

Critical Incident Management Policy

School ethos:

This is a caring school in a small community and it is natural that events in the community would also affect the school. It is the wish of this school that there be a consistent, co-ordinated, premeditated response to critical incidents.

Introduction

In St. Michael's N.S. we aim to protect the well-being of all members in our school community by providing a safe, caring and learning environment which nurtures the full educational potential of each child. We have taken a number of measures to create a supportive and caring environment in our school and we have formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the safety of staff and pupils.

Our Critical incident policy follows the guidelines for schools available in the following publications;

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- When Tragedy Strikes INTO 2000

The BOM through consultation with the Principal, the Staff formulated this critical incidents policy. This policy was formulated with all stakeholders in 2006, reviewed in 2010, reviewed and amended 2019 and also in 2026.

Why have a Critical Incident Management Policy?

It is always better to be well prepared. It is impossible to prepare for all eventualities but if there is an established procedure it gives those in charge definite tasks and an opportunity to consider further actions.

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’ (NEPS/DES 2008). Critical Incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school or the local community.

Examples of critical incidents include:

- Death of a member of school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide
- Major illness/outbreak of disease
- A physical attack on pupils/staff member
- Criminal incidents
- Major accidents
- Serious injury
- Sexual, physical and psychological abuse
- Civil unrest
- Disappearance of student from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of a student from home or school

“Whether an incident is critical or not depends on past and current experience as well as the perception and coping skills of those involved. What is traumatic at one stage in the life of a person or school may not be so at a different time. The most important factor in a critical incident is the significance of the effect on the whole or part of the school community. What is a small –scale incident for one school maybe a major one for another. It is vital to measure the significance of the impact not its size,”(INTO p. 1).

Aims of Critical Incident Management Policy:

The key to manage a critical incident is planning. St. Michael’s have formulated this plan to enable us to manage a Critical Incident in the most effective ways. We also aim to ensure the:

- Development of a curriculum, which will build children’s capacity to cope with the small and large crises, which they will face in their lives.
- Development of an emergency plan and appropriate strategies, which will help the school community to cope in the event of an emergency.

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- Communication of this plan to present and future members of the school community. This is especially important in the case of substitute teachers.

Pre Incident Preparation:

- The Safety Officer on the Board of Management reviews safety procedures every three years. Agnes Durkin is the current safety officer.
- Equipment is regularly checked.
- School Eircode is located on classroom whiteboards and on First Aid Kits.
- Fire Extinguishers are serviced annually.
- Admission to the school is by ringing the front door bell(s). The door is locked at 9.30 am and reopened at 1.50 pm and again at 2:50pm.
- Fire drill is carried out each term. Ms Toolan is responsible for this.
- Contact addresses and telephone numbers for all children are available via Aladdin.
- All teachers have a list of parent contact details.
- Emergency telephone numbers of all services are on display in the office
- Every effort will be made to build healthy home, school and community links
- Every effort is made to ensure safety of children in the yard and at play
- Dangerous or rough play of any type is totally forbidden and children are regularly reminded of this

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- Safety guidelines are followed for school trips and fieldwork
- The school does not pretend to have all the answers. Expert help and advice will always be sought and welcomed.
- Risk Assessment/ Child Safeguarding Statement

Curricular areas to support children:

Through the normal curriculum work especially in the areas of SPHE and Religion, work will be done to build self- esteem and coping strategies. Visual Arts, Music and P.E., will allow for self-expression. Oral language helps the child to build up a vocabulary, which will give them the words they need to express emotions.

Critical Incidents Management Team:

- Leadership Role: Emily Whitehead (Acting Principal) / Niamh Murtagh (Deputy Principal)
- Communication Role: Niamh Murtagh (Deputy Principal) / Emily Whitehead (Acting Principal)
- Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: All class teachers
- Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Vincent Sherlock
- Staff Health & Safety Representative: Colette Toolan
- BOM Health & Safety Representative: Agnes Durkin
- Chairperson of Parents Association: Eimir Murphy
- Chairperson of Board of Management : Fr. Vincent Sherlock
- Secretary: Shauna Gorman

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Leadership Role: Acting Principal Emily

Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team

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- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services, Board of Management, Department of Education & Skills
- 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
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)
- Liaise with Parents Association Chairperson
- Report incidents to the Health & Safety Authority
- Communicate with the media

Postvention

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

Communication Role: Deputy Principal Niamh

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 including NEPS
- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils

Postvention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response
- Review & evaluate plan

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: All class teachers

Intervention

- Alert other staff to vulnerable pupils
- Activate specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Access materials for staff (from Critical Incident Folder in Office)
- Provide information to leader

Postvention

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

Chaplaincy Role Fr. Vincent

Intervention

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

Postvention

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Parish team and NEPS
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

Staff Health & Safety Representative Colette

BOM Health & Safety Representative Agnes Durkin

Intervention

- Assessing the Health and Safety issue
- Liaising with other members of Critical Incident Management Team
- Assisting with reports of dangerous occurrences or accident for the Health and Safety Authority
- Reporting to Board of Management on any Health & Safety aspects

Postvention

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

Chairperson of the Parent's Association Eimir Murphy

Intervention

- Representing parents' concerns and wishes with regard to the school's response to the critical incident

Postvention

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

Chairperson of the Board of Management Fr. Vincent Sherlock

Intervention

- Liaising with Patron and Department of Education & Skills
- Liaising with Principal regarding incidents and issues occurring on the ground
- Consider legal & financial consequences
- Consult with Principal & Critical Incident team in preparing a media statement

Postvention

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

Secretary Shauna

Intervention

- Ring the emergency services immediately
- Ensuring that the Office is manned
- Liaising with other members of Critical Incident Management Team

Contact Numbers & Emergency Information

- The Secretary has responsibility for maintaining an up to date list of Contact numbers for pupils and their parents / guardians. Private and Confidential forms will be sent out in June to ensure all contact information is available from the first day of the new school year. These numbers will be stored on Aladdin and text-a-parent service.
- It will be the **responsibility of each parent** to ensure that this phone number is current. Should a number be changed during the school year, it is the parent's responsibility to inform the Secretary who will immediately update the contact list.
- The Health and Safety Representative has responsibility for ensuring that a list of contact numbers for the emergency support services is displayed in the Secretary's Office. This will be reviewed and updated at the beginning of each school year.

Postvention

- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

Additional Responsibilities

Evacuation procedures

The emergency evacuation procedure will be practised once per term using the fire alarm. **All visitors and parents must evacuate the building on the sound of the fire alarm, whether it is a practise drill or emergency manoeuvre.**

Red Card System

From January 2020 every classroom will have a Red Card to be used for an Emergency within a classroom. Pupils are trained early in September should an emergency occur (such as a teacher fainting, a child taking seriously ill, a violent, abusive or intoxicated individual entering the classroom) a pupil takes the card to teacher next door. This teacher will respond immediately to the emergency. The child proceeds with the same card to the Principal, so that she is informed immediately and can come to assist the situation. The Staff H&S Officer has responsibility to ensure each year that every class has a red card visible in case of emergency.

Training & Staff Development

The school will provide opportunities for staff and members of the Board of Management to attend information /training meetings on issues such as suicide, grieving and first aid. The school will use the resources of NEPS as an advisor in planning for, and as a support facility after any incident. All staff completed First Aid Training on 8th January 2026 with Workplace Training and Compliance.

The Media

Members of the media must report to the Principal's Office, identify themselves and state their business in the school. Members of the media will not be allowed beyond the office except at the invitation of the Principal or Deputy Principal. Members of the media may be asked to remain outside school property if this in any way hinders the management of a critical incident.

Action plan Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident Short Term Actions (Day 1)

- Ensure the safety of all students, staff & visitors
- Convene a meeting of the Critical incident Management team and delegate responsibilities
- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate – Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Gather accurate information (use Incident Report form)
- Identify high risk, vulnerable pupils
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff (BOM room)
- Immediate contact with affected/bereaved family/families
- Contact appropriate agencies and organise support
- Contact BOM, DES, NEPS, HSA & PA
- Appoint people to assist Secretary in handling phone queries & manning school gates
- Arrange the supervision of pupils
- Organise a timetable for the day
- Respond to the media – only the leader will speak to the media; all other staff will refrain from commenting

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- 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.
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

As far as possible, maintain normal school routine. In serious cases of intruder or abduction, neighbouring schools will be informed.

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?
- **Contact appropriate agencies**
1. Emergency services
 2. Medical services
 3. S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
 4. NEPS
 5. BOM
 6. DES/Schools Inspector

Medium-Term Actions (24-72 HOURS)

- Re-convene a meeting of the Critical Management Team to review the events of the first 24 hrs and to delegate responsibilities
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff in order to clarify what has happened
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Update BOM, DES, PA & other relevant external agencies
- Update the media
- Plan visits to the injured
- Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
- Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
- Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Plan restoration of normal school routine
- Consider the legal & financial consequences
- School closure (if appropriate) – Request a decision on this from school management
- In the case of a bereavement, consider the following actions;
- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staff responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school

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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 and/or long-term counselling 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

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 staff are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area

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- 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 (Be sensitive to special days and events)

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
- Plan a school memorial service.
- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records
- Evaluate the long-term effect on the educational progress of pupils
- Evaluate the legal and financial consequences
- Report to the BOM, DES & PA

Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

This policy was drawn up in 2010. It was reviewed in 2019 by the staff and the Board of Management. The policy was reviewed Term 2 2022. It was reviewed by staff and ratified by the BOM during Term 3 2026.

The Critical Incident Policy Committee will review the policy every 3 years or on formation of a new Board of Management. Ongoing review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, staff,

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legislation and feedback from parents/guardians, staff and pupils. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning.

Chairperson: Fr Vincent Sherlock

Date: 28/05/26

Next review date: September 2027

The initial policy was ratified on 18th May 2006. Reviewed and redrafted 2010, 2019, 2022, 2026. This policy is available on our school website.

Class Activities to Promote Healthy Coping Skills

Individuals who cope best in life are those with a broad range of coping mechanisms. People cope differently and will very often criticise others who do not cope in the same way as they do. There are different channels through which people experience and cope with the world: Beliefs: about you and the world, including religious and life beliefs
Activities, which promote a broad range of coping mechanisms, under each heading, include:

Beliefs: building self-esteem, citizenship, religious education, rules for living, morals, beliefs of others, finding meaning and significance in life. All staff will be given consistent information about the incident as soon as possible

Emotions: how they are expressed and acted out Trained professionals will give staff team post-trauma stress debriefing where necessary

Emotion: language of feelings, expression of feelings, empathy and acceptance of others' feelings, useful and unhelpful reactions arising from feelings.

Fellow Humans: society, including family support, friends, social role and value

Staff support procedures will be updated

Imagination: the way we use imagination for expression of emotion, creative problem solving and pleasure after each incident

Thinking: facts and how we order and use them to understand and deal with life

Physical: how we nourish, exercise and rest our bodies

Fellow Humans: peer support, working together, finding and keeping friends, co-operation, resolving conflicts, Managing differences.

Imagination: any creative activity for expressing emotion e.g., fun and development, relaxation, rituals, memorials and celebrations.

Thinking: gathering facts, distinguishing fact from fiction, prioritising, action planning, and presenting facts. Use can be made of news journals, news boards, charts, graphs, logical thinking, and statistics.

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**Critical Incident Management Policy Emergency Numbers Physical to be updated
yearly- listed in office**