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CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

St. Comán's Wood P.S. aims to protect the well being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

We have taken a number of measures to create a coping, caring and supportive ethos in the school, which include implementing such programmes as *Stay Safe* and *Walk Tall* and actively following the Anti Bullying policy. All teachers take seriously their role as pastoral carers of the children and communicate any concerns they have with senior management. The school has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of the school community, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident. These include regular fire drills, vigilant yard supervision and monitoring of entrances/exits.

What is a Critical Incident?

In line with the National Educational Psychological Services [NEPS] publication "Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools", St. Comán's Wood P.S. recognises a critical incident to be as follows:

"... an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school".

Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school or the local 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, vandalism etc.*
- *The disappearance of a member of the school community;*
- *An accident involving members of the school community.*

- *Any other unforeseen accident/tragedy which may befall the school community and for which Management & Staff must be prepared in terms of safe handling with a view to optimum wellbeing of all concerns in the outfall.*

1. POLICY CONTEXT

The main purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for dealing with any significant trauma or crisis which may occur in the life of the school. Sudden or traumatic death of students or staff through accidental means can have a major effect. A tragedy outside the school community may impact on school life and incidents not involving death may also have considerable impact. Our hope is that, in the event of an incident, these will help staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. These should also help us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and ensure that the ongoing health of the school community.

2. CREATION OF A CARING ETHOS IN THE SCHOOL:

We have put systems in place to lessen the probability of an occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of both staff and pupils.

Physical Safety

- Our Health and Safety policy is regularly updated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Our evacuation plan is prominently displayed and practised
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Entrances to the school are locked during school times
- Safety rules during playtime are in place

Psychological Safety

- SPHE programmes are followed to address such issues as grief and loss, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, decision making, and alcohol and drug prevention
- We implement our Bullying Policy
- Staff members are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware and vigilant to their needs
- Staff has access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the Primary school child.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students

3. CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM:

We have set up a Critical Incident Management Team* in line with best practice and will maintain this team in future. The members of the team will meet once a year to review and update the plan.

*A critical incident team is '... a group of individuals from the staff of the school who know the community, the students and each other well enough to make the necessary decisions called for when the incident occurs' (Mary Schoenfeldt)

Our Critical Incident Team will exercise a leadership role providing direction, guidance, containment and support when a critical incident occurs. The Response Team will consist of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principals, Chairperson of the Board of Management, Post-holders and all members of staff as appropriate.

4. CRISIS PREVENTION

While the main purpose of this policy is to outline procedures to be followed in the aftermath of a critical incident, it is essential that an overall preventative approach be followed by all in the school community.

- (a) The promotion and development of positive, personal mental and health especially in SPHE classes;
- (b) adhere to the school Health & Safety Policy;
- (c) provision of counselling and psychological support within and outside the school context;
- (d) in-service provision for staff.

5. In the event of a critical incident the responsibilities of each role-holder will be as follows:

Team Leader: Úna Feeley

Staff Liaison: Patricia Morris and Joan O'Shea (Junior site), Cathy Mulrooney (Senior site)

Student Liaison: Frances Mitchell (Junior site), Nicola Gately (Senior site)

Community Liaison: Fr. John Cullen and Marie Doorly

Parent Liaison: Olivia Ward

Media Liaison: Paul Healy

Administrative Tasks: Ann Igoe and Mary Brennan

Health and Safety: Cathy Mulrooney (Senior site); Caitríona Duignan (Junior site)

Team Leader: Úna Feeley

(A person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis (e.g. school closure, attendance at memorial services etc)

1. Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
2. Coordinates tasks of the team. This may involve ensuring the safe quick exit of children and adults from the building.
3. Liaises with the Board of Management and Department of Education & Skills.
4. Liaises with the affected family/staff member.

Staff Liaison: Patricia Morris/ Joan O'Shea/ Cathy Mulrooney

1. Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and outlines the routine of the day.
2. Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students.
3. Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
4. Provides materials to staff

5. Give support to staff, e.g. recently bereaved members of staff or those who have had experience of sudden death in their family.

Student Liaison: Frances Mitchell/ Nicola Gately

1. Liaises with other team members to keep them updated with information and progress.
2. Alerts staff to vulnerable students.
3. Provides materials for students
4. Prepare a short statement for classes, including a short prayer
5. Help to identify vulnerable students and how onward referrals are made. Liaise with health board personnel and NEPS psychologist if necessary

Community Liaison: Fr. John Cullen and Marie Doorly

1. Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.
2. Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.
3. Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies. Key parents such as members of the Parents' Association to be involved. Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources to be liaised with.
4.
 - Assists with prayer services
 - Makes contact with local clergy
 - Is available as personal and spiritual support to staff and students
 - Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral

Parent Liaison: Olivia Ward

(Someone who is well-known to parents. This person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have skills to manage emotional reactions of individual or groups of parents.)

If a death/ serious accident occurs this person expresses sympathy to the family and assures them of the support of the school and the principal and liaises with the family and the principal;

1. Identifies a suitable response room for meeting with parents and family.
2. Designate a room(s) for traumatised students to meet with the priest;
3. Meets with individual parents.
4. Provides materials for parents
5. Visits the bereaved family with the principal and advises the principal following this visit.
6. Assist in drafting appropriate letter to parents regarding the death/ incident and school arrangements;
7. Consider school involvement in the funeral respecting family wishes, eg. guard of honour, readers, prayers
8. At time of inquest, anniversary or significant dates, recognise the support needs of the family and school friends, e.g. arrange family visit a few days prior.

Media Liaison: Paul Healy

(Someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media, by phone, or in person.
A person who is able to set limits without being offensive.)

1. Advises the principal on how to speak to the media and may speak to the media on the principal's behalf.
2. In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the Communications Section in the DES.
3. Prepare a media statement and plan a response to requests for information: In preparing for the role, she will consider issues that may arise during the incident and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)

Administrative Tasks: Ann Igoe and Mary Brennan (secretaries)

- Maintenance of up to date lists of contact numbers of:
 - Parents or Guardians.
 - Teachers.
 - Emergency Support Services.
- Telephone calls need to be responded to, letters sent and materials photocopied.
- To do list:
 - Confirm death or incident has occurred in consultation with the principal
 - Contact parents/guardians
 - Contact accident and emergency services.
 - Contact Fr. John Cullen.....life or death situation.
 - Contact Principal and/or Deputy and Assistant Principals
 - Contact Class Teacher.
 - Contact First Aid Person/Health & Safety Officer.
 - Contact the I.N.T.O.

5.1 The Teaching Staff

- Read announcement devised by the Response Team, using the deceased person's name;
- Acknowledge the deceased in that class. Have a moment's silence or say a short prayer;
- Do not speculate about the death with students. Give honest answers. All questions put by the students should be acknowledged.
- Be alert to any mention of 'copy-cat' tendencies or mention of similar incidents from the recent past and bring such matters to the attention of the Principal/Guidance Counsellor;
- Don't use 'I know how you feel' statements;
- Encourage students to be supportive of each other;
- The teacher should feel free to express his/her own feelings appropriately;
- Advise students of teachers who are available to them to help them deal with their fears and worries;
- Identify and notify the Response Team of vulnerable students or students who are distressed. These students may need individual support;
- Parents/guardians of distressed students should be contacted and advised of the situation before the end of the school day.

6. CRITICAL INCIDENT DURING HOLIDAYS

If a critical incident occurs during a holiday period, the school will contact the Response Team members and carry out the following:-

- (i) express sympathy to family and assure them of the support of the school
- (ii) prepare a statement for the media if appropriate
- (iii) try and arrange for key members of staff to attend the funeral
- (iv) consider the involvement of other students as appropriate, e.g. readings, prayers, guard of honour.
- (v) prepare a plan for the support of vulnerable students on the return to school.

Record Keeping:

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meeting held, persons met, interventions used, materials used etc. The

school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

Letter/Text to Parents:

Deputy Principal Patricia Morris will prepare a brief, written statement to include:-

- 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.
- What has been done?
- What is going to be done?

A text will be sent by the secretaries Ann Igoe/ Mary Brennan to parents if they are required urgently to attend the school.

Confidentiality and good name considerations:

The school has 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 see to ensure that pupils do so also. (For instance, the term “suicide” will not be used without the consent of the family involved or until it has been established categorically that the person’s death was a result of suicide. The phrases “tragic death” or “sudden death” may be used instead).

Development and communication of this policy and plan:

Our school’s final policy and procedures in relation to responding to critical incident has been presented to all staff and Board of Management. It is available on the school website. All new and temporary staff will be made aware of the availability of all policies on the school website.

7. POLICY EVALUATION

This Policy will be reviewed bi-annually and amended, as deemed necessary, in the aftermath of a critical incident.

Policy ratified by the Board of Management on the _____

Review is ongoing.