

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY



**ST OLIVER POST PRIMARY
OLDCASTLE**

2016-2017

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PREAMBLE

St Oliver Post Primary will respond to critical incident situations in a manner that insures optimum safety for students and staff members. Critical incidents are defined as violent acts or emergencies causing serious injuries or actual, attempted or threatened suicide and sudden death situations. They overwhelm the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupt the running of the school.

In all our policies St Oliver PP wishes to respect and embrace the practices of all cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. We are dedicated to a community in which the dignity of each student, staff member and parent is honoured and reflected in school policies and structures.

Outlined below are eight guidelines to be referred to in crisis situations:

ESTABLISH THE FACTS:

It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. Therefore it is important that senior and involved staff gather to establish the facts- this may involve contacting others such as hospitals, Gardaí, parents.

AN OUTLINED IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

This group (i.e. the staff involved with the crisis- the Critical Incident Team, the Pastoral Care Team) will need to agree an immediate plan of action, which may involve:

- Informing students and staff
- Contacting parents
- Visiting the home(s) of the student(s) involved- Principal, Year Head, Class Tutor
- Organising a school or class assembly
- Involving other staff, religion teachers, etc.
- Alerting outside agencies such as Counsellors, Samaritans etc.
- Agreeing a common statement with regard to the crisis for the media for example
- Assigning tasks within the group

INFORM

It is vital that all those needing information receive it as soon as is practicable. It is helpful if a common statement is agreed when informing students and others. Such a statement will reduce the spread of rumour. Attempt to alert and inform staff in the first instance. If at all possible, the students should be told at the same time in no larger than normal class size.

The statement should seek to:

- Be communicated in a sensitive manner
- Give the facts as they are known
- Highlight the support that will be available
- Indicate the actions that are planned

In the case of suspected suicide, great care should be taken not to use the term 'suicide' until it has been established categorically that the student's death was as a result of suicide. Use the term 'tragic death' instead.

In the case where an accident has occurred on a school trip, a similar statement is needed to assist those who will be telephoning relatives. It is preferable to have a group of people involved so that all concerned are informed in or around the same time. Some further considerations in contacting parents:

- Offer any practical help needed- transport, phone numbers, contact names
- Enquire if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support
- Carefully review with the parent that the information given has been fully understood
- Alerting all other involved parents to the trauma will help them when they subsequently make contact with their child.

Liaising with the Press

If there are to be enquiries from the press, it is important that the school cater for this possibility by nominating one person only to act as a liaison. In preparing a press statement thought should be given to the following suggestions:

- Priority to be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis
- The non-release of names, addresses and phone numbers
- Rely on facts and avoid speculation
- Consider likely questions and a response to them
- Agree with the press a time for briefings if this is necessary in an ongoing situation
- Nominate a specific location for press briefings

It is recommended that this Press Statement be simple and brief. If appropriate, it should express the sorrow of the entire school community at the sudden death or illness of one of their members and it should extend sympathy to the bereaved family. This statement should be adhered to- and not elaborated on- in all communications with the media and it should be familiar to every member of the school staff.

Others to be informed

When possible, inform the chairperson of the Board of Management and decide whether an emergency meeting of the Board is necessary.

Whether the school will remain open or will close as a mark of respect to the bereaved family will depend on the judgement of the Principal, management and the Board of Education following consultation with the school staff. If the decision is to close the school, it is advisable to do so ONLY after informing the students of the student's death and of the routine which the school will follow over the coming days. Parents should be formally notified of the school closure.

Consider when, or if, it is appropriate to inform the school's insurance company and other concerned agencies.

SHORT- TERM ACTION

The action that is needed in the short-term will obviously be very dependent on the nature of the crisis. Actions will come under a number of headings:

- Students
- Staff
- Parents

Students

-In the case of a sudden death the Principal should inform the student body at the earliest possible opportunity. He/She should begin with the deceased students class or classes. He/She should be prepared to spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to the news of the death. It would be useful if the Class Tutor or another appropriate person such as the Guidance Counsellor accompany the Principal and remain with the class after his/her departure. In addressing the class, the Principal should tell students of their friend's sudden death and advise that it is an event with which everyone- students and teachers- will find difficult to cope with. He/She should also explain the routine for the day and the following days and the arrangements which will be available for students to see the Guidance Counsellor and other support services.

- Efforts should be made to sustain an atmosphere where it is 'okay' to talk about the experience. This may cause problems for some teachers. However, all staff who are available and willing, should be asked to lend a hand. This will entail sensitivity on the part of the Year Heads and Principal as regards time needed for such sharing. Care should be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.

- The most essential quality in adults needed by students is that of listening. The school needs to put in place a support system for students in this regard. Such a system will again involve those staff who are willing and able to offer support, together with outside professionals where required, time and resources to carry out their role, a method of supporting each other, and a review of their effectiveness.

- The involvement of students in any funeral or other services needs to be discussed. This requires invitation, planning and review. The families involved need to be consulted, the students invited to take part, time given to prepare for this participation and, finally, a debriefing of those concerned. While it would be appropriate for the deceased student's classmates to attend the church services and the burial, it may be inappropriate for large numbers of students to be present. The presence of large numbers of young people at such highly charged events could prove to be inappropriate as well as being upsetting for individual students and for the parents of the deceased student. **At all times the rights of the deceased family to privacy must be respected.**

- The students may wish to organise some service or ritual within the confines of the school. They should be consulted as to the nature of such a service. Such an event may be of great benefit to staff and parents.

- Attention needs to be given to the possible signs of distress being exhibited by students. In noticing possible signs, it is important to say that these are not necessarily indicative of stress in relation to a trauma. Rather they are merely prompts to staff as the 'watch out' for students in their care. Such signs will be related to uncharacteristic behaviour, for example, being unusually quiet. It is important that staff check out signs with others before drawing conclusions.

- Students need to be asked their 'permission' regarding discussing their feelings and reactions to a crisis. The Principal, Deputy Principals, Year Heads, Guidance Counsellor are key people in addressing the needs of individual students.

- Freedom to be upset is important for anyone responding to a trauma. The school needs to ask itself how it creates a safe atmosphere for this to occur.

- Students not directly involved with the trauma should also be monitored as some may be affected. We know this from our own past experience. Allowing students to express their sympathy can be a catalyst for such students- writing a card, attending a service.

- Constant reminders will need to be given in relation to the supports that are available within the school. We know that students react in different ways and at different times in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

- Focus on the friends of a bereaved student, as they can be the best source of support. Often the bereaved student may not wish to speak to an adult and may rely heavily on friends. These close friends may need support as they attempt to find ways to be of help.

Staff:

- Many staff, following a trauma, may need to air their feelings and reactions. It may be helpful to consider a number of options such as; staff meeting, inviting in professional help, a staff prayer service, a simple confidential questionnaire to determine needs of the staff.

- Care needs to be taken of those staff directly involved with the trauma that they receive support, are not overworked, and have time to de-brief
- Staff who feel for whatever reason, that they are unable to be involved in the school's direct response to the trauma should be able to opt out readily
- Those staff having any concerns about students or others in relation to the trauma should have easy access to personnel who assist them.
- The guidance counsellor, chaplain and other members of the Pastoral Team will be the key resource in the short and medium term response. They need to be facilitated, resourced and supported in their task. It is vital that they regularly meet with the Principal in reviewing progress. It will be this group who can liaise with, and support, the other members of staff.
- The Principal will also need to ensure (s) he is receiving support. The weight of responsibility surrounding a crisis may be enormous. Principals are often people who are very competent in practically responding to a crisis. Nonetheless, the Principal need to take care of his/her own well-being and should seek whatever support appropriate within and outside the school community.

Parents:

- The school will have some role to play in supporting parents concerned with a trauma. This will vary depending on the nature of the crisis and the resources available to the school.
- The school should nominate contact people for parents to liaise with, particularly in regard to monitoring the progress of their children.
- Put parents in contact with each other if appropriate.
- Discuss with involved parents and/or Parent's Association what action could be taken to support those concerned.
- Involve parents in a school liturgy following a tragedy

FUNERAL SERVICES

- Decide what form of representation is appropriate. It is essential where possible, to consult the family concerned. Do not presume that the bereaved family will want a very public presence by the school.
- Prepare students ahead of the funeral. For some this may be the first occasion they have been exposed to a major grief.
- For those students who wish, encourage and assist them to write a personal message of sympathy. Consider also a common expression from students and/or staff.
- Check out, perhaps with the funeral directors, the arrangements concerning floral tributes. Any accompanying messages should be hand written.

- If possible, representatives of the school should visit the home of the bereaved. If students request to visit the home, phone ahead to check that this is appropriate. Visiting the bereaved may be distressing- support those involved.

PROVISIONAL STRATEGY

Order of Action:

1. Confirm event and clarify facts – Principal/Deputy Principal
2. Express sympathy to family concerned - (as required) Principal, Deputy Principal
3. Establish school contact with family - (as required) Principal
4. Activate C.I Team – Principal/Deputy Principal
5. Make contact with other agencies (as required) – Ms McArdle, Ms Ferris
6. Provide on-going support to staff and students
7. Arrange supervision of students (as required) – Year Heads
8. Meeting of Pastoral Care Team
9. Hold Staff Meeting (as required) – Principal, Deputy Principal
10. Arrange/Attend any religious serviced required
11. De-briefing meeting of (a) Critical Incident team (b) staff

Communications:

1. Decide how news to be communicated to different groups – in person – Principal if available, Year heads
2. Prepare simple public statement (Team) of sympathy etc., - Ms Lynch
3. Organize designated room for media (as required) – Boardroom
4. Immediate needs of staff – information/counselling – Principal/Deputy Principal, NEPS
5. Monitor class/group/individuals most affected – **DO NOT** leave students on their own – all teachers
6. Refer, as appropriate, to other/outside agencies – Ms McArdle, Ms Ferris

MEDIUM AND LONG- TERM ACTION

The following are merely a selection of the possibilities worthy of consideration:

- Students returning to school after a major action or bereavement cannot be easily categorised in terms of their needs. The Pastoral Care team will be a useful resource in seeking to support each student appropriately. Care should be taken to monitor their relationship with peers and teachers; falling behind in academic and other work; involvement in extra-curricular activities.

- Consider if a special day of reflection/retreat would benefit the class affected by a tragedy.

- Offer the Rainbows Programme to the students. Such groups will be a resource to the school in responding to the medium and long-term needs of young people and adults in the school community most affected by a tragedy.

- The Pastoral Team will benefit all in the school by constantly reviewing the needs of the students, staff and parents in relation to issues of trauma.
- The Pastoral Team, in co-operation with the Principal, should constantly review curricular provision, specialist staff training and links with outside agencies in the area of change, loss, death and crisis issues.
- When a subsequent bereavement occurs in the school setting, take care to support those who were bereaved previously as this subsequent trauma may trigger deep emotional reactions.
- The school should consider holding an annual remembrance service for all those connected to the school community who have died. Students, staff and parents can be encouraged to record the names of those they would like remembered.
- The school might consider the dedication of a tree, special garden, piece of artwork, notice board to recall those that have died.

REVIEW

It is vital to regularly review all those procedures in the light of experience. It is most helpful to take time to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and procedures subsequent to their application. It is also a good idea to make contact with other schools and professionals to compare the effectiveness of their Trauma Response Plan and assess courses of action both proposed and taken.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this Plan will be of support in the event of a tragedy occurring in our school community. It is important to note however that these guidelines cannot replace the most vital qualities needed in dealing with such personal issues as suicide, bereavement and loss- the sensitivity, care and compassion we offer to one another and our students on a daily basis.

PRINCIPAL'S CHECKLIST/ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

The following is a checklist of things to consider on the morning of a tragedy. They are not written in order of what must come first etc. It is important for a Principal to take time to plan what he/she must do and what is appropriate to say to all concerned.

Short term

- Take time to let the news sink in
- Call a meeting of the Pastoral Team, include Year Head and Tutor of deceased student (see notes on same)
- Put together as much factual information as possible
- Inform staff what has happened

- Discuss school routine for the first day with the staff
- Identify particular students who may need to be told individually, e.g. close friends, relatives etc.
- Inform the pupils that a student has tragically died and explain that this is something that everyone will find difficult to cope with. Explain school routine for the day and support and back-up for the students.
- Contact Local Health Board Crisis Service
- Make contact with the family of the deceased
- Meet with key staff who can offer student support and decide on the format for this.
- Decide on any other arrangements which need to be made on the first day, e.g. prayers for the student and his/her family.
- Check in with staff in the staff room during the day and keep abreast of what is happening in the school.
- Be aware of any particular teachers who may be particularly distressed, e.g. teachers who are recently bereaved themselves or have had prior experience of suicide in the family
- Encourage staff to come to you during the day and let you know how things are going
- Find out details of the funeral etc. and communicate this to staff and students.
- At the end of the first day review events with staff and make plans for the following day
- Make staff aware of students who are particularly vulnerable and what supports will be available to them.
- If there is a likelihood of interest from the media discuss a strategy to deal with any such requests.

Long Term

- In-service for Form Teachers and staff to help them explore death, dying and grief with students.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ST OLIVER POST PRIMARY CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM

Position	Name
Principal	Mr. Brendan Corcoran
Deputy Principal	Mr. Micheal McCafferty
Yearhead / H+S	Mr. Cathal Harvey
Pastoral Care Co-ordinator	Ms Ciara Ferris
Guidance Counsellor	Ms Siobhain McArdle

APPENDIX B

SUICIDE- INDICATORS AND INTERVENTION MEASURES

Suicide is a particularly traumatic event in the life of any school. A study conducted in Ottawa, Canada revealed a number of behaviours which can be exhibited by those contemplating suicide. Principals may find this list and the suggested forms of intervention helpful.

Ottawa Pointers

1. Loss of interest in usual activities
2. Withdrawal from social contact
3. Difficulty in concentrating, problems with judgement and memory
4. Dramatic fall-off in school performance
5. Feelings of sadness, emptiness, hopelessness may be expressed in essays
6. Sleep disturbance- decreased or sometimes increased
7. Increased overt displays of anger and rage, verbal or physical
8. Excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol
9. Promiscuous behaviour
10. Uncharacteristic delinquent behaviour/thrill seeking
11. Lack of supportive relationships with friends or family
12. Previous suicidal threats, gestures, attempts
13. Statements, verbal or written, revealing wish to die or preoccupation with death
14. Nihilistic comments- life is meaningless, filled with misery
15. Gestures to be noticed- self mutilation, scratches
16. Planning for death, making final arrangements, giving away treasured possessions
17. Suddenly becoming cheerful after long depression (relief when decision taken)

WHAT TO DO: TAKE IT SERIOUSLY- have a talk with the young person keeping some principles in mind:

1. Remain in control- don't panic, act slowly
2. Encourage expression of feelings and accept them (give time)
3. Avoid judgemental comments or empty reassurance
4. Avoid promises you can't keep (e.g. secrecy; call me any time; confidentiality)
5. Empathise and let them know you care (biggest single preventative is knowing someone cares)
6. Encourage them to see a counsellor or therapist (carefully)
7. Inform parents and management of the school
8. If seriously worried, don't leave them alone
9. Seek advice and support yourself (nobody should carry the worry about a suicidal youngster alone)

WHAT NOT TO DO:

1. Don't assume a youngster is not the 'type' to commit suicide
2. Don't leave a child/teenager alone if you believe the risk of suicide is imminent
3. Don't act shocked at whatever is told to you
4. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong. This may make him/her feel more guilty and intensify the depression
5. Don't take responsibility for 'saving the youth', get additional help
6. Don't feel that you have to have an answer to all the child's questions. If you do not know the meaning of life, say so. Make it clear that you are there to help, not to solve problems
7. Don't be afraid to be the first to mention suicide. Generally it comes as a relief to the youth that you are willing to discuss the subject.
8. Don't deny or cover up the youngster's feelings or intents. Don't be judgemental. Acknowledge his/her feelings without reinforcing the negative. 'I believe you are feeling miserable right now. Let's talk about it'.
9. Don't abandon the youth because the problems are too overwhelming. Follow through in getting him/her help. Don't be another loss or rejection to him or her.
10. Don't wait too long because you hope he/she will get over it. It can't hurt to talk about their feelings.

What can you do when a child says 'I want to kill myself'

1. Try to keep your own shock under control
 2. Reply with an open question
 3. Try to find out how long they have been feeling this way.
 4. Who else have they told?
 5. Can you speak to Mum and Dad?
 6. If 'everything' is wrong, start checking everything.
 - a. Parents
 - b. School
 - c. Exams
 - d. Siblings
 - e. Friends
 - f. Home environmentAdd you own to this!
 7. Re-assure- everything is redeemable. There is always a second chance. Nothing is ever so bad that a parent will not love a child (this includes their sexual orientation, failing exams, missing CAO points, being a horrible person etc., etc.)
 8. Make a contract that they won't hurt themselves until you meet them again and get help
 9. Where are your back-ups?
 10. Can you contact the parents?
 11. Make a plan of possible helping agencies and follow through
- Get support for yourself. Hang in there!

APPENDIX C

EMERGENCY SERVICE ORGANISATIONS AND OTHER CONTACTS

Emergency Services:	999
Teen Counselling:	01 6231398
Fire Brigade:	046-9051068
Garda Station:	049-8541102
Kells Garda:	046-9280820
Ambulance:	046-9023333
Oldcastle Health Centre:	049-8541118
Doc on Call:	1850777911
E.S.B:	1850372757
DES:	0906483600
NEPS: Eleanor Mythen	046-9093310
TUSLA (Navan)	046-9097870

Media:

Meath Chronicle:	046-9079600
Meath Weekender:	046-9022333
Cavan Anglo Celt:	049-4331100
Westmeath Examiner:	044-9346700
LMFM:	041-9832000
Shannon side Northern Sound:	047-72666
Staff Numbers:	Office
Chairman of Board of Management:	087-2250819
Meath VEC:	046-9068200
Caretakers: Tom Peyton	087-6709274
Kathleen Hubble	087-6699660
Local GPs	
Dr Hanly:	049-8541159
Dr Kerins:	049-8541159
Dr McKevitt	049-8541118

Bereavement Counselling Groups & Suicide support groups
Suicide Bereaved Support Group,
Northside Counselling Service Ltd.,
Coolock Development Centre,
Bunratty Drive,
Bonnybrook,
Dublin 17.
Tel: 01 8484789

[Solus](#), (Bereavement Helpline for Children),
Barnardo's,
Christchurch Square,
Dublin 8,
Tel: (01) 4732110.
E-mail: solas@barnardos.ie

[Samaritans](#),
Marlboro Street,
Dublin 1.
Tel: 1850 609090

[Console](#),
All Hallows College
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9.
Tel: 1800 201 890 (24 hour helpline service)
Tel: 01 857 4300
Fax: 01 857 4310
E-mail: info@console.ie
Free one-on-one counselling service for anyone affected by suicide. Also run
therapeutic support groups and courses (free of charge). Provide referral service

[Mental Health Ireland](#),
Mensana House,
6 Adelaide St. Dun Laoghaire,
Co. Dublin,
Tel: 01 2841166.
E-mail: info@mentalhealthireland.ie

[Aware](#),
147 Phibsborough Road,
Dublin 7,
Tel: (01) 830 8449
Fax: (01) 830 6840
E-mail: aware@iol.ie