



# Carlow Vocational School Carlow Institute of Further Education



## **Critical Incident Policy**

### **Scope**

Carlow Vocational School /Carlow Institute of Further Education aims to protect the wellbeing of its students by providing a safe and caring environment at all times.

### **Rationale**

Carlow Vocational School/Carlow Institute of Further Education has taken a number of measures to create a supportive and caring ethos in the schools. The schools have formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students during the normal course of the school day and in the event of a critical incident.

### **Aim**

The aim of the Critical Incident Policy is to help management and staff react quickly and effectively, and to maintain control during a critical incident.

The policy provides a framework to help the schools to return to normality as soon as possible and limit the effects of the incident on staff and students.

## **Policy Content**

The Critical Incident Policy includes.

1. Definition of a critical incident and incident levels
2. Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident
  - a. The school response
  - b. Critical Incident Management Team
  - c. Support Response Team
  - d. Appropriate actions to be taken
  - e. List of agencies
3. Medium term actions (24 – 72 hours)
4. Longer term actions
5. Dealing with the aftermath of suicide
6. School trips

### **Response to Critical Incidents & Major Emergencies Protocol and Procedures to be followed in the event of critical incidents**

#### **Preparation & Planning**

Preparation and planning are critical to responding in a coordinated manner in the aftermath of a critical incident / major emergency.

#### **Confidentiality**

The Principal (Deputy Principals or other designated person in charge) is the only person to verify information and to speak to media. Any person who comes across a critical incident must pass the information on to the Principal – notwithstanding the need to get emergency help. Although the events surrounding a critical incident are often very much in the public domain it is important to ensure that confidentiality is strictly maintained by responding teachers and staff.

#### **1. Definition of a Critical Incident**

For the purposes of this policy a critical incident is defined as any incident that overwhelms individual's or the local community's capacity to support students and their carers affected by events such as murder, suicide, extremely violent assault, witnessing or experiencing an incident involving firearms, sudden death in a public / community setting, serious accidents e.g. fires, drowning, road traffic accidents.

#### **Incident Levels**

- **Level 1:** a critical incident in a school setting which impacts on a specific number of students
- **Level 2:** a critical incident impacting on a significant number of students/ and or with a high media profile and/ or involving the wider community

- **Level 3:** a major incident that happens in the locality that triggers a broader emergency response at regional or national level

## **2. Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident**

### **Role of the Principal or designate**

#### **Gather accurate information:**

- 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 risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?
- Inform CE or EO of KCETB asap of incident / level of incident
- Convene the Critical Incident Management Team
- Chair the meeting
- Liaise with NEPs
- Ensure implementation of agreed response and actions
- To respond to the media
- Make contact with the bereaved family – whoever is appropriate

### **The School's response**

When a critical incident occurs that affects the school community the response will generally involve:

- **Planning**

The school community working together with agencies, to assess the situation and the impact on the students, their family and the school community  
A coordinated response plan for the school  
Access school supports and interagency supports

- **Information and Support**

Providing information and support to students, teachers, staff, parents, relevant agencies and wider community. Providing support for students, teachers and parents immediately affected. Signposting parents, teachers, staff to available services and agencies. In the first instance, GP referral for students / staff is recommended.

## **SUMMARY CHECKLIST FOR PRINCIPAL or Designate**

1. Gather the facts – Who? What? When? And Where?
2. Contact appropriate agencies i.e. KCETB /NEPS/BOM
3. Convene the Critical Incident Management Team
4. Organise for the supervision of students
5. Inform staff
6. Agree on a statement of the facts for the media or no comment as appropriate (Family may prefer to respond)
7. Identify high risk students
8. Appoint someone to deal with phone enquiries
9. Organise timetable for the day – Maintain the normal school routine when at all possible
10. Inform parents/guardians
11. Inform students
12. Make contact with bereaved family
13. Organise support
14. Respond to the media

### **Critical Incident Management Team:**

This team will assess, prioritise and manage the response to the incident. This team will consist of; Principal and Deputy Principals.

### **The Role of the Critical Incident Management Team:**

- To assess the level of incident and response required
- To coordinate and lead the response
- Decide on actions required
- Decide what staff / agencies need to be mobilised – as appropriate
- Review and evaluate the response
- A written statement of the facts for students, presented where appropriate by the Principal

- A written statement of the facts for staff, parents and media
- Delegate responsibilities to the **Support Response Team (SRT)**
- Appoint someone to handle phone enquiries.
- Appoint someone to contact appropriate agencies
- Organise the timetable/routine for the day (Adhering to the normal school routine as much as possible)
- Decide what staff need to be briefed

### **Support Response Team (SRT)**

Principal convenes meeting regardless of whether incident occurs in/out of school year. This team will be appointed by the Critical Incident Management Team to provide the frontline response to the critical incident. This team will include Guidance Counsellors, Home School Liaison Officer, Pastoral Care Coordinator and Assistant Principal Liaison, NEPS, HSE, year heads / class teachers / course programme coordinators, administration staff (as appropriate to CVS /CIFE)

### **Role of the Support Response Team (SRT)**

- To carry out the actions as requested by the Principal

### **Appropriate Actions as required:**

#### **Inform parents/guardians - *students directly involved:***

Parents/Guardians should be contacted as soon as possible, and this first contact will need to be handled with great sensitivity. The steps involved are set out below:

The Principal / Deputy will decide and direct 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 avoid duplication of messages
- Give parents/guardians relevant and factual information
- Set a room aside for distressed students to meet parents/guardians
- Provide support to parents who are on their own when they arrive at the school The Principal / Deputy will decide and direct who should support parents
- Give telephone numbers for enquiries

### **Organise the reunion of students with parents, if necessary**

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.

### **Organise a staff meeting (if appropriate).**

All staff should be asked to attend, including auxiliary staff

- Organise the supervision of students during any staff meetings
- Decide whether an outside professional be invited to the staff meeting
- Give staff an account of the facts as known
- Give staff an opportunity to express their views and their feelings
- Set in place with staff a procedure for identifying vulnerable students
- Distribute relevant hand-out material

### **Students not directly involved**

- The parents of other students in the school should be informed of the incident and that their child may be upset
- Send a letter to parents stating the facts and brief details of the incident. It may not be appropriate at this point to disclose the names of those involved.
- Send a *parent call* message directing parents to information and signposts on school website
- Organise emotional support for students, through meetings with appointed school Counsellors and other qualified counsellors on the staff

### **Inform Students**

Careful preparation is important when meeting students to inform them of a critical incident. Consideration should be given to the age of the pupils and the optimum group size. It is best to do it in class groups or sub-groups. The suitability of the 'messenger' should also be considered, remembering that it is generally thought that support is best given by the adults known to the child. Any outside 'expert' might help by assisting the staff undertaking this task to prepare for it and by providing advice and support as they manage it. The nature of the event will clearly have an influence on how students are informed. This team will be appointed by the Principal to provide the frontline information to the students.

The key points/actions in the process are listed below:

- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours, which can cause unnecessary stress
- Allow students to ask questions tell their story and express feelings
- Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident

### **Dealing with the media**

Principal usually responds to the media 'no comment' (If appropriate) It may be more appropriate for other agencies and or the family to respond to the media.

However, 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

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

Consider setting aside a room for the media. This may help to control their access to staff and students.

Brief staff and students and advise them on dealing with media – no comment unless they are appointed to brief the media

**Contact appropriate agencies: Person appointed by Critical Incident Management Team**

NEPS

Garda's Carlow

0599136620 /9131505

Fire Brigade Carlow

999 or 112

Ambulance

999 or 112

Health Board – Child & Family

0599136520

Chairperson Board of Management - Bríd Griffin

State Examinations Commission

0906 442700

Kilkenny & Carlow ETB

059 9138560

Chaplin – Fr. John Dunphy

059 9141833

CRYS

059 9130476

The Vault

059 9133714

HSCL Co-ordinator

SCP – Sinead O' Keffe

Caretakers

### **3. Medium-Term Actions (24 – 72hours)**

#### **Review the events of the first 24 hours**

- Reconvene key staff/Critical Incident Response Team
- Briefly check out how each person on this team is coping
- Decide arrangements for future support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Gather feedback from teachers on vulnerable students

- Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments
- Be sensitive as to how all staff are coping on a personal and professional level
- Establish contact with absent staff and students

#### **Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary**

- Provide a suitable room
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students in order to clarify what has happened. Offer advice and reassurance. Inform them about support services and provide relevant hand-outs
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Arrange, in consultation with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission

#### **Plan for the reintegration of students and staff (e.g. Absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc.)**

- Identify key person(s) to liaise with above on their return to school

#### **Plan visits to injured**

- Identify key person(s) to visit home/hospital if appropriate

#### **Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service**

- Designate staff member to liaise with family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service, Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service, decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

#### **School closure**

- Request a decision on this from school board of management and school inspector

### **4. Longer Term Actions**

#### **Monitor students for signs of continuing distress**

A referral to their GP via their parent may be necessary.

For example, if over a prolonged period, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from their GP:

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms – e.g. weight loss/gain; lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

### **Evaluate response to incident and amend the Critical Incident Response Plan appropriately**

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

### **Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future**

- Consult with your NEPS psychologist and Board of Management

### **Brief new staff on school Critical Incidents Policy**

- Ensure that new staff are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.
- Ensure they are aware of which students were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
- When individual students or a class of students affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, it would be useful to brief the Principal of the new school.

### **Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (be sensitive to special days and events)**

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family and liaise on any proposed commemoration
- Be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day

## **5. Dealing With The Aftermath Of Suicide Or Suspected Suicide**

### **Introduction**

When a person dies through suicide, those who know the person experience a deep sense of shock. The unexpectedness of the death and the taboo associated with suicide can leave a school community feeling unsure of how to proceed. Again, the key to this is planning.

The term 'suicide' should not be used until it has been 'established categorically that the student's or teacher's death was as a result of suicide'. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead.

The following is a guide to how a school can support the bereaved family, school staff and students.

### **Family**

- The Principal should contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family's wishes about how the death should be described
- Acknowledge their grief and loss
- Organise a home visit by two staff members
- Consult with the family regarding the appropriate support from the school, e.g. At the funeral service

### **Organise a staff meeting (if appropriate).**

All staff should be asked to attend, including auxiliary staff

- Organise the supervision of students during any staff meetings
- Decide whether an outside professional be invited to the staff meeting
- Give staff an account of the facts as known
- Give staff an opportunity to express their views and their feelings
- Set in place with staff a procedure for identifying vulnerable students
- Distribute relevant handout material

Students need to be with people they know and trust. If possible, it is better if the teachers provide support for students. The external 'expert' visitor should therefore be primarily used to brief teachers.

Help teachers to prepare for breaking the news to students. Close friends and relatives of the deceased in the school need to be told first. This needs to be done in a private location.

Outline the possible reactions.

Give them information from the schools pack on dealing with the students in the classroom and on reactions to grief.

Identify high-risk students and what supports are available.

Remind them of the school's critical incident plan.

Decide on the strategy to deal with queries from parents/guardians. Prepare a letter setting out the facts, how the school is dealing with the events and how parents or guardians can support their child.

Ensure that a quiet place can be made available for students/staff.

Hold further staff briefings during the day to update information, to offer support and to further identify high-risk students.

### **Inform Students**

Careful preparation is important when meeting students to inform them of a critical incident. Consideration should be given to the age of the pupils and the optimum group size. It is best to do it in class groups or sub-groups. The suitability of the 'messenger' should also be considered, remembering that it is generally thought that support is best given by the adults known to the child. Any outside 'expert' might help by assisting the people undertaking this task to prepare for it and by providing advice and support as they manage it. The nature of the event will clearly have an influence on how students are informed. This team will be appointed by the Principal to provide the frontline information to the students.

The key points/actions in the process are listed below:

- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours, which can cause unnecessary stress
- Allow students to ask questions tell their story and express feelings
- Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident
- Create a safe and supportive space for the students where they can share their reactions and feelings
- Advise them on their possible reactions over the next few days
- Avoid glorifying the victim and sensationalising the suicide
- Advise the students of the support that is available to them
- Take any talk of suicide seriously and provide support or refer on immediately to parents and advise they visit their GP
- Students may wish to confide in and seek support from each other rather than adults

Facilitate this if appropriate and if it is possible. However, information should be provided about how to get further help if they, or their friends, should need it

### **Indicators of high-risk students**

- Close friends and relatives of the deceased
- Students with a history of suicide attempts/self-harm
- Students who experienced a recent loss, death of a friend or relative, family divorce or separation, break-up with a boyfriend/girlfriend
- Students who have been bereaved by a suicide in the past
- Students with psychiatric history
- Students with a history of substance abuse
- Students with a history of sexual abuse
- Non-communicative Students who have difficulty talking about their feelings
- Students experiencing serious family difficulties, including serious mental or physical illness

- Less able students
- School should be vigilant around the time of the inquest and the anniversary of the student's death

### **Assessing for suicide potential**

Where there is a serious question mark or concern about a student, then referral should be made to a person trained in risk assessment, (Guidance Counsellor) and parents informed immediately

## **6. School Trips**

It is the policy of Carlow Vocational School /Carlow Institute of Further Education to promote a safe and secure environment for its staff and students at all times

### **Procedure:**

No student or teacher will be allowed to travel without insurance and the Principal's permission. Parental permission is also required

### **Permission for trips / tours**

- Field Trip Permission form completed and submitted to Principal a week in advance (see appendix 1)
- (Copy of above and list of students left in main Office, each accompanying teacher must have a copy of student list also. Parents' permission slips filed and kept by the organising teachers)
- Emergency contact number – out of school hours numbers (Principal's mobile number)
- Contact number of teachers accompanying students must be available to Principal and main office while on tour

### **On Tour**

- Teachers must bring pack including list of teachers, students and procedures for emergencies.
  - Teachers on overnight trips must contact school each morning
1. In case of emergency, teacher in charge must contact 999 / 112 (as appropriate), giving name, location and phone number
  2. In case of emergency, teacher in charge must contact School, giving accurate information about the incident

- i. What happened, when and where?
  - ii. What is the extent of injuries?
  - iii. is the location of those injured and those not injured?
  - iv. How many are involved and what are their names?
  - v. Is there a risk of further injury?
  - vi. What agencies have been contacted already?
3. The School will inform parents/guardians and others on a need to know basis, via CIT policy. Teachers/students are advised not to comment on incident to media etc. (outside of guidelines given by Principal)
4. A full report on incident to be available to Principal and First Aid officer as soon as possible

### **Timeframe**

This policy was reviewed in April 2015.

Modifications were made and ratified by Board of Management May 2015.

Published and circulated May 2015.

The above Policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Carlow Vocational School / Carlow Institute of Education at a meeting

In: \_\_\_\_\_ (venue)    On: \_\_\_\_\_ (date)

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson, Board of Management)

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Secretary, Board of Management)

## **Appendix A**

### **Sample letter in the event of a tragedy.**

Taken from “Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools, Advice and Information Pack for Schools”, NEPS.

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (*the sudden death, accidental injury*) of one of our students/member of staff. We are deeply saddened by the death/events.  
(*Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost*)

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. (*Include details*)

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

If you would like advice or assistance you may contact the following people at the school.  
(*Details*)

Yours sincerely,

Principal

**Sample letter requesting consent for involvement of outside professional/s.**

Taken from “Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools, Advice and Information Pack for Schools”, NEPS.

Dear Parents,

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

Your son/daughter has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with the psychologist. 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 to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip or telephone the school.

Yours sincerely,

Principal.

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I/We consent to having our daughter/son met by a psychologist employed by the Minister for Education and Science.

I/We understand that my daughter/son may meet the psychologist(s) in an individual or group session depending on the arrangements that are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of student: \_\_\_\_\_ Class/Year: \_\_\_\_\_

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

I would like my daughter/son ..... to avail of the support being offered by the psychologist.

## **Appendix B**

School Trip Permission form