

# Woodbrook College Bray, Co. Wicklow



## Critical Incident Policy

This policy was drafted in consultation with the education partners at Woodbrook College, Bray, Co. Wicklow having taken into account relevant DES Circulars. This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

## Introduction

The main purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for dealing with any critical incident which may occur in the life of the school. The main aim of the policy is to lessen the effect of such a critical incident on the staff, students and parents of Woodbrook College, Bray.

## What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is one which arises suddenly. Critical incidents may occur in school or out of school, but both types will have a major impact on staff and students. An incident might be designated as critical where the result is likely to lead to serious disruption to the running of the school, or where there is likely to be significant public and/or media attention on the School. **This plan needs to be read in conjunction with the School Tours Policy.**

### Examples of in-school critical incidents

- The sudden death of a student or staff member through accident or suicide
- The death of a student or member of staff through natural causes, such as an illness
- A serious accident to a student or staff member for example a traffic accident
- Violence or assault within the school
- Destruction of part of the school building through for example fire, flooding or vandalism
- Abduction of a student
- A student or students absconding
- An illness such as meningitis within the school or the local community

### Examples of out-of-school critical incidents

- Death or injury to students or staff members while on a school journey for example a school bus crash
- An accident to a student or staff member while out of school on a tour, match etc.
- Tragedies involving children from many schools
- Civil disturbances or terrorist attack

## Rationale

Individual class teachers and Year Heads have an important role to play in managing critical incidents and may well be the best people to deal with the students in their classes. The main role of specialist agencies is one of support, empowerment and to support students who cannot be helped by the teachers within the school alone. In times of crises, teachers must react as they feel is appropriate and there can be no easy formula for dealing with critical incidents. However, by having a plan in place to be followed in the event of a critical incident occurring and by ensuring good communication within the school, a crisis may be managed more effectively and the resulting effects on the school community may be reduced considerably.

## **Critical Incident Management Team**

A core group, known as the Critical Incident Team, will exercise a leadership role providing direction, guidance, containment and support when a critical incident occurs. The role of the team is to review and direct the handling of the incident and the response and recovery process in order to:

- Ensure the safety and security of students, staff, other users of the premises and visitors
- Minimise the loss to the school in physical, human and financial terms
- Manage an incident to minimise disruption to the day to day operation of the school
- Liaise with appropriate agencies, including the media.

The Critical Incident Team will be drawn from the following persons:

- The Principal
- The Deputy Principal
- The School Chaplain
- The School Counsellor
- The School Pastoral Care co-ordinator
- The school secretary
- The Chairpersons of the Board of Management and Parents Association
- The relevant Year Head(s)
- The relevant Class Tutor(s)
- Other members of staff or members of the school community co-opted by the Principal as appropriate.

The Principal will act as Team Leader or in his absence the Deputy Principal

## **Critical Incident Prevention**

In an effort to minimise the risk of such incidents occurring, the Principal of the school or a person designated by them for example the Health and Safety Officer, will be responsible for the following on-going procedures:

- Organisation of practice drills to test the plan
- Regular review of the plan
- Arranging relevant Staff Development Programmes, where necessary
- Monitor staff and student adherence to the school Health & Safety Policy

## **Cultural Diversity**

Given the diversity that exists in the school and the community, it is important to bear in mind that certain individuals and groups may respond differently than staff would expect from their own cultural perspective. Some areas to consider include:

- Individuals and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds may respond differently to stress situations.

- Those required to respond to a critical incident may need to go outside the school to community support staff who possess additional language skills etc.
- Beliefs around concepts of religions, death and the grieving process differ amongst cultures.

## **Critical Incident Roles**

### **Principal/Team Leader**

The particular role of the Principal lends itself most clearly to being a supportive presence to others in the school. This is shown through acknowledging the feelings of those in any way affected and to providing formal and informal opportunities for people to chat and discuss the incident and its impact on them. Specifically the role of the Principal will be to:

- Alert team members to the crisis and convene a meeting of the team
- Co-ordinate/delegate tasks of the other team members
- Liaise with the Board of Management and the Department of Education and Skills
- In case of bereavement, liaise with the bereaved family
- Contacting Emergency support services
- Briefing and advising the staff and noting their feelings and concerns

In addition to the specific functions listed above, the Principal will have on-going responsibilities including:

- Having in place a trained critical incident response team
- Providing in-service to staff around issues of loss and trauma
- Promoting the inclusion of programmes that deal with bereavement, loss and related issues in the curriculum

### **Guidance Counsellor**

A pivotal role in the critical incident team will be the school counsellor who will have responsibility to manage and co-ordinate a range of counselling services required during times of trauma. Integral to the role of the counsellor is the relationship that is built up with the students particularly in the area of social and personal development. They have a role in supporting those students at risk and are also best placed to be a resource to staff and parents in a variety of ways. In addition, the school Guidance Counsellor has the following responsibilities in relation to critical incidents:

#### **On-going**

- Assist with the development of programmes dealing with bereaved and suicide prevention
- Support and resource those teachers involved in the facilitation of such programmes within the Social, Personal and Health Education programme
- Contribute to the organisation and delivery of in-service to staff around issues of loss, crisis management and suicide
- Develop a network and a working relationship with, the school psychologist, mental health professionals, clergy, Garda, local doctors and voluntary agencies

#### **As part of Critical Incident Response Team**

- Assist the Principal in co-ordinating the school response
- Clarify their role as co-ordinator of counselling services in relation to the specific critical incident
- Put in place a clear referral procedure to support staff in dealing with students in distress
- Address the immediate needs of staff in relation to dissemination of information

- In the case of a student death, attend with the Year Head to the needs of the class group to which the deceased student belonged
- Be available to students to support them, assess their needs and refer on as necessary

### **Postvention Responsibilities**

- On-going support to vulnerable students with a particular eye to the concern around copycat incidents. An effective identification and referral strategy will be a significant resource in this area
- In the case of the death of a student, continue to monitor the bereaved class group
- With the Critical Incident Response Team, evaluate the overall effectiveness of the school's response and put in place any changes necessary. In particular, the counsellor will be concerned with the effectiveness of the referral procedures; support panel of staff; the liaison with outside personnel/agencies and the programmes dealing with loss, bereavement and suicide

### **Pastoral Care Co-ordinator**

The school pastoral care co-ordinator has an important pastoral role to play in supporting students, staff and family members. In the event that the critical incident involves the death of a student, the pastoral care co-ordinator with the assistance of the guidance counsellor will play a major role in the response of the school to the bereaved family and to other families who may be distressed.

### **School Spokesperson**

Following a critical incident involving the school or members of the school community, there may be media interest that will need to be sensitively managed so that the involvement becomes part of the support effort rather than an unhelpful intrusion. As part of the school response, the Principal will appoint a designated media liaison person who will have responsibility for handling and dealing with all media enquiries. They will be the only person with authority to speak publicly on behalf of the school regarding the critical incident and in this regard, their specific role is detailed later in this policy document.

## **Critical Incident Aftermath**

### **a) During School Time**

In the event of a critical incident occurring during school time, the following action(s) should be taken and the following steps followed:

#### **By the Principal**

The principal should take the following action as soon as he becomes aware of the occurrence of a critical incident:

- Confirm that an incident has occurred and the scale of damage, injury or fatality. Clarify all facts and get as much information as is available
- In the case of an in-school incident, adequately assess the hazards and situations which may require emergency action
- Carry out an analysis of the requirements to address these hazards including notification of emergency services and evacuation of school building if appropriate
- Mobilise the Critical Incident Team (Appendix 1)
- Co-ordinate an appropriate school response
- Ensure that confidentiality is maintained until information is shared with the whole staff and clarify any relevant privacy issues.
- Brief staff (including secretarial and janitorial) generally and outline the plan of action
- Identify two telephone numbers:
  - School phone for incoming calls
  - Mobile phone for outgoing callsAppoint a member of staff to attend to the incoming phone line
- Liaise with the Board of Management, Edmund Rice Schools Trust and the Department of Education and Skills
- Arrange for outside assistance and supports for example NEPS, local counselling services, local clergy etc
- Meet with key staff who can offer student support and decide on the format for this
- Express sympathy to the family and assure them of the support of the school and designate a person to liaise with the family
- Prepare a media statement, appoint a media spokesperson and plan a response to requests for information and requests for access to school property
- Give support to others for example members of staff or students who have personal experience of similar or related incidents

### **By the Critical Incident Team**

The Critical Incident Team will take responsibility for the following actions:

- Hold a meeting to consider an appropriate response from the school
- Prepare a short statement for classes, including a short prayer
- Designate a room(s) for traumatised students to meet with the Chaplain / Counsellor or other relevant persons for example DES Physiologist
- Arrange for a “Quiet Room” to be opened and suitably furnished, where students and others can congregate for silent prayer, reflection and mutual support
- Help to identify vulnerable students (including close friends or relatives of those involved) and refer them for appropriate additional support either in-house or outside
- Draft an appropriate letter to parents regarding the incident and any school arrangements which are being made. (See samples contained in the NEPS Advice and Information Pack)
- Consider school involvement in any funeral services which may be held while at all times respecting family wishes for example guard of honour, readers, prayers
- Liaise with Health Service Executive personnel and NEPS psychologist if necessary

### **By the Teaching Staff**

The general teaching body will have responsibility for the following actions as directed by the Principal or representative of the Critical Incident Team:

- Read the announcement drawn up by the Critical Incident Team to their classes
- Acknowledge the name(s) of those deceased or injured in that class and in each subsequent class. Have a moment’s silence or say a short prayer
- Do not speculate with students about the cause of the incident. Give honest answers. All questions put by students should be acknowledged. Questions of ‘How’ or ‘Why’ in the case of suicide should be diverted. Information given should be low-key and factual based:
  - What happened
  - When and where events occurred
  - Who was involved
  - What happened after the event
  - What will happen next
- Don’t use ‘I know how you feel’ statements or euphemisms for death such as “sleep”, “passed away”, “gone”, etc
- Encourage students to be supportive of each other
- The teacher should feel free to express his/her own feelings appropriately
- Advise students of personnel who are available to them to help them deal with their fears and worries
- Identify and notify the Critical Incident Team of vulnerable students or students who are distressed. These students may need individual support
- Parents/guardians of distressed students should be contacted and advised of the situation before the students leave at the end of the school day

## **b) Outside School Time i.e. during holiday periods**

In the event of a critical incident occurring outside school time, the procedure already outlined should be followed in so far as possible. At the very least however, the following action(s) should be taken and the following steps followed:

The school will contact the Critical Incident Team members and carry out the following:

- Express sympathy to family and assure them of the support of the school
- Prepare a statement for the media and appoint a spokesperson if appropriate
- Notify the entire staff if possible by use of a scripted mobile phone text message (Appendix 2) and arrange a staff meeting before the school reopens fully. Do not leave messages on answering machines or with children
- Open the school and arrange for NEPS Physiologist, School Counsellor or other suitable persons to attend.
- Arrange for a “Quiet Room” to be opened and suitably furnished, where students and others can congregate for silent prayer, reflection and mutual support. Relevant members of the support team and teaching staff should be present.
- Try and arrange for key members of staff to attend the funeral if required
- Consider the involvement of Prefects / other students as appropriate e.g. readings, prayers, guard of honour
- Prepare a plan for the support of vulnerable students on the return to school.

## **c) During State Examinations**

In the event of a critical incident occurring during the State Examinations, the following action(s) should be taken and the following steps followed:

- Mobilise the Response Team and give support to students as in term time, where practicable.
- Contact the State Examinations Commission regarding examination students who are particularly badly affected for advice and assistance.

## **Remembrance Activity**

Family wishes should guide planning of a remembrance activity after a critical incident which involved a student or staff death.

- Open a book of condolence and present to family at an appropriate time
- Caution should be exercised against holding a large assembly to honour the deceased because of the potential for group hysteria and for glorifying death in the case of a suicide. Large assemblies are not recommended for acute grief situations
- Students or staff may wish to express their grief or sympathy by contributing something in the names (s) of the deceased for example a scholarship fund, school garden, plaque

etc. Caution should be taken when establishing a permanent or highly visible memorial to remember a student who completed suicide

- Staff should provide leadership to students wishing to establish an appropriate remembrance, as judgements of peers may be impaired following a traumatic event
- At time of inquest, anniversary or other significant dates, recognise the support needs of the family and school friends for example arrange family visit a few days prior

## **Evaluation**

This policy should be reviewed every two years and in the aftermath of a critical incident.

## **Notes**

### **(1) Suicide**

The school may wish to devise a separate policy for dealing with suicide. However, if suicide is the nature of the critical incident, the following should be borne in mind:

- The topic of suicide should be addressed, but teachers must keep the focus on suicide in general and not on the death of the specific person. Do not get drawn into arguments with anyone who believes suicide 'is a brave and noble act'. Focus on the loss and pain of those left behind. Discuss normal grief reactions and what students might expect over the following days. Reassure students that anger, guilt, and tears are all part of a normal response.
- Be alert to any mention of 'copy-cat' tendencies or mention of similar incidents from the recent past and bring such matters to the attention of the Principal/Counsellor

### **(2) School Tours**

As critical incidents may occur while groups are away on school trips, it is the responsibility of those organising school trips to supply the following information to the school principal in advance of the trip:

- A complete list of the names, contact numbers of all those travelling including the staff
- A list of all medical conditions affecting any of those travelling, including details of medication, allergies, special requirements etc
- An emergency contact number(s)
- A copy of the itinerary including details of any outside organisations involved in the organisation of the trip for example a tour company

## Appendix 1

The following information should be available both in school and off school by at least one member of the Critical Incident Team:

- Telephone numbers of all members of staff
- Name and contact details of key-holder
- Student contact information
- Details of names, location and contact details relating to all pupils and staff off site at any time for example on school tours, matches etc.
- Significant medical information relating to pupils and staff off site on school related outings at any time
- Telephone numbers of all members of the Critical Incident Team and all other relevant persons or organisations
- Location of school keys
- Premises and site plan of the school, including critical locations for example chemical storage, water mains etc
- Back-up discs containing all relevant school data

## Appendix 2

### Telephone Tree

Contact details for all members of staff are available as follows:

1) The Principal

2) [www.webtext.com](http://www.webtext.com)

**Log-on:** [info@saintbrendans.ie](mailto:info@saintbrendans.ie)

**Password:** Woodbrook2

## **Appendix 3**

### **Emergency Contact Numbers**

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1.	Gardai	Bray – 01-6665392 Shankill – 01-6665900
2.	Ambulance	999/911
3.	Hospital	Loughlinstown – 01-2825800
4.	Fire Brigade	999/911
5.	Department of Education and Skills	090-6442700 01-8896400
6.	N.E.P.S. Psychologist	Chris Chapple 01-7074427 087-9369242
7.	Barnardos	01-4530355
8.	The Samaritans	1850-609090
9.	Childline	1800-666666
10.	Parentline	1890-927277
11.	Aware	01-6766166 1890-303302
12.	National Suicide Bereavement Support	1800-201890
13.	Rainbows	01-4734175
14.	Bereavement Counselling Service	01-8391766 01-6767727

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**Appendix 4**  
**Short Term Actions and Roles Assigned**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Day**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Name</b>
Gather Accurate Information	_____
Contact Appropriate Agencies	_____
Convene a Meeting of Key Staff	_____
Arrange Supervision of Students	_____
Hold Staff Meeting	_____
Organise Timetable for the Day	_____
Inform Parents	_____
Inform Students	_____
Make Contact with Affected Family	_____
Deal with the Media	_____

**Short Term Actions and Roles Assigned  
24-72 Hours**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Name</b>
Review the Events of the First 24 Hours	_____
Arrange Support for Individual/Groups/ Parents/Students/Teachers	_____
Plan the Re-integration of Staff and Students	_____
Plan Visits to the Injured	_____
If a Death has Occurred, Liaise with Family Regarding Funeral Arrangements	_____
Attendance and Participation at Funeral Service	_____
School Closure	_____

**Beyond 72 Hours**

Monitor Students for Continuing Signs of Stress	_____
Evaluate Response and Amend Critical Incident Response Plan Appropriately	_____
Formalise Plan for the Future	_____

Inform New Staff and Pupils

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Decide on Appropriate Way to  
Deal with Anniversaries

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**Appendix 5**  
**Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The school has experienced (the sudden death/injury) to one of our students/staff. The whole school community at Woodbrook College are deeply saddened by this tragedy.

(Brief details of the incident and in the case of death, perhaps some positive remembrances of person lost)

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 that he may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen to them and encourage them to express their feelings. It is important to give truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

If you would like any advice or support you may contact the following people who will be able to help you (Details)

Yours sincerely,

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**Principal**

**Appendix 6**  
**Sample Letter Requesting Consent for Involvement of Outside Professionals**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Following the recent (tragedy/death) we have arranged specialist support for students in the school who need particular help. ( ) is available to help with this work. The support will usually consist of talking to the Students either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your child has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from availing of this service. If you would like your child to receive this support, please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by..... If you would like further information on the above or if you would like to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip, or contact the school.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_.

**Principal**

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I/We consent to having our child meet with .....

I/We understand that our child may have this meeting in an individual or group session, depending on the arrangements that are thought most appropriate.

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 7**

### **Sample Statement for Media**

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, staff and students of Woodbrook College have learned of the tragic death of.....

Our sincerest sympathy is extended to ..... family and friends

On hearing the tragic news, the Critical Incident Response Plan was put into immediate operation. The response team convened a meeting to ensure that students affected by this tragedy are cared for adequately and that appropriate procedures are put in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this tragedy are given all the help and support they need.

The school is offering counselling and support for students and parents affected by this tragedy. Prayer services have been held with each class in the school and students will attend and participate in the funeral service, in consultation with the wishes of the family.

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

**Review**

Review Date:..... \_\_\_\_\_