

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

CONTEXT

The mission of Ratoath Senior National School is to provide quality, holistic and inclusive education for all of our students. Our aim is to create a safe and caring environment, which encourages pupils to reach their full potential in an atmosphere of mutual regard.

In keeping with our aims to create a safe and caring environment Ratoath Senior National School promotes a pastoral care system, which is receptive to the changing needs of pupils and staff. We strive to make the environment psychologically safe through pastoral care, SPHE, our Anti-Bullying Policy and our Child Protection Policy. Incorporated within these measures is our policy on Internet Safety, our Social Skills programmes and Friends for Life. The Critical Incident Policy is part of that system.

A critical incident is “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelm the normal coping mechanism of the school.”

AIM

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively 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 students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to return to normality as soon as possible.

CREATION OF A COPING, SUPPORTIVE AND CARING ETHOS IN THE SCHOOL

We have put systems in place to help 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 in the school community.

PHYSICAL SAFETY

The school has developed and formulated a Health and Safety policy of which all staff are aware. The following practices have been developed to provide physical safety for staff and students

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- School exit doors are locked during class time
- Rules of the playground are enforced
- Cycling on school grounds is not permitted

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

The management and staff of Ratoath Senior National School 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.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by incorporating 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 have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and with details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Relevant books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school student are available
- The school has developed links with NEPs and the NCSE

- 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 clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated support teacher, 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
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

ESTABLISH FACTS

Any staff member becoming aware of a traumatic incident will inform the Principal or Deputy Principal. The crisis response team will be convened consisting of Principal, Deputy Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Management.

Name	Title	Role	Mobile Number
Lorraine Butler	Principal	Team Leader	(087) 248-7036
Claire Donnellan	Deputy Principal	Staff Liaison	(087) 919-0014
Siobhán Conlon	Assistant Principal	Pupil Liaison	(087) 995-4763
Mary Ryan	Chairperson B.O.M	Community/Media Liaison	(087) 638-3437
Fiona O' Shea	Chairperson P.A.	Parent Liaison	(087) 941-0125
Sandra Mc Gonigle	Admin/Secretary	Administrator	(01) 8254470

A full staff meeting will be held as soon as possible before the normal school day begins, when the CI occurs after school hours during the school week. A middle-management meeting may also be called at the Principal's discretion. A file containing all relevant contact numbers, templates of letters to staff, media, parents and guardians and specific roles of members of the Critical Response Team will be made available to those on the team. The CRT will consist of the Team Leader, Principal (and in her absence, the Chairperson of the Board of Management) and Deputy Principal. The Chairperson of the Board of Management (in her absence, the Principal) will take on responsibility of media access to the school.

It is critical that the school has correct and accurate information regarding the crisis. This may involve contacting others such as hospitals, Gardaí, parents. The family's version of a tragic death must be respected.

ROLES OF TEAM MEMBERS

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
- Liaises with the bereaved family
- Liaises with the Gardaí
- 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 known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Advises staff for the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials of staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually

STUDENT LIAISON

- Alert other staff to vulnerable students as appropriate

- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed (Library)

PARENT LIAISON

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- 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 meeting with parents (Numeracy room)
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

COMMUNITY/MEDIA LIAISON

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
 - ❖ Key parents, such as members of the Parents' Association
 - ❖ Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies
- 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 INTO
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

ADMINISTRATOR

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 - ❖ Parents or guardian
 - ❖ Teachers
 - ❖ Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the school system in advance and are ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

RECORD KEEPING

In the event of an incident each team member will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used and materials used. Sandra Mc Gonigle will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND GOOD NAME CONSIDERATIONS

The management and staff of Ratoath Senior National School 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 this also.

CRITICAL INCIDENT ROOM

In the event of a critical incident:

- The staff room will be the main room used to meet staff
- Students will be met in their classrooms
- SEN library may be used for individual sessions with students
- The library may be used for meetings with parents and the media

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

The Critical Incident Team will assign tasks within the group.

The Principal will inform the staff with as much factual information as possible.

The Deputy Principal will notify all staff to go to the staff room on arrival at school.

The Critical Incident Team will agree on a common statement with regard to the crisis. School routine for the day will be kept as normal as possible.

Staff members not present initially will be informed as soon as possible.

Class teachers will avail of the written statement: "Breaking the news to students". See Sample A below.

The Principal may co-ordinate a suitable service at her discretion and if judged appropriate by the Principal she might arrange to visit the home of the bereaved with other staff.

The Deputy Principal will contact N.E.P.S. Psychologist, Navan (046) 6909331 and (076) 1108639.

The Principal and Deputy Principal will draft a letter for parents and guardians (see Sample B below).

The Principal will liaise with those at an accident site (in case of an out of school crisis).

When the critical incident occurs in the school itself, during the school day, the following steps will be taken in addition to the procedure above.

1. The site of the incident will be out of bounds to the general school population.
2. In the case of a critical incident involving a student, his/her class teacher will be informed by the Principal or Deputy Principal. The Principal will then meet the class group most directly affected by the critical incident and in the company of the class teacher, inform them of the incident.
3. A suitable room will be made available to that class group for the rest of the day. Some students may wish to go home and may do so if signed out by a parent or guardian.
4. Chaplains and guidance councillors from the parish may be called on by the Principal or in her absence by the Deputy Principal to offer professional support to students who wish to meet them. Rooms will be made available for such meetings. Records will be kept of visitors.

INFORM

Staff will be alerted and informed first. An agreed common statement will be used when informing students and others, thus reducing the spread of rumour. The statement will give the facts as they are known in a sensitive manner, highlighting the supports that will be available and indicating the actions that are planned (Sample C below). Principal, Deputy Principal, Chaplain, Class Teacher and Special Needs Assistant will inform students in the classes most affected by the crisis.

In dealing with enquiries from the media, the Principal and her representative will act as a liaison. Names, addresses and telephone numbers will not be released. Students and staff will be discouraged from dealing with the media. The agreed statement will also be given as a response to enquiries from anxious parents.

Parents collecting their children if they wish must come directly into the school. Children travelling by school bus must be escorted directly to the bus.

SHORT TERM ACTION

Pastoral care will be needed for the students, teachers, parents and guardians. On day one of the crisis, the Principal will co-ordinate initial counselling for the most affected students. Students need to be with those whom they know best and their class teacher. Normal reactions need to be allowed. This will need to be monitored. It is important to normalise the thoughts and feelings which the students may express. Care will be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.

All staff will be on the alert for students in particular need.

FUNERAL SERVICES (where applicable)

Families will be consulted as to their wishes in relation to school involvement. Students will need to be prepared emotionally for the ritual of the funeral. Principal and Deputy Principal will decide which classes attend. The Principal will liaise with family and local clergy. The Board of Management will make the decision as to the closure of the school on the day of the funeral. If the school is to be closed, notification of the proposed closure will be made to parents, guardians, bus drivers and visitors.

MEDIUM / LONG TERM CLOSURE

The pastoral team will monitor students with the support of the entire staff. The Board of Management will encourage and fund specialist staff training and links with outside agencies in the area of change, loss, death, suicide and crisis issues (Rainbows for example).

As part of the SPHE syllabus, lessons will be taught in each school year on change with emphasis on problem solving techniques and on the services available both in school and in the wider community.

Teachers will be encouraged by the Principal or Deputy Principal to be alert to behaviour that would suggest that students might be at risk and to pass on such concerns to the relevant staff, Principal, resource teachers etc. who will deal with them to the best of their ability and where appropriate refer the person in need of further professional help.

REVIEW

Procedures will be reviewed annually in the light of experience and suggestions from staff, management and Parents Association and any change in personnel. Other schools and professionals will be contacted

Agency		Contact Numbers
Principal's mobile telephone number:	Lorraine Butler	(087) 07639433
Deputy Principal's mobile telephone number:	Claire Donnellan	(087) 9190014
Board of Management Chairperson's telephone number:	Mary Ryan	(087) 6383437
Parents' Association Chairperson:	Fiona O'Shea	(087) 9410125
Parish Priest:	Fr Gerry Stuart	(01) 8256207
Local Garda Station:	Ashbourne Gardaí	(01) 8010600
Community Garda:	Garda Ashling Connor	(087) 8292349
Fire Brigade:	Ashbourne	(01) 8352444
Ambulance:	Dunshaughlin	112/999
Local GPs:	Dr Ursula Keane Dr Michael Burke	(01) 8257901 (01) 8257151
Hospitals:	Navan Blanchardstown Temple Street	(046) 9071088 (01) 6465000 (01) 8784200
NEPS Psychologist		(046) 9093310
Community Care Psychology Department HSE		(046) 9078826
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)		(046) 9420803
Employee Assistance Service		1800 411 057
Family Resource Centre		(046) 9438850
Other local Schools:	Ratoath Junior National School St. Paul's National School Ratoath College	(01) 8256639 (01) 8257246 (01) 8254102
DES		(01) 8896400
INTO		1850 708708

Sample A

Notes to Staff on Breaking News of Tragic Incident

(Suggested Script)

"I have sad news for the class today. It is difficult to tell you. Yesterday evening a very sad thing happened. A boy/girl in _____ class _____. The next few days will be difficult for all of us and it is important that everyone be as supportive to one another as possible. I would like to remind you that help is available here in the school for anyone who might be finding it difficult to cope at any time. You should contact any member of staff if you are worried about yourself or another pupil. In particular _____ and _____ will be available to all students.

You may be asked by reporters for details about _____. Please do not give any information. An official statement on behalf of the school has been prepared and the reporters should talk to _____.

It is difficult for me to continue teaching, and I know it is difficult for you all, but it's probably best for us all if we continue normally as we can. So let's begin...."

Notes to Teacher:

- Please take note of individual pupils who appear particularly upset and pass on to _____.
- Please do not make any statements to the media. An official statement has been made.
- Prayers may be said only if deemed appropriate by the Principal for the occasion and with due respect for the religion of the child or relevant family.
- Please shred this page when you have finished.

Sample B

Letter to Parents / Guardians

Dear Parents / Guardians,

The school has experienced the tragic death of one of our _____ class students, _____. We are deeply saddened by _____ death.

The school staff is helping pupils cope with this tragedy.

It is possible that your child may have feelings that he/she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and encouraging him/her to express their feelings. It is important to give students truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

If you feel your child is very distressed and you would like advice or assistance please contact phone number: (01) 825-4470, fax: (01) 825-7118, email: admin@ratoathsns.ie

The National Educational Psychological Service will also be available to support the school.

The school will facilitate the attendance of _____ class at the funeral service on _____, with the permission of parents/guardians. Bus transport will be provided. Parents/Guardians of other pupils who wish to attend are asked to make their own arrangements. All pupils attending the service are asked to wear full school uniform.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

Sample C

Statement for Media on a Tragic Incident

It is with profound sadness that the Management, Staff, Students and Parents of Ratoath Senior National School have learned of the tragic death of _____, a student in _____ class. Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the family of _____.

A critical incident response plan has been put in place. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given help to cope at this time. Prayer services have been held in the school.

Our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this tragedy.