

Critical Incident Policy **Corpus Christi Girls National School.**

Corpus Christi National School is an all girls primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. It operates according to the rules for national schools, laid down by the Department of Education and Science. As outlined in the school mission statement, *'Corpus Christi is a Catholic Primary school in which we strive to learn together in a happy and safe environment, where everyone is valued, respected and encouraged to do their best.'*

As a Catholic school we have the responsibility to ensure that

- Our duty of care to pupils and staff is fulfilled to the best of our ability and in line with statutory responsibilities.
- Our practices reflect our belief in our Catholic community and are inspired by the Gospel values of care, respect, dignity compassion, love and forgiveness.
- A safe and stable environment is provided for pupils and staff.
- The physical and emotional and spiritual well being of the school community is safeguarded.

This critical incident policy was initially drawn up by the teaching staff at the school development planning day in December 2008 and forms part of the pastoral care in the school. The Critical Incident Guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Science and those issued by the INTO have been used in the formulation of this policy.

Definition of a Critical Incident

'A crucial incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school.'
Critical incidents may involve pupils, staff, other members of the school or local community. Examples may include

- A serious accident or tragedy in the school community.
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding, vandalism etc.
- A physical assault on a pupil or staff member.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, suicide or illness.
- Intrusion into the school.
- Unexpected evacuation of the school. (e.g. bomb threat)
- Unauthorized removal of pupil from school or home.
- Closure of the school because of infectious diseases.

Introduction

A critical incident may occur at the school or offsite at another location. In some cases emergency services may have responsibility for dealing with and managing the situation. In others, the incident may be more localised. The Board of Management places no obligation on any staff member to intervene in a critical incident situation if by so doing she/he is placing her/himself or others at risk.

Each situation will require a different response. We are mindful that people respond to a critical incident in different ways according to their attitudes, experiences and beliefs.

At all times the Board of Management and the staff of Corpus Christi school have a responsibility to protect the good name and privacy of those involved in a critical incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statement.

The aims of the critical incident plan are as follows;

1. To help staff react quickly and effectively in the event of a critical incident and to maintain control of the situation.
2. To restore the school to normality as soon as possible and to limit the affects of the incident on pupils and staff.

The Board of Management has a Health and Safety Statement in place, which is reviewed regularly. Measures are in place to address both the physical and psychological safety of the pupils and staff. Among the measures to ensure physical safety include:

- Health and safety statement for the school.
- Regular fire drills and evacuation procedures.
- Regular checking of fire exits and extinguishers.
- Regular maintenance of school hazards and machinery.
- Corridor doors kept locked during school time.
- Security measure for pupils.
- School yard rules (see appendix).
- School tour procedures (see appendix)
- Updated contact details for pupils and staff.
- Updated contact details for parents/guardians.
- Record of pupils who may have specific medical needs.

A number of policies also support the psychological safety of the pupils and staff.

- The child protection policy
- Social, Personal and Health Education Programme.
- The anti-bullying policy.
- The school code of discipline.

External Resources

In the event of a critical incident the school may contact NEPS, the Irish National Teachers Organisation, and the Catholic Primary School Management Association as necessary to access support.. The chaplain to the school is our local parish priest. At the moment this is Monsignor Martin O' Shea. The current chairperson of the Board of Management is Denis McCarthy.

Critical Incident Management Team

The team leader will be the Principal, or in her absence, the Deputy Principal. The members of the team are selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles 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 will have a dedicated critical incident folder containing a copy of the plan and materials particular to their role. All staff members will be given a copy of the plan. There will be an option to co-opt members onto the team if this becomes necessary.

A critical incident box containing keys of the emergency gate, contact phone numbers for parents and emergency contact numbers will be kept in the principal's office. Contact details for parents are also kept on file in the secretary's office. A copy of emergency numbers will be available on office and staffroom notice boards and in the offices.

The types of responses needed in the event of an incident are outlined below. However, as each situation is different, tasks may vary from one incident to another. Critical incident management will affect all staff. Even if not directly involved in the team, staff will be making sure that normal schoolwork continues and will be providing support to pupils and colleagues.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Team.

Team Leader:

- Alerts team members to the incident and convenes a meeting of the team.
- Clarifies the facts surrounding the incident.
- Coordinates and delegates tasks to the team members.
- Liaises with the Board of Management, with the Department of Education and Science and with any outside agencies involved as appropriate.
- Contacts the Trustees in the event of damage to the building
- In cases of bereavement liaises with the family.
- Acts as spokesperson to the media if necessary.
- Ensures provision of ongoing support to pupils and staff.
- Decides with team how news will be communicated to staff, pupils and parents.
- Ensuring telephone lines are available for important incoming and outgoing calls.
- Maintains contact with relevant outside agencies.
- Maintains up to date list of contact numbers for teachers, parents/guardians, external agencies and support services.

Staff Liaison Role:

It is very important that staff is kept informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments from both pupils and parents.

- Briefing and advising staff on the facts as known and noting their feelings and concerns/questions.
- Keeping staff updated on developments.
- Noting which staff members are missing at update and passing on the information to them
- Provides resource material for staff from folder.
- Liaising with the school chaplain.
- Arranges supervision cover for class if necessary.
- Maintains a record of staff contact with external agencies.
- Agree with staff how and what information will be given to pupils.
- Maintain links with absent staff as necessary.

Pupil Liaison Role:

- Gathering information from class teacher regarding child's friends, absentees and anyone who may need to be contacted.
- Disseminating information to pupils.
- Gathering information from class teacher/SET regarding the needs of the class or particular students as a result of the incident.
- Organizing an assembly/ prayer service or Mass for the school community to congregate.
- Alerting teachers other than class teachers to vulnerable students as appropriate.
- Keeping records of pupils seen by external agency staff. (e.g. NEPS)

Chaplaincy Role:

- Visiting the classroom and providing support to the class.
- Visiting the staff and providing support.
- Conducting the funeral service if appropriate.
- Conducting a prayer service/mass with the school community.

Family Liaison Role:

- Visiting the bereaved family with the team leader.
- Arranging meeting for parents if necessary.
- Maintaining a record of parents seen by external agencies as appropriate.
- Providing appropriate material for parents from the incident folder.
- Checking different religious beliefs about death and funeral services if relevant.

Staff responsibilities

At all times teaching staff have a responsibility to

- Safeguard welfare of pupils and colleagues.
- Control flow of information by pupils with mobile phones.
- Liaise with other staff to ensure safety of pupils.
- Assist in gathering information.
- Supervising their own or colleagues' classes.
- Assisting in identifying and supporting students at risk or in distress.
- Maintaining normal procedures.
- Maintaining confidentiality.

Ancillary staff will also have the responsibility to maintain normal procedures. In addition, the school secretary will ensure that the reception office is staffed at all times and that phone lines are available for important ingoing and outgoing calls.

Contact Details for Pupils and Staff.

Contact details for parents and guardians of all pupils are kept in the office.

Contact details for all staff members are kept by the principal and deputy principal. A copy is also held on file in the principal's office. Details for parents, guardians and staff are updated annually. Parents are asked to inform the school office should their contact details change. A list of emergency numbers is on display in both the principal's and secretary's offices and on the staff room notice board.

Phone/Fax /Email Contacts

There are 2 phone lines in the school. In the event of an emergency the main school line will be kept for incoming calls only. The phone number for this line is 8379745. Outgoing calls will be made from the phone in the principal's office 8367990.. Faxes may be sent from the fax machine in the principal's office. The email address for the principal is ccadmin@eircom.net

Dealing with the Media.

A critical incident may on occasion necessitate dealing with the media. Only the Principal, Deputy Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Management will communicate with the media.

Members of the media must report to the reception office, identify themselves and state their business in the school. Members of the media will not be allowed beyond the reception office except at the invitation of the Principal or Deputy Principal. The media will not be allowed to interview or photograph pupils on the school premises.

As necessary, the principal and deputy principal will prepare a brief media statement to include the following;

- Expressing sympathy for the affected /bereaved family.
- Stating that it is a difficult time for the school community.
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/ injured parties.

- The facts about the situation (following consultation with the families.)
- The term suicide will not be used. Instead the term 'tragic death' will be used.
- Outline what is being done to support pupils and staff.

Some pointers in relation to dealing with the media are included in appendix 2.

Record Keeping

All team members will keep written records of phone calls made, meetings, and interventions. Records will be compiled and kept on file in the principal's office. All phone calls will be logged by the school secretary.

Immediate/Short term Actions

Every incident will require a different response. A critical incident may occur on or off site and will consequently require a different response. However the following will serve as a guide to the types of response necessary. Evacuate the building if necessary.

- Inform emergency services.
- Take emergency action to ensure safety at onsite incidents.
- Limit further injury at on site incidents.
- Account for all pupils, personnel and visitors.
- Care for the injured parties.
- Gather accurate information
- Inform Chairperson of Board of Management
- Inform solicitors and insurance company as appropriate.
- Convene a meeting of the CIMT.
- Organise a timetable for the day.
- Inform staff and update on any arrangements as necessary.
- Contact appropriate agencies and organize support.
- Arrange for supervision of pupils.
- Inform pupils and parents.
- Make contact with the affected /bereaved family.
- Respond to the media.
- Report to the health and safety authority if necessary.
- Arrange visit to the affected /bereaved family.
- Identify high-risk students.
- Designate particular areas for parents, media, friends etc to avoid large groups congregating in particular areas, blocking entrances etc.

Medium Term Actions (24-72 hours)

- Meeting of the CIMT to decide on the following
- Arrange support for staff /pupils.
- Decide on mechanism for getting feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils.
- If relevant plan visits to the injured.
- School closure if appropriate following agreement from the Board of Management.
- If relevant, prepare staff/students for attending funeral.
- If appropriate and if agreed by the affected family, involve the pupils or staff in funeral.
- Maintain contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Plan for the reintegration of pupils and staff e.g. those injured, those who were directly affected, absentees etc.
- Hold a prayer service for the pupils and staff.

- Arrange for pupil and staff response to those affected. e.g. cards, flowers etc.
- Maintain the normal timetables/school day to make sure pupils are unsettled as little as possible
- Provide information to families on the kind of support available to them and their children.

Long Term Actions

- Monitor pupils for signs of anxiety.
- Liaise with parents re vulnerable pupils.
- Liaise with external agencies regarding referrals.
- Arrange for school memorial service/ anniversary if relevant.
- Review plan in light of incident.
- Update and amend school records.
- Ensure new staff are aware of policy and which pupils/staff affected by an incident.
- Evaluate legal and insurance consequences.
- Written report for the DES and the Board of Management.

Ratification and Review

Following discussion and some amendments, the Board of Management at the meeting in February 2009 ratified this policy. The policy was reviewed in 2016 and will be reviewed again in 2019 or sooner if necessary.

Signed: _____

Date: _____