Room or RE Room will be used for parents.

The Principal and Deputy Principals' offices or other suitable location will be used for media.

Offices belonging to key pastoral care staff will be used for individual sessions with students.

Suitable rooms will be made available for other visitors: The Year Head Room, the main office etc

### **Expressions of Faith.**

Salesian Secondary College is a Catholic school and, thus acknowledges that faith expression through prayer or religious ceremony and ritual have an important place in the management of a Critical Incident. The CIMT will assess at what moments during the management of a critical incident prayer, reflection, para liturgy and liturgy, which are inclusive of all members of the school community concerned, have a role.

In the case of religious services off site eg funeral, the Principal and CIMT will assess how the school will be represented. Students will not be permitted to attend religious services (or other gatherings connected to the critical incident) off site without written permission from parents / guardians.

In the case of attendance at gatherings off site, the care of attending students at critical moments of heightened emotion is paramount. Thus, the degree to which students may observe or participate in ceremony or other gatherings is to be decided by the supervising teachers, in consultation with the Principal and CIMT. Decisions will be made based on the age of the students, the circumstances at play at the gathering and the perceived impact on the students' ongoing well-being. This relates to, for example, Books of Condolence, Guards of Honour, visiting graveside or funeral home and other rituals which may be associated with a critical incident.

In all cases, the wishes of family members of the focus of the incident will be respected.

### **Consultation and communication regarding this policy:**

This policy and plan is a Management updated version of a similar plan ratified in 2011.

Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents was presented to all staff during the school year 2018, as part of the delivery of updated policies within the context of the completion of the Child Safeguarding Statement 2018.

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

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

The plan will be reviewed periodically.

### **Evaluation.**

School management will accept feedback from staff, students and parents made through the proper use of the appropriate channels ie staff meetings, student committees and PSAC. This feedback will inform periodic evaluation of the policy by management.

**This policy is incorporated into the body of School Policy from the date of ratification.**

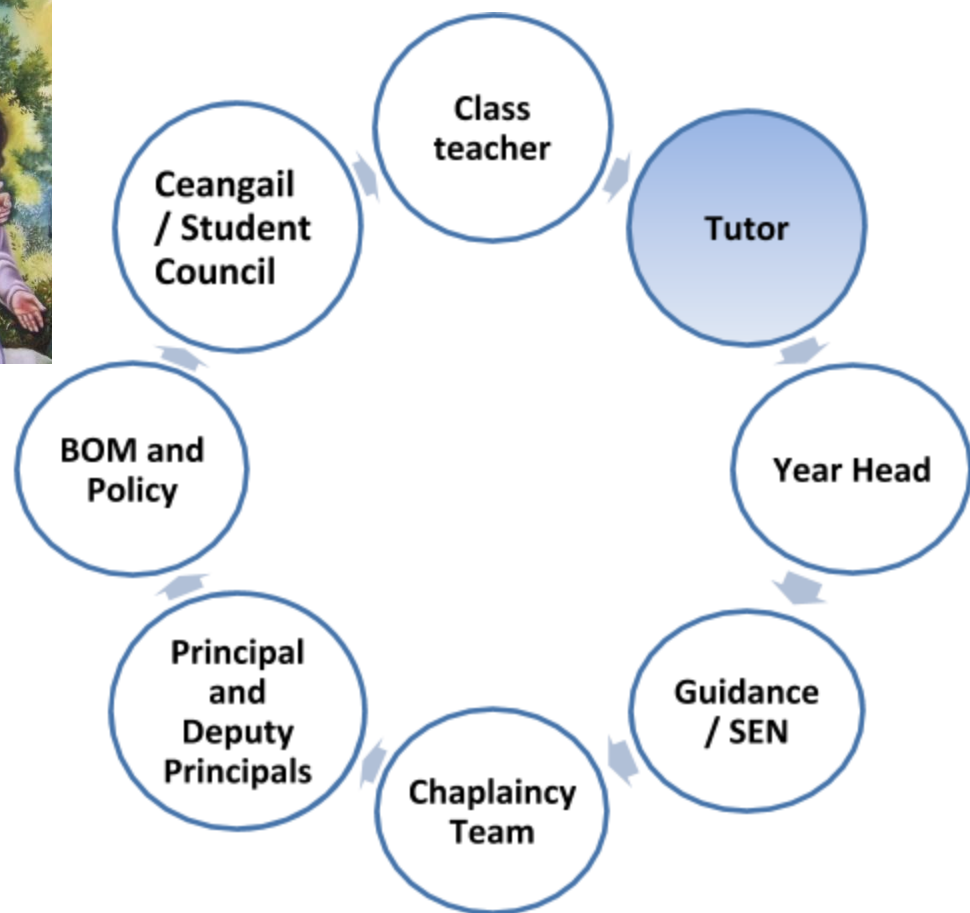
**Proposed date of review:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of ratification:** \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix 1.

## Pastoral care of the Salesian Secondary College's student:

Our Pastoral Care Structure is the bedrock of all we do in Salesian Secondary College....





**Salesian Secondary College,  
Don Bosco Road,  
Pallaskenry,  
Co. Limerick.**

Tel: 061 393105  
Email: [secretary@salesiancollege.ie](mailto:secretary@salesiancollege.ie)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parent / Guardian,

As you know, a member of our Pastoral Care Team communicated with you recently about your son / daughter.

We would like to follow up on this matter and would be obliged if you would provide us with an update about what has happened for your daughter since that communication. Please complete the table overleaf and return it to the DLP, Salesian Secondary College.

Naturally, this information will be treated with discretion.

Please note that the school is required to log certain episodes / concerns with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, under the terms of Child Protection Guidelines 2017. You can find more information about the nature of concerns which need to be logged and the support services of this agency at [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)

If you have any questions about this requirement or any other matter, please contact the school.

I hope that you will feel that Salesian Secondary College can continue to assist you and your child where this is considered suitable. I wish you well.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

Member of Pastoral Care Team.



To the Designated Liaison Person,

Re: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Following our recent discussion, I wish to inform you that I have sought further outside support for my daughter.

Tick appropriate box below, please. (Provide additional information in the space provided, if you wish, where appropriate):

☐

Family doctor: (please also give name of any onward referral made by your doctor, where this has occurred):

\_\_\_\_\_

☐

Community / Private counsellor: \_\_\_\_\_

☐

Psychologist: \_\_\_\_\_

☐

Other medical professional: \_\_\_\_\_

☐

Dean Clinic / Pieta House or similar organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of 1<sup>st</sup> appointment: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of next appointment: \_\_\_\_\_

**OR**: Following our recent discussion, I wish to inform you that I do not wish to seek outside support at this time because: \_\_\_\_\_ (tick.)

☐

Additional comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

# Appendix 3

## **PROPOSED AGENDA FOR MEETING WITH CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM/KEY STAFF.**

- Open with brief prayer.
- Share full details of the event.
- Agree on the facts. These will need to be relayed in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner by all staff to the students.
- Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional ones that that should be informed. Consider:
  - Emergency services
  - Medical services
  - Board of Management
  - National Educational Psychological Service
  - Health Service Executive
  - Teacher Unions
  - State Examinations Commission
  - Parish Priest/Clergy
  - Check Emergency Contact List : Appendix 5
- During major incidents phone lines may become jammed. Agree which phone line is to be kept open for outgoing and incoming emergency calls.
- When a number of external agencies is involved in a response, coordination will be needed and procedures will need to be agreed. An agency such as NEPS may take on this role
- Plan procedures for the day
- Discuss issues relating to school routine, including school closure. Remember it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. It is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students. Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what has happened and temporarily shelve all academic activities if necessary. See Appendix 8 for staff suggestions
- You may wish to consult students about what to do if there is an event scheduled such as a trip, concert, match. This should reduce the likelihood of students being angry later on as a result of any school action or in-action
- Discuss how to break the news to relatives and close friends separately and who should do this
- Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students. It is often best to do this with class groups, rather than large assemblies, (see R5)
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students



- Consider inclusion of diverse nationalities and faith backgrounds in the school if organising organising prayer services, attendance at the funeral etc.
- Parents of different religious or national groups may need to be consulted
- Plan a whole staff briefing (including ancillary staff). This may need to be done in two groups depending on the arrangements for the supervision of students
- Agree the text of a letter to be sent to parents, (see Appendices 7 and 8)
- Discuss how to deal with the media. Prepare a media statement place it on the school's website, if appropriate (see Section 9 and R4). This can be emailed to media representatives who make contact with the school. It may also be used if an interview is requested
- Delegate responsibilities to the appropriate critical incident team member or key personnel
- Discuss which room(s) will be available to external agencies and students.
  - Designate a Comfort Space for students and determine supervision of same. Students should sign out of their regular class and sign into the quiet room for a certain time. The room should be supervised to ensure student safety. A very distressed student may need individual support. This might be offered by the guidance counsellor, chaplain or other staff member. A similar room could be set up for staff
- A record should be kept of all students seen by school staff and agencies external to the school, (see R1). One person should be appointed to collate the lists regularly
- Agree the next meeting time for the Critical Incident Management Team/key staff.

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. It also allows time for preparation for the following day. Lastly, it gives staff a chance to share their experience and to wind down after the day

## **Appendix 4**

### **Contact Details Support Services (in preparation)**



## **Appendix 5: Emergency Contacts: General Practitioners in Pallaskenry Area**

Appendix 6:

Contact details for Limerick Schools.

School	Office	Principal	Deputy Principal(s)	email

## Appendix 7

### **SAMPLE CONSENT LETTER - INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP SUPPORT SESSION**

**Resource for schools: R2**

*This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are seeking parental consent for a child to be seen in a group or individually by a NEPS psychologist.*

Dear parents

You may already know that our teachers and staff have been providing support to our students following (specific reference to the incident).

Additional support is also being provided to our school by psychologist/s from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

The psychologist will be available, where necessary, to meet with individuals or with groups of students to help them during this difficult time.

The aim of such sessions will be to:

- a) Provide information about dealing with grief and loss in a healthy way
- b) Allow students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment
- c) Allow students time to comfort and support each other, under the guidance of experienced staff from .....
- d) Help students resume their normal routines as soon as possible.

If you would like for your son/daughter to participate in such a session and any follow-up meetings that might be scheduled, please give your consent by signing below.

**You should return it to the school immediately.**

If you have any questions, please contact **(Name and phone number of contact person)**.

I give my consent for \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in a Group/Individual Session  
Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Sincerely

School Principal,

# Appendix 8

## SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS – SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT

Resource for schools: R4

*This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a tragedy, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves.*

Dear Parents

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of *Name of student(s)*. We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

*(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost).*

Our thoughts are with (family name).

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. *(Elaborate).*

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their age.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or to be fearful, anxious, or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reactions. Over the course of the day to come, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

*(Optional)* An information night for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given.

We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school. *(Details).*

Principal's signature

# Appendix 9

## Responding to a Critical Incident: Useful resources.

- When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools (INTO/Ulster Teachers Union 2000)
- Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools (NEPS 2007)
- Guidelines for Schools on How to Respond to the Sudden Unexpected Death of a Student (ASTI 1997)  
Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group 2002)

# Appendix 10.



## **BREAKING BAD NEWS TO STUDENTS: Guidelines for Teachers.**

- Only if the family confirms the tragedy as a suicide, can it be relayed as such to students.
- The class of the student who has died should be the first to be told, with Chaplain, Counsellor and Class Teacher present.
- Other classes to be told by their class teacher.
- Not every class is going to be traumatised, some student may not even know the deceased, but it is important to acknowledge the loss for the whole school community.
- Tell the class you have sad news and it is difficult for you to do this.
- Let them know the name of the person the news is about.
- Let them know the facts, as you know them. (It is important to prevent rumours through misinformation).
- Encourage questions.
- Let the class know of common reactions to tragic news.
- The most common reaction is shock.
- Expect tears and outbursts.
- Don't allow a student to leave the classroom alone in a distressed state.
- Students must be supervised within the building while in a distressed state.
- Let them know that you will support them.
- Let them know who else is available to support them.
- Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news. Students can learn from your appropriate emotional response to bad news (crying, being sad or confused, searching for answers).
- Allow them time to mingle and talk to one another in groups.



- Explain how they can support one another.
- Be attentive to identifying those who are not coping well with the news.
- You may need to remind students again who is there to help, as little information is assimilated once in shock.
- Let them know where the Crisis Response Team will be (possible base classroom).
- Arrange to have refreshments ready also boxes of Kleenex.
- A short prayer for the deceased would be appropriate.
- If the students appear ready, a Year Group Assembly may be held later in the day.
- Some students may be able to continue and go to class.
- Some will need to stay with the Crisis Response Team for the morning.
- Encourage students to stay in school to support their friends.
- Some may need to go home, (only if parents come and collect them. Please go through proper, agreed channels.).
- Those who go to class may not be able to concentrate on work of the class
- Subject teachers will need to make allowances for them to talk in groups as the need arises.

## **After spending time with students in the wake of a Critical Incident,**

- Take time for yourself.
- Talk with colleagues.
- Rest, eat well, exercise, sleep, spend time with loved ones.
- Tell the Principal or a Deputy Principal if you are concerned for a colleague or if you feel you are not coping well, even after time has passed.
- Refer to ASTI Employee Assistance Service for Teachers.