

Millstreet Community School

CRITICAL INCIDENT

MANAGEMENT POLICY



Based on *Responding to Critical Incidents Resources for Schools: R21, P. 34* (NEPS), Millstreet Community School aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. This is in line with the school's mission statement. The Board of Management, through the Principal, Mr Pól Ó Síodhcháin, have overseen the drawing up of a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) as one element of the school's policies and plans. The school has established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of this plan.

Definition of the Term 'Critical Incident'

The staff and management of Millstreet Community School 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

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 the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to allow a 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 critical incidents. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Physical Safety

Please refer to our Health and Safety policy

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of Millstreet Community 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.

Specific examples to Millstreet Community School include;

- A Guidance Programme is available to the students of Millstreet Community School which is coordinated by the guidance counsellor. The plan comprises of three key areas; developing *Myself*, *Developing My Learning* and *developing My Career*
- 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 have access to training for their role in Guidance and SPHE
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and those who are interested will be trained in SafeTalk (Suicide Prevention Awareness)
- Principal/Deputy Principal liaise with staff members where a need is identified
- Transition Years participate in the Amber Flag; a mental health initiative designed to help schools promote positive mental health within the educational system
- Staff are made aware of the availability of the Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme Inspire (See Appendix 3)
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies – information available in the school's Guidance Plan
- 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. See DES Circular 0023/2010 (Post-Primary)
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published in 2010 for post primary schools. This system puts a care plan in place for whatever student may require it. See also Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014). These documents are available on www.education.ie
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. chaplain, guidance counsellor), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, recommendation to take the student to the G.P and seek referral to CAMHS
- Each week, there is a timetabled Pastoral Care meeting with the Principal, Deputy Principal, Chaplain, Guidance Counsellor and Special Needs Coordinator to discuss particular student needs which may arise during the school week.

Further examples of practices carried out at Millstreet Community School are available in the school's Guidance Plan.

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 positions 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 contains a copy of the policy and plan. Discussed at the meeting will be the roles required by each member which include;

Team Leader Role

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC
- Liaises with the bereaved family

Garda Liaison Role

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

Staff Liaison Role

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials for staff
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually

Student Liaison Role

- Co-ordinates information from tutors about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students
- Maintains student contact records.
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Community/Agency Liaison Role

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
 - Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council
 - 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
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

Parent Liaison Role

- 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 meetings with parents (Board Room)
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents

Media Liaison Role

- In advance of an incident, will consider and prepare for 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 draw up a press statement (See Appendix 2), give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator Role

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

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.

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

A single statement prepared by the CIMT will issue from the school and an identified member of the team will deliver same. Other staff members are asked not to engage with the media including all forms of social media.

Management and staff of Millstreet Community School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of public statements. Members of school staff will bear this in mind, and seek to ensure that students do so also, e.g. 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.

Critical Incident Rooms	
In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms are designated for the indicated purposes	
Room Name:	Designated Purpose:
<i>Board Room</i>	Meeting of CIMT
<i>The Staff Room</i>	Main room for meeting staff
<i>Library/Classrooms</i>	Meetings with students
<i>Board Room</i>	Meetings with parents
<i>Board Room</i>	Meetings with media
<i>Chaplain/Guidance Office</i>	Individual sessions with students
<i>Board Room</i>	Meetings with other visitors

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

All staff were consulted and their views acknowledged in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments. Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff. 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 a member of the CIMT. The plan is a work in progress and will be updated as necessary.

Position	Name
Principal	<i>Pól Ó Síodhcháin</i>
Deputy Principal	<i>Frances Moynihan</i>
Chaplain	<i>John Magee</i>
Special Needs Coordinator	<i>Eileen O Leary</i>
Guidance Counsellor	<i>Denise O Leary</i>
Assistant Principal 1	<i>Jennifer O Donoghue</i>
Assistant principal 1	<i>Mary Fitzgerald</i>

The Principal is contacted immediately. He, in turn, confirms the incident with the family or the local priest. If the Principal is not available, then the Deputy Principal assumes responsibility for what follows. It is important to establish accurate information from an early stage so that rumours don't take over and cause more distress to those involved.

The **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)** is informed of what has happened as soon as possible. Whenever the bereavement occurs, a meeting of the CIMT will be held as soon as is practically possible. Should the incident occur on the way home from school, this would mean the CIMT meeting later on that same evening. The aim of doing so is to relieve some of the pressure from the following day. The CIMT will then also meet at 8am of the first school day after the incident. Should the incident occur during a weekend, or during a holiday, provision may need to be made for reopening the school.

Once accurate information has been gathered, two members of the CIMT will contact all members of staff to alert them to the current situation, and remind them to be in school for 8.45am the following day.

Using the lines of contact within the school (School Secretary), the Board of Management and the Parent's Advisory Council will be informed.

All groups will receive the same information so that there is no misunderstanding.

N.B.1 If the need arises to close the school the day after an incident, the school text message service can be used by the Principal to communicate this to all parents/guardians

N.B.2 Should the evacuation of the school be necessary at any time, Thomas Duggan has said that he is happy for us to take the students to Green Glens should the need arise after a critical incident.

N.B.3 If news of a critical incident reaches the Principal and Deputy Principal after school has closed for the day, the other members of the CIMT will be contacted and asked to meet at the school as soon as possible that evening. Staff will be informed by text from the school of the need to be in the staffroom for a meeting on the following day at 8.45am.

Short-Term Actions – Day 1

Meeting of CIMT at 8am

The aim is to:

- Agree on a statement for staff including secretary, students, parents and media. All stakeholders are asked to keep the information of the incident away from social media.
- Confirm the roles each of the group members will undertake during the day.
- Organise the timetable/routine for the day (adhering to the normal school routine as much as is possible)
- Organising a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Organise the supervision of students during staff meeting
- Inform and ask for the assistance of the relevant agencies, if not already done.

Hold Staff Meeting at 8.45am

All staff should attend, including non-teaching staff. Two members of the CIMT will address and deal with the following:

- A brief written statement will be given of all the facts that can be disclosed at this stage. This is so that everyone is agreed as to what should be said to students
- An opportunity for staff to express their views/feelings and their comfort with engaging with students around this issue

- *Agreement* as to how facts should be made known to the students
- An outline of the timetable/routine of the day
- Information for staff about which outside agencies have been contacted, or are involved, and what supports will be put in place for both staff and students
- Procedures (See page 2) are in place for addressing vulnerable staff/students

During this meeting, school bells will be turned off, and the two members of the CIMT will supervise the students in the corridor.

First Class Contact of the Day

- Not every class is going to be traumatised. Some students may not even know the people involved, but it is important to acknowledge the loss for our whole school community.
- The tutorial/s of the people involved should be the first to be told, with Chaplain and Class Tutor, if comfortable to do.
- For other classes, subject teachers of the first class inform the pupils if the teacher is comfortable with this. If not, two members of the CIMT will call promptly. This should be done in a sensitive but clear way. The nature of the incident has an influence on how the students are informed. Especially in the case of suicide, do not glorify the actions of the individual or present suicidal behaviour as an effective strategy for coping with difficult situations. *Only if the tragedy is confirmed as a suicide by the family, can it be relayed as such to the students.* Rumours should not be entertained or discussed. (see Appendix One: *Breaking the news of a tragedy to students*)
- The pupils should be given the chance to talk amongst themselves. If any teacher is not comfortable with informing a class, one of the CIMT will assume the responsibility. Information should be given of the supports available within the school (e.g. chaplain, guidance counsellor), and those from outside the school who will be available (e.g. counsellors, local clergy), and in what rooms they can be found.
- Acknowledge pupils' varying reactions – grief is a natural process.
- After about 15 minutes of the first class, two members of the CIMT will call to colleagues in each class to check how things are going.

When it is appropriate to continue with work, it might be better to do revision rather than new work, so that students might not feel under as much pressure.

Make Contact with Bereaved Family

If possible, or appropriate, the chaplain / a member of the CIMT will visit the bereaved family and, during this or a subsequent visit, will liaise with a relative regarding funeral arrangements and the school's possible involvement. The wishes of the family will be taken into consideration in by the school in its response to what has happened.

Dealing with the Media

A written statement prepared by the CIMT (see Appendix 2). This is the only comment that should be made to the media from the school. This statement should include:

The facts about the incident;
What has been done already?
What is going to be done?
Positive information or comments about the deceased person

Facilitate the Contact of Parents of Distressed Students

Contact will be made with the parents of distressed students by the relevant class tutor/member of CIMT. This is to highlight our care, to inform the parents of our concerns, and possibly suggest that the student might be better at home, with family support, for the remainder of the day.

Prayer Services

The chaplain will organise prayer services with various tutorial/year groups as appropriate. How these are planned will depend on the year group of the student who has died, and also if there are siblings in other year groups. These can be held in their tutorial room or the library, depending on group size. The Oratory will be open and available for any staff or students who wish to use it. A book of condolence should be opened and placed in the Oratory, or in another central location in the school.

The Rest of the School Day

School should continue its normal routine, as much as possible, to maintain a calm, supportive environment, while allowing some flexibility.

- Staff, who for whatever reason are unable to be involved in the school's direct response, are free to opt out and cover will be provided.
- During the day, all teachers should continue to stress the supports that are available within the school for students.
- At the start of lunchtime (12.30pm), there should be a meeting of CIMT to evaluate the school response to date, gather names of students who colleagues are concerned about, agree a plan for the afternoon.
- During break and lunchtime, more staff than usual could mingle with students to support upset students.
- Staff should be made aware of the support services that they may wish to avail of (See Appendix 3)
- A brief staff meeting should be held at 3.50pm to discuss how the day went, identify vulnerable students, and tell of plans and arrangements for the funeral, if available.

Medium-Term Actions – 24 to 72 Hours

Review the Events of the First 24 Hours

1. The CIMT should meet again.

- Briefly check how each person in the group is coping
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Confirm also what the family's wishes are regarding the school's involvement in the funeral. On the basis of this, share out responsibilities regarding the school's participation (i.e. Guard of Honour, readings, music). Invite other staff involvement in the organisation of this. Be aware of different religious traditions and faiths

- Deputy Principal to arrange for floral tribute if appropriate

2. Hold a staff meeting with all staff, if necessary. It is important to ensure that staff are kept up to date on any developments. Get feedback from teachers about students they have concerns over. Be sensitive to how colleagues are coping on a personal and a professional level.

The Funeral

1. The Principal will contact the relevant bodies about closing the school on the day of the funeral, if appropriate, as a mark of respect. Contact the necessary bodies regarding this e.g. bus services, canteen

2. The member of staff responsible will co-ordinate the students for the guard of honour. The Principal, Deputy Principal, the class tutor may also form part of the guard of honour, and other staff members will be welcome to join in if they wish.

3. Students who are involved in a particular way in the funeral should be dressed in full school uniform as they will be representing the school

When School Reopens

1. Member of the CIMT should liaise with anyone who is absent because of the incident on their return to school

2. Pupils seen as vulnerable are personally referred to Chaplain/Guidance Counsellor.

3. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD): This includes;

- If a number of students appear to be coping badly with the events of the previous couple of days, there will be scope for meeting with them as a group.
- This is a recognised method of coping with the aftermath of a traumatic incident in a school.
- The students affected are invited to attend the meeting
- The session will follow a clear structure and it is hoped that it will enable individuals not to get 'stuck' in the tragedy of what has happened.
- The session will be facilitated by the Chaplain and the Guidance Counsellor, and should involve the class tutor of the deceased, or another teacher who knew them well.

AIMS

- to provide them with a safe, confidential place in which to tell their story
- to alert the school to individuals who are in need of more specific longer term support
- to prevent the onset of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)


Mass/Prayer Service

1. If a Mass of Remembrance is requested afterwards, it could be held on an appropriate day/evening in the school library
2. If a Mass/ Prayer Service is requested by a particular class/tutorial, this could be organised within a religion class

Long-Term Actions

- Monitor students/staff for signs of continuing distress
- Evaluate response to incident and amend the school's protocol for dealing with the sudden death of a student where needed
- Ensure that new staff members are aware of the school's protocol and of which pupils have been affected by a recent traumatic incident, and in what way
- CIMT meeting for themselves (CIMT members) and also to assess/follow up on the students/staff affected by the incident
- Decide on an appropriate way of dealing with anniversaries. They can trigger emotional responses in staff/students and additional support may be needed at such times.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on January 28th 2020

Signed: 
Chairperson

Signed: 

Principal / Secretary to the Board of Management

Date for Review: May 2021