



CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Approved by the Board of Management: 09-11-2022

REVIEWED BY	DATE

Definition of a Critical Incident

A Critical Incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the ordinary coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school.

Examples of Critical Incidents include but are not limited to

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide,
- An accident involving staff or students on or off the school premises,
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school,
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism,
- The disappearance of a member of the school community,
- An accident or tragedy in the wider community.

Aim of Critical Incident Plan

The aim of the critical incident plan is to ensure that management and staff will react effectively and promptly to maintain control of the situation. The plan will also assist the college community to return to normal as quickly as possible and limit the effects of the incident on staff and students.

We acknowledge the complex nature of traumatic events/ bereavement which may have far reaching consequences, and can affect attitude, performance and the ability to cope. It is, therefore, important for the College to have clear supportive strategies in place for our students and staff.

Confidentiality

The College is conscious of its responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements.

The Critical Incident Response Team

The Critical Incident Response Team will include the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, Senior Person in charge of Public Relations, Pastoral Care Team members (Year Head, Tutor), DDLETB Psychological Support Services and other staff member that are directly associated

The College is mindful that personal circumstance or experience may preclude any of the above at any time. In the event of the Principal being absent from the College premises, they will be informed immediately of any critical incident. In their absence, the Incident Manager role will devolve to the Deputy Principal.

Roles and Responsibilities

Critical Incident Response Team – Roles

- Leadership – Coordinating
- Counselling
- Family liaison person
- Chaplaincy/spiritual advisor – priests/ministers
- Communication officer– e.g. media and parents

Leadership: Role of college Management

- To confirm the event and to clarify facts surrounding event.
- To alert members of the Crisis Response Team to the crisis and to convene a meeting of the team, and subsequently the whole staff.
- To coordinate / delegate tasks to members of the Crisis Response Team members.
- Liaise with Board of Management, E.T.B., D.E.S., S.E.C. etc. as appropriate.
- To make contact with family to express sympathy.
- To ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students.
- To facilitate any appropriate memorial events.
- To outline specific services available in college.
- To put referral procedures in place
- Inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management and decide if an emergency meeting needs to be called.
- If appropriate inform the college's insurance company or other agencies.
- To nominate one member of staff to deliver an agreed Public Media Statement from the Crisis Response Team. This should:
 - Give the facts as they are known.
 - Highlight the supports which are available
 - Indicate any action which are planned

If an incident occurs on a college trip an issued statement should include assistance with telephone numbers and making contact with any students affected.

Counselling Role

- To monitor class / students most affected and to facilitate ongoing support to vulnerable students.
- Visit home, if appropriate.
- Liaise with family to provide support.
- Be available as support to staff.

Supervise the critical incident room (room 1).

Chaplaincy Role:

- Visit home, if appropriate
- Provide follow-up support to family – collaborate with Home-school Liaison teacher
- Assist with prayer service Collaborate with religious education team
- Contact local Faith Leaders
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff and students

Communications Role:

- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups,
- Prepare a public statement with Team (DDLETB),
- Organise free telephone line for outgoing and incoming calls,
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies,
- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response.

Family Liaison Role:

- Co-ordinate contact with families,
- Consult with family re. involvement of school (e.g. funeral service),
- Involve family, as appropriate, in school liturgies/memorial services,
- Offer to link family with community support groups,
- Provide on-going support to bereaved family.

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE: Day 1

(Appendix 2)

- Contact the Principal/next available member of the Critical Incident Response Team.
- Gather information - clarify accurate and factual information. Record and verify details. Immediate contact with family / families. It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident. Clarify the family's wishes regarding the college's involvement.
- Convene a meeting with the Critical Incident Response Team.
- Assess the needs of the situation – evacuation, supervision etc.
- Contact appropriate agencies, e.g. emergency services, medical services, E.T.B., H.S.E., Psychological Support Service, BOM, DES / colleges Inspectorate.
- Create a calm, purposeful environment.
- Organise timetable / routine for the day (Adhering to the normal college routine is important, if this is possible).
- Inform students and explain to students why activity on social media sites e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat etc. should cease. Ensure that there is no sharing of images or videos.
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted i.e. list of friends or any other relevant information and report to the college office.

- Close friends and students with Special Educational Needs may need to be told separately.
- Contact/visit the bereaved family.
- Prepare and agree a media statement and deal with the media.
- Inform parent(s)/ guardian(s).
- Hold an end of day staff briefing. Remind staff to not engage in social media activity in relation to the incident.

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

(Appendix 2)

- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Re-convene Critical Incident Management
- Maintain a calm and supportive atmosphere
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Plan for the reintegration of students and staff (e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc.).
- Plan visits to injured
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- School closure (decide with DDLETB is it necessary)

LONG TERM ACTIONS

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress
A referral to outside agencies through the Riversdale guidance service may be necessary.
- Evaluate response to incident and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately
- Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (be sensitive to special days and events)

Informing Staff & Students

Staff

- In the event of the death of a colleague, the Principal / Deputy Principal will contact staff by phone.
- In the event of the death of a student, the Crisis Response Team needs to be informed immediately. Other staff will be informed subsequently.

Similar procedures will be followed if a critical incident occurs during college holidays or while a group of staff and students are away on a college trip. If an incident occurs on a college trip contact details for all staff and students on the trip should be with the office (see Extra-Curricular Policy).

Students

- Only if an incident is confirmed by the family, can it be relayed as such to the students.
- The tutor class of the student(s) affected should be the first to be told with the Counsellor(s) and tutor present.
- Other classes to be preferably told by their tutors.
- Room 1 is the designated Crisis Response Centre

Appendices

Appendix 1 Critical Incident Response Team

Appendix 2 Critical Incident Emergency Kit

Appendix 3 Action Plan

Appendix 4 Dealing with the aftermath of Suicide or a Suspected Suicide

Appendix 5: Student Handouts

Appendix 6: How teachers can support students in school following a Critical Incident

Appendix 7: A Classroom Session Following a Critical Incident

Appendix 8: Reactions to a Critical Incident

Appendix 9: Re-integration of the Bereaved Student in School

Appendix 10: Guidelines for meeting and Communicating with Parents

Appendix 12: Guidelines for input with pupils on coping with their reactions to a Critical Incident

Appendix 13: Emergency Contact List

Appendix 14: Resources

Appendix 15: Preventative Measures

Appendix 1: Critical Incident Response Team

Emily Boyle	(Principal)
Cathal Mc Daniel	(Deputy Principal)
Eileen Crawley	(Secretary)
Shauna Murphy	(Counsellor)
Susan Robinson	(Chaplain)
Leona Dixon	(HSCL)
Janet Murphy	(Public Relations)

Appendix 2: Critical Incident Emergency Kit

- Ensure that appropriate contact numbers are available to all staff - emergency services; medical services (local GPs, hospitals, HSE personnel, Community Care Services etc.)
- Student telephone numbers Critical Incident Management Policy (available in office on VShare)
- Contact details for Dublin & Dun Laoghaire ETB. & Psychological Support Service
- Contact details for the Board of Management
- Contact details for parent(s)/guardian(s), staff (including administrative and ancillary staff)
- Contact details for Department of Education & Skills
- First Aid kit
- Sample templates of letters to parents (re. tragedy, involvement of outside agencies)
- Sample templates for press releases
- Critical Incident Management Team names and numbers
- Evacuation plan
- Advice leaflets

Appendix 3: Action Plan

Action Plan

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

- **Information:** – Gather accurate information about the incident, what happened, where, when, extent of injuries, location of those injured/not injured, how many involved and their names, what agencies have been contacted already.
 - **Appropriate agencies** Examples of agencies that could be contacted include, emergency services, medical services, psychological services, Board of Management, E.T.B (see appendix 7)
 - **Convene a meeting of the critical incident management team:** - The agenda for the meeting could include the following (1) Agree a statement of facts for the staff, students and parents. (2) Ensure that DDLETB are advised of the situation (3) Delegate responsibility to the Critical Management Team (4) Ensure a phone line remains open to deal with enquires from all concerned parties (5) Organise time table for the day, ***it is important to adhere to normal school routine as far as possible*** (6) Organise a staff meeting and arrange for supervision of students during the staff meeting (7) Decide if an outside professional is to be invited to the staff meeting.
 - **Arrange supervision of students:** -
 - **Hold a staff meeting:** - All staff should be invited to attend this meeting including Caretaking staff, Special Needs Assistants, School Completion, Office Staff etc. Items to be covered at the staff meeting include (1) An account of the facts as known (2) An opportunity for the staff to express their views and feelings (3) Establish an agreed approach on how the facts will be shared with students, parents. (4) An outline of the schedule for the day (5) Give information to staff relating to the outside agencies and others involved and the supports being put in place for students, staff and parents. (6) Vulnerable students to be identified. (7) Relevant handout material to be distributed.
 - (Appropriate material is kept on file in the critical incident file in the main guidance office.)
 - **Organise timetable for the day.**
 - **As far as possible maintain normal routines. This procedure is based on sound psychological reasoning which is a practical and appropriate coping mechanism in the event of a critical incident taking place.**
 - **Inform parents/guardians of (a) children directly involved and (b) parents of children not directly involved.**
- a. **Children directly involved:** -
- **Critical incident team** agree who should share information with parents and how this should be done.

- **To avoid duplication, make a list of parents already contacted and those who must still be contacted.**
- **The information shared must be relevant, factual and practical.**
- **The Parents' Room/HSCL office is to be set aside for distressed students to meet with their parents/guardians. Room 15 may be used in the event of a larger venue being required.**
- **All staff should be mindful of parents who are on their own when they arrive in the school and please ensure that they are supported.**
- **Give telephone numbers for enquiries.**
- b. **Children not directly involved:**
 - The parents of other children in the school should be informed of the incident and that their child may be upset.
 - Send a letter to parents stating the facts and brief details of the incident.
 - It may not be appropriate at this point to disclose the names of those involved. (See Appendix 8 for sample letter).

Inform students

Careful preparation is important when meeting students to inform them of a critical incident.

Consideration should be given to the age of the pupils and the optimum group size. It is best to do it in class groups or sub-groups. The suitability of the 'messenger' should also be considered, remembering that it is generally thought that support is best given by the adults known to the child.

In our case this should be a tutor, year head, guidance counsellor or any other teacher who may know or have a special relationship with the class. If at all possible the teacher should be accompanied by another professional and not meet the class on his/her own.

The key points/actions in the process are listed below.

- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours which can cause unnecessary stress.
- Allow pupils to ask questions, tell their story and express feelings.
- Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident.
(See Resource Documents in appendix 1, 2 and 3 on reactions to grief and critical incidents.)

Make contact with the bereaved family

Dealing with the media

It is the role of the principal to deal with the media. (Or should the principal so direct this role may be delegated to another staff member or to D.D.L.E.T.B. Head office). Any other staff member who speaks to the media will be speaking in a personal capacity and will not be representing the school or the agreed procedures within the critical incident plan.

Prepare a written statement to include:

- the facts about the incident
- what has been done already
- what is going to be done
- positive information or comments about the deceased person.

Some points to remember if you are asked to give a live interview:

- consider assigning the task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with the media
- take some time to prepare
- remember that everything you say is on record and, therefore, keep it simple, factual and brief
- decline if you are not ready or think it inappropriate.

Consider setting aside a room for the media. This may help to control their access to staff and students.

Brief staff and students and advise them on dealing with the media.

Organise the reunion of students with their parents, if necessary

- Inform students that their parents/guardians will be collecting them as soon as possible.
- Facilitate distressed students and their parents by providing a private room where they can meet following an incident. This could be a very emotional time.
- Where appropriate offer help with transport, especially for younger children.

Summary Checklist for Principals

- Gather the facts – Who? What? When? and Where?
- Contact appropriate agencies or delegate this to key staff.
- Convene the Critical Incident Management Team.
- Organise for the supervision of students.
- Inform staff.
- Agree on a statement of the facts.
- Identify high risk students.
- Appoint someone to deal with phone enquiries.
- Organise timetable for the day.
- Inform parents/guardians.
- Inform students.
- Make contact with the bereaved family.
- Organise support.
- Respond to the media.

- **MAINTAIN THE NORMAL (Timetabled) SCHOOL ROUTINE WHEN AT ALL POSSIBLE. (This is particularly important and will assist with the grieving process).**

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24 – 72 Hours)

Review the events of the first 24 hours

- Re-convene Critical Incident Management Team and other key staff members who may have become specifically involved.
- Briefly check out how each person on this team is coping.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Have review staff meeting with all staff if necessary. Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments.
- Be sensitive as to how all staff are coping on a personal and professional level.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Update media, if necessary.

Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary

- Provide a suitable room. Room 8 will be made available.
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students in order to clarify what has happened.
- Offer advice and reassurance. Inform them about support services and provide relevant handouts. (See Resource Documents in Appendix).
- Any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings has the choice of opting out.
- Arrange, in consultation with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission. See Appendix 4 for sample letter for parental consent.

Plan for the reintegration of students and staff (e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc.)

- Name key person(s) to liaise with above on their return to school.

Plan visits to injured

- Key person(s) to visit home/hospital would be any member of the Critical Incident Team, year head, tutor, or other staff who may have a specific relationship or role.

Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service

- Designate staff member to liaise with family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service. This liaison role should be undertaken by HSCL and/or Chaplain.
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.
- Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service
- Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.

School closure

- Request a decision on this from school management.

LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

A referral to outside agencies through the Riversdale guidance service may be necessary.

Reactions to a Critical Incident.

For example, if over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from:

- 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 the 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 D.D.L.E.T.B. psychologists, and all relevant personnel involved about this.

**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.
- 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, it would be useful to 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 and liaise on any proposed commemoration.
- Be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day.

Appendix 4: Dealing with the aftermath of Suicide or a Suspected Suicide

Introduction

When a person dies through suicide, those who know the person experience a deep sense of shock. The unexpectedness of the death and the taboo associated with suicide can leave a school community feeling unsure of how to proceed. Again, the key to this is planning.

The term 'suicide' should not be used until it has been "established categorically that the student's or teacher's death was as a result of suicide" (ASTI Guidelines 1997). The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead.

The following is a guide to how a school can support the bereaved family, school staff and students.

Family

- A staff member should contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family's wishes about how the death should be described.
- Acknowledge their grief and loss.
- Organise a home visit by two staff members.
- Consult with the family regarding the appropriate support from the school e.g. at the funeral service.

Staff

- Convene a staff meeting to brief staff on the above details. It may be necessary to do this in two shifts therefore ensuring staff are available for support to students and for cover at all times. Remember to include auxiliary staff.
- Students need to be with people they know and trust. If possible, it is better if the teachers provide support for the students. The external "expert" visitor should therefore be primarily used to brief the teachers.
- Help teachers to prepare for breaking the news to students. Close friends and relatives of the deceased in the school need to be told first. This needs to be done in a private location.
- Outline the possible reactions. *
- Give them information from the school's pack on dealing with the students in the classroom and on reactions to grief.
- Identify high-risk students and what supports are available.
- Remind them of the school's critical incident plan.
- Decide on the strategy to deal with queries from parents/guardians. Prepare a letter setting out the facts, how the school is dealing with the events and how parents or guardians can support their child.

- Ensure that a quiet place can be made available for students/staff.
 - Hold further staff briefings during the day to update information, to offer support and to further identify high-risk students.
- * See Resource Documents Appendix. for Reactions to Grief. See also Sample Letter to Parents (1).

Students

- Give the facts as they are known.
- Create a safe and supportive space for the students where they can share their reactions and feelings.
- Advise them on their possible reactions over the next few days (see Resource document 4.5).
- Avoid glorifying the victim and sensationalising the suicide.
- Advise the students of the support that is available to them.
- Take any talk of suicide seriously and provide support or refer on immediately.
- Students may wish to confide in and seek support from each other rather than adults. Facilitate this if appropriate and if it is possible. However, information should be provided about how to get further help if they, or their friends, should need it.

Indicators of high risk students

- Close friends and relatives of the deceased
- Pupils with a history of suicide attempts/self-harm
- Pupils who experienced a recent loss, death of a friend or relative, family divorce or separation, break-up with a boyfriend/girlfriend
- Pupils who have been bereaved by a suicide in the past
- Pupils with a psychiatric history
- Pupils with a history of substance abuse
- Pupils with a history of sexual abuse
- Non-communicative pupils who have difficulty talking about their feelings
- Pupils experiencing serious family difficulties, including serious mental or physical illness
- Less able students.

Schools should be vigilant around the time of the inquest and the anniversary of the student's death.

Assessing for suicide potential

This is a brief note indicating how to go about making an immediate assessment as to whether a student is at risk.

Where there is a serious question mark or concern about a student, then referral should be made to a person trained in risk assessment.

Have a sensitive but direct and open discussion with the student.

If a student has been reported to be talking about suicide, they should be asked openly "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" This will offer the student the opportunity to talk about their feelings and their thoughts. If they affirm that they have been thinking about it, then this should be explored by raising the following issues with the student.

Previous attempt: Has the student attempted suicide before? You might ask "Have you ever tried to harm yourself before?" If the answer to this is "Yes", then the risk increases.

Personal/family history: The level of risk increases with the number and seriousness of family difficulties e.g. parental separation, recent bereavement, serious illness etc.

Physical/emotional history: A student who has experienced major personal difficulties, whether as a result of physical (recent hospitalisation, chronic illness) or significant emotional difficulties (depression, loneliness, guilt, anger etc.) is more at risk.

Plan: Does the student have a plan, for example, has written suicide notes, has a particular day in mind to carry out the act, has a gun, or pills to take? The more concrete the plan the more serious the threat.

Means: Does the student have the means and place to do it. Are the means available lethal? Will the student be in a place where they can be rescued? For example, do they intend to carry out the action when both parents are at work and their siblings are at school.

The greater the number of "Yes" answers, the higher the risk and the greater the need for immediate onward referral of the student. Parents should be informed at once and asked to bring the student to their GP or to another service. (If a student is under 18 years' teachers are obliged to inform the parents even without the student's consent).

Appendix 5: Student Handouts

Grief after Suicide or Suspected Suicide

Remember there is no right or wrong way to react when someone you know dies.

People will have many different reactions to what has happened.

- Know that you can survive, even if you feel you can't.
- You may feel overwhelmed and frightened by your feelings. This is normal. You're not going crazy; you are grieving
- You may not feel a strong reaction to what has happened. This is ok.
- You may experience feelings of guilt, confusion, forgetfulness and anger. Again these feelings are all normal.
- You may feel angry at the person who has died, at yourself, at everyone and everything. It is ok to express it.
- You may feel guilty about what you did or did not do. Suicide is the act of an individual, for which we cannot take responsibility.
- You may never have to answer "why" but it is ok to keep asking "why" until you no longer need to ask or are satisfied with partial answers.
- Sometimes people make decisions over which we have no control. It was not your choice.
- Feeling low is temporary, suicide is permanent. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If you are feeling low or having a difficult time, ask for help.
- Allow yourself to cry, this will help you heal.
- Healing takes time. Allow yourself the time you need to grieve.
- Delay making any big decisions if possible.
- This is the hardest thing you will ever do. Be patient with yourself.
- Spend time with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk and who also understand you need to be silent.
- Seek Professional help if you feel overwhelmed.
- Talk to a trusted adult.
- Avoid people who try to tell you what to feel and how to feel it and, in particular, those who think you "should be over it by now".
- Ask in school about a support group for survivors that provide a safe place for you to express your feelings, or simply a place to be with other survivors who are experiencing some of the same things you're going through.
- Allow yourself to laugh with others and yourself. This is healing.
- Useful websites: www.spunout.ie, www.youth.ie, www.reachout.com.au

HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

- Reach out- people do care.
- Talk to your friends, family, and teachers- talking is the most healing medicine.
- Remember you are normal and having normal reactions- don't label yourself as crazy or mad.
- It is ok to cry.
- It is ok to smile.
- If your feelings and reactions seem different to those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently.
- When the stress levels are high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings with alcohol and drugs. This complicates the problems, rather than relieving them.
- Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a letter or note to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?
- Spend time with people that have made a positive influence on you.
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat- answer them, even though you aren't sure.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal.
- Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk.
- Sticking to your "normal" routine helps. Structure your time- keep busy.
- Take time out- go for a walk or kick a football.
- Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen- like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc. Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits.
- Useful websites: www.spunout.ie, www.youth.ie, www.reachout.com.au, <https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/>

Appendix 6: How teachers can support students in school following a Critical Incident

The following (appendix 2.) is taken from NEPS booklet "Responding to Critical Incidents:- Advise and Information Pack for Schools"

(Adapted from Critical Incidents: Managing Loss and Trauma in Schools: A Wiltshire Psychological Service and School Improvement and Support Information Booklet.)

How teachers can support students in school following a critical incident

General considerations

- Students should be given opportunities to discuss the incident and express their thoughts or feelings in a secure environment. The teacher needs to be aware of the importance of handling the discussion in a confident but sensitive manner. However, normal routines should be returned to as soon as possible.
- Students should be encouraged to resume sports and other extra-curricular activities.
- Help students re-establish support systems, identify with them who they go to for different kinds of support.
- It is appropriate that the class curriculum is adjusted or adapted. For example, teachers should avoid presenting new learning material for a while following an incident as concentration may be impaired.
- Use opportunities which arise within ordinary class work, where coping and support can be reinforced.
- Students could be encouraged to discuss how to avoid future crises and lessons learnt from their experiences. There will be opportunities within the school's personal, social and health education programmes for structured discussion.

Meeting with individual students

- Take your cue from the student. When they feel like talking, try to find the time to listen. If the time they choose is not appropriate, explain that you would like to talk with them and name an alternative time and place.
- Don't be afraid to mention the incident or the deceased person's name. It is important to acknowledge what has happened for the student.
- It is alright to ask the student what he/she needs, what helps or what doesn't help.
- Let the students know that it is normal to laugh and cry. Reassure them it is okay to lighten the mood by remembering old times and stories.
- Believe what the students say. Feelings must be acknowledged, believed and discussed. Try not to make comments such as "you don't really mean that" or "it will be okay soon".

Appendix 7: A Classroom Session Following a Critical Incident

A classroom session following a critical incident

(Adapted from Critical Incidents: Managing Loss and Trauma in Schools: A Wiltshire Psychological Service and School Improvement and Support Information Booklet.)

A classroom session is an important intervention following a critical incident that affects large numbers of students. Sessions containing up to 30 students can be effective. It is recommended that the classroom teacher take an active role, if possible. Students may feel safe and secure with their classroom teacher rather than being with an adult they do not know. Teachers may be able to lead these sessions and a D.D.L.E.T.B. psychologists can act as a co-facilitator. If the teacher feels uncomfortable with this role the psychologist may take more of an active role. Teachers should have the opportunity to opt out of this work if they wish.

A class session needs to be tailored to the developmental level of the class. The time required will vary depending on the class experience and age.

The process involves:

- providing facts and dispelling rumours
- sharing stories
- sharing thoughts and feelings
- normalisation of thoughts and feelings
- empowerment
- closure.

Providing facts and dispelling rumours

State the facts clearly. Talk in concrete rather than abstract terms. Dispelling rumours helps students understand the reality of the events. Helping students hear the facts is an important prerequisite for coming to terms with what has happened.

Sharing stories

Students are asked to tell their story of the event. As a result, they will feel less alone because of their common shared experiences. Helping them verbalise their experiences helps their recovery. For those students who find it difficult to verbalise their experiences or for students with learning difficulties it may also be helpful to allow them to express their feelings and recount their experiences in other ways. Writing stories or using art can be particularly helpful, especially for younger students. Give the students a choice as to how they want to represent their experiences. Have a box of tissues at hand.

Sharing thoughts and feelings

Help the students identify what they thought and felt at the time of the incident, or when they first heard of the incident. It may be helpful to share your own feelings, thoughts and fears that you experienced during the crisis or just after hearing the news.

Normalisation of thoughts and feelings

Explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Let the students know that in time, for most people, the reactions or symptoms will go away. Inform the class that if the symptoms don't go away they need to seek help. Distribute handouts on reactions to grief to the students, if appropriate.

Empowerment

Help the students identify strategies that they can use to help manage symptoms. For example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep, exercise etc. If appropriate, students can brainstorm ideas that might help prevent a similar situation happening again. Overall, it is important to help the students regain a sense of control.

Closure

End the session by focussing on the future. Depending on the nature of the incident, help the class/group decide what would bring about a sense of closure, for example, organising a memorial, writing cards or letters. Reiterate the message that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Tell students what further supports will be put in place if needed.

Grief

(Adapted from "Grief in Children: Someone to talk to". Barnardos p. 64 – 65.)

It is acknowledged that while there are distinct stages/phases in the grieving process different people may go through these stages in different sequences and at different paces. Generally, the grieving process in adults is thought to take about two years while with children and adolescents it may be over a more extended time-frame with different issues arising as they go through developmental milestones.

Denial, numbness, shock (up to 6 weeks)

- Death of the person may be denied
- Emerging feelings may be suppressed
- Refusal to talk about the death
- Bereaved keeps very busy to avoid thinking about the death
- Bereaved may show signs of confusion and forget everyday routines
- Children in shock may display either silent withdrawal or outbursts of crying/screaming.

Acute grief/searching and longing for deceased (6 weeks to 4 months)

- Acute sadness – crying
- Physical pangs of pain including loss of appetite and disturbed sleep
- Emotional pain accompanied by dejection, hopelessness, lack of concentration
- Fears of life after death, nightmares, ghosts
- Disorganisation
- Strong guilt feelings and questioning of self and others, particularly in the case of a sudden

death

- Feelings of anger at the departed for leaving them
- Bereaved may reject offers to comfort them.

Adaptation to life without the deceased (6 months to 18 months)

- People begin to adjust to their lives without the lost person
- Sense of isolation
- Fearful of forgetting the deceased
- Less crying and irritability
- Exacerbation of existing personality problems. Children with low self-esteem may be at a greater risk of emotional behavioural difficulties.

Re-organisation

- Getting on with life
- Returned sense of humour and play
- Able to participate emotionally in new relationships
- Changed relationship with the deceased – able to think of the deceased without pain
- Reduction in physical/emotional symptoms
- Less guilt.

Children's understanding and reaction to grief according to age

(Adapted from "Children's understanding of death" Barnardos. p. 28 – 32.)

- **Ages 9 – 12 Years**
- Understand the finality and universality of death
- Awareness of their own mortality and may worry about their own death
- May display psychosomatic symptoms
- May wish to stay at home close to parents
- May display anger.

- **How you can help**
- Dispel fears about their own health or the health of other loved ones by offering reassurance
- Encourage them to go to school
- Allow them to express their anger, offering appropriate ways to do so.

- **Adolescents**
- Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults
- May feel a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.

- Death adds to the already confused array of emotions
- May appear to not care about the death
- May seek support outside of the family.

How you can help

- Offer them time to listen
- Allow them to express their grief in their own way
- Be prepared for mood swings.
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Note: If parents are grieving themselves, they may be emotionally unable to support their other children. In this instance, another supportive adult in the child's life, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours may need to offer emotional support.

It should be remembered that for children with special educational needs, their understanding of what has happened will be in line with their developmental age.

Appendix 8: Reactions to a Critical Incident

The range of 'normal' reactions to a Critical Incident

(Adapted from Somerset Educational Service pack.)

Each individual has his/her own way of dealing with feelings, loss and tragedy. There is no right or wrong way to react and any or all of the following can be experienced.

FEELINGS

Fear
Guilt
Shame
Anger
Regret
Loneliness
Anxiety
Shock
Yearning
Numbness
Confusion
Isolation
Separation anxiety
School refusal
Physical/Verbal aggression
Misuse of drugs, including alcohol

BEHAVIOUR

Bedwetting
Nightmares
Thumb sucking
Over dependency
Social withdrawal
Tantrums
Mood swings
Loss of concentration
Forgetfulness
Irritability
Tearfulness
Insecure feelings

PHYSICAL

Tiredness
Sleeplessness
Headaches
Gastrointestinal Problems
Bowel/Bladder problems
Loss or increase in appetite

THOUGHTS

Disbelief
Denial
Sense of unreality
Preoccupation with images of the event/person

Appendix 9: Re-integration of the Bereaved Student in School

REINTEGRATION OF THE BEREAVED CHILD IN SCHOOL

Some suggestions are offered here which may help prepare the school and the bereaved child for their return to school. They will help to ensure that the individual, the other students and the staff feel more comfortable and at ease.

- Visit the bereaved student at home to see what he/she would like to happen when they return to school.
- Talk to the student's class about how people are affected by grief and encourage them to share their own feelings. Ask about how they have coped with bereavements in their own lives and what has helped.
- Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to come back to school. Ask how they would like to be treated if they were returning to school after a death. This might be done in pairs or small groups, thus encouraging all to be involved. It will also ensure that a range of preferences are expressed, reinforcing the fact that different people will have different preferences as to how they are treated. Some people may want to discuss what has happened, while others may want to be left alone. In general, bereaved students say that they would like others to treat them as before rather than being 'over-nice' to them. However, it is a delicate balance as they don't want people to behave as if nothing has happened at all.
- It may help if, in advance of the student's return to school, classmates have sent cards or notes for their bereaved classmate. This will let him/her know that they are in their thoughts.
- When they return, acknowledge their loss "I'm sorry that (name of deceased) died. I know that you are sad. It is ok to cry". (Ensure that this is done early on the day of the student's return and teachers can express their own sympathies separately once the general re-entry to class has been managed.)
- When the student returns, they may have difficulty concentrating or joining in class activities. Be understanding.
- Allow them access to a 'quiet room' where he/she can be alone. You might suggest: "We can set up a signal for you to use if you need to leave the class at any time". (ensure supervision)
- Link the student in with the guidance counsellor for support if needed.
- Listen when they want to talk: "If you need to talk at any time, I am here to listen".
- Carry on normal routines and normal approaches to discipline.
- The student may have difficulty completing homework and assignments: "If you are having difficulty doing your homework it is ok to do as much as you can for a while".
- Allow them as much time as they need to grieve

Appendix 10: Guidelines for meeting and Communicating with Parents

Guidelines for meeting with parents

When a critical incident occurs, many parents are very anxious about how their child will react and what they can do to help. It is often useful for the school to arrange a meeting after school to allay parents' fears. It also reduces the number of individual calls and visits to the school from concerned parents. It is recommended that the Principal heads the meeting and the psychologist attends to talk about the psychological impact of trauma. The following are recommended areas to be covered at the meeting.

1. Acknowledge what has happened, offer condolences and give space for sharing of feelings and emotions if appropriate.
 2. Outline what has been done to date and a plan for the next days and weeks. (How the students are reacting in general. What help has been provided and by whom and what help will be provided in the future).
 3. Outline what are the normal reactions to a critical incident and provide handout.
 4. Go through Children's Understanding of Grief and provide handout.
 5. Suggest ways in which they can help their child (Give Frequently Asked Questions by parents).
 6. Give time for people to vent their concerns and provide answers, if possible.
 7. Advise that you will all be available at the end of the meeting for 15 minutes if anyone has any further concerns or questions.
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