

## Critical Incident Policy

### **Introduction**

In Wexford Educate Together we aim to protect the well being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment as outlined in our school mission statement,

In Wexford Educate Together N.S., every child will learn in a safe, inclusive, democratic, co-educational setting that is committed to enabling and supporting each child to recognise their gifts and to achieve their full potential, while at the same time preparing them to become caring and active members of a culturally diverse society.

The BoM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association have drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

### **What is a Critical Incident?**

‘A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school’.

### **Examples:**

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease e.g. Covid 19 Pandemic, Foot & Mouth
- Criminal incidents e.g. Dunblane shooting, Shooting at first communion in Ballymun
- Major accidents, serious injury e.g. Navan bus crash
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster e.g. school ceiling collapsing in Cork
- Intrusion into the school
- Disappearance of student from home or school e.g. Middleton incident in Cork
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, tsunami

### **Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school**

In Wexford Educate Together we have systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. The following are the measures that we have put in place to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community:

- Positive teaching and learning environment: School Ethos, Student Council, Parent Association, Positive Language Policy, Code of Behaviour, School Assemblies
- Physical safety: evacuation plan, fire drills, extinguishers regularly checked, playground rules, lanyard system, school gates bolted, code system for entrance, procedure for late arrival and early collection, morning supervision.
- Policies: Child Protection Guidelines, Anti-Bullying Policy, Inclusion Policy
- Curricular: SPHE Curriculum, Learn Together Curriculum, RSE programme, Stay safe programme, Internet safety
- Extra-Curricular Activities: Amber flag, Buddy bench, Student Council, Zeeko training (internet safety)
- Continuum of Support: Procedure for identification of at risk pupils, development of links with outside agencies e.g. NEPS, Túsla etc.
- Staff: Provision of staff training and resources, awareness of Employee Assistance Scheme for staff mental health support

### **Critical Incidents Management Team:**

Leadership Role: Maria Caesar (Principal)

Communication Role: Selina Carmody (Deputy Principal)

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Lorraine Watchorn (NEPS Psychologist)

Parents Association Rep:

B.O.M. Rep: Anne Marie Ferris

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined.

The second-named person assists and only assumes responsibility on the absence of the first-named.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **1. Leadership Role:**

##### **Intervention**

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies e.g. NEPS
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)
- Record keeping: phone calls, meetings etc.

#### **Postvention**

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review plan

### **2. Communication Role:**

#### **Intervention**

- With team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies
- Record keeping: phone calls, meetings etc.

#### **Postvention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

### **3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:**

#### **Intervention**

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information and counselling

#### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

## Action Plan

### SHORT TERM ACTIONS (DAY 1)

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school e.g. funeral service
- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc., or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person.
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff
- Contact appropriate agencies
  1. Emergency services
  2. Medical services
  3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
  4. NEPS
  5. BOM
  6. DES/Schools Inspector

### **Media Briefing (if appropriate)**

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
  1. What happened, where and when?
  2. What is the extent of the injuries?
  3. How many are involved and what are their names?
  4. Is there a risk of further injury?
  5. What agencies have been contacted already?

## **MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)**

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- 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 re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc.
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
  1. Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
  2. Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
  3. Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate)
- Request a decision on this from school management

## **LONGER TERM ACTIONS**

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress. If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the HSE. Constant communication with family is essential.

- 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

Review and evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management 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 NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate.
- Ensure that new staffs are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school.

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries.

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time.
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family.
- Need to be sensitive to significant days and events e.g. Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day

Care of deceased person's possessions.

- What are the parent's wishes?

Plan a school memorial service

Update and amend school records

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Wexford Educate Together on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2017.

Reviewed: November 2018 & April 2020