

**ST. PAUL'S SECONDARY SCHOOL**  
**Greenhills**  
**Dublin 12**



# Critical Incident Policy

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*Ratified by the Board of Management on Nov. 11<sup>th</sup> 2019*

# **St. Paul's Secondary School**

## **Critical Incident Response Policy**

### **Introduction**

St. Paul's Secondary School strives to create a caring environment for the school community as a whole. The school has formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students during the normal course of the school day and in the event of a critical incident.

### **Definition**

For the purposes of this policy a critical incident is defined as any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the normal running of the school. Critical incidents may involve students, staff, the school or the whole community.

Examples of a critical incident may include:

- the death of a student or a member of staff, through sudden death, accident, suicide or terminal illness;
- severe physical violence in the school;
- accident on a school trip;
- school fire or explosion;
- disappearance of a member of the school community;
- a serious tragedy within the school community.

### **Critical Incident Management Team**

It is regarded as good practice for the school to establish a Critical Incident Management Team which may include:

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Two Assistant Principals
- Two Year Heads
- Guidance Counsellor(s)
- Representative of the Board of Management
- Co-ordinator of Religious Education

The Critical Incident Management Team may co-opt other members of staff to assist them, should they deem it necessary.

The Principal will act as team leader or in his/her absence the Deputy Principal.

This team will:

- meet annually;
- maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers for Staff, Parents/Guardians of students and Emergency Services;
- establish a system of communication among staff so that information can be conveyed one to another should a critical incident happen outside of school hours;
- provide reading material regarding the effects on individuals of shock, trauma and grief;
- designate a person to respond to any Media inquiries.

### **Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident**

#### ***Establish the Facts***

It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. The Critical Incident Management Team will establish the facts and agree a general statement in response to the crisis.

#### ***Outline Immediate Response***

The team will agree on an immediate plan of action which may involve:

- informing the Staff, Board of Management, DES and Le Cheile Office;
- informing students, Parents/Guardians;
- alerting outside agencies such as Gardaí, Emergency Services, School Psychological Services etc;
- assigning tasks within the Team;
- developing a crisis plan for the day;
- devising a process for dealing with telephone enquiries; logging telephone calls made and received, letters sent and received and important information gathered. These logs will be held by the Principal, in case of follow up after time has passed;
- reviewing events of the first day to make plans for the following day.

In the event of a death:

- It is important that at all times the wishes of the bereaved family be respected;
- visiting the home of the bereaved;
- supporting distressed pupils and staff;
- facilitating staff and students response e.g. book of condolence, flowers etc;
- informing staff and students re funeral arrangements;
- arranging involvement in Liturgy, if agreed, with bereaved family;
- deciding what form of representation is appropriate at the funeral;
- preparing students prior to the funeral and taking time to support them afterwards;
- ensuring support/counselling services are available, if deemed necessary.

## ***Inform***

It is vital that all those needing information, receive it as soon as is practicable. It is helpful if the agreed statement is used when informing students and others as this may help reduce the spread of rumour. If at all possible, the students should be told at the same time in groups no larger than normal class size.

The statement, communicated in a sensitive manner, should seek to:

- give the facts as they are known i.e. what happened, who was involved;
- highlight the support that will be available;
- indicate the actions that are planned.

The school has the responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the person(s) involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any statements. The term suicide will not be used without the consent of the family involved. The phrase “tragic death” or “sudden death” may be used instead.

Where a critical incident has occurred on a school trip, an agreed statement is needed to assist those who will be telephoning Parents/Guardians. It is preferable to have a number of staff involved so that all concerned are informed at or around the same time. Some further considerations in contacting Parents/Guardians:

- offer any practical help needed – transport, phone numbers, contact names;
- enquire if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support;
- carefully review with the Parents/Guardian that the information given has been fully understood;
- alerting parents to the trauma will help them when they subsequently make contact with their child.

## ***Liaising with the Press***

If there are enquiries from the press, it is important that only one person acts as liaison – this will usually be the Principal/Chairperson of the Board of Management. All staff and students should understand that all press enquiries are to be referred to the designated person. No other discussion with the press should take place and no interviews should be given without the approval of the Principal/Chairperson of the Board of Management.

In preparing a press statement, thought should be given to the following suggestions:

- the press statement should be simple and brief;
- it should express the sorrow of the entire school community and extend sympathy to the family/families;
- priority should be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis;
- the names, addresses and telephone numbers of those affected should not be released;
- likely questions should be considered and a response prepared;
- a specific location and time for press briefings should be nominated in an ongoing situation.

## **Short-term Action**

The action that is needed in the short term will be dependent on the nature of the crisis and may include the following:

### *Students*

- care should be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine while sustaining an atmosphere where it is acceptable to talk about the experience;
- contact with Parents/Guardians will be maintained throughout all stages of the crisis. Parents/Guardians need to be able to contact the school if they have information that will help the school care for their daughter;
- some form of memorial service is likely to take place. Head Girl and Deputy Head Girl, Senior Prefects and the Students Council may be consulted as to the nature of the service. Such a service may also be of great benefit to staff and parents/guardians;
- students who feel, for whatever reason, that they are unable to be involved in the school's direct response to the incident should be able to opt out;
- the pastoral care of students exhibiting possible signs of distress or uncharacteristic behaviour during the time of a critical incident, requires sensitivity. The Guidance Counsellor may be a key person in addressing the needs of individual students;
- reminders should be given in relation to the supports that are available as students will react in different ways and at different times;
- friends of a bereaved student can sometimes be the best source of support. These friends may in turn need support as they attempt to find ways to be of help.

### *Staff*

Many Staff, following a critical incident, may need to air their feelings and reactions. The school might consider a number of possibilities such as a staff meeting, inviting in professional help, a staff prayer service.

- care needs to be taken of those staff directly involved with the incident to ensure that they receive support;
- staff who feel, for whatever reason, that they are unable to be involved in the school's direct response to the incident should be able to opt out;
- the Principal needs to have a care for his/her own well being and seek whatever support is appropriate.

## *Parents*

The school has a role to play in supporting parents/guardians concerned with a critical incident. This will vary depending on the nature of the crisis and the resources available to the school.

The school should nominate contact persons with whom Parents/Guardians can liaise in regard to the well-being of their daughter(s).

The school may discuss with involved Parents/Guardians and/or Parents' Association Representatives what appropriate action can be taken to support those concerned.

Parents/Guardians may be involved in a school service or assembly following a tragedy.

## **Long Term Action**

The following are some possibilities worthy of consideration:

- Care should be taken to monitor students returning to school after a critical incident or bereavement.
- when a subsequent bereavement occurs in the school setting, care should be taken to support those who were bereaved previously as this subsequent incident may trigger deep emotional reactions;
- the school might consider holding an annual remembrance service;
- the school might consider the dedication of a tree, special garden, piece of art work or notice board to recall those who have died.

## **Review and Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed and evaluated after the occurrence of a Critical Incident and at least once during the term of the Board of Management.

***This Policy was ratified by the Board of Management on: 6<sup>th</sup> October 2011***

***This Policy was reviewed and revised by the Board of Management on: 21<sup>st</sup> March 2017***

***This Policy was reviewed and revised by the Board of Management on: 11<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2019***

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson: Board of Management

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal/Secretary: Board of Management

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

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

## **Appendix**

### **Emergency telephone numbers**

Ambulance	999 (112)
Fire	999 (112)
Crumlin Children's Hospital	4096100
Tallaght Hospital	4142000
Greenhills Surgery	4504168 - <i>133 St Peter's Road</i>
Gardai Crumlin	6666200
Community Garda Gina	6666200
ESB (emergencies)	1850 372 999 – <i>24 hour/7day service</i>
Bord Gáis (Gas leaks etc.)	1850 205050 - <i>24 hour emergency services</i>
Tony Keogh (Electrical emergencies)	01 4295080
MGM (Plumbing & Heating)	087 2615227 (Michael Murphy)
PKF O'Connor Leddy & Holme	01 4961444
Auditor	
Chubb Ltd (Fire Alarm repairs)	2953333
Phoenix Alarm (Burglar)	087 2555395 - After hours (01) 2002967
Whelanapier Alarms (CCTV System)	2952555
G4S Monitoring Ltd (keyholders)	7077203 (control No. 7077270) (for burglar break ins) (school code 1143)–(to cancel fire alarm)
Accel Lifts (Wheelchair/stair lift)	4067580 - <i>24 hour/7day emergency service</i>
Allianz plc (Accident Reporting)	6133966

NEPS Psychologist Ciara Hogan	07618449
NEPS (Head Office)	8892700
Pieta House	1800 247 247
Samaritans	116123
Rape Crisis Centre	1800 778888
National Office for suicide prevention (HSE)	6201670
Sólás- (Bereavement Counselling for Children – Barnardo’s)	473 2110
Aware	1800 80 48 48
Al-Anon	8732699
A A	8420700
Narcotics Anonymous (Helpline)	6728000