

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT POLICY

St. Mary's Secondary School, Macroom aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. This document is in keeping with the school's mission statement which outlines the school's aim to provide a caring and just environment for all members of the school community.

Definition of a Critical Incident

A Critical Incident is defined as "any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school" (Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools, NEPS, 2008).

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members or members of the local community.

Examples of a Critical Incident include:

- Death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide/ suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

The aim of a Critical Incident Plan as outlined in this document is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable personnel to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff.

Steps taken to creating a supportive and caring ethos in the school

The school makes every effort to reflect, review and adapt its policies and practices in areas such as physical safety and health and psychological safety needs of its students and staff on an on-going basis.

Physical Safety

- The school has an up to date Safety Statement which is reviewed regularly.
- A safety committee meets twice a term to deal with issues pertaining to safety and health in the school.
- Fire drills are carried out once a term and more often if required.
- Adequate supervision of students both before and after school time is provided by teachers.
- Students are instructed through the Social, Personal and Health Education programme on issues regarding safety and health both within and outside of school.
- All subject areas whose students are exposed to minimal risk have their own Subject Rules which students are taught at the beginning of the academic year and students are asked to sign the rules to acknowledge their understanding of them.
- Fire equipment is checked regularly.

Psychological Safety

The Management and Staff of St. Mary's Secondary School, Macroom aim to use all 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 is integrated into the work of the school. The content focuses on issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Issues pertaining to mental health are also taught in other subject areas e.g. Religion, Science and Home Economics.
- Whole School Awareness Weeks are held on an annual basis, where the school attempts to address issues pertaining to psychological wellbeing (Bullying, Nov. 2009, Mental Health Awareness Nov. 2010).
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Information is available on Mental Health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Books and resources on difficulties affecting the secondary school student are held by the Guidance and Counselling and SPHE Subject Departments.
- Staff are informed of suicide awareness and some are trained in interventions for suicidal students.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies including NEPS, Community Gardai, Family Resource Centre, Community Drugs Counsellor.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- The school has a strong pastoral care support system. The Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Learning Support Coordinator, Year Heads, subject teachers as well as the Chaplain all form “cogs in the wheel” of pastoral support to students in the school.
- A Pastoral Care Team (made up of Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and Learning Support Coordinator) meets on a weekly basis to identify individual students and/ or groups who may be “at risk”. Students who are identified as being “at risk” are referred to a designated staff member eg Guidance Counsellor, 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 work of the Pastoral Care team also involves planning and coordinating whole school seminars and awareness weeks for students as a preventative measure. Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria regarding student safety, the appropriateness of the content and the expertise of the providers.
- Assemblies are held once a week with year groups. This time is used by Year Heads to instruct students on mental health themes.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

A Critical Incident Management Team has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role to be used in the event of an accident.

Critical Incident Management Team

The Critical Incident Management Team is made up of Ciarán Cooke, Principal, Angela Collins, Deputy Principal, Caroline McSweeney, Guidance Counsellor, Jennifer Murnane, Learning Support Coordinator and Fr. Manning, Chaplain. A Year Head may be invited onto the team as the need arises.

Roles and Responsibilities

Principal

- To alert the Critical Incident Management Team members to the crisis and convene a meeting.

Critical Incident Management Team

- To confirm the death/injury of a person by making contact with their family and ensuring that information about a death or other developments are accurate before being shared.
- To lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings, to ask questions, to outline the routine for the day and the support available.
- To inform students, parents, BOM and other members of school community.
- To invite personnel from National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to speak to staff/students and/or to provide support for individual students and staff members.
- To distribute key tasks to personnel within the school.
- To set up a room for students affected by the incident.
- To prepare guidelines for teachers on how best to approach class groups.
- To provide material for staff (from folder).
- To advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students.
- To inform students and staff of the need for, and value of a normal timetable as much as possible.
- To identify individual students and/or specific groups who may be most “at risk” and provide them with the necessary support.
- To identify individual staff members who may be most “at risk” and provide them with the necessary support.
- To liaise with the spiritual team on an appropriate prayer service.
- To update staff regularly.
- To liaise with the bereaved family.
- To liaise with the Gardai.
- To co ordinate information from teachers about students they are concerned about.
- To alert staff to the names of vulnerable students.
- To provide material for students (from folder).
- To liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.
- To be alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support.
- To keep records of students seen by external agency staff.
- To set up a room for meetings with parents.
- To arrange a meeting for parents, if appropriate.
- To meet with individual parents.
- To provide appropriate material for parents (from folder).
- To discuss appropriate school involvement at the funeral.
- To draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews.
- To debrief as a team.
- In advance of an incident, to consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to.
- To ensure that sample letters are typed up on the school’s system and ready for adaptation.

Administration

- To maintain an up to date list of staff telephone numbers.
- To take calls and note those that need to be responded to.
- To ensure that templates are on the school system in advance and ready for adaptation.
- To prepare and send out letters, emails and faxes.
- To maintain records.

The Management and Staff of St. Mary's Secondary School, Macroom have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the individuals involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements.

Short, Medium and Long Term Priorities

The following is a list of the priorities in the short, medium and long term when a trauma occurs:

Immediate/Short Term

- Ensure the safety of students and staff.
- Assembly of Crisis team and planning the appropriate strategies to deal with the trauma.
- Dissemination of information to students, parents, staff and BOM.
- Providing the necessary and appropriate support for students and staff.
- Involvement of outside agencies e.g. NEPS
- Visiting parents/families involved.
- Cancellation of events.

Medium Term

- Provide the necessary and appropriate support for affected students, their families and staff.
- Provision of appropriate materials for use by teachers in classes.
- Organisation of appropriate events e.g. prayer service.
- Access to the counselling services of Guidance Counsellor, NEPS, private counsellors.
- External relations with press, Gardai, parents in general.
- Informing BOM, Parents Association and Student Council.
- Ensuring continuity and restoration of normal school routine as soon as possible.

Long Term

- Provision of long term support/counselling for students and staff.
- To discuss the lessons learned and document them.
- To arrange for appropriate memorials.
- To teach the student body about coping skills needed at a time of trauma.
- To provide regular in-service for staff on coping skills.

Consultation and Communication

Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to a critical incident has been presented to all staff. 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 a team member. The plan will be updated annually.

The school recognises that amendments may be required to meet the needs of different critical situations as they arise.

The BOM will continue to monitor, review and evaluate this policy on an ongoing basis to ensure that best practices are employed. This policy will be reviewed in December 2011.

Ratified by the Board of Management of St. Mary's Secondary School March 2011

This Policy will be reviewed in March 2013

Appendices

Appendix 1 Responding to Critical Incidents : Guidelines for Schools

Appendix 2 Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Materials for Schools

Appendix 3 Emergency Call List

Macroom Garda 026/20590

Fire Brigade 026/41051 999 or 112

DOCTORS

Dr. Con Kelleher 026/41783

Dr. John Burke 026/41413

Dr. P. Cronin 026/41088

Dr. Harte 026/41281

Southdoc 18500335999

Macroom Hospital 026/41002

Macroom Health Centre 026/20650

Cork University Hospital 021/4546400

CLERGY

Fr. Donal Roberts 026/21068

Fr. Francis Manning 026/41092

Mons. O'Donnell 026/41042

Appendix 5 List of External Agencies

Catriona Hogan, School Psychologist, NEPS

Orla Doyle, Community Garda

Catherine Buckley, Macroom Community Drugs Counsellor

Colette Phelan, Former School Psychologist, NEPS

North Lee Social Work Dept, Floor 2, Adjacent To Blackpool Shopping Centre, Blackpool, Cork. 021 4927000

Domestic Violence Social Work Service, HSE, Liberty Street House, 8 Liberty Street, Cork 021 4921728

Sexual Violence Centre, 5 Camden Place, Cork 021 4505577 Freephone 1800496496

West Cork Women Against Violence, 7 Lower Glengariff Road, Bantry, Co.Cork 02753847

www.aware.ie

www.samaritans.org

PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS :

Tony Hegarty, counsellor

Aileen Fitzgerald, counsellor and psychotherapist

Anne Prendergast, counsellor and psychotherapist

Clare Stokes, counsellor

Loreto Power, counsellor and psychotherapist

Mary Mangan, counsellor

Bernadette Hegarty, counsellor

Clyona Ryan, counsellor