

**Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Fheargus,  
An Gleann,  
Co. Luimnigh.**

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## **CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY AND PLAN - Review, November 2023**

### **Introductory Statement:**

The Key to managing a critical incident is planning. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) strongly advises schools to develop a policy in relation to critical incident response. NEPS also encourages schools to develop a Critical Incident Management Plan, outlining who will do what in the event of a tragedy. This is the response plan of St. Fergus NS, developed in the event of such an event.

### **Defining a Critical Incident:**

The Board of Management and staff of St. Fergus' National School recognize a critical incident to be: "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school".

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or 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.

### **Aim:**

The aim of the Critical Incidents Policy, is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

### **Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School:**

St. Fergus' National School is a co-educational, Catholic primary school which strives to provide a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the spiritual, intellectual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are fostered.

Our school aims to protect the well being of our students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

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

We have put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

### **Physical Safety:**

- Evacuation plan formulated – the emergency evacuation procedure will be practised once per term using the fire alarm.
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.
- Pupil are supervised at break times.
- Safe dismissal plan at 3.05 p.m.
- Clearly stated playground rules as per our Code of Behaviour.

### **Psychological Safety:**

The Board of Management of St. Fergus' National School aims to use available programs 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. For example:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a mandatory element of the Primary School Curriculum. It is addressed in the curriculum by dealing with 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. St. Fergus has a Well Being Committee which meet regularly and hold Positive Well Being Events for the School Community.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- The School has access to a NEPS assigned Psychologist - Deirdre Folen.

- Staff are familiar with the Child Safety Statement and Risk Assessment and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures. These documents are displayed inside entry ways and each teacher receives a copy in September. The names of the DLP (Mrs Deirdre Kennelly) and the DDLP (Ms Deirdre Dillane) are displayed inside these doors also. All teaching staff are aware of their responsibility as Mandated Persons.
- Books, training and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school student are available.
- The school has clear anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying policies and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- These policies are updated annually and displayed on our school website ([www.stfergusns.ie](http://www.stfergusns.ie)) or on request.
- Staff are mindful of children who might be at risk. Parents are invited to discuss their own and/or teacher concerns and where appropriate a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves. They have all been provided with details on how to contact the Employee Assistance Service (EAS).

#### **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT):**

A CIMT 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 incident.

#### **Roles:**

- Team Leader/Garda Liaison/Media Liaison: Deirdre Kennelly (Principal)
- Staff Liaison/Student Liaison/Parent Liaison: Deirdre Dillane (Deputy Principal)
- Administrator/Community or Agency Liaison: Geraldine O Donovan (School Secretary)
- Parents Association Rep: Joanne Stackpoole (Chairperson of The Parents' Association)
- B.O.M Rep: Fr Tim Curtin (Chairperson)

#### **Team Leader:** Deirdre Kennelly

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of management; DES; NEPS.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.

**Garda Liaison:** Deirdre Kennelly

- Liaises with the Gardai.
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments are checked out for accuracy before being shared.

**Media Liaison:** Deirdre Kennelly

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc).
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the relevant teacher unions, i.e. INTO and CPSMA or local Diocesan Office.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

**Staff Liaison:** Deirdre Dillane

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members 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/days progress/es.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Advises them of the availability of the EAS and gives them the contact number.

**Student Liaison:** Deirdre Dillane

- Coordinates information about students they may be concerned about.
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately).
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder).
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff.
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.

**Parent Liaison:** Deirdre Dillane

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader.
- Arranges parent meetings, if to be held.
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'.
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy.
- Sets up room for meetings with parents.
- Maintains a record of parents seen.
- Meets with individual parents.
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder).

**Administrator:** Geraldine O'Donovan

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of:
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency services.
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to.
- Ensures that templates/sample letters are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation.
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails, text/Aladdin messages.
- Photocopies materials needed.
- Maintains records.

**Community/Agency Liaison:** Geraldine O'Donovan

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of :
  - Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council
  - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources.
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support.
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies.
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges.
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

In the absence of the team leader, Deirdre Kennelly, the role of team leader will fall to Deirdre Dillane.

## **Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident**

### **Day One:**

#### **Principal and Deputy Principal**

- Gather the facts of the incident (who, what, when, where)
- Contact appropriate agencies, if necessary (NEPS, Emergency services, Health Service Executive, Community Care Services, DES, Board of Management)
- Convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team (Principal's Office) – 8am if overnight within an hour if during the day
- Have administration staff photocopy appropriate literature
- Draft any media statements and any other letters re parents etc - liaise with DES first, if necessary

See Appendix C for agenda (page 20 & 21 of Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines for Schools)

- Agree a statement of facts for staff, students, parents and media
- Inform all staff of incident - Staff communication via short memo which includes detail of staff meeting outside school hours (8:30a.m. or 3:15 p.m.)
- Delegate responsibilities to the CIMT members.

## **All Staff**

- Decide on how, and what facts will be shared with students. Information will be provided by the CIMT in this regard
- Inform staff of what outside agencies have been contacted
- All staff share factual information with student population in class groups if possible
- Maintain the normal routine as far as possible for classes not immediately affected
- Note: Awareness of high risk students. (Children with SEN, neighbours, late arrivals, children who are absent, relatives and close friends informed separately by a member of the CIMT. If concerns emerge, students can be referred to the CIMT or Principal.
- A member of the CIMT will look for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Keep all staff up to date on developments
- Contact absent staff - friend of absent staff member to make personal contact
- Designated staff member to liaise with family/families involved in incident. In the case of bereavement arrange with the family the school's level of involvement in the funeral/memorial service.
- Those teachers who are uncomfortable with providing support will not be required to do so. (Principal, Deputy Principal)
- Seek parental approval for support meetings with outside agencies.

## **Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident**

### **Day Two/Three:**

#### **Principal and Deputy Principal**

- Convene Critical Incident Management Team at 8am- Principal's Office
- Convene staff meeting and decide who will contact absent staff

#### **Critical Incident Management Team**

- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Check how everyone is coping
- Member of CIMT to hold information meeting with staff to clarify what has happened
- Arrange support for students, (pg 27 Guidelines) providing a suitable room for this to happen – class teacher makes referrals

### 7.3 WARNING SIGNS

Below is a list of factors which indicate that a person is troubled or distressed. The list is not exhaustive, and there may be other signs which those familiar with a student may notice. There may be an increased likelihood of suicide or suicidal behaviour if a number of these signs are present, (see Section 11, R14, R15).

An unexpected reduction in academic performance
A change in mood and marked emotional instability, either more withdrawn, low energy or more boisterous, talkative, outgoing
Withdrawal from relationships, separation from friends or break-up of a relationship, getting into trouble at school, discipline problems, suspension or expulsion, trouble with the law
Loss of interest in usual pursuits, study, relationships
Ideas and themes of depression, death or suicide
Hopelessness and helplessness
Giving away prized possessions
Stressful life events, including significant grief
Bullying or victimisation
A history of mental illness
Alcohol/drug misuse
A history of suicidal behaviour or deliberate self-harm
A family history of suicide/attempted suicide
Expression of suicidal ideas on social media.

## STEPS TO TAKE WHEN CONCERNS ARISE

School staff may hear of suicidal behaviour or become aware of young people who are emotionally distressed and could be at risk in a number of ways:

- Students may learn of a fellow student's intentions to harm him/herself and report this to a teacher
- A note may be found or a posting on a social media site in which a desire for death or for an end to problems or to an 'impossible' situation is expressed. This might also be found on internet sites used by young people (see Section 11, R22)
- There may be changes in the young person's behaviour which are uncharacteristic and cause concern
- A student may begin to show an interest in issues of death or suicide, (see Checklist Section 11, R14)
- The young person may share his/her thoughts about suicide with the staff member, directly or indirectly.

### REMEMBER

Concerns about suicidal behaviour should never be dismissed on the grounds that the student is merely seeking attention and will not make a suicide attempt.

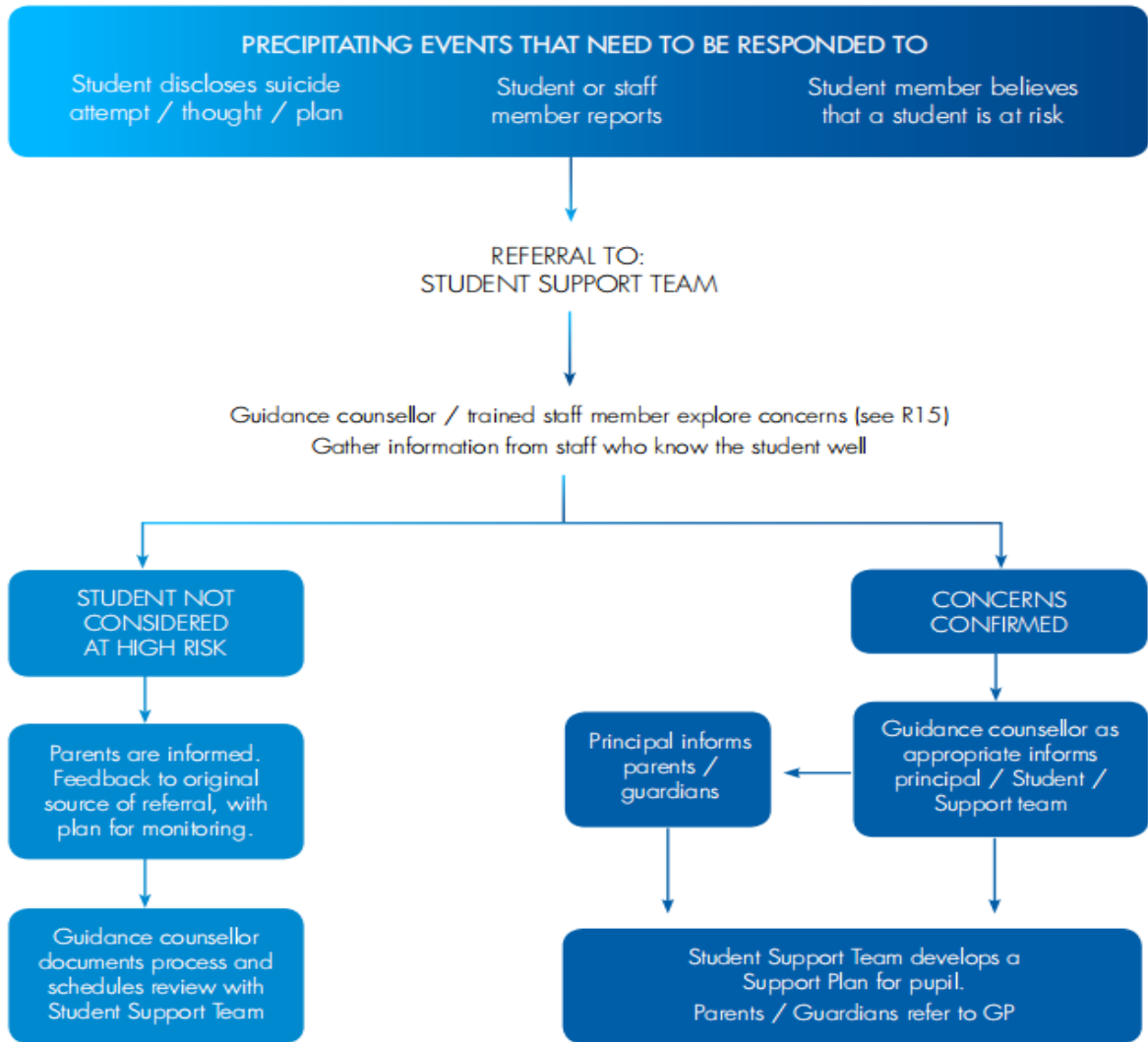
Schools need to have in place a clear procedure for the care of students about whom such concerns arise.

#### Suggested procedure:

- Concern is reported to guidance counsellor or designated staff member
  - A meeting takes place with the reporting staff member or student
  - A meeting takes place with the student, (see Section 11, R13, R14 and R15)
  - A judgement is made of the seriousness of the situation
  - Parents are informed of concerns, feedback is given to the original source of the referral, and a plan is drawn up for monitoring the student. Check with the student after an agreed period as there may be some underlying issues which need to be addressed
- 
- Where a concern is confirmed, the guidance counsellor reports to the principal, and may consult with NEPS or with local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
  - The principal informs parents or caregivers immediately
  - A management plan appropriate to the level of risk is put in place, including onward referral to the family GP.



## 7.4 FLOW CHART: RESPONDING TO CONCERNS



- CMIT to ensure there is a male and female teacher on supervision on corridors

## **Follow Up - Beyond 72 hours**

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, Principal, Deputy Principal
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)(R13 Guidelines) Plan for siblings, close relatives, injured students etc.	Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, Principal, Care Team
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BOM

### **Record Keeping:**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters 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.

### **Confidentiality and good name considerations:**

The Board of Management and staff of St. Fergus' National School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do so also. For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

**Critical Incident Room:**

In the event of a critical incident, the Staff Room will be used to meet staff, students, parents and media. The Principal's Office will be used for individual sessions with students or to receive other visitors.

**Consultation & Communication regarding the plan:**

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and 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.

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 the Principal, Deirdre Kennelly.

The plan will be updated annually or sooner if the need arises.

Ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting on \_\_\_\_\_

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fr. Tim Curtin  
CHAIRPERSON, Board of Management

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX A

### CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

ROLE	NAME	TELEPHONE NUMBER (home and mobile)
Team Leader Garda Liaison Media Liaison	Deirdre Kennelly, Principal	068-49821 087-6453607
Staff Liaison Student Liaison Parent Liaison	Deirdre Dillane Deputy Principal	087-6940757
Community Liaison Administrator	Geraldine O Donovan School Secretary	068-34461 087-9218588
Parents' Association Rep	Joanne Stackpoole Chairperson Parents' Association	0877477370
Board of Management Rep	Fr. Tim Curtin	0863697735

**APPENDIX B**  
**SHORT TERM ACTIONS – DAY 1**

<b>TASK</b>	<b>NAME</b>
<b>Gather accurate information</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Who, what, when, where?</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Contact external agencies</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Arrange supervision for students</b>	Deirdre Dillane
<b>Hold staff meeting</b>	All Staff
<b>Agree schedule for the day</b>	Deirdre Dillane
<b>Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)</b>	Deirdre Dillane
<b>Compile a list of vulnerable students</b>	Whole Staff
<b>Contact/visit the bereaved family</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Inform parents</b>	Deirdre Dillane
<b>Hold end of day staff briefing</b>	Deirdre Dillane

## APPENDIX C

### 4.3 AGENDA FOR MEETING WITH CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM / KEY STAFF

Share full details of the event

Agree on the facts. These will need to be relayed in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner by all staff to the students

Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional ones that should be informed (check Emergency Contact List Section 11, R21)

Managing communication needs careful attention. Use of social media is a good medium for facilitating factual and appropriate communication

When a number of external agencies are involved in a response, co-ordination will be needed and procedures will need to be agreed. An agency such as NEPS may take on this role

Plan procedures for the day

Discuss issues relating to school routine, including school closure. Remember it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. It is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students. Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what has happened and temporarily shelve all academic activities if necessary. See Section 11, R5 for further information

You may wish to consult students about what to do if there is an event scheduled such as a trip, concert, match, etc. This should reduce the likelihood of students being angry later on as a result of any school action or in-action

Discuss how to break the news to relatives and close friends and who should do this (remember that they must always be told separately)

Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students. It is often best to do this with class groups, rather than large assemblies (See Section 11, R5)

Discuss how to identify vulnerable students (see page 25)

If there are students of various nationalities and religions in the school, this needs to be taken into consideration in organising prayer services, attendance at the funeral etc.

Parents of different religious or national groups may need to be consulted

## **APPENDIX D**

### **MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS – (Day 2 and following days)**

<b>Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Meet external agencies</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Meet whole staff</b>	All Staff
<b>Arrange support for students, staff, parents</b>	Deirdre Dillane
<b>Visit the injured</b>	Deirdre Dillane
<b>Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Agree on attendance &amp; participation at funeral service</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Make decisions about school closure</b>	Board of Management

### **FOLLOW UP – beyond 72 hours**

<b>Monitor students for signs of continuing distress</b>	Whole Staff
<b>Liaise with agencies regarding referrals</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Plan for return of bereaved student(s)</b>	Deirdre Kennelly
<b>Plan for giving ‘memory box’ to bereaved family</b>	Deirdre Dillane
<b>Decide on memorials and anniversaries</b>	Board of Management/Staff, Parents and students
<b>Review response to incident &amp; amend plan</b>	Board of Management/Staff.

## **EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST:**

(To be displayed in Staff-Room, School Office and Principal's room).

<b>AGENCY</b>	<b>CONTACT NUMBERS</b>
<b>GARDA</b>	068-34101
<b>HOSPITAL – Limerick Regional</b>  <b>-Tralee General</b>	061-301111  061-482120 (A&E)  066-7126222
<b>FIRE BRIGADE</b>	999 or 112
<b>LOCAL GPS:-</b>	<b>Dr. Cassidy</b>  068-26000  <b>Foynes Medical Clinic</b>  069-65196  <b>Dr. Lehane, Tarbert Medical Centre</b>  068-36433  <b>Dr. Wallace Athea</b>  068-42271
<b>HSE, Foynes</b>	069-65542
<b>HSE, Limerick</b>	061-483718/483337
<b>Child &amp; Adolescent Mental Health Services</b>	061-483388
<b>SCHOOL INSPECTOR: Ms Carmel O'Doherty</b>	061-430004
<b>NEPS</b>	076-1108561  01-8892700
<b>School Psychologist - Deirdre Folen</b>	087-1794623
<b>NCSE</b>	01-8892700
<b>DES:-</b>	
<b>DUBLIN OFFICE</b>	01-8896400
<b>CORNAMADDY OFFICE</b>	09064-83600



<b>INTO</b>	1850708708
<b>FORSA</b>	061 319 177
<b>PARISH PRIEST – Fr. Curtin</b>	086/3697735
<b>DIOCESAN OFFICE</b>	061-347777
<b>EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SERVICE</b>	1800 411057 Text “HI” to 0873690010
<b>CARE CALL COUNSELLING</b>	028-90328474

**STUDENT CONTACT RECORD:**

*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	OUTCOME (include need for follow up)