Scoil Bhríde, Eglantine.

Critical Incident Management

A School Crisis Plan 2026

Crisis Response Team

Team Leader, Family, Garda & Media Liaison; Chairperson, Sheelagh O Leary

Team Leader, Family, Garda & Media Liaison; Principal; Ger O Brien

Staff Liaison; Aideen Canning & DP, Louise Hennessy

Student Liaison; Lisa Ryan & DP, Louise Hennessy

Community Liaison; Ruben O' Leary

Parents Liaison; Alasdair Fitzpatrick

Chaplaincy; Parish Priest.

Critical Incident Management Plan

Scoil Bhríde aims to protect the well being of it's students, staff and school community by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. Our school motto is;

In Safe Hands

We, in Scoil Bhríde, endeavour to nurture the self esteem of all within our school. We aim to create an environment where everyone is free to question and encouraged to think. Where everyone feels cherished, valued and respected. Where children will learn and grow in honesty, respect and faith.

The Board of Management of Scoil Bhríde, through principal Ger O Brien and members of the Critical Incident Management team, has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan as one element of our school's plans and policies.

Scoil Bhríde has policies which allow us to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has implemented a number of policies and procedures which ensure the physical safety and psychological safety of the students, staff and school community both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

Scoil Bhríde recognises a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school" (*NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools*).

Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff or members of the school community. Types of incidents might include;

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- An intrusion into the school.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider school community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood or vandalism.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident involving members of the school community.

Aim

Recognising that the key to managing critical incidents is planning, Scoil Bhríde has developed this Critical Incident Management Plan and accompanying supports. Such forward planning will , in the event of an incident, allow staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. To ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff and ensure that the effects on students and staff will be limited. Forward planning will help to ensure a return to normality as soon as is possible.

Creation of a Coping, Supportive and Caring Ethos in Scoil Bhríde

In so far as is practicable, we have systems in place which shall reduce the possibility of the occurrence of an incident. We have also put systems in place to help to build resilience in both students and staff, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include policies to address both the physical and psychological safety of students, staff and the school community.

Physical Safety

- Evacuation Plan formulated
- Regular fire drills
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly inspected
- Regular training in first aid and CPR
- Regular inspection of AED (machine and pads) and first aid kits
- School public access doors are secured during class time
- School gates (A,B,D) are locked during the school day
- Rules of the school and of the playground in place

School Security

- Arrival and dispersal procedures are reviewed regularly
- During class time external doors are locked (pin code system). Entry is via the main reception door only and all visitors must report to the office
- All external classroom doors have a thumb lock on the inside
- Sign in and sign out system in place
- Visitors to the school such as TY and TP students wear a visitors badge

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of Scoil Bhríde aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- SPHE programmes are included in the curriculum to address issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, resilience, conflict management, problem solving, help seeking, bullying, decision making, alcohol and drug abuse prevention.
- Promotion of caring for our mental health is an integral part of the provision of SPHE through the Weaving Wellbeing Programme. This programme is taught at all class levels.
- Staff are familiar with the child protection procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP).
- DLP (principal) completes an oversight report to the Board of Management at each BOM meeting.
- All teachers are mandated to report to Tusla.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware and vigilant to their needs.
- Staff have access to resources and training on difficulties affecting the students.
- Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness and expertise of the providers. See DE Circular 22/2010.
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "*Continuum of Support Approach"* which is outlined by NEPs, NCSE and DE.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member, the principal. In the event of the principal (DLP) being unavailable the deputy principal will be the Designated Deputy Liaison Person (DDLP). Concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed and where appropriate a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves e.g. Employee Assistance Service.

The Board of Management of Scoil Bhríde has established a Critical Incident Management Team in line with best practice as outlined in the *NEPs Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools.* The team comprises of a group of individuals from the staff and school community who know the students and community well enough to make the necessary decisions called for when a critical incident occurs. The members of the team were selected and appointed on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team meet and communicate regularly to formulate, review and update this plan. Each member has a Ready-To-Go-Pack with relevant materials to be used in the event of an incident.

The Critical Incident Management Team are as follows;

Team Leader, Family, Garda & Media Liaison; Chairperson, Sheelagh O Leary

Team Leader, Family, Garda & Media Liaison; Principal; Ger O Brien

Staff Liaison; Aideen Canning & DP, Louise Hennessy

Student Liaison; Lisa Ryan & DP, Louise Hennessy

Community Liaison; Ruben O Leary

Parents Liaison; Alasdair Fitzpatrick

Chaplaincy; Parish Priest, Monsignor Dullea

Below is an outline of the duties and responsibilities associated with each individual role.

Team Leader and Garda Liaison

- Alerts the Team Members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management, DES, NEPS.
- Liaises with the bereaved/affected family.
- Liaises with the Gardai
- Ensures that information about deaths or other development is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff member an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of the care call service and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable pupils
- Provides materials for students (from critical incident folder)
- Maintains student contact records (R1)
- Looks after setting up and supervision of "quiet" room where agreed

Community Liaison

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers
  -Key parents, such as members of the Parents Association

  -Emergency Support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referrals
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies



- Updates team members of the involvement of external agencies.

Parent Liaison

- Arranges parent gathering, if held
- Sets up room for meeting with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from critical incident folder)

Media Liaison

- Draws up a press statement, gives media briefings and interviews.

Administrative Tasks will entail the following:

- Maintenance of up to date lists of contact numbers of
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency support services (see Appendix 1)

- Telephone calls that need to be responded to, letters sent and materials photocopied.
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and received, letters, emails and texts sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc. The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

Letter to Parents

The Principal will prepare a brief, written statement to include (See Appendix)

- The sympathy of the school community for the affected/bereaved family
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured persons(s)
- The facts of the incident (as may have been established)
- What has been done
- What is going to be done

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

Scoil Bhríde has a Data Protection Policy (DPP) which shall dictate the contents of any public statement. Where such statements are issued it shall case sensitive of the incident pursuant of the DPP. The school has a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of any person or people who may be involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. Where such statements are issued its likely impact on the family and or school community shall be assessed prior to issue. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that pupils do so also. [For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used. The phrases "tragic death", 'sudden death' or 'untimely death' may be used instead.]

Critical Incident Room

In the event of a critical incident, the staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff, parents and visitors involved. Seomra Shorcha will be used as a quiet or private meeting space for individual or small groups of children. The SET rooms may also be used for individual or small group meetings with staff or outside agencies.

Social Media and Critical Incidents

Social Media is now part of everyday communication and information sharing. Social media messages speed up the rate at which information is shared. This can have a significant influence on the behaviour of young people during a critical incident. Some social media communication may occur without the knowledge of school staff that leads to distress among students or their parents/guardians.

We in Scoil Bhríde consider the following issues may be helpful when dealing with a critical incident:

- As part of the school curriculum children are made aware of internet safety
- During a critical incident a message may be placed on the school website along the following lines e.g.

  You may be aware of a recent event within the school community. We ask you to respect the relevant family's privacy and sensitivities by considering if you should post any comments especially on social media. We will inform you through the normal channels of any relevant developments.
- Another important message that may be posted on our website is to remind parents/guardians to discuss social media use with their children and monitor use more actively following a crisis.
- Media Personnel who make contact with the school during a critical incident will be provided with *Media Guidelines for reporting suicide Samaritans Booklet.*
- Young people often post RIP messages on social media sites when tragedies occur. These posts can be heart felt and emotional. Should the school become aware of any messages that cause concern regarding the emotional welfare of a child we will immediately inform parents/guardians.
- Should we become aware of inappropriate posts by students we will inform parents/guardians and encourage them to request that it is deleted.

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

School staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff and the Board of Management.

Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by Louise Hennessy, Deputy Principal.

The plan will be updated regularly.

This Policy has been reviewed and ratified by the BOM of Scoil Bhríde on

06/10/2026

Sheelagh O' Leary

Sheelagh O Leary

Chairperson BOM

Ger O Brien

Principal

Appendix 1

Emergency Contact List

OUTSIDE AGENCY	CONTACT NUMBERS
GARDA	**Douglas - 4857670** **Angelsea St - 4522000**
HOSPITAL	**CUH - 4922000**
FIRE BRIGADE	**999**
LOCAL GPS	**Avonlea Medical Centre, Boreenamanna Rd** **4294415**
HEALTH BOARD/FAMILY CENTRE	**South Lee - child Protection 021 4923001**
INSPECTORATE	**Gráinne Cull** **grainne_cull@education.gov.ie**
NEPS PSYCHOLOGIST	**Gearóidín Farrell** **Gearoidin_Farrell@education.gov.ie** **087 912 9186**
DES COMMUNICATIONS	**Through Inspectorate**

INTO	**01 804 7700**
PARISH PRIEST/CLERGY	**Monsignor Dullea** **massarelli.gd@gmail.com** **086 241 8298**
DIOCESAN OFFICE	**education@corkandross.org** **021 430 1717**
PIETA HOUSE	**Text Help to 51444** **1800 247 247**
SAMARITANS	**116 123**

Appendix 11

Crisis Response: Step by Step

1. The Principal having confirmed the details of tragedy makes contact with the family.
2. Crisis Management Team meet to plan strategy, keeping mind the guidelines below.
3. Key tasks are distributed.
4. Have all guidelines for teachers ready.
5. Have written and oral statements ready for all communication with the school.
6. Have a notice at entrances to the school for staff to report to the staff room at 8.15a.m.
7. Meet staff (note any absences or late arrivals to ensure that all staff know the news)
8. Crisis Management Team outline to staff the plan for the day and the support available.
9. Location of Crisis Response Room announced (Staff Room)
10. Class teachers break news to their classes (handouts given on guidelines)
11. Deputy Principal to make alternative arrangements for classes normally using SET rooms or additional spaces required.
12. Plan another update staff meeting later in the day.
13. Clarify arrangements for staff later e.g. funeral or vigil arrangements.
14. Crisis Management Team meet to plan procedures for school involvement in vigil, funeral or similar.
15. **Day 2:** Students who are not coping are referred to psychologist – with parents' permission - on an individual basis. Important for the school to run as normal as possible.
16. **Day 3:** Crisis Management Team meet to plan response after the funeral in the next few days.
17. Discussion with fellow students, parents or colleagues on dealing with Child's/teacher's belongings, their desk etc. What should be done with these items?

Intervention Responsibilities:

Leadership/Family Liaison/Communication

- Confirm the tragic incident has occurred. Get accurate information
- Express sympathy to family, assure of school's support
- Ensure family know who is the contact person with the school
- Consult with family on school involvement in arrangements. (Family wishes to be respected; be careful of wording)
- Organise the Crisis Management Team to meet
- Notify BOM
- Prepare an announcement for staff/students
- Plan a staff meeting if required
- Prepare statement and distribute procedures to class teachers in breaking the news
- Devise a process for dealing with telephone enquiries from anxious parents
- Have written and/or oral response to enquiries prepared
- Prepare media statement
- Discourage any student or staff from dealing with the media
- Make decisions on who should attend funeral
- Draft letter to parents on the issue
- Should the school be closed on the day of the funeral? (Notification to parents/buses/visitors etc)

Intervention Responsibilities:

Pastoral Care:

- Set up Crisis Management Team Room in the School.
- Outline services available to affected students during the first hours
- Assist class teacher of the class affected in breaking news
- Have guidelines for staff in dealing with students in distress i.e. information on grief responses, identifying those with need of counselling and support
- Take time with the most affected students in Crisis Response Rooms (SET Rooms and Seomra Shorcha)
- Organise a class prayer service for mid morning, once all students have been notified
- Contact parents where some students request to go home
- Encourage those who feel able, to return to class
- Meet and support any distressed parents and staff
- Liaise with local clergy
- Set up a Book of Condolences and candle in foyer. Consider including a photo of the person.

Breaking the News to Students:

Guidelines for Class Teachers

- Only if the tragedy is confirmed, can it be relayed to students – tragic accident, untimely death, sudden death etc should be used.
- The class of the student who has died should by the first to be told, with Principal & Class Teacher present.
- Other classes to be told by their class teachers
- Not every class will be traumatised, 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
- Let them know the facts, as you know them. (It is important to prevent rumours through misinformation)
- Encourage questions
- Let the class know of common reactions to tragic news
- The most common reaction is shock
- Expect tears and outbursts
- Don't allow a student to leave the classroom alone in a distressed state
- Students must be supervised within the building while in a distressed state
- Let them know that you will support them
- Let them know who else is available to support them
- Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news
- Allow them time to mingle and talk
- Be attentive to identifying those who are not coping well with the news
- You may need to remind students again who is there to help, as little information is assimilated once in shock
- Let them know where the Crisis Management Team will be (possibly a classroom)



- Arrange to have refreshments ready also boxes of Tissues
- A short prayer for the injured/deceased would be appropriate
- Some students may be able to continue and go to class
- Some will need to stay with the Crisis Management Team for the morning
- Encourage students to stay in school to support their friends
- Some may need to go home, (only if parents come and collect them)
- Those who go to class may not be able to concentrate on the work of the class
- Teachers will need to make allowances for them to talk in groups as the need arises.

Appendix 111

Immediate, Medium and Long-term

Action and Roles: Checklist

1ST DAY

TASK	NAME (KEY & SUPPORT)
GATHER ACCURATE INFORMATION	**Relevant Staff and Witnesses (accidents)**
CONTACT APPROPRIATE AGENCIES	**Principal**
CONVENE A MEETING WITH KEY STAFF	**Principal and Deputy**
ARRANGE SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS	**Deputy Principal**
HOLD STAFF MEETING	**ALL STAFF**
ORGANISE TIMETABLE FOR THE DAY	**Deputy Principal**
INFORM PARENTS	**Principal**

INFORM STUDENTS	**Staff**
MAKE CONTACT WITH THE BEREAVED FAMILY	**Chairperson and Principal**
DEALING WITH MEDIA	**Principal**

MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS AND ROLES ASSIGNED

24 -72 HOURS

TASK	NAME/GROUP
REVIEW THE EVENTS OF THE FIRST 24 HOURS	STAFF
ARRANGE SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUAL/GROUPS OF STUDENTS, PARENTS ETC.	Principal
PLAN THE REINTEGRATION OF STUDENTS AND STAFF	Principal and Deputy
PLAN VISITS TO INJURED	Principal and Deputy Principal
LIAISE WITH FAMILY RE FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS/MEMORIAL SERVICE	Principal and Chair
ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION AT FUNERAL SERVICE ETC	STAFF
SCHOOL CLOSURE	BOM

LONGER TERM ACTIONS AND ROLES ASSIGNED

BEYOND 72 HOURS

TASK	NAME/GROUP
MONITOR STUDENTS FOR SIGNS OF CONTINUING STRESS	CLASS TEACHERS
EVALUATE RESPONSE TO INCIDENT AND AMEND CI PLAN APPROPRIATELY	STAFF/BOM
FORMALISE PLAN FOR FUTURE	STAFF/BOM
INFORM NEW STAFF/PUPILS	Principal
DECIDE ON APPROPRIATE WAYS TO DEAL WITH ANNIVERSARIES	BOM, STAFF AND PARENTS

Appendix IV

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

BARNARDOS **Family Support Centre** **8/9, Ring Mahon Rd**	**021 4357679**
ISPCC	**021 4509588** The ISPCC offers a range of services for children who have experienced loss or bereavement
RAINBOW IRELAND	**01 4734175** Loreto Centre, Crumlin Road, Dublin 12. Organises support groups nationally for children and young adults of bereaved or separated families.
CHILDLINE	**1800 666666**
PARENTLINE	**1890 927277**
AWARE	***1890 303302*** *The Aware Helpline offers a non-judgmental listening ear to people who may be distressed or worried, or just need someone to talk to.*
THE SAMARITANS	**1850 609 090**
PIETA HOUSE	**1800 247 247**



Appendix V

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (the sudden death, untimely death accidental injury) of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by the deaths/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. *(Elaborate*)

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 truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

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

Principal



SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING CONSENT FOR INVOLVEMENT OF OUTSIDE PROFESSIONALS

Dear Parents,

Following the recent (tragedy, untimely death of x) we have arranged professional support or students in school who need particular help. (x…) is available to help us with this work. The 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 x….. If you would like your child to receive this support please sign the permission slip and return 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.

Principal

…….

I consent to having our daughter/son met by ……



I understand that my daughter/son may meet x….. in a individual or group session depending on the arrangements which are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of Student: _____

Class: _____

Date of Birth: _____

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

Signed: _____

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND REACTION TO DEATH ACCORDING TO AGE

Handout R8 (May be used with various groups and individuals)

Childrens' understanding and reaction to death will depend on their age and their developmental stage. The following are guides only as children will differ in their reactions and grasp of events for a range of reasons other than age alone.

Ages (0 – 2 years)

- Infants do not understand the meaning of death
- They may display anxiety when separated from a loved one
- They may appear upset, subdued and uninterested in their surroundings

Ages 2 – 5 years

- No understanding of the permanency of death
- May search for the missing person
- May feel responsible for the death in some way
- May become apathetic and depressed
- May regress to an earlier stage of development e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting, tantrums or may become clingy
- May develop fears of going to sleep
- May worry that other loved ones may die

How you can help

- *Continuity of normal routine e.g. mealtimes and bedtime*
- *Offer physical comfort*
- *Explain the death in clear, simple language, using words like "dead" and "died"*
- *Do not use terms like "gone to sleep" or "passed away"*
- *You may need to repeat the same information again and again*
- *Permit them to ask questions and be consistent in your answers*
- *Reassure them that they had nothing to do with the death and of the well-being of other family members*

Ages 5 – 9 years

- Beginning to realise the permanency of death, but their idea of life after death is still vague
- May have concerns about how the deceased is feeling or what he/she is thinking in the grave
- May have a lot of questions about aspects of the death e.g. how the person died, what they looked like, the funeral, heaven, coffins
- The reaction of their peers is important, they may feel 'different' to them
- Their peers may be awkward about the death and avoid contact
- They may become the target of bullying

How you can help

- *Encourage the child to talk and cry about the deceased if they wish to, otherwise respect their silence*
- *Answer questions and provide as much factual information about the death as possible*
- *Reassure them that thinking and feeling ceases after death*
- *Be vigilant in relation to bullying*

Ages 9 – 12 Years

- Understand the finality and universality of death
- Awareness of their own mortality and may worry about their own death
- May display psychosomatic symptoms i.e. physical complaints like tummy aches
- May wish to stay at home close to parents
- May display anger

How you can help

- *Dispel fears about their own health or the health of other loved ones by offering reassurance*
- *Encourage them to go to school*
- *Allow them to express their anger, offering appropriate ways to do so*

Adolescents

- Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults
- May have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
- Death adds to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents
- May appear to not care about the death
- May seek support outside of the family

How you can help

- *Offer them time to listen*
- *Allow them to express their grief in their own way*
- *Be prepared for mood swings.*
- *Don't feel left out if they seem to value their friends more than their parents*

If parents are grieving themselves, they may be emotionally unable to support their other children. In this instance, another supportive adult in the child's life, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours may need to offer emotional support.

It should be remembered that for children with special educational needs, their understanding of what has happened will be in line with their developmental age.

STAGES OF GRIEF

Handout R9 (May be used with various groups and individuals)

Grief is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Although there are distinct phases in the grieving process, people go through these stages in different sequences and at different paces. Generally the grieving process in adults is thought to take about two years, while with children and adolescents it may be over a more extended time-frame with different issues arising as they go through developmental milestones.

Denial, numbness, shock (up to 6 weeks)

- Death of the person may be denied
- Emerging feelings may be suppressed
- Refusal to talk about the death
- Bereaved keeps very busy to avoid thinking about the death
- Bereaved may show signs of confusion and forget everyday routines
- Children in shock may display either silent withdrawal or outbursts of crying

Acute grief/searching and longing for deceased (6 weeks to 4 months)

- Acute sadness – crying
- Physical pangs of pain including loss of appetite and disturbed sleep
- Emotional pain accompanied by dejection, hopelessness, lack of concentration
- Fears of life after death, nightmares, ghosts
- Disorganisation
- Strong guilt feelings and questioning of self and others, particularly in the case of a sudden death
- Feelings of anger at the departed for leaving them
- Bereaved may reject offers to comfort them

Adaptation to life without the deceased (6 months to 18 months)

- People begin to adjust to their lives without the person who is gone
- Sense of isolation
- Fearful of forgetting the deceased
- Less crying and irritability
- Exacerbation of existing personality problems. Children with low self-esteem may be at a greater risk of emotional/behavioural difficulties

Normalisation of life

- Getting on with life
- Returned sense of humour and play
- Able to participate emotionally in new relationships
- Changed relationship with the deceased – able to think of the deceased without pain
- Reduction in physical/emotional symptoms
- Less guilt

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Handout for parents: R14

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

- Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal
- Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting.
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them
- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, exercise, or talking
- Help them to understand that defiance, aggression and risk behaviour is a way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and or fear they are feeling
- When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back.
- If you are out for a long time telephone and reassure them
- Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light
- Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen
- Work with the school support services and other available services.

STUDENT CONTACT RECORD

Resource for schools: R1

This form can be used by school staff or external agency staff to record the details of students seen following a critical incident. This information should be collated centrally.

Name of staff member: _____

Date	Student's name	Class/Year	Outcome (include need for follow-up)

A CLASSROOM SESSION FOLLOWING NEWS OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Handout for teachers: R7

Normally, the class teacher, class tutor or other teacher who knows the students should be the person to inform them of the events and lead the classroom session. Students generally feel safe and secure with someone they know. If the teacher feels uncomfortable with this role another staff member or the psychologist may work with them and share the task. Teachers should have the opportunity to opt out of this work if they feel unable to handle it and other arrangements should be made for that class group.

The aim of the session is to break the news to give the students an opportunity to discuss what has happened and to express their thoughts and feelings in a secure environment. The teacher needs to listen and be empathic.

The session needs to be tailored to the age and developmental level of the class group.

The outline of the session is as follows:

Step 1: **Giving the facts and dispelling rumours**
Step 2: **Sharing stories and allowing and encouraging the sharing of thoughts and the expression of feelings**
Step 3: **Normalising the reactions**
Step 4: **Worries (for younger children)**
Step 5: **Empowerment**
Step 6: **Closure**
Step 7: **Free Time**
Step 8: **Recovery**

Step 1: Giving the facts and dispelling rumours.
Tell the students in a calm, low key and factual voice

- *What has happened*
- *Who was involved*
- *When it happened*
- *The plan for the day*

Sample Script

I have something very sad I want to share with you. The factual information agreed upon by the staff e.g. (Name of student), who attends our school and was missing, has been found. He is dead. Yesterday, the Gardaí found his body. They are investigating what has happened and will let us know as soon as they find out more information.

I am feeling very sad about what's happened. Let's spend some time together now helping each other to talk about how we feel about what has happened.

Step 2: Sharing stories

Take some time for discussion. Students may wish to tell their story of the event. As a result they will feel less alone because of their common shared experiences. Assisting them to verbalise their experiences helps their recovery. For those students who find it difficult to verbalise their experiences, or for students with learning difficulties, it may be helpful to allow them to express their feelings and recount their experiences in other ways. Writing stories or using art can be particularly helpful, especially for younger students. A number of materials that can be used are suggested in 'Resources for Schools' pg 45. Give the students a choice as to how they want to represent their experiences. Have a box of tissues at hand.

Sample script

To help us today, we are going to make a memory box for (name of deceased). You can draw a picture of a time you remember with (name of the deceased) or write a poem or a letter to him. If you like we can put these in a nice box and give it to (name of deceased) family sometime soon. This will help them to see how important (name of deceased) was.

Step 3: Normalising the reactions

Tell the children that they will all react differently to what has happened and that there is no right or wrong way. List some possible feelings and reactions, (see **R11**). Explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Let the students know that the reactions or symptoms will go away in time. Tell them that if the symptoms haven't gone after a few weeks, they should let you or their parents know. They may need to talk to someone about how they are feeling. Depending on the incident and the age of the students distribute handouts **R9, R10, R11, R12**.

Step 4: Worries (for younger children)

Sample script

You may be worried about (name of the deceased) - that they might be sad or lonely or hungry or cold. When someone dies they don't feel cold or hungry or feelings like that anymore.

You may be worried that the same thing could happen to you or someone in your family. What happened to (name of deceased) doesn't happen very often.

If the classmate has been ill, you could say. *He was very sick and the chances of this happening to someone else you know are low.*

Step 5: Empowerment

Help the students to identify strategies that they might use to help manage their reactions. For example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep, exercise may all help. If appropriate, students can share strategies that worked for them in other stressful situations or brainstorm ideas as to what might help. Overall, it is important to help the students regain a sense of control.

Step 6: Closure

End the session by focussing on the future. Depending on the nature of the incident, help the class group decide what they would like to do about various issues, e.g., what to do about the person's empty chair, about writing cards or letters. Reiterate the message that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances.

Step 7: Free Time
After the discussion the teacher may want to allow the student's some play time in the play ground or free time in the classroom or an agreed area, depending on the age.

Step 8: Recovery
It may be useful to continue to do these activities at intervals during the days following and to intersperse them throughout the curriculum in the coming days.

Normal routines should generally be returned to as soon as possible.

- Students should be encouraged to resume sports and other extra-curricular activities
- Help students to identify or establish some supports; help them to identify who they go to for different kinds of help
- It is appropriate that the class curriculum is adjusted or adapted. For example, teachers should avoid presenting new learning material for a while following an incident as concentration may be impaired
- Use opportunities which arise within ordinary class work, where coping and support can be reinforced
- Students could be encouraged to discuss how to avoid future crises and lessons learnt from their experiences. There will also be opportunities for structured discussion within the school's social, personal, and health education programmes. Where Circle Time is in use, this is an ideal context in which to offer support.

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND REACTION TO DEATH ACCORDING TO AGE

Handout R8 (May be used with various groups and individuals)

Childrens' understanding and reaction to death will depend on their age and their developmental stage. The following are guides only as children will differ in their reactions and grasp of events for a range of reasons other than age alone.

Ages (0 – 2 years)

- Infants do not understand the meaning of death
- They may display anxiety when separated from a loved one
- They may appear upset, subdued and uninterested in their surroundings

Ages 2 – 5 years

- No understanding of the permanency of death
- May search for the missing person
- May feel responsible for the death in some way
- May become apathetic and depressed
- May regress to an earlier stage of development e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting, tantrums or may become clingy
- May develop fears of going to sleep
- May worry that other loved ones may die

How you can help

- *Continuity of normal routine e.g. mealtimes and bedtime*
- *Offer physical comfort*
- *Explain the death in clear, simple language, using words like "dead" and "died"*
- *Do not use terms like "gone to sleep" or "passed away"*
- *You may need to repeat the same information again and again*
- *Permit them to ask questions and be consistent in your answers*
- *Reassure them that they had nothing to do with the death and of the well-being of other family members*

Ages 5 – 9 years

- Beginning to realise the permanency of death, but their idea of life after death is still vague
- May have concerns about how the deceased is feeling or what he/she is thinking in the grave
- May have a lot of questions about aspects of the death e.g. how the person died, what they looked like, the funeral, heaven, coffins
- The reaction of their peers is important, they may feel 'different' to them
- Their peers may be awkward about the death and avoid contact
- They may become the target of bullying

How you can help

- *Encourage the child to talk and cry about the deceased if they wish to, otherwise respect their silence*
- *Answer questions and provide as much factual information about the death as possible*
- *Reassure them that thinking and feeling ceases after death*
- *Be vigilant in relation to bullying*

Ages 9 – 12 Years

- Understand the finality and universality of death
- Awareness of their own mortality and may worry about their own death
- May display psychosomatic symptoms i.e. physical complaints like tummy aches
- May wish to stay at home close to parents
- May display anger

How you can help

- *Dispel fears about their own health or the health of other loved ones by offering reassurance*
- *Encourage them to go to school*
- *Allow them to express their anger, offering appropriate ways to do so*

Adolescents

- Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults
- May have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
- Death adds to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents
- May appear to not care about the death
- May seek support outside of the family

How you can help

- *Offer them time to listen*
- *Allow them to express their grief in their own way*
- *Be prepared for mood swings.*
- *Don't feel left out if they seem to value their friends more than their parents*

If parents are grieving themselves, they may be emotionally unable to support their other children. In this instance, another supportive adult in the child's life, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours may need to offer emotional support.

It should be remembered that for children with special educational needs, their understanding of what has happened will be in line with their developmental age.

STAGES OF GRIEF

Handout R9 (May be used with various groups and individuals)

Grief is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Although there are distinct phases in the grieving process, people go through these stages in different sequences and at different paces. Generally the grieving process in adults is thought to take about two years, while with children and adolescents it may be over a more extended time-frame with different issues arising as they go through developmental milestones.

Denial, numbness, shock (up to 6 weeks)

- Death of the person may be denied
- Emerging feelings may be suppressed
- Refusal to talk about the death
- Bereaved keeps very busy to avoid thinking about the death
- Bereaved may show signs of confusion and forget everyday routines
- Children in shock may display either silent withdrawal or outbursts of crying

Acute grief/searching and longing for deceased (6 weeks to 4 months)

- Acute sadness – crying
- Physical pangs of pain including loss of appetite and disturbed sleep
- Emotional pain accompanied by dejection, hopelessness, lack of concentration
- Fears of life after death, nightmares, ghosts
- Disorganisation
- Strong guilt feelings and questioning of self and others, particularly in the case of a sudden death
- Feelings of anger at the departed for leaving them
- Bereaved may reject offers to comfort them

Adaptation to life without the deceased (6 months to 18 months)

- People begin to adjust to their lives without the person who is gone
- Sense of isolation
- Fearful of forgetting the deceased
- Less crying and irritability
- Exacerbation of existing personality problems. Children with low self-esteem may be at a greater risk of emotional/behavioural difficulties

Normalisation of life

- Getting on with life
- Returned sense of humour and play
- Able to participate emotionally in new relationships
- Changed relationship with the deceased – able to think of the deceased without pain
- Reduction in physical/emotional symptoms
- Less guilt

HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

Handout for Students: R10

- Reach out – people do care
- Talk to your friends, family and teachers - talking is the most healing medicine
- Remember you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy or mad
- It is ok to cry
- It is ok to smile
- If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently
- When the stress level is high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings with alcohol and drugs. This complicates the problems, rather than relieving them
- Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?
- Spend time with people who have a positive influence on you
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even it you're not sure
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful
- Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk
- Sticking to your "normal" routine helps. Structure your time – keep busy
- Take time out – go for a walk or kick a football
- Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen – like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc. Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits
- Useful websites: **www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au**

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.

REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Handout for Students: R11

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

FEELINGS	BEHAVIOURAL
Fear	Nightmares
Guilt	Social withdrawal
Shame	Irritability
Regret	Loss of concentration
Anger	Forgetfulness
Tearfulness	Physical/Verbal aggression
Loneliness	Misuse of drugs, including alcohol
Anxiety	
Mood swings	
Shock	
Yearning	
Numbness	
Confusion	
Isolation	
Insecurity	

PHYSICAL	THOUGHTS
Tiredness	Disbelief
Sleeplessness	Denial
Headaches	Sense of unreality
Stomach Problems	Preoccupation with images of the event/person
Bowel/Bladder problems	
Loss or increase in appetite	

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Handout for parents: R14

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

- Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal
- Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting.
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them
- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, exercise, or talking
- Help them to understand that defiance, aggression and risk behaviour is a way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and or fear they are feeling
- When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back.
- If you are out for a long time telephone and reassure them
- Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light
- Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen
- Work with the school support services and other available services.

CHECKLIST - STUDENTS AT RISK

Handout for schools: R16

This checklist may be used by the psychologist or may be offered as an aid to school staff who are concerned about a student. It should be remembered that the checking of a number of items for any one student may point to other problems. Indication of a number of these factors in any one student should always be followed up.

- Unexpected reduction of academic performance ☐
- Talking about suicide ☐
- Ideas and themes of depression, death and suicide in their work ☐
- Making statements about hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness ☐
- Change in mood and marked emotionally instability ☐
- Significant grief or stress ☐
- Withdrawal from relationships ☐
- Break up of an important relationship ☐
- Discipline problems, being in trouble in school ☐
- Withdrawal from extra-curricular activities ☐
- Giving personal belongings away ☐
- Loss of interest in things one cares about ☐
- Neglect of physical appearance ☐
- Physical symptoms with emotional cause ☐
- High risk behaviours ☐
- Alcohol or drug abuse ☐
- Bullying or victimization ☐
- History of suicidal behaviour e.g. cutting or overdose risk behaviours ☐
- Family history of suicide/attempted suicide ☐

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Teachers: R19

The following is a summary of questions often asked by teachers in the aftermath of a critical incident.

Q. I would like to opt out of support type work for personal reasons. Is this OK?

A. It has been found that their teachers are the best people to support students in school in times of distress because they need to be with people they know and trust. Accordingly, all teachers and other school staff members are encouraged to help the students at these times. However, nobody should be obliged to do this work and people should be able to opt out of it if they feel they need to. This may be for a number of reasons, including recent personal bereavement, experience of a loss similar to that occurring in the particular incident or other circumstances. However, in order to stay in touch, they would need to be in attendance at staff meetings where information is disseminated in relation to the incident.

Q. I have no qualifications to help out in this area. Shouldn't the job should be left to the experts?

A. You probably have more skills here than you realise. Your experience, competence and skills as a teacher and as an expert in dealing with children and young people are invaluable. Most importantly, the students know you. Students need a safe environment in which to come to terms with what has happened. This security is often enhanced by being able to discuss the events with a familiar teacher in the first instance.

Q. What should I do in the classroom to be helpful?

A. You should acknowledge the situation and clarify the facts, as they are known. Honesty is essential. Encourage questions so that the students have a clear understanding. You should try to establish normal routines as soon as possible – but balance this with allowing students opportunities to discuss the incident and to express their thoughts and feelings. Encourage them to resume extra-curricular activities and help them to identify where they can go to for support. Encourage them to be supportive of one another.

Q. What are the signs of grief that I may notice in students seen?

A. After bereavement students may have a wide range of different reactions – some may become quiet and withdrawn, while others may seem to be aggressive, irritable or angry. They may have mood swings or lack concentration. Try to handle all these 'normal' reactions with patience, do not seem surprised by them and do not get cross (see **R8, R9** and **R11**). If students come from a background where there is family breakdown, serious illness, alcohol or drug related or other difficulties, then you need to take extra note of any behavioural changes.

Q. What if I think that some students are not grieving normally?

A. There is no such thing as a 'correct' way to grieve. Some people cry, some may laugh or become giddy, some show no reaction. The important thing is that all these different ways are natural and normal and you should try to help the student understand this.

Q. What skills do I have that are important?

A. Listening skills are probably the most important. People who have experienced loss or trauma generally feel that talking helps them to cope with their feelings. When you sense a student wants to talk, try to make the time. Be reassuring and patient while gently encouraging them to talk about the loss. Reassure the student that you are there to help.

Q. Is there any one important thing I should say?

A. Yes – emphasise that grieving is a normal healthy process following a traumatic incident. It is the person's way of coping with the event. It is also normal for people to react in different ways – there is no 'right' way to grieve.

Q. Is it a good idea to organise a classroom session following a critical incident?

A. Some schools do and they have found this to be very effective. You will find notes on leading a class session after news of an incident in **R7**. An advantage here is that students may feel safer and more secure with their regular classroom teacher rather than being with an adult they do not know.

Q. What should I do if I feel that a student needs more professional support?

A. Discuss the issue with the Principal or guidance counsellor. They, in turn, may wish to discuss it with the NEPS psychologist or other support services and with the student's parents. The outcome may be a referral through the GP to the appropriate service.

Q. What is the overall message in helping bereaved children?

A. *"You will get through this difficult time and we are here to help if you need support. Take care of yourself and look out for each other. Talk to us if you need help or if you think a friend is in difficulty".*

Q. When should I get back to a normal teaching routine with a class?

A. It is important to give students sufficient time and space to share their feelings and to come to terms with what has happened. However, it is also important to move towards a normal routine as soon as possible. Getting on with the regular and familiar pattern of school life helps reduce stress. Avoid introducing new material in the immediate aftermath of an incident or bereavement, as grief and shock can interfere with concentration and motivation. It is often a good idea to consult the students themselves about returning to the normal routine.

Q. What do I do about the empty chair/a student's belongings etc?

A. A helpful strategy might be to involve students in a discussion about what to do about the chair. This might also present an opportunity to move to a new phase in the process. With regard to the student's belongings, it might be useful to put together a folder or a 'memory box' of the student's work for the parents. This can be given to them at an appropriate time.

Q. Is there a danger that by talking about suicide you make it appear to be an option for others?

A. Talking about the death helps people to make sense of what has happened. People can cope with the truth, but **suicide must never be represented as a valid option**. There should be no criticism of the person who has died. Separate the person from the

behaviour. It is important to talk about how a person can get to the point where suicide may *seem* to be the only option but **emphasise that it is not a good option**. Feeling low is usually a temporary thing, whereas suicide is permanent. With suicide the intention may have been to change life circumstances rather than end life. There is always help available if a person can take the step of reaching out for it. Encourage students to seek help if they need it.

Notes

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Parents: R20

The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents after a critical incident.

Q. This incident has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?

A. The school will inform students and parents of the core details of the incident insofar as they are known. It sometimes takes some time for the true facts to emerge. In the meantime, it is important to stick to the facts as known. Discourage rumour or gossip as it is often incorrect and can be distressing for the families and friends of those involved.

Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?

A. This will depend on the particular situation. The school will usually put a plan in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion or individual support for students who need it. This support may be offered by school staff themselves, or by staff of other agencies. If there is particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.

Q. How can I help my child?

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them 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.

Q. How long will the grief last?

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories of other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.

Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?

A. 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.

Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?

A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP/Child and Family Centre/CAMHS.

Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?

A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just

be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.

Notes