



Presentation College Bray Critical Incident Response Plan

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school.

The following policy has been established to help Presentation College Bray respond to such an eventuality. It is based on the advice pack *Responding to Critical Incidents, 2016*, produced by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) as well as the *2022 NEPS eLearning Course for Schools*. It has been designed to assist the school in responding in an effective way to a serious crisis within the school community. There may be many kinds of serious crises but some examples are death or suicide of a student or staff member, serious accident in the school or on a trip, severe violence associated with the school, the disappearance of a student. The Principal (or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Principal) will decide what constitutes a “critical incident” necessitating the implementation of this policy.

The Critical Incident Team (CIT) will be convened by the Principal and will usually consist of:

- Chairperson of the Board of Management
- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Guidance Counsellors
- Pastoral Care Team representative
- Clerical Officer
- Communications Officer
- Catering Officer

However, this will need to be fluid and depending on the nature of the incident, the relevant Year Heads, Class Tutors and other staff or parent members may also be brought onto the team. Visiting counsellors may be invited to attend CIT meetings, which will usually take place immediately after an incident has occurred and then before and after school for the next few days. The Principal may also decide to involve the NEPS psychologist for the school/regional area.

It is particularly important that the work to be done is facilitated by good organisational practices, so lists of telephone numbers will be made available immediately by office staff to those involved. Organisers of school trips and outings will ensure that a list of all pupils and teachers involved is left with the Office prior to a trip or outing and that the Office has their mobile phone details.

Depending on the nature of the incident, judgements will have to be made regarding the appropriate response. The following is intended as a guide. Additional assistance may be sought from *Responding to Critical Incidents, 2016* (NEPS) and the 2022 NEPS eLearning Course for Schools.

All members of the CIT will have been circulated with a soft copy of the 2016 Guidelines and will have undertaken the 2022 eLearning Course.

A. IMMEDIATE RESPONSE/SHORT TERM ACTIONS – DAY ONE

1. Establish Facts

It is important to obtain accurate, factual information related to the incident. This is to be done by senior management.

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?
- What is the location of those injured and not injured?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?

2. Convene a meeting with key staff/Critical Incident Team (CIT) to discuss the following:

- Agree a statement of the facts for staff, students, parents and the media. There should be ONE written version of this.
- Appoint ONE person to deal with enquiries from the press – usually, but not necessarily the Principal.
- Send a message home to parents.
- Delegate responsibilities to the Critical Incident Team.
- Appoint one person to handle phone enquiries and to deal with the media.
- Ensure that a phone line remains open and available for enquiries.
- Organise the timetable/routine for the day. (as far as possible maintain normal routines - adhering to the normal school day is helpful to students and staff).
- Organise a staff meeting as soon as possible.
- Organise the supervision of students during any staff meetings.
- Organise other staffing cover – set up cover on Day One so staff can go for tea breaks if they need to
- Decide whether an outside professional should be invited to the staff meeting.
- Decide whether to contact [the](#) local school network for additional support.
- Arrange other supervision of students where necessary.
- Contact appropriate agencies.

A template Day One CIT Meeting Agenda is included in Appendix 1

3. Inform Staff

This may be done by email depending on the circumstances, but as soon as possible an initial Staff Meeting should be held. Remember to include auxiliary staff. The areas which might be covered are listed below.

- An account of the facts as known.
- An opportunity for staff to express their views and feelings.
- Discussion with the staff about how the facts will be shared with students.
- An outline of the routine for the day.
- Information for staff about which outside agencies have been contacted, or are involved, and the supports that will be put in place for both students and staff.
- Information pack to be given to all teaching staff (appendices).
- A procedure for identifying vulnerable students.
- The weight of responsibility surrounding a crisis may be enormous. Staff should be aware of the need to support senior staff who are dealing directly with the crisis.

A template Day One Staff Meeting Agenda is included in Appendix 2

4. Inform parents/guardians

Children directly involved

Parents/guardians should be contacted as soon as is possible and this first contact will need to be handled with great sensitivity. The steps which may be involved are set out below

- Agree who should share information with parents and how this should be done.
- Make a list of parents/guardians who have been contacted and those who still need to be told to avoid giving duplication of messages
- Give parents/guardians relevant and factual information
- Set a room aside for distressed students to meet their parents/guardians.
- Provide support to parents who are on their own when they arrive at the school
- Give telephone numbers for enquiries

Children not directly involved

The parents of other children in the school should be informed of the incident and that their child may be upset. Send communication stating the facts and brief details of the incident. It may not be appropriate at this point to disclose the names of those involved.

5. Inform students

- Ideally, students should be informed by their tutor or year head.
- Tell close friends first and separately.
- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours which can cause unnecessary stress.
- Allow pupils to ask questions and express feelings.
- Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident. (See resource bank for documents which may be helpful)
- Tutors and year heads should try to identify vulnerable students who may need extra care or to go home.
- 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 friends may need support as they attempt to find ways to be of help.

6. Organise the reunion of vulnerable students with their parents, if necessary

- Contact parents of vulnerable children, asking them to collect their children.
- Inform students that their parents/guardians will be collecting them as soon as possible.
- Facilitate distressed students and their parents by providing a private room where they can meet following an incident. This could be a very emotional time. Provide tea/coffee.
- Where appropriate offer help with transport, especially for younger children.
- Make contact with the bereaved family.

7. Dealing with the media

In the event of a very serious incident there may be media interest. Media enquiries should be dealt with by one person, normally the Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Management. However, in some instances it may be useful to brief staff and students and advise them on dealing with unsolicited media attention. The School may need to consider setting aside a room for the media.

If necessary, the Principal will prepare a written statement to 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(s).
- Some points to remember if you are asked to give a live interview:
 - consider assigning the task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with the media
 - take some time to prepare
 - remember that everything you say is on record and, therefore, keep it simple, factual and brief
 - decline if you are not ready or think it inappropriate.

Consideration will also need to be given to social media and how to manage how the story is being disseminated around the local and wider community.

8. Contact and Inform Appropriate Agencies

- NEPS
- Board of Management
- HSE Children Services
- State Examinations Commission

When a number of different schools are involved, additional communication systems need to be put in place in order to coordinate actions.

9. End of Day One Follow-Up Critical Incident Team Meeting

B. MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24 – 72 Hours)

- **Review the events of the first 24 hours**
- Reconvene key staff/Critical Incident Team. Possible discussion areas might be:
 - Need for outside agencies
 - Funeral arrangements
 - Handling of media
- The Critical Incident Team may need to meet daily.
- Hold a review meeting with all staff if necessary. Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments. One school reported that a collective discussion with all staff led by counsellors was “the most effective thing we did”.
 - Update staff on new and ongoing daily schedule changes
 - Update staff about the family, funeral info, etc.
 - Continue to allow staff to raise any questions
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Arrange individual or group support meetings with NEPS personnel if necessary. Arrange parental permission. (See Appendix 4 for sample letter for parental permission)
- Update media, if necessary.

2. Plan visits to injured / bereaved

- Name key person(s) to visit home/hospital.
- If possible, representatives of the school should visit the home of the bereaved. If students request to visit the home, the school should phone ahead to check that this is appropriate. Visiting the bereaved may be distressing - support those involved.

3. Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service

- Designate a staff member to liaise with family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service.
- Decide what form of representation is appropriate. It is essential to consult the family concerned. Do not presume that the bereaved family will appreciate a very public presence of the school.
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.
- Prepare students ahead of the funeral. For some this may be the first occasion they have been exposed to a major grief.
- Take time after the event to de-brief students.
- 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

4. Plan for the reintegration of students and staff (eg. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc.)

- Name key person(s) to liaise with above on their return to school.
e.g. presence of tutor/Year Head on return.
- Plan for the return of immediately bereaved students (siblings, etc).

5. Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service

- Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.

6. School closure

- Request a decision on this from the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

7. Develop Plan for listing and monitoring vulnerable students

- Review how they're coping in the coming weeks.

C. LONG-TERM ACTIONS

The following is a selection of the possibilities worthy of consideration, but it is not an exhaustive list.

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress. Normal distress is expected among a number of students, but within about 6 weeks most students will return to normal functioning. If there are students experiencing ongoing distress after that, they may need a referral.
- Review the wellbeing of staff
- Ensure NEW staff or pupils are informed of the critical incident and policy and procedures in place
- Consider if a special day of reflection would benefit the class affected by a tragedy.
- Consider whether a bereavement programme from an outside agency would be of assistance.
- Review of curricular provision, eg. in RE, SPHE CSPE classes in the area of change, loss, death and crisis issues.
- Continue to liaise with the family. Inviting bereaved parents to visit the school can be very helpful for them. Collecting items (from the student's locker, etc) may be a good pretext.

- 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. However, it is important to give priority to the students left behind – eg. allowing the deceased's locker to be turned into a memorial shrine, etc, is a bad idea for vulnerable students.
- Parents Debrief – it may be helpful to hold a consultation session for parents trying to support their grieving children. Parents need to let their children process and express their grief and should try to take the pain away. Kids grieve with friends, not with their parents who may feel left out.

D. EVALUATION AND REVIEW

Evaluate response to incident and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately. This policy will be reviewed after an incident, should there ever be one, or every five years in the absence of an incident. The policy should be reviewed yearly to ensure all information is up to date.

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

Approved by the Board of Management following a consultation process with the Student Council, PA Committee and Teaching Staff:

Martin Locke

Signed _____
Martin Locke, Principal

Date: 23-6-25

Carol Mooney

Signed: _____
Carol Mooney, Chairperson BOM

Date: 23-6-25

Appendix 1 Critical Incident Team (CIT)

Team Leader

Martin Locke, Principal

*Alerts the CIT to a critical incident and calls a meeting.
Coordinates the tasks of the team.
Liaises with external agencies, Gardai, NEPS, etc.
In the absence of the Principal, a DP shall fulfil this role.
Leads briefing meetings for staff.*

Chairperson of Board of Management

Carol Mooney

Overall oversight and advice. Guidance on press statement and media interviews.

Administrators

Linda Leonard & Jenny Butler

*Maintains up-to-date contact details of staff, parents, external support agencies. Next of kin?
Responds to phone calls and emails or, if required, coordinates a team of people undertaking this function.*

Staff Liaison

Ronan Coffey, Deputy Principal

*Arrange staff to attend meetings.
Arrange any classroom supervision required.
Provide space for staff to ask questions.*

Student Support

Donal Donnelly - Guidance
Anne Marie O'Brien – Guidance

Coordinate pastoral team to provide immediate care to vulnerable students. Coordinate information from Class

Fiona Collins – Pastoral Care

*Tutors and other staff about students of concern.
Set up and supervision of the "Quiet Room".*

Audrey Mooney – Year Head
Eoin O'Braonain – Year Head
Catherine Farren – Year Head
Richard Kelly – Year Head
Olan Savage – Year Head
Una McCarron – Year Head

*Liaison with external agencies of support.
Note: to keep the CIT at an effective size, there will be one representative from each of the Guidance and Pastoral Care teams (the full-time member of staff), but these reps will, of course, involve the FULL Guidance and Pastoral Care team in response to the incident.*

Communications Officer/Principal

Media Liaison, response to media enquiries of issues that may arise such as students being interviewed, Photographers on the premises, etc. In conjunction with the Principal and Chair of BoM, responsible for drawing up a press statement, media briefings, etc.

Catering

Food Excellence Catering Team *Provision of tea, water, biscuits and other refreshments as well as planning for how best to dispense them to students and staff.*

Appendix 2 Critical Incident Team (CIT) Meeting Agenda

1. Details of event

- Share full details
- Agree what the facts are

2. Notifications

- What is the message?
- Who is to be notified:
 - Staff?
 - Parents?
 - Students?
 - NEPS?
 - Board of Management?

3. Response to Phone-calls

- Agree script

4. Response to Media

- Media script
- Media and social media strategy

5. Liaison with Family (families)

- Plan sensitive and supportive approach

6. Plan Day One

- Schedule
- How to achieve as much normality as possible
- How to help staff cope
- Set up of a quiet room

7. Plan Initial Staff Meeting(s)

- May need to split into two to allow supervision

8. Review of NEPS Critical Incident online training course

- Need someone to redo the ¾ hour course to gather helpful advice relevant to this situation

9. Catering

- Tea and food for distressed TCG community
- Plan timing and location of refreshments
- Organise supervision cover on Day One so staff can go for tea breaks if they need to

10. Delegation of Other Responsibilities

11. Any Other Business

Appendix 3 Day One Staff Meeting Agenda

The purpose of this meeting is to relay facts and to plan the schedule for the day. It is crucial that the staff have accurate facts and are kept updated. This will help to dispel rumours, which may begin to circulate. Consider including the NEPS psychologist(s) in this meeting.

1. Details of event

- Share full details of the facts as known
- Details of CIT
- Outline of which external agencies are involved

2. Promoting normality

- The need for **routine** to be maintained in order to provide a sense of security to students, especially younger students
- It is okay for staff to be upset, and it is okay that students know and see that they are upset. It may be reassuring for them

3. Outline of how facts will be shared

- It is important that close friends are told first and separately
- It is not a good idea to break the news in an Assembly setting – form time is better
- There should be one message from the school regarding the critical incident and no staff member should comment, online or offline, about the incident without the permission of the Principal

4. Supporting Students

- Planning for how best to support students and outline what supports will be put in place.
- A lot of the students may be very upset and will want and need to talk about what has happened. For the majority of students this can be done in the classroom or group setting. It is usually helpful for students to hear others talking about how they are feeling. This normalises their reaction.
- Additional support in the Library - this is a place that students can go if they are having difficulty remaining composed in the classroom. It should have tissues, a few stuffed toys, tea/coffee, cushions, drawing and writing materials and information leaflets from the Resource Materials section appropriate to the age of the students.

- A very distressed student may need individual support. If a student or group of students are particularly distressed, it is advised to give them opportunities to talk to someone who they know and who will be available over the next days and weeks, for example the student liaison from the Critical Incident Team.
- Procedure for identifying vulnerable students
- Procedure for monitoring vulnerable students

5. **Supporting Students with SFL Needs**

- Some students with general learning difficulties or students in the Harbour class will be at a different developmental level to their peers and may need the critical incident explained to them by members of the SFL Dept or Harbour staff. Their understanding of death will be in accordance with their developmental age. They should be told the news separately so that the information can be given according to their level of understanding.

6. **Resources for Staff**

- Details of access to the Critical Incident Resource Bank (see Appendix 8 of the Critical Incident Response Plan)

7. **Encouragement for Staff to Self-Care**

- Information for staff about support services available. The Employee Assistance Service for Irish teachers is run by Spectrum Life (formerly by Inspire Wellbeing and Carecall) and provides a 24 hour 7 day helpline for teachers. The EAS helpline can be contacted on **1800 411 057**.
- Access to Staff Self-Care Checklist (see Appendix 9 of the Critical Incident Response Plan)
- Every staff member to have a “buddy teacher” to check that they’re coping okay

8. **Schedule for the next 24/48 hours**

- Agreement on the immediate schedule, the routine for the next day(s).

9. **Whole School Event to mark the Critical Incident**

- Prayer service? Moment of silence? Cancellation of school for a funeral?

10. **Staff Discussion**

- An opportunity for staff to discuss their views and feelings or to ask questions.

11. **Details of follow-up staff meeting**

- Agree time for a follow-up meeting (perhaps at the end of the day) to provide an update on any developments and prepare for the following day. The NEPS End-of-Day Template (p.27 NEPS Guidelines) may be used for this meeting.

NEPS: Programmes focused directly at raising student awareness of suicide may appear desirable, especially in the aftermath of a suicide. However, they may carry the risk of increasing suicidal behaviour among young people through normalising it as a legitimate response to adolescent stress. Instead, best practice suggests that preventative programmes should focus on encouraging resilience, problem solving, coping skills and help seeking behaviours.

Ongoing suicide awareness training is essential and there is good advice (and a lot more resources) to be found in the NEPS Critical Incident training, Module 6.

APPENDIX 4 Useful Contact Numbers

Bray Garda Station 01 666 5300

Ambulance 999 or 112

Fire Brigade 999 or 112

Hospitals

St Columcille's, Loughlinstown 01 282 5800

St. Vincent's Hospital 01 221 4000

Beaumont Hospital 01 809 3000

Crumlin Children's Hospital 01 409 6100

Temple St Children's Hospital 01 878 4200

Tallaght Hospital 01 414 2000

Local GPs

Bray Medical Centre 01 286 2035

Southern Cross Medical 01 255 1558

Carlton Clinic 01 286 0568

HSE

Bray Primary Care Centre 01 778 6020

NEPS

Head Office 01 283 3028

Local Clergy

- Our Lady Queen of Peace
Parish Office 01 274 5497

APPENDIX 5 - SELF-CARE CHECKLIST FOR STAFF

"Self-compassion is simply giving the same kindness to ourselves that we would give to others."

– Christopher Germer

- Be realistic about your role, what you can and cannot do
- Identify one method of relaxation that works for you: Take time out during the day for a quick walk; call a friend/family member; engage in a 5 minute relaxation or mindfulness exercise
- Drink plenty of water and remember to eat and to avoid junk food
- Tune in to when you are **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired (HALT)**
- Share feelings/thoughts/experience - Avail of the support mechanism in your school
- Take time at the end of the day, away from students to talk through with your colleague(s):
- What went well?
- What was difficult?
- Plan next day
- Check in with your principal or your NEPS psychologist
- Maintain your normal routine as much as possible
- Spend time with friends and family
- Do things you enjoy and things that make you laugh
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Keep exercising
- Write, draw, paint
- Practice good sleep routines
- Seek external help as necessary (see below)

Reflection Checklist for School Staff

Staff responding to a critical incident are encouraged to reflect on and evaluate the degree to which an incident or a series of incidents may have affected them or a member of their team and then to take appropriate steps. The following checklist may be used as a way of helping you, or any individual, to check how they are feeling in the medium-term, after responding to a critical incident. It is intended to aid self-reflection and it may provide an indication of a need for additional support, where this has not been fully recognised.

- Have I experienced a recent bereavement or significant personal upset?
- Have I been ill recently?
- How many critical incidents have I responded to recently?
- Is this incident resonating with something in my own personal life?
- Am I checking in with my colleague(s) for support?
- Am I finding it hard to switch off at home?
- Am I talking incessantly about the incident?
- Am I getting upset easily?
- Am I finding it hard to relax?
- Am I having difficulty getting to sleep/staying asleep?
- Has my eating pattern changed?
- Am I more irritable than usual?
- Am I having repetitive intrusive and/or racing thoughts?
- Am I experiencing unusual physical sensations like heart racing; irregular breathing; feeling flushed; tension in the shoulders; headaches?

APPENDIX 6 - USEFUL RESOURCES

Link to NEPS Guidelines on Responding to Critical Incidents

https://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwi3srW03piIAxUBVUEAHcJRAOkQFnoECB8QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.gov.ie%2F40700%2F21b5193521d147c890b4309fe4bfce9d.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0kRoBA9P4FVUfYE9_JEJLS&opi=89978449

Video link: Explaining to a child that someone has died

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsRoTQcRJQI>

Advice sheet on how to explain to a child that someone has died

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=33eac0b5-6523-4817-b2bf-df78db2f5774>

Supporting people with disabilities through grief and loss

https://education.instructure.com/courses/148/pages/module-4-day-1-actions-slash-classroom-session?module_item_id=2341

Link to NEPS Critical Incident Online Training Course

<https://elearning.education.ie/browse/neps/courses/responding-to-critical-incidents>

Advice in the NEPS Guidelines on Responding to Critical Incidents

- R5 - A classroom session following a critical incident (page 57)
- R6 - Children's understanding and reaction to death according to age (page 60)
- R7 - Stages of grief (page 62)
- R8 - How to cope when something terrible happens (page 63)
- R9 - Reactions to a critical incident (page 64)
- R10 - Grief after suicide (page 65) (*only to be used when it is clear that the death was due to suicide and where parents have accepted this*)
- R17 - Frequently Asked Questions for Teachers (page 76)

Documents in a shared CIT folder

- When a student dies by suicide/suspected suicide
- Social Media and critical incidents
- Psychological First Aid – the five steps
- Practical Guidance for responding to the media
- NEPS Guide: *Responding to Critical Incidents*
- Five principles that can guide interventions
- Critical Incident Staff Training Powerpoint
- Circles of Vulnerability

APPENDIX 7

THOUGHTS AFTER UNDERTAKING THE NEPS CRITICAL INCIDENT TRAINING and AFTER PREVIOUS INCIDENTS

- Our experience and the way we work well as a team will help us through.
- The school provides normality for our community so we should stay open as a general default.
- NEPS don't usually counsel students, the support needs to come from within the school. This can strengthen our staff in a time of crisis. For the vast majority of students, external counselling is not advised.
- The primary goal of NEPS will be to support our staff.
- PREVENTION is the key – build resilience through schemes like the One Good Adult. Are we doing enough?
- We may need a building plan – but generally we will use the Canteen or Sports Hall (backed up by the medical room adjacent to the Principal's office if necessary) as a triage centre for distraught students.
- Children will understand and react to grief with a range of emotions.
- Note from experience: children will be quick to judge each other in terms of who deserves to be upset and who doesn't, need to puncture this.
- Don't forget to list students of most concern (closest to victim, etc) and follow up six weeks after the event
- Just because a suicide doesn't happen within our school doesn't mean it shouldn't be treated as a Presentation College Bray Critical Incident.