



# **BALLINROBE COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

## **Critical Incident Plan**

Ballinrobe Community School values and respects each individual in the school community. For this reason we have a comprehensive Pastoral Care system in place. Should a crisis arise, the school is equipped to support both students and staff.

If the crisis is one that affects the whole school community, then the Critical Incident Plan is put into action. This ensures that best practice is followed in offering emotional, spiritual, and psychological support to all those affected by the tragedy at a critical time in the life of the school.

The Critical Incident may include a suicide or other traumatic death or a traumatic incident such as a shooting, knife attack, an intruder, gang activity, natural disaster, abuse or medical emergencies or any other crisis situation which may affect any member of our school community.

## The Critical Incident Management Team

It is school policy to have a number of key personnel to provide leadership and expertise in the implementation of the plan.

The team will comprise the Principal, Deputy Principal, Chaplain, Guidance Counsellors and other teachers concerned (i.e. Class Tutor or Year Head of the effected group).

## The Critical Incident Management Team

Rachelle McDonagh      Guidance Counsellor  
Emer McGrath

Lorraine Kerrigan      Chaplain

Kathleen Devaney      Deputy Principal

William Culkeen      Principal

The roles of the CIMT are as follows:

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| A. Team leader and Staff/Media liaison                | W. Culkeen  |
| B. Garda/medical liaison; Board of Management liaison | K. Devaney  |
| C. Family liaison                                     | L. Kerrigan |
| D. NEPS and other counselling services                | R. McDonagh |
|   | E. McGrath  |
| E. Office management and Phone line management        | M. Moran    |
| F. Assistant Safety Officer                           | M. Gavin    |

### **Year Heads role**

- A. To coordinate response to students
- B. To take charge of their year group with teachers designated to specific classes
- C. To relay information/instructions and coordinate school activities
- D. To liaise with parents of their year group
- E. To maintain routine
- F. To identify any at risk/seriously distressed students within their year group
- G. To liaise with Core team

### **Teachers role**

- A. To assume responsibility for one class group
- B. To remain with class and provide information received from Year heads
- C. To ensure safety of all students in group
- D. To identify at risk/distressed students and where necessary provide information to Year heads

- **The most essential requirement is to keep students IN school and ensure that all students attend school**
- **School is the best place for students in a critical incident**
- **School should NOT close during or because of a critical incident.**

In the event of a critical incident occurring at night, all staff will be contacted between 6.30 am and 7.00am and will be requested to attend at school at 8.00 o'clock to properly plan the response to the incident.

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will be contacted via text should a critical incident occur and will contact other external personnel as needed. See phone numbers listed below.

N.E.P.S. Head office Castlebar	018892700 094 902 8310
Pieta House	093 25586
The Parish priest Fr. Gormally	094 9541784
Garda Station	094 9542830
Dr. Kieran O'Reilly Dr. Martin Finnerty Dr. Michael O'Dwyer	094 9541721 094 9541635 094 9541467
Fire Station	094 9541070

<p><b>Intervention Responsibilities</b></p> <p><b>Leadership/ Family Liaison/ Communication</b></p>
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Task	Resource
Confirm the death has occurred. Get accurate information from family or Gardaí	Principal/DP
Express sympathy to family, assure of school's support. Ascertain if name is in public domain.	Principal/DP
Notify BOM	Principal/DP
Ensure family know who is the contact person in the school	Principal/DP
Consult with family on school involvement in funeral. (Family wishes to be respected)	Principal/DP
Organise the CIMT to meet	Chaplain/DP/Principal
Prepare an announcement for staff/students	Principal/DP
Plan a staff meeting if required (to include teaching and non-teaching staff)	Principal/DP
Prepare statement and distribute procedures to Class Teachers in breaking the news	Appendix 1

Devise a process for dealing with telephone enquiries from anxious parents/student name not to be given out.	Principal/DP/Office
Have written and/ or oral response to enquiries prepared	Principal/DP
Prepare media statement	Appendix 2
Discourage any student or staff from dealing with the media	Principal/DP
Make decisions on who should attend funeral	CIMT
Draft letter to parents on the issue	Appendix 3
Should the school be closed on the day of the funeral? If at all possible the school should remain open (Notification to parents/buses/DES/visitors of closure)	CIMT
Liaise with local organizations/schools if necessary	Principal

### **Intervention Responsibilities**

#### **Chaplain/Counselling**

Task	Resource
Set up CIMT Room in the school	
Outline services available to affected students during the first hours	Oratory
Open the school if tragedy occurs on weekend or during holidays	Principal/DP
Assist teacher of the class affected in breaking news	Chaplain & Year Head
Have guidelines for staff in dealing with students in distress i.e. information on grief responses, identifying those with need of counselling and support	Appendix 1
Take time with the most affected students in Crisis Response Room – Create Rota so an individual teacher is not overwhelmed	Oratory
Organise a Class Prayer Service or Assembly, once all students have been notified	Chaplain & Year Head

Contact parents where some students request to go home – Rota of teachers & a Log of students allowed home. Students only released into direct care of a parent or nominated adult	Year Head
Encourage those who feel able, to return to class – Students who are supported out of class should only be done so for a defined period	Chaplain & Year Head
Meet and support any distressed parents and staff. Parents should only be met in small groups	Available Team Members
Liaise with local clergy re: funeral	Chaplain
Set up a Book Of Condolences (if required)	Chaplain
In the event that the bereaved family is not Catholic contact home to ascertain their wishes regarding the service	Principal

### Critical Incident Management Team: Step by Step

Task	Resource
The principal having confirmed the death makes contact with the family	Principal
CIMT Meet to plan strategy, keeping in mind the guidelines above	CIMT Room
Key Tasks are distributed. Prepare list of tasks and those responsible	CIMT
Have all statements/guidelines for Teachers ready	
Have written and oral statements ready for all communication with the school	
Send text to the staff to report to the staff room when they arrive	Principal/DP
Meet Staff (note any absences or late arrivals to ensure that all staff know the news)	Principal/DP
CIMT outline to staff the plan for the day and the support available	CIMT
Location of Crisis Response Room announced	Oratory
Class Teachers break news to their classes (handouts given on guidelines)	Appendix 1

D.P. to also ensure that Chaplain and Guidance Counsellor are freed from all other commitments for the day.	Deputy Principal
Plan another update staff meeting later in the day	Principal/DP
Clarify funeral arrangements for staff later	Chaplain/Principal
CIMT meet to plan procedures for school involvement in removal and funeral	Principal/Chaplain
Day 2: Students who are not coping are referred to chaplain/counsellor on an individual basis. Important for the school to run as normal as possible	Year Head/Teacher
Day 3: CIMT meet to plan CISD (critical incident stress debriefing) response after the funeral in the next few days.	CIMT Room
Contact additional counsellors should the need arise	

**APPENDIX 1**  
**Breaking Bad News to Students:**  
**Guidelines for Class Teachers**

Task	Resource
The Class of the student who has died should be the first to be told, with Chaplain, Counsellor, Tutor and Year Head present.	Chaplain/Counsellor
Other classes to be told by their Tutor or class teachers	
Not every class is going to be traumatized, some students may not even know the deceased, but it is important to acknowledge the loss for the whole school community	
Tell the class you have sad news and it is difficult for you to do this	
Let them know the name of the person the news is about	Staff meeting
<i>Let them know the facts, as you know them. (It is important to prevent rumours through misinformation)</i> <i>It is also important that students know that it is not appropriate for them to speak to the media about what has happened. If they are asked they should say they have nothing to say.</i>	Staff meeting
The cause of death should be relayed to the students as a sudden death. If they have questions regarding if it was suicide, inform them that it only a coroner, following a hearing, that gives the cause of death.	
Encourage questions	
<i>Let the class know of common reactions to tragic news (see pg10)</i>	Teachers Pack
The most common reaction is shock	
Expect tears and outbursts	
Inform students that support will be available during the day	CIMT
<i>Don't allow a student to leave the classroom alone in a distressed state</i>	Oratory/CIMT



Students <i>must be supervised</i> within the building while in a distressed state	Oratory/CIMT
Let them know that you will support them	
Let them know who else is available to support them	
If a student is suspected as being at risk the Principal should be notified immediately so that the student can be referred to a teacher with 'Assist' training	
Be attentive to identifying those who are not coping well with the news – Referral of students for individual attention	Counsellor/Chaplain
Let them know where the CIMT will be (possibly base classroom/Oratory/Guidance office)	
Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news	
Allow them time(limited) to mingle and talk to one another in groups (avoid hysteria)	
Explain how they can support one another	
You may need to remind students again who is there to help, as little information is assimilated once in shock	
Offer a short prayer for the deceased.	
Inform students that Year Head will keep them up to date	
Some students may be able to continue and go to class	
Some will need to stay with the CIMT for a while	
Encourage students to stay in school to support their friends	
Some students, who may need to go home, may do so in consultation with the year head and only if parents come and collect them. Students must sign out in the office	
Those who go to class may not be able to concentrate on the work of the class Subject teachers will need to make allowances for them to talk in groups as the need arises	

## Common Reactions on Hearing Traumatic News

### Emotional and Physical

Shock  
Fear  
Guilt  
Grief  
Tears  
Panic  
Denial  
Anxiety  
Depression  
Anger  
Emotional outbursts  
Overwhelmed  
Nausea  
Fainting  
Pain  
Dizziness  
Weakness  
Palpitations  
Breathing difficulties

### Mental and Behavioural

Confusion  
Blame  
Poor Concentration  
Disorientation  
Withdrawn  
Restlessness  
Let down  
Uncertainty

## Contacting Staff if tragedy occurs over a Weekend/Holidays

Task	Resource
If it is the death of a colleague the system of informing staff is via the texting service	Principal's texting facility
If it is the death of a student, The Critical Incident Management Team needs to be informed immediately. Other staff can be informed later.	Principal/Deputy/Chaplain
Whoever first hears the news to contact the Principal or Deputy	
Contact Board of Management and Parents Council	Principal/Deputy

## Media Statement 1

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Ballinrobe Community School, have learned of the tragic death of.....N.

Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the family of N.

On hearing the tragic news the Critical Incident Plan was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management Team met to ensure that students affected by this loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

The school is offering support for students & staff affected by this tragedy. Prayer services have been held with affected classes in the school. Students will attend and participate in the funeral service, in consultation with the wishes of the family.

Our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this tragedy.

## **Media Statement 2**

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Ballinrobe Community School have learned of the tragic death of one of our students.

Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the bereaved family.

On hearing the tragic news the Critical Incident Plan was put into immediate operation, The Critical Incident Management Team met to ensure that members of the school community affected by this loss receive all the help they need to cope at this time.

Prayer services have been held with classes upset by the tragedy and some students will attend and participate in the funeral service, in consultation with the wishes of the family.

Our prayers and support are with the loved ones and friends of the deceased student.

### **Media Statement 3**

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Ballinrobe Community School have heard of the tragic news of .....

On hearing the news the School Critical Incident Plan was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management Team met to ensure that Students and Staff affected by this crisis are cared for adequately. Procedures have been put in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this Crisis are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

## General Letter to Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Ballinrobe Community School have learned of the tragic death of our student N. Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the N family. On hearing the tragic news the School Critical Incident Plan was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management Team met to ensure that students affected by this loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given the help they need to cope at this time. Prayer services have been held with affected classes in the school and we hope to have a memorial service in the near future. Following consultation with the deceased's family, the arrangements for the funeral are as follows:

Removal:

Church Service:

Burial:

If your child wishes to attend the funeral service, please inform us in writing. You will also find enclosed some information that might be of assistance at this most difficult time. If there are any other areas of concern please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Yours sincerely,

## Muslim Death

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Ballinrobe Community School have learned of the death of .....N

N.....was a valued member of our school community and we will be holding a memorial to him/her in the coming days. N..... was a Muslim student and following that tradition the funeral takes place almost immediately in the mosque in ..... We have contacted the mosque and while students may attend the service female students will not be able to take part in the service or attend the burial in accordance with Muslim tradition. As we are a multidenominational school we wish to respect the faith of all our students and therefore request that our female students wait to express their sympathy at our school memorial service. We will be inviting N..... family to attend our memorial service here in school and this will give all our students an opportunity to express their sympathy to the family.

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I allow my son to attend the funeral.

Parents/guardians signature \_\_\_\_\_



## Information Sheet for Parents

### Common Reactions on Hearing Traumatic News

As you are the natural support for your child you may find that he/she will want to discuss some feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully, restating what you hear them say so they know you are really listening. You should tell them that it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. You may also find that your child will look for comfort and support from their friends, this is a natural reaction from an adolescent. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check-up. The length for the grieving period varies from individual to individual. If your child remains very distressed after six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support.

<b>Emotional and Physical</b>		<b>Mental and Behavioural</b>
Shock	Emotional outbursts	Confusion
Fear	Overwhelmed	Blame
Guilt	Nausea	Poor concentration
Grief	Fainting	Disorientation
Tears	Pain	Withdrawn
Panic	Dizziness	Restlessness
Denial	Weakness	Let down
Anxiety	Palpitations	Uncertainty
Depression	Breathing difficulties	
Anger		

## **School Programmes to tackle issues of Mental Health, Stress and Suicide**

There are a number of programmes within the school that provide information on personal health issues and allow students an outlet for discussion of problems that may be causing distress. In the SPHE subject area, they are as follows:

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year SPHE classes - One Class period per week. The programme includes stress/anger/conflict management, decision-making, problem solving and other mental health related topics.

Fifth year and Leaving Cert groups - Study skills techniques that are designed to alleviate stress regarding preparation for examinations, Guidance classes and RSE module within the core curriculum.

Transition Year – Personal development classes.

All class groups are timetabled for two PE classes per week.

**Teachers with 'Assist' Training**

The Board of Management adopted this policy on \*\*\*\*\*