

# **Critical Incident Policy for Aghamore National School**

## **Introduction:**

In Aghamore N.S. we aim to protect the well being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment.

The BOM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

## **Definition of Critical Incident**

The staff and management of Aghamore N.S. 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, their family members or members of the local community e.g.

- 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.

## **Critical Incidents Management Team:**

Leadership Role: Ann-Marie Stenson (Principal)

Communication Role: Deirdre Bracken (Deputy Principal)

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Lorraine Maloney

Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Gerald David

Family Liaison Role: Georgina Ruane -Parents representative BoM

Community/Agency Liaison: Caroline Peyton (Secretary)

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined.

The second-named person assists and only assumes responsibility on the absence of the first-named.

## **Roles and Responsibilities:**

**Leadership Role: Ann-Marie Stenson.**

### **Intervention**

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

### **Postvention**

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

**Communication Role: Deirdre Bracken**

### **Intervention**

- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

### **Postvention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

**Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Deirdre Bracken**

### **Intervention**

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide counselling

### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

### **Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Gerald David**

#### **Intervention**

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

### **Postvention**

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

### **Family Liaison Role: Georgina Ruane and Ann-Marie Stenson**

#### **Intervention**

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident

### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

### **Community liaison – Caroline Peyton**

- Maintain up to date lists of contact numbers - members of the Parents Council, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinate the involvement of these agencies
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies

**Media Liaison – Ann-Marie Stenson**

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

**Garda Liaison – Ann-Marie Stenson**

- Liaise with the Gardaí
- Ensure that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

**Action plan****SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)**

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff

**Media Briefing (if appropriate)**

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
  1. What happened, where and when?
  2. What is the extent of the injuries?
  3. How many are involved and what are their names?
  4. Is there a risk of further injury?
  5. What agencies have been contacted already?
- Contact appropriate agencies
  1. Emergency services
  2. Medical services
  3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
  4. NEPS

**Critical Incident Rooms**

In the event of a critical incident:

- The Staff Room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- The G.P. room for meetings with students
- The G.P. room for parents
- The G.P. room for media
- The G.P. room for other visitors

## **BOM**

### **DES/Schools Inspector**

- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths
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### **MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)**

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
  - Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
  - Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
  - Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate)
- Request a decision on this from school management
- LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the Health Board. Constant communication with family is essential.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staffs are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events)

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
  - Plan a school memorial service
  - Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
  - Update and amend school records

Drawn up by the Board of Management of Aghamore N.S on: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson BoM

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

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal

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

Review Date: November 2023.

## Student Contact Record

Name of staff member: \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

## Consent Letter - Individual or Group Support Session

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:

- Provide information about dealing with grief and loss in a healthy way
- Allow students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment
- Allow students time to comfort and support each other, under the guidance of experienced staff from [Aghamore N.S.]
- 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 the Principal.

Yours Sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_

Principal

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

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

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



## Advance Parental Agreement to Child Being Seen

Dear Parent

Aghamore N.S. has developed a plan for responding when a tragedy occurs.

When such an event happens, schools are offered psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), an agency of the Department of Education and Science. If we feel it is necessary, we would like to be in a position to have your child seen by a psychologist who can offer advice and support.

Before any child is seen by a NEPS psychologist, parental consent is usually required. We will make every effort to obtain this. However, in the unlikely event of being unable to contact you, we are writing to seek your consent for your child to be seen by a member of NEPS as part of our school's immediate response. This is to allow us to support your child in the best way possible. Your child may be seen individually, in a small group or as part of a class group.

If you wish to discuss this, please contact me at your convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal



### Option A

Please fill in the form below confirming that you have read this letter and stating whether **you wish** or **do not wish** to have your child seen by a NEPS psychologist. Please return to [Aghamore N.S.].

- ☐ I wish to have \_\_\_\_\_ seen by the NEPS Psychologist.
- ☐ I do not wish to have \_\_\_\_\_ seen by the NEPS Psychologist.

Parents/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

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

### Option B

The school will assume your agreement if you do not return this slip stating that you **do not wish** to have your child seen by a NEPS Psychologist. Please fill in the form below and return to [Aghamore N.S.].

- ☐ **I do not wish** \_\_\_\_\_ to be seen by the NEPS Psychologist.

Parents/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Sudden Death/Accident Notification Letter

Dear Parents

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) 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 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 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 tearful, anxious or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of psychical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are general short-term reactions. Over the course of the days to come, please keep an eye on your child and allow her to express her 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 - List.

Yours Sincerely

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Principal

## Critical Incident Management Team/Roles

Role	Name	Telephone Number (home and mobile)
Team Leader	Principal Ann-Marie Stenson.	086 3863300
Garda Liaison	Principal Ann-Marie Stenson.	086 3863300
Staff Liaison	Deputy Principal ISM Team Members Deirdre Bracken	087 9543211
Student Liaison	Principal Ann-Marie Stenson Deputy Principal Deirdre Bracken Relevant Class Teacher Lorraine Maloney	086 3863300  087 9543211  087 6487973
Parent Liaison	HSCL Georgina Ruane Ann-Marie Stenson	087 2943304 086 3863300
Community Liaison	Chairperson Seamus Tighe.	094 9367163 086 1641885
Agency Liaison	Secretary Caroline Peyton	089 4773718
Media Liaison	Principal Ann-Marie Stenson.	086 3863300
Administrator	School Secretary Caroline Peyton.	089 4773718

## Emergency Contact List

Agency	Contact Numbers
Garda: Claremorris Garda Station Ballyhaunis Garda Station Swinford Garda Station	094 9372087 094 9630008 094 9252990
Hospital: University Hospital Castlebar University Hospital Galway	094 9021733 091 524222
Fire Brigade Ambulance	999/112 999/112
Local G.P.'S: Dr. M. Brogan, Ballyhaunis Dr. K Keane, Kiltimagh. Dr. Anne & Dr. S. Kennedy, Kilkelly Dr. D. Murray Ballyhaunis Dr. D. Murray Knock Dr. P. Noone, Ballyhaunis	094 9632232 094 9381378 094 9367016 094 9630324 094 9388385 094 9630091
Dentist: Ballyhaunis	094 9630377
HSE/Community Care Team/Child & Family Centre/CAMHS	094 9042218/ 094 9042217
School Inspector: Martin Whyte	087 3298301
NEPS Psychologist: Kathleen Gavin	094 9028310 087 2025052
DES- Communications Unit.	01 8734700
INTO/ <b>IPPN</b>	1850 708707/ <b>1890 212224</b>
Parish Priest/Clergy: Fr. Gerald David	094 9367024 087 9968164
Chairperson: Seamus Tighe.	086 1641885 / 094 9367163
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057

## Aghamore N.S. CIMT Action Plan

### Short-term Actions - Day 1

Task	Name
Gather accurate information	Leader & All Staff
Who, what, when, where?	
Convene a CIMT meeting - specify time and place clearly	Leader - Ann-Marie Stenson
Contact external agencies	Leader & Secretary Ann-Marie Stenson & Caroline Peyton
Arrange supervision for students	Joe McDermott & Rebecca Kearns
Hold staff meeting	All staff
Agree schedule for the day	Leader Ann-Marie Stenson
Inform students (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	Ann-Marie Stenson Deirdre Bracken Lorraine Maloney
Compile a list of vulnerable students	Deirdre Bracken
Contact/visit the bereaved family	Ann-Marie Stenson Georgina Ruane
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	Ann-Marie Stenson
Inform parents	Ann-Marie Stenson (Letter) Caroline Peyton
Hold end of day staff briefing	Deirdre Bracken

### Medium-term Actions- Day 2 and Subsequent Days

Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Ann-Marie Stenson.
Meet external agencies	Ann-Marie Stenson
Meet whole staff	All Staff.
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	Ann-Marie Stenson & Staff.
Visit the injured	Ann-Marie Stenson, Georgina Ruane & Class Teacher.
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	Ann-Marie Stenson.
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	Ann-Marie Stenson, BOM & Staff.
Make decisions about school closures	B.O.M.

### Follow-up-beyond 72 hours

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Caroline Peyton
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	Ann-Marie Stenson & Class Teacher
Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family	Ann-Marie Stenson & Class Teacher
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BoM/staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BoM

