

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY – updated November 2021

A **'Critical Incident'** is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and is likely to be difficult or traumatic for members of the school community and which requires support or other response from St Farnan's Post Primary School.

Essentially, the purpose of the plan /policy is to:

- Maintain the normal functioning of the school.
- Identify those at risk or in need of support.
- To provide support for those who are traumatised or distressed.

What constitutes a **'Critical Incident'**?

- The death of a staff member or student.
- A serious accident involving student(s) or staff member(s).
- The disappearance of a staff member or student.
- A disaster within the wider community.
- An environmental disaster.
- Threatening intrusion into the school.
- Destruction of the whole or part of the school.
- Sexual assault.
- Attempted abduction.

What are the objectives of a critical incident policy? (All to be considered)

1. Support for the staff and students.
2. Enable the school to return to normality.
3. To provide required information to relevant parties (students/staff/press).
4. To take steps to safeguard the school community's welfare, interests and its privacy.
5. To establish the facts.
6. To assist (where necessary) with funeral arrangements.
7. Obtain factual information.
8. Active response team (4/5 people).
9. Inform staff at a full staff meeting of information available.
10. Identify students at risk.
11. Prepare a statement for (1) students, (2) media.
12. Appoint a contact 'person'.
13. Debriefing of staff and students.

Operating Principles.

1. There should be a sense of the school authority being in control and responding accurately to the situation.

2. Up to date accurate information to be conveyed regularly to those who need to know. (Principal or nominated staff member)
3. A strong sense of sympathy, empathy to be conveyed regularly to those needing to know (by Principal or nominated staff member).
4. All staff to be involved as much as possible in responding (teamwork is essential).
5. Prepare a statement and distribute procedures to class tutors/teachers in breaking the news.
6. Notify chairperson of B.O.M. plus all other members immediately.
7. Devise a process for dealing with telephone enquiries from anxious parents / parties / media.
8. Media to be dealt with by Principal only or Deputy
9. Decisions on who to attend funeral.
10. Should school close?
 - Crisis team – have a nominated team – Principal, Deputy Principal, Year Heads, Guidance Counsellor & School Counsellor, HSCL, School Completion Program.
 - See Critical Team – additions to be added as required.

Checklist: Short Term Actions - Day 1 (from PDST document)

1. Gather the facts:
 - a. Who?
 - b. When?
 - c. Where?
2. Contact appropriate agencies – KWETB, NEPS, Garda Community Liaison
3. Convene 'Critical Incident' team immediately.
4. Inform all staff.
5. Inform parents to support their children.
6. Organise supervision of students.
7. Agree statement of the facts.
8. Identify 'high risk' students and any others.
9. Appoint a person to deal with the phone - secretary.
10. Emergency services & Medical services: Health Board Psychology / Community Care Service / NEPS / Clergy, if appropriate
11. Chairperson of the B.O.M.
12. D.E.S. / School inspectorate if needed (students in school or during state exams)
13. Some students may need to go home (only on the basis that parents come and collect them).
14. The class of the student involved should be first to be told with the Tutor / Chaplain / Counsellor present.

Critical Incident Management Team: (Crisis Team)

1. **Team Leader:** Andrew Purcell: Alerts, Coordinates tasks, Liaises with DES, KWETB, NEPS, SEC
2. **Garda Liaison:** Andrew Purcell: Liaises with Gardai.
3. **Staff Liaison:** Sarah Kennedy * (or acting DP): Leads briefing meetings with staff, along with staff identify vulnerable students, keeps staff updated, Advises of availability of Employment Assistance Scheme
4. **Student Liaison:** Year Heads (all or of particular year group/s if CI is a student/s issues)
5. **Guidance Counsellor:** Anita Cleary **School Counsellor:** Annette Duggan.
Coordinate information from Tutors or link teachers/YHs. Arrange class visits to address students. Maintain student contact records.

6. **Parent Liaison: Jennifer Reilly HSCL.** Visits bereaved family with Team Leader. Sets up room for meeting with Parents, maintain a record of Parents seen, provides appropriate material for Parents.
7. **Media Liaison¹: Andrew Purcell through KWETB ONLY.** After advise being sought with SML in KWETB, who will consider issues that may arise such as students, teachers or management being interviewed, photographers on premises. Will draw up press statement, give media briefings. No other staff member/s are to provide updates in any way to any entities, whether media or private persons.
8. **Administrator: Jenna Donagher.** Maintains up to date telephone numbers of Parent /Guardians, teachers & Next of Kin (in VSware), Emergency services. Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to. Prepares and sends out letters, emails, texts under the direction of Principal

¹Dealing with the Media: Principal/Deputy Principal only to check with KWETB firstly before replying to any media / interview etc:

- a. Take time to respond.
- b. Remember that everything you say is on record and therefore, keep it *simple, factual and brief*.
- c. Decline, if you are not ready or think it may be inappropriate.
- d. Consider setting aside a room for media (this may help to control their access to staff and or students).
- e. Remind staff and students that they are not to deal with any media.
- f. Letter/text/email to parents – see Neps Guidelines booklets

Breaking the news to students & staff (in no particular order):

- a. A period of reflection for the deceased / injured (Book of Condolences if needed etc., vigil)
- b. Allow them time to mingle (under supervision).
- c. Be aware of those who are not coping with the news.
- d. Class students to be informed first (tutor/counsellor should be present)
- e. Do not allow student(s) to leave classroom alone in a distressed state.
- f. Do not be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news.
- g. Encourage students to stay in school.
- h. Expect tears and outbursts.
- i. Let them know that you will support them.
- j. Let them know the facts (without details).
- k. Let them know who else is available to support them.
- l. Normal School Routine is paramount within a school.
- m. Only when a tragedy is confirmed can it be relayed to the students.
- n. Other classes by the tutors / year heads.
- o. Remind students of who is available to help.
- p. Some may need to go home (only if parents collect them).
- q. Some students who go to class may not be able to concentrate (show consideration).
- r. Students must be supervised within the building while in a distressed state.

Note:

The above policy caters for some requirements depending on the 'Critical Incident'.

Ratified at on-line BOM meeting: *Ellen Brendan Weld* (Chairperson)

Date: 24th November 2021