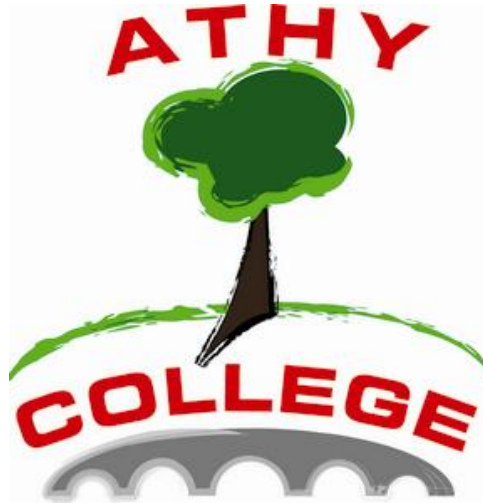


Athy College

Athy

Co Kildare

059 8631663



Critical Incident Management Policy

(including CIM Plan)

Reviewed: Autumn 2010

Critical Incident Policy

Introduction

Athy College aims to protect the wellbeing of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. As stated in the school mission statement:

“In a caring school we are dedicated to fostering educational excellence empowering all students to reach their full potential – academic and social, physical and spiritual. Through partnership and co-operation we openly respect and nurture the dignity and uniqueness of each individual”.

As a school community of teachers, students and parents, we strive for excellence in everything that we do having the well-being of the student at the core of our mission.

The school has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring environment ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both students and staff during the normal course of school activity and in the event of a critical incident.

Athy College attends to prevention by having some systems in place which help to promote emotional health and wellbeing and which build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events.

Mental health promotion is a vital element of this work. Mental health has been defined as follows:

“A state of emotional and social well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can manage the normal stresses of life, can work effectively, and is able to play a role in his or her community” (WHO, 1999).

Such policies include:

- Admissions Policy
- Anti- Bullying policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Health and Safety Policy
- Special Education Needs Policy
- I.T. Users Policy
- Guidance Policy
- Child Protection Policy

- School Trip Policy

Along with these policies the school has developed:

- A Pastoral Care Team with tutor support and Year Heads
- A Mentoring Programme for first year students with the assistance of fifth year students
- A Code of Behaviour supported by teachers, management and the pastoral care system
- ‘Open Door’ access to one-to-one counselling
- An integrated S.P.H.E. programme at junior cycle and also at senior cycle (through the R.E. programme and LCA programme)
- Physically safe environment and fire drills
- Health and safety policies for each practical subject department
- Child protection guidelines and procedures
- Student Council and access to participation and involvement in school policy development.
- LCA programme both curriculum based (Social Education) and through cross curricular activities
- Access to and participation in sport

The S.P.H.E.syllabus which is time-tabled for all junior cert classes is a key element of the school’s prevention work. S.P.H.E supports the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development of students. There are 10 modules that comprise the S.P.H.E curriculum:

- Belonging and integrating
- Self Management: A sense of purpose
- Communication skills
- Physical health
- Friendships
- Relationships and sexuality
- Emotional health
- Influences and decisions
- Substance use
- Physical safety

Critical Incident - Definition

Athy College recognises a critical incident as “any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school” (“Responding to Critical Incidents”, NEPS).

Critical incidents may involve students, staff, the school or the local community. Examples might include the following:

- the sudden death of a member of the school community;
- a serious accident involving a member of the school community;
- a serious physical attack on a member of the school community or a serious violent intrusion into the school;
- very serious damage to the school building;
- the disappearance of a member of the school community;
- a tragedy in the wider community which seriously impacts on the school community
- a sexual assault.

Issues related to suicide/suspected suicide

Athy College is aware of the sensitive issues which surround a death by suicide .

- Great care should be taken in the use of the term ‘suicide’
 - (a) until it has been fully confirmed and
 - (b) the family may be sensitive about use of the term. The use of the terms ‘sudden’ or ‘tragic’ death is more appropriate in all communications.
- In communication with students staff need to be aware :
 - that suicide should never be presented as a valid option
 - there should be no criticism of the person who has died; separation of the behaviour from the person
 - encourage students to always seek help if they need it
 - give the facts as agreed with the bereaved family
- The school authority will endeavour, to the best of its ability

- To provide safe and supportive spaces/ structures where students can share their reactions and feelings
 - Develop a system of identifying those who are most traumatised by the incident
 - Be aware that this event does not impact on all students and normal routines should be adhered to as much as possible
 - Take all talk of suicide seriously, using the school protocol in place to deal with this
 - Provide guidance to parents on support of students in the initial and long –term aftermath.
- Appendix
- Avoid sensationalising suicide, carrying out the same the same rituals or memorial services as done for other student /staff deaths such as those through road traffic accidents.
 - In the long term, increase staff awareness of suicide and facilitate training of key members of the CIMT and staff to recognise or intervene if there is suspicion of risk
 - Build on the policies and procedures outlined above.

Aims

The aim of the Critical Incident Management Policy and Plan is to ensure an effective response to crisis situations, in line with the policy and guidelines of the Department of Education and Science.

Objectives

- The Critical Incident Management Policy and Plan seeks to respond effectively to crisis situations involving and/or impacting on members of the school community.
- The response focuses on the needs of students, staff, parents/guardians and any other persons within the school community affected by a critical incident.
- The plan outlines the role of a number of parties within the school community, including the Critical Incident Management Team, the Board of Management, the VEC, teachers and non-teaching school staff.
- The plan outlines:
 - a. short-term procedures for the first 24 hours
 - b. medium-term actions for days 2 and 3 after the incident
 - c. long term actions
- The plan includes input from the staff of the school, students and parents.

The Critical Incident Management Team

Athy Community College's Critical Incident Management Team will comprise of the following staff:

Principal

Deputy Principal

Assistant Principal on duty at the time of a critical incident

Home School Community Liaison Teacher

Guidance Counsellor

Year Head/s of Student/s

Co-ordinator of the ASD unit – **NB: In the case of a critical incident which affects a student/students attending the ASD Unit, the critical incident team member is always in the first instance the co-ordinator of the ASD unit.**

School Secretary

Educational Psychologist(s) – as nominated and made available by DES/NEPS

Other person/s deemed essential in the particular circumstances.

Record Keeping:

All members of the team will keep written records of phone calls, letters, meetings, intervention etc.

Confidentiality:

Athy 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. Only the Principal (or another person designated by him) will communicate any public or press statements.

Important Note to ALL Staff

All staff members should ensure that they are aware of the following:

1. Keys that may be required in an emergency – including alarm keys – are to be found on an emergency key rack behind the door in the school office.
2. A register of student/parent contact details is available in the school office and on e portal.
3. A list of emergency telephone contact numbers is available on the notice board in the Secretary's office and on the general notice board in the staffroom.
4. In the event of an emergency, the Principal's mobile phone number is 087-2612104.
5. Staff are reminded that when students are being taken to an event outside the school premises that a full list of all students travelling together with parent/guardians' contact numbers should be posted on the white information board or on the staff noticeboard in e-portal.

Critical Incident Management Plan

Short-Term Procedures in the Event of a Critical Incident.

(First 24 hours)

1. The Principal will gather the facts about what has happened, to whom, where and when; the extent of the injuries; the location of those injured; the names of those involved in the incident. There is a need to be mindful that a lot of students may have received text messages and as a result may be deeply shocked and upset. Information that has been passed around may be incorrect.
2. The Principal will assess whether there is risk of further injury.
3. Assess if this incident is a Response Level 1, 2 or 3.
4. The Principal will find out what agencies have already been contacted – e.g. emergency services, medical services, health board, community care services NEPS, BOM, DES.
5. The Principal will contact appropriate agencies.

6. The Principal will convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team.
7. The Deputy Principal will organise for the supervision of students.
8. The Principal will convene staff meetings of all staff, including administrative and caretaking staff. (Depending on the nature of the incident it may be necessary to convene a number of short initial information meetings so that an adequate number of staff is available at all times to supervise students.) At the meetings he will:
 - Outline the facts of the critical incident.
 - There will be an opportunity for staff to express their views and feelings.
 - A decision will be reached on how the facts will be shared with the students.
 - The plan for the remainder of the day will be outlined.
 - Information will be given on which outside agencies have been contacted and what supports will be put in place to give pastoral/emotional care for both students and staff.
 - Vulnerable students will be identified.
 - Relevant information letters and handouts will be available for distribution. (See downloaded Appendix 4, booklet from Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Material for Schools, NEPS 2008.)

AS FAR AS POSSIBLE NORMAL ROUTINES FOR THE DAY WILL BE MAINTAINED.

9. Inform parents/guardians

i. Students directly involved:

The staff member nominated to undertake this contact will share information sensitively with parents, giving parents/guardians factual and relevant information. A room will be set aside for distressed students to meet their parents/guardians. A nominated staff member, ie the Home, School, Community Liaison teacher, will be available to support parents/guardians who are on their own when they arrive at the school. Staff need to be aware that because of technologies, for instance texting, information may already have reached parents/guardians and other affected parties.

ii. Students not directly involved:

The parents/guardians of other students in the school should be informed of the incident and that their son/daughter may be upset. This communication would be by letter stating the facts and brief details of the incident. It may not be appropriate at this early point in time to give the names of those involved. (See Appendix 2 for a draft letter.)

10. Inform students. This may be best done in class groups or sub-groups by a staff member who relates well with the particular group (possibly the group's tutor/year head). The nature of the event will influence how and by whom students are informed. It is important to give facts and discourage rumours. Students should be given the chance to ask questions and to say how they feel. It should be explained to students that it is normal to feel overwhelming emotions following a critical incident. In this, staff will strive to be culturally sensitive and cognisant of students with learning difficulties ensuring information will be in accordance with their developmental age.
11. Support and sensitivity for teachers who may be vulnerable and unable to cope with the unfolding circumstances e.g. arranging for colleagues to cover classes for them.
12. It may be decided (depending on the tragedy) to have a designated room available for students for a period, possibly a week following a tragedy. This allows people a quiet space to be in if feeling overwhelmed.
13. The Principal will make contact with the bereaved family.
14. Responding to the media. The Principal and Deputy Principal will prepare a written statement expressing the sympathy of the school community to those affected (it may not be appropriate to mention names); facts about the incident; an outline of what has been done already and what supports will be in place in the days ahead.

In the event that a live interview with the media is requested, the Critical Incident Management Team will decide whether or not it is appropriate. If a live interview is deemed appropriate it will be given by the Principal. He will speak simply, factually and briefly.

Staff, students and parents/guardians will be given advice on dealing with the media and every effort will be made to control the media's access to staff and students.

15. Facilitating the collection of students by their parents, where necessary. Every effort will be made to contact the parents of distressed students. When parents/guardians arrive to meet their children a private space should be available if possible where they can meet following the incident.
16. In the event that a critical incident takes place off the school premises, eg. on a school bus, every effort will be made to contact the parents of students affected once the facts of the situation have been ascertained. The maintenance, updating and accessibility of the general register are therefore very important. (The most current copy of the general register and, where available, lists of students who travel to/from school by school bus will be available at the back of the door in the school secretary's office. Staff are asked to inform the school secretary at once of any change in contact details for parents/guardians.)
17. At the end of the first day the CIMT will review events with staff and make plans for the following day.
18. In the event of a critical incident which takes place during a school holiday, the Principal or his Deputy will endeavour to ascertain the facts and communicate information as deemed appropriate by the situation. As students affected by the incident return to school the medium and longer term actions outlined below will be undertaken as appropriate.

KEY ROLES ASSIGNED BY THE TEAM LEADER

NAME OF TEAM MEMBER	TASK
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL Richard Daly	
DEPUTY PRINCIPAL Breda Sunderland	
H.S.C.L. TEACHER Shirley Butler	
GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR Margaret Cambie McEvoy	
YEAR HEAD/S	
ASD UNIT CO-ORDINATOR Fiona Murtagh	
OTHERS	

SHORT TERM ACTONS AND ROLES ASSIGNED
1st DAY

TASK	NAME/ ACTION
GATHER ACCURATE INFORMATION	
CONTACT APPROPRIATE AGENCIES	
CONVENE A MEETING WITH KEY STAFF	
ARRANGE SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS	
HOLD STAFF MEETING	
ORGANISE TIME TABE FORTHE DAY	
INFORM PARENTS	
INFORM STUDENTS	
MAKE CONTACT WITH THE BEREAVED FAMILY	
DEALING WITH THE MEDIA	

Medium-Term Actions

These are actions which may need to be taken within the next day or two, after the initial 24 hours has elapsed.

1. There will be a meeting of key staff involved and of the critical incident management team. It is important to be aware of how each person on this core team is coping.
2. Arrangements will be made for support meetings as appropriate for parents/students and staff affected by the critical incident.
3. A procedure will be put in place to filter feedback from teachers on students that they identify as vulnerable.
4. A staff meeting may be convened if necessary to ensure that all staff members are kept up-to-date on any developments.
5. Every effort will be made to be as mindful as possible of how staff are coping with the situation. Staff should be aware of the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) at 1800 411057
6. Make every effort to contact absent staff and pupils.
7. If a media update is deemed to be appropriate at this stage the Principal will give that update.
8. Arrangements will be made to give appropriate support to individual students, groups of students and parents as necessary. A suitable room will be provided. Parents and students will be informed about the support services that are available and a handout will be distributed giving details of the relevant agencies. In consultation with outside agencies, support and/or debriefing meetings will be organised WITH parental permission for individual students participating. Students who do not wish to be involved in support meetings have the choice of opting out.
9. The year head for individual students that have been affected by the critical incident (e.g. an injured student; brother/sister/close relative/close friend) will be supported initially by their year head/tutor and will have access to Guidance Counsellor if required when they return to school.
10. The Home, School, Community Liaison Person will make contact with any injured student, either at home or in hospital, as appropriate.
11. The Principal will liaise with any bereaved family, extending the sympathy of the school community and having regard for different religious traditions and faiths will clarify the

family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in any funeral or memorial service. Any participation at a funeral/memorial service will be in accordance with the family's wishes.

12. Any decision on a school closure may only be made with the permission of Board of Management, Co. Kildare VEC and the DES School Inspectorate.

**MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS AND ROLES ASSIGNED
24 – 72 HOURS**

TASK	NAME/ACTION
REVIEW EVENTS OF THE FIRST 24 HOURS	
PLAN IDENTIFICATION OF VULNERABLE STUDENTS	
ARRANGE SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUAL/GROUPS/PARENTS/STUDENTS/TEACHERS	
PLAN FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF STAFF AND STUDENTS	
PLAN VISITS TO INJURED	
LIAISE WITH FAMILY REGARDING FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS	
ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION AT FUNERAL SERVICE	
PLAN ARRANGEMENTS FOR STUDENTS AFTER FUNERAL SERVICE	

Longer Term Actions

1. Every effort will be made to organise relevant in-service for teachers and staff to support them as they support students.
2. Continue to monitor students for signs of distress. Indications might include uncharacteristic behaviour, deterioration in school work, physical symptoms, increased absenteeism, inappropriate emotional reactions. (A useful resource to refer to if concerned is “Normal Reactions to a Critical Incident”, available in the NEPS Advice and Information Pack for Schools on Responding to Critical Incidents” – may be downloaded). Maintain contact with outside agencies e.g. NEPS, Rainbows, Kildare Youth Services, Child and Adolescent Services should some students need to be referred for additional support (this should be done with the consent of parent/guardian)
3. Evaluate response to the incident and review the Critical Incident Management Plan as necessary. Where possible, attend to any matters arising from the incident that may remain outstanding at this stage.
4. Communicate information as appropriate to new staff so that they may be aware of students affected by critical incidents.
5. Be sensitive to special days and events that may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and parents - eg anniversaries, birthdays, Christmas, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day....
6. Ensure that all required reporting has been completed and lodged with the VEC and any other relevant authority.
7. The healing effects of a later occasion when the school community can come together to remember, mourn and celebrate can be significant. Such an event may be planned in due course so that the tragedy might become incorporated into the life of the school.
8. School records must be updated so that no inappropriate communications are sent in error to a bereaved family.

BEYOND 72 HOURS

TASK	NAME /ACTION
MONITOR STUDENTS FOR CONTINUING SIGNS OF STRESS	
EVALUATE RESPONSE TO INCIDENT AND AMMEND CRITICAL INCIDENT PLAN	
FORMALISE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE	
INFORM NEW STAFF AND STUDENTS	
DECIDE ON APPROPRIATE WAYS TO DEAL WITH ANIVERSARIES	

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Each of the following resources is printed in “Responding to Critical Incidents: Advice and Information Pack for Schools”, compiled by NEPS:

“Dealing With the Aftermath of a Suicide or Suspected Suicide.”

“How Teachers Can Support Students in School Following a Critical Incident.”

“Grief” (adapted from “Grief in Children : Someone to talk to”, Barnardos.

“The Range of ‘Normal’ Reactions to a Critical Incident.”

“Guidelines for input with pupils on coping with their reactions to a Critical Incident.”

“Guidelines for Meeting with Parents.”

Also useful is:

“Dealing With Bereavement”, by Shay Bannon.

“Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Materials for Schools” NEPS 2008. This booklet is downloaded and is available in the Guidance Office, Principal’s Office, the Deputy Principal’s Office, the HSCL Office and the Guidance Folder in the Staff Room

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS FOR INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Barnardos	01-4530355
The Samaritans	1850 609090
Childline	1800 666666
Parentline	1890 927277
Aware	1890 303302
National Suicide Bereavement Support Network	024 95561
Rainbows	01 4734175

Appendix 1

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

Garda		059 8631669
Ambulance		999 or 059 8631614
Fire Brigade		999 or 059 8631768
Hospital		Naas 045 897221
		St Vincents 059 8631614
Doctors		Dr. O'Neill 059 8631476
		Dr. Reeves 059 8638619
		Dr. Farrell 059 8638538
		Dr. Macdougald 059 8631352
		K Doc (after 6pm) 1890 599362
Health Board	Naas	045 880400
		Health Centre, Athy 059 8633500
Chairperson of Board of Management:		
State Examination Commission		090 6442700
DES – Communications Unit		045 848599
NEPS		01 8892700
		01 8892755 (fax)
Clergy/Pastoral Care	Parish Priest, St. Michael's	059 8631781
Local Counselling Services (HSE) Child, Adolescent Guidance (up to age 16)		059 8632461
Kildare Youth Services Athy (11-25 year olds)		045 856968

Appendix 2

SAMPLE LETTER IN THE EVENT OF A TRAGEDY

Dear Parents/Guardians

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury....) of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by the death/events.

(Give brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost.)

We have support structures in place to help your child to cope with this tragedy. (Give details.)

It is possible that your child may have some feelings that he/she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and encouraging them to express their feelings. It is important to give them truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

If you would like advice or assistance you may contact the following people at the school. (Details)

Yours sincerely

Appendix 3

SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING PARENTAL CONSENT FOR INVOLVEMENT OF OUTSIDE PROFESSIONAL/S

Dear Parents/Guardians

Following the recent (tragedy/death of X) we have arranged professional support for students in the school who need particular help. (Y....) is available to help us with this work. This support will usually consist of talking to students, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

_____ has been identified as one of the students who may benefit from meeting with the psychologist/counsellor. If you would like _____ to receive this support please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by _____ .

Yours sincerely

.....

I/we consent to having _____ met by a psychologist.

I/we understand that _____ may meet with the psychologist in an individual or group session depending on the arrangements which are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of student: _____

Class/Year: _____

Date of Birth: _____

I would like my daughter/son _____ to avail of the support being offered by the psychologist.

Signed: _____ (Parent/Guardian)

Responding to Critical Incidents

SAMPLE CONSENT LETTER - INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP SUPPORT SESSION

Resource for schools: R2

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are seeking parental consent for a child to be seen in a group or individually by a NEPS psychologist.

Dear parents

You may already know that our teachers and staff have been providing support to our students following (specific reference to the incident).

Additional support is also being provided to our school by psychologist/s from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

The psychologist will be available, where necessary, to meet with individuals or with groups of students to help them during this difficult time.

The aim of such sessions will be to:

- a) Provide information about dealing with grief and loss in a healthy way
- b) Allow students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment
- c) Allow students time to comfort and support each other, under the guidance of experienced staff from
- d) Help students resume their normal routines as soon as possible.

If you would like for your son/daughter to participate in such a session and any follow-up meetings that might be scheduled, please give your consent by signing below.

You should return it to the school immediately.

If you have any questions, please contact (Name and phone number of contact person).

I give my consent for _____ to participate in a Group/Individual Session

Student Name _____

Parent or Legal Guardian _____

Date _____

Sincerely,
School Principal,

SAMPLE LETTER - SEEKING ADVANCE PARENTAL AGREEMENT TO CHILD BEING SEEN

Resource for schools: R3

This letter can be used as a template for schools which decide to seek advance parental consent so that a child may be seen by a NEPS psychologist (in a group or individually) in the aftermath of a critical incident. It is to cater for the situation where parents cannot be immediately contacted.

Dear Parent

(..... name of school) has developed a plan for responding when a tragedy occurs.

When such an event happens, schools are offered support by psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), an agency of the Department of Education and Science. If we feel it is necessary, we would like to be in a position to have your child seen by the psychologist who can offer advice and support.

Before any child is seen by a NEPS psychologist parental consent is usually required. We will make every effort to obtain this. However, in the unlikely event of being unable to contact you, we are writing to seek your consent to your child being seen by a member of NEPS as part of our school's immediate response. This is to allow us to support your child in the best way possible. Your child may be seen individually, in a small group or as part of a class group.

If you wish to discuss this, please contact me at your convenience.

Yours sincerely

Principal's name

Schools should choose whether to use Option A or B below, or a more general letter (see 1.3 in the Schools Guidelines

Option A.

Please fill in the form below confirming that you have read this letter and stating whether you wish or do not wish to have your child seen by a NEPS psychologist and return to

I have read this letter and

I wish to have seen by the NEPS psychologist.

I do not wish to have seen by the NEPS psychologist.

Parents/carers: _____

Date: _____

Option B

The school will assume your agreement if you do not return this slip stating that you do not wish to have your child seen by a NEPS psychologist. Please fill in the form below and return to.....

I have read this letter and I do not wish to be seen by the NEPS psychologist.

Parents/carers: _____

Date:

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS – SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT

Resource for schools: R4

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a tragedy, offering

some advice and outlining what the schools response involves.

Dear Parents

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of Name of student(s). We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost).

Our thoughts are with (family name).

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. (Elaborate).

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their age.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings.

All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for

children to have difficulty concentrating or to be fearful, anxious, or irritable. They may become

withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares.

Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reactions. Over the course of the days

to come, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without

criticism.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

(Optional) An information night for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given.

We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school. (Details).

Principal's signature

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS - VIOLENT DEATH

Resource for Schools: R5

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a violent death, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves.

Dear Parents

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened.

(Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, who is the brother of _____, a student here at school, was killed as a result of (a violent attack, violent incident in the street etc.) earlier this week. We are all profoundly saddened by his death.

We have shared this information and have had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened. School staff members have been available for students on an on-going basis today. Other support personnel (including psychologists etc, according to actual arrangements) are available to advise staff and, where necessary, to talk to students. This support will continue to be available for (if appropriate insert how long).

The death of any young person is tragic, but a violent death is even more difficult. It is hard to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to accept that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it.

This death may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Some children/young people may be afraid for their own life and for the lives of those they love. Take time to listen to their fears and reassure them that what has happened is rare.

We have enclosed some additional information that may be useful during this time.

The media are in the vicinity of the school and may approach you or your children. You need not respond to their questions if you are approached. We will not allow the media to interview your child at school and our general advice is that you should not let your children be interviewed. They are not mature enough to judge what to say and may say something they will regret later.

(If planned) A support meeting for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time we can talk further about how to help ourselves and our children.

Our thoughts are with (family name) and with each of you.

Sincerely

Principal's name

SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA

Resource for schools: R6

This can be used as a template by schools to be emailed, faxed or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the school.

In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals.

This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the victim's family and the nature of the incident.

My name is (Name) and I am the Principal of (Name) School. We learned this morning of the death of (one of our students or Name of student). This is a terrible tragedy for _____ family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (Name) family and friends.

Name of student/students was a (5th year boy) and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

We have been in contact with his/her parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school have implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and (insert other information if relevant) have been with us all day supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time.

The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event.

The school has been open to parents, to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.

We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you.

A CLASSROOM SESSION FOLLOWING NEWS OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Handout for teachers: R7

Normally, the class teacher, class tutor or other teacher who knows the students should be the person to inform them of the events and lead the classroom session. Students generally feel safe and secure with someone they know. If the teacher feels uncomfortable with this role another staff member or the psychologist may work with them and share the task.

Teachers should have the opportunity to opt out of this work if they feel unable to handle it and other arrangements should be made for that class group.

The aim of the session is to break the news to give the students an opportunity to discuss what has happened and to express their thoughts and feelings in a secure environment. The teacher needs to listen and be empathic.

The session needs to be tailored to the age and developmental level of the class group.

The outline of the session is as follows:

Step 1: Giving the facts and dispelling rumours

Step 2: Sharing stories and allowing and encouraging the sharing of thoughts and the expression of feelings

Step 3: Normalising the reactions

Step 4: Worries (for younger children)

Step 5: Empowerment

Step 6: Closure

Step 7: Free Time

Step 8: Recovery

Step 1: Giving the facts and dispelling rumours.

Tell the students in a calm, low key and factual voice

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- When it happened
- The plan for the day

Sample Script

I have something very sad I want to share with you. The factual information agreed upon by the staff e.g. (Name of student), who attends our school and was missing, has been found. He is dead. Yesterday, the Gardaí found his body. They are investigating what has happened and will let us know as soon as they find out more information.

I am feeling very sad about what's happened. Let's spend some time together now helping each other to talk about how we feel about what has happened.

Step 2: Sharing stories

Take some time for discussion. Students may wish to tell their story of the event. As a result they will feel less alone because of their common shared experiences. Assisting them to 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 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. A number of materials that can be used are suggested in 'Resources for Schools' pg 45. Give the students a choice as to how they want to represent their experiences. Have a box of tissues at hand.

Sample script

To help us today, we are going to make a memory box for (name of deceased). You can draw a picture of a time you remember with (name of the deceased) or write a poem or a letter

to him. If you like we can put these in a nice box and give it to (name of deceased) family sometime soon. This will help them to see how important (name of deceased) was.

Step 3: Normalising the reactions

Tell the children that they will all react differently to what has happened and that there is no right or wrong way. List some possible feelings and reactions, (see R11). Explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Let the students know that the reactions or symptoms will go away in time. Tell them that if the symptoms haven't gone after a few weeks, they should let you or their parents know. They may need to talk to someone about how they are feeling. Depending on the incident and the age of the students distribute handouts R9, R10, R11, R12.

Step 4: Worries (for younger children)

Sample script

You may be worried about (name of the deceased) - that they might be sad or lonely or hungry or cold. When someone dies they don't feel cold or hungry or feelings like that anymore.

You may be worried that the same thing could happen to you or someone in your family.

What happened to (name of deceased) doesn't happen very often.

If the classmate has been ill, you could say. He was very sick and the chances of this happening to someone else you know are low.

Step 5: Empowerment

Help the students to identify strategies that they might use to help manage their reactions. For example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep, exercise may all help. If appropriate, students can share strategies that worked for them in other stressful situations or brainstorm ideas as to what might help. Overall, it is important to help the students regain a sense of control.

Step 6: Closure

End the session by focussing on the future. Depending on the nature of the incident, help the class/group decide what they would like to do about various issues, e.g., what to do about the person's empty chair, about writing cards or letters. Reiterate the message that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances.

Step 7: Free Time

After the discussion the teacher may want to allow the student's some play time in the play ground or free time in the classroom or an agreed area, depending on the age.

Step 8: Recovery

It may be useful to continue to do these activities at intervals during the days following and to intersperse them throughout the curriculum in the coming days.

Normal routines should generally be returned to as soon as possible.

- Students should be encouraged to resume sports and other extra-curricular activities
- Help students to identify or establish some supports; help them to identify who they go to for different kinds of help
- 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 also be opportunities for structured discussion within the school's social, personal, and health education programmes. Where Circle Time is

in use, this is an ideal context in which to offer support.

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND REACTION TO DEATH ACCORDING TO AGE

Handout R8 (May be used with various groups and individuals)

Childrens' understanding and reaction to death will depend on their age and their developmental stage. The following are guides only as children will differ in their reactions and grasp of events for a range of reasons other than age alone.

Ages (0 – 2 years)

- Infants do not understand the meaning of death
- They may display anxiety when separated from a loved one
- They may appear upset, subdued and uninterested in their surroundings

Ages 2 – 5 years

- No understanding of the permanency of death
- May search for the missing person
- May feel responsible for the death in some way
- May become apathetic and depressed
- May regress to an earlier stage of development e.g. thumb sucking, bed wetting, tantrums or may become clingy
- May develop fears of going to sleep
- May worry that other loved ones may die

How you can help

- Continuity of normal routine e.g. mealtimes and bedtime
- Offer physical comfort
- Explain the death in clear, simple language, using words like "dead" and "died"
- Do not use terms like "gone to sleep" or "passed away"
- You may need to repeat the same information again and again
- Permit them to ask questions and be consistent in your answers
- Reassure them that they had nothing to do with the death and of the well-being of other family members

Ages 5 – 9 years

- Beginning to realise the permanency of death, but their idea of life after death is still vague
- May have concerns about how the deceased is feeling or what he/she is thinking in the grave
- May have a lot of questions about aspects of the death e.g. how the person died, what they looked like, the funeral, heaven, coffins
- The reaction of their peers is important, they may feel 'different' to them
- Their peers may be awkward about the death and avoid contact
- They may become the target of bullying

How you can help

- Encourage the child to talk and cry about the deceased if they wish to, otherwise respect their silence
- Answer questions and provide as much factual information about the death as possible

- Reassure them that thinking and feeling ceases after death
- Be vigilant in relation to bullying.

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 i.e. physical complaints like tummy aches
- 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 have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
- Death adds to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents
- 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.
- Don't feel left out if they seem to value their friends more than their parents

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.

STAGES OF GRIEF

Handout R9 (May be used with various groups and individuals)

Grief is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Although there are distinct phases in the grieving process, people 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

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 person who is gone
- 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

Normalisation of life

- 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.

HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

Handout for Students: R10

- 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 from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently
- When the stress level is 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 note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?
- Spend time with people who have 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 if you're not sure
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful
- 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

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.

REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Handout for Students: R11

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

FEELINGS BEHAVIOURAL

Fear Nightmares

Guilt Social withdrawal

Shame Irritability

Regret Loss of concentration

Anger Forgetfulness

Tearfulness Physical/Verbal aggression

Loneliness Misuse of drugs, including alcohol

Anxiety

Mood swings

Shock

Yearning

Numbness

Confusion

Isolation

Insecurity

PHYSICAL THOUGHTS

Tiredness Disbelief

Sleeplessness Denial

Headaches Sense of unreality

Stomach Problems Preoccupation with images of the event/person

Bowel/Bladder problems

Loss or increase in appetite

GRIEF AFTER SUICIDE OR SUSPECTED SUICIDE

Handout for Students: R12

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 God, 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 an answer as to "why" but it is ok to keep asking "why" until you no longer need to ask or you 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 to heal
- Healing takes time. Allow yourself the time you need to grieve
- Every person grieves differently and at a different pace
- 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 your need to be silent
- Seek professional help if you feel overwhelmed
- If you are thinking of trying to kill yourself, you must 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 provides a safe place for you to express your feelings, or simply a place to go to be with other survivors who are experiencing some of the same things you're going through
- Allow yourself to laugh with others and at yourself. This is healing
- Useful websites: www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au.

REINTEGRATION OF THE BEREAVED CHILD IN SCHOOL

Handout for schools: R13

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 or drawn pictures for the bereaved classmate. This will let her/him 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". (In Post-Primary schools, check that this is done in the first class of the day and not in every class. 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 go to 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
- They 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.

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Handout for parents: R14

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

- Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal
- Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting.
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them
- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, exercise, or talking
- Help them to understand that defiance, aggression and risk behaviour is a way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and or fear they are feeling
- When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back.
- If you are out for a long time telephone and reassure them
- Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light
- Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen
- Work with the school support services and other available services.

**A GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS,
CHAPLAINS, OTHER DESIGNATED STAFF**

Teacher Handout : R15

This can be used to help explore a student's reaction to a critical incident and how it is impacting on them. It can help the student to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions in a safe environment with a caring adult.

Student's name _____ Birth date _____ Age _____ Sex M F Class/Year _____

We are concerned about how things are going for you. Our talk today will help us to discuss what's going well and what's not going so well. If you want me to keep what we talk about between me and you, I will do that – except for those things that I need to discuss with others in order to help you. For example, if you or someone else is at risk in any way, I could not keep that confidential. My job is to help and I will need to do something about it.

In answering, please provide as much detail as you can. At times, I will ask you to tell me a bit more about your thoughts and feelings.

1. Where were you when the event occurred?
2. What did you see or what did you hear about what happened?
3. How are you feeling now?
4. How well do you know those who were hurt or killed?
5. Has anything like this happened to you or any of your family before?
6. How will your life be different now?
7. How do you think this will affect your family in the days to come?
8. What bothers you the most about what happened?
9. Do you think anyone could have done something to prevent it?

Yes No

Who?

10. What could you/they have done?

11. Thinking back on what happened
not at all a little more than a little very

How angry do you feel about it? 1 2 3 4

How sad do you feel about it? 1 2 3 4

How guilty do you feel about it? 1 2 3 4

How scared do you feel? 1 2 3 4

12. What changes have there been in your life or routine because of what happened?

13. What do you usually do when you need help with a personal problem?

14. Which friends and who at home can you talk to about this?

15. What are you going to do when you leave school today? If you are uncertain, let's talk about what you should do.

CHECKLIST - STUDENTS AT RISK

Handout for schools: R16

This checklist may be used by the psychologist or may be offered as an aid to school staff who are concerned about a student. It should be remembered that the checking of a number of items for any one student may point to other problems. Indication of a number of these factors in any one student should always be followed up.

Unexpected reduction of academic performance

Talking about suicide

Ideas and themes of depression, death and suicide in their work

Making statements about hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness

Change in mood and marked emotional instability

Significant grief or stress

Withdrawal from relationships

Break up of an important relationship

Discipline problems, being in trouble in school

Withdrawal from extra-curricular activities

Giving personal belongings away

Loss of interest in things one cares about

Neglect of physical appearance

Physical symptoms with emotional cause

High risk behaviours

Alcohol or drug abuse

Bullying or victimization

History of suicidal behaviour e.g. cutting or overdose risk behaviours

Family history of suicide/attempted suicide

EXPLORING SUICIDE RISK

Guideline for schools and NEPS: R17

The term 'risk assessment' is now used in quite a specific sense and such an assessment needs to be carried out by a trained professional. This note is intended to help those professionals (designated school staff, such as guidance counsellors or chaplains, and psychologists) most immediately available to the student, to make an immediate judgement as to whether a student is at risk. Where there is a serious concern about a student, then a referral should be made immediately.

Review available information: The school should review any significant changes observed in the student over recent weeks. The list of warning signs in R16 should be used to guide a review discussion with concerned staff.

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 confirm 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 personal/family difficulties e.g. relationship breakdown, loss of friendship, problems with the law, parental separation, recent bereavement, serious illness etc. "How have things been going for you recently; has anything significant happened in your life recently?"

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. "How have things been going for you recently? Have you been ill? Has anything significant happened to you recently?"

Plan: Does the student have a plan? If 'yes', ask "How do you intend to do it?" Does he/she have a particular day in mind? "When are you thinking of doing it?" Has he/she written suicide notes? The more concrete the plan the more serious the threat.

Means: Does the student have the means and a place to do it. Ask "How do you intend to do it?" Are the means available lethal? Have they access to a gun or pills? "Where would you do it?" 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 out and their siblings also?

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.

Don't be afraid to use the word 'suicide'. Getting the word out in the open may help the student feel that his/her cry for help has been heard.

Notes

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Principals: R18

The following is a summary of questions often asked by Principals in the aftermath of a critical incident.

Q. What do I do first on hearing news of the incident/death?

A. If the source of the news is the affected family, express condolences and get as many facts as possible – sensitively. If it is from another source, check for veracity; obtain the facts; the numbers injured etc. Ascertain who is to contact the next of kin. The Gardaí may have already undertaken this role.

Q. Who do I contact for help?

A. If the school is closed (weekends/holidays) contact members of the Critical Incident Management Team with a view to setting up a meeting. Contact the Board of Management and/or outside agencies e.g. NEPS/Health Service Executive. If the State Examinations are in progress, contact the State Examinations Commission (SEC) (0906 442700) as soon as possible, in order to alert the Examination and Assessment Manager (EAM) for the school.

Q. What should I do first thing on the first morning back at school?

A. Call a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team, if the school has one. If not, call a meeting of the BOM and Senior Management. Set up a team for the duration of the crisis.

Q. What should be on the agenda for this meeting?

- A. 1. A statement of the facts as known.
2. Delegation of responsibilities.
3. Preparation of what to say at a staff meeting.
4. Preparation of what to say to students.
5. Initial schedule for the day.
6. Preparation of a letter to parents.
7. Discussion of support services/agencies whose support may be needed and agreement about who will contact them.
8. Preparation of a media statement, if appropriate.

Q. How do I handle all the phone calls?

A. Staffing the telephone may be a stressful task. Assign one or two suitable people to take calls. Clear guidance should be given to those involved on what to say. An agreed factual statement should be available to the telephone operators. It can also be read or faxed to the media.

Q. How do I keep staff up to date?

A. The staff room is a very important room for teachers on this day. Informal briefings can take place during the breaks, as well as more formal meetings at the beginning and end of each day.

Q. How do I dovetail the school's part in the funeral/religious ceremonies with the wishes of the parents?

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A. The school chaplain or local clergy/parish priest will be the main link person here. Ensure that the parents' wishes are respected and that participation of any students or friends is agreed with them. Ensure that beliefs about death or particular customs about funerals of different religious groups are understood and respected.

Q. How do I handle staff members who want to opt out?

A. All staff would be expected to attend meetings held to disseminate information. However, it should be made clear to staff at these meetings that opting out of support type work is possible if they feel quite unable to cope. Be aware that some staff may be particularly vulnerable and watch out for them.

Q. How do I handle the media? (See Section 8 – Dealing with the media)

A. Delegate one suitable person to deal with the media.

Prepare a media statement.

- State that it is a difficult time for the school community
- Emphasis should be on what is being done to support staff and students
- The ‘Media Guidelines for the Portrayal of Suicide’ suggest that the media can help prevent copy-cat suicides by not mentioning specific details of the suicide e.g. location and method used; not using colourful phrases to romanticise it; not citing causes of suicide and thereby indirectly suggesting suicide as an option. These guidelines should be adhered to by the school in any communication with the media
- Allow limited and controlled access to the media by providing a press room
- The SEC can help if the incident is during exam time. Teacher unions, trustees of schools and management bodies may also have press officers who are able to advise, if appropriate.

Q. What/when should I tell staff/students about the incident?

A. Give the facts, as you know them. This is the best way to counter rumour and fantasy. It should be done as soon as possible to prevent staff and students hearing from other, sometimes inappropriate, sources.

Q. What if I feel upset myself and find it difficult to talk?

A. It is very important to let children know that it is natural and acceptable to be upset and to cry. It is better to share feelings with them than to hide them, so don’t worry if you get upset. It may help to create a safe and open atmosphere for grief. You should also seek and accept support for yourself while dealing with this difficult event.

Q. What if some students do not appear to grieve?

A. Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so. Don’t assume that because overt signs are absent, the person is not grieving. Each individual has his/her own personal way of grieving. It is important that these different individual ways are respected and seen as normal.

Q. How long does it take to come to terms with bereavement?

A. There is no definite answer to this. Each individual progresses at his/her own pace and there are enormous variations, (see R9).

Q. How soon should brothers and sisters or friends who are closely involved be encouraged to return to school?

A. They should usually return fairly quickly. They need the support of their peer group and the routine of school will offer them some sense of normality. Their presence at school will offer others an opportunity to express their grief. The sooner they return the easier it is for them to reintegrate. This advice should, however, be tempered by any particularly unusual circumstances and decisions will ultimately be made by parents/guardians.

Q. Where a lot of well-intentioned friends are calling to the house and perhaps staying out late at night, what should I advise a grieving family to do?

A. Encourage them to set clear limits, when friends can call and when they should leave. Often the bereaved adults need to be reminded that setting clear limits is good. Friends

may stay too long because they do not know when or how to leave the house. School can help by suggesting time limits to the friends. This is especially important at exam time when rest is essential.

Q. What can I do about phone texting or internet chatting, especially if unreliable (or inappropriate) messages are being passed about?

A. A critical incident highlights the need for a well established school policy on this issue. Also inter-school policies are essential because the text does not respect the school boundary. All students should be advised that they are being given reliable and up-to date information by the school. They should be encouraged and advised to report to a teacher any texts, emails or internet files received which are at variance with the facts as known, or which are a cause of worry or concern - especially about friends.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Teachers: R19

The following is a summary of questions often asked by teachers in the aftermath of a critical incident.

Q. I would like to opt out of support type work for personal reasons. Is this OK?

A. It has been found that their teachers are the best people to support students in school in times of distress because they need to be with people they know and trust. Accordingly, all teachers and other school staff members are encouraged to help the students at these times. However, nobody should be obliged to do this work and people should be able to opt out of it if they feel they need to. This may be for a number of reasons, including recent personal bereavement, experience of a loss similar to that occurring in the particular incident or other circumstances. However, in order to stay in touch, they would need to be in attendance at staff meetings where information is disseminated in relation to the incident.

Q. I have no qualifications to help out in this area. Shouldn't the job should be left to the experts?

A. You probably have more skills here than you realise. Your experience, competence and skills as a teacher and as an expert in dealing with children and young people are invaluable. Most importantly, the students know you. Students need a safe environment in which to come to terms with what has happened. This security is often enhanced by being able to discuss the events with a familiar teacher in the first instance.

Q. What should I do in the classroom to be helpful?

A. You should acknowledge the situation and clarify the facts, as they are known. Honesty is essential. Encourage questions so that the students have a clear understanding. You should try to establish normal routines as soon as possible – but balance this with allowing students opportunities to discuss the incident and to express their thoughts and feelings. Encourage them to resume extra-curricular activities and help them to identify where they can go to for support. Encourage them to be supportive of one another.

Q. What are the signs of grief that I may notice in students seen?

A. After bereavement students may have a wide range of different reactions – some may become quiet and withdrawn, while others may seem to be aggressive, irritable or angry. They may have mood swings or lack concentration. Try to handle all these 'normal' reactions with patience, do not seem surprised by them and do not get cross (see R8, R9 and R11). If students come from a background where there is family breakdown, serious illness, alcohol or drug related or other difficulties, then you need to take extra note of any behavioural changes.

Q. What if I think that some students are not grieving normally?

A. There is no such thing as a 'correct' way to grieve. Some people cry, some may laugh or become giddy, some show no reaction. The important thing is that all these different ways are natural and normal and you should try to help the student understand this.

Q. What skills do I have that are important?

A. Listening skills are probably the most important. People who have experienced loss or trauma generally feel that talking helps them to cope with their feelings. When you sense a student wants to talk, try to make the time. Be reassuring and patient while gently encouraging them to talk about the loss. Reassure the student that you are there to help.

Q. Is there any one important thing I should say?

A. Yes – emphasise that grieving is a normal healthy process following a traumatic incident. It is the person's way of coping with the event. It is also normal for people to react in different ways – there is no 'right' way to grieve.

Q. Is it a good idea to organise a classroom session following a critical incident?

A. Some schools do and they have found this to be very effective. You will find notes on leading a class session after news of an incident in R7. An advantage here is that students may feel safer and more secure with their regular classroom teacher rather than being with an adult they do not know.

Q. What should I do if I feel that a student needs more professional support?

A. Discuss the issue with the Principal or guidance counsellor. They, in turn, may wish to discuss it with the NEPS psychologist or other support services and with the student's parents. The outcome may be a referral through the GP to the appropriate service.

Q. What is the overall message in helping bereaved children?

A. "You will get through this difficult time and we are here to help if you need support. Take care of yourself and look out for each other. Talk to us if you need help or if you think a friend is in difficulty".

Q. When should I get back to a normal teaching routine with a class?

A. It is important to give students sufficient time and space to share their feelings and to come to terms with what has happened. However, it is also important to move towards a normal routine as soon as possible. Getting on with the regular and familiar pattern of school life helps reduce stress. Avoid introducing new material in the immediate aftermath of an incident or bereavement, as grief and shock can interfere with concentration and motivation. It is often a good idea to consult the students themselves about returning to the normal routine.

Q. What do I do about the empty chair/a student's belongings etc?

A. A helpful strategy might be to involve students in a discussion about what to do about the chair. This might also present an opportunity to move to a new phase in the process. With regard to the student's belongings, it might be useful to put together a folder or a 'memory box' of the student's work for the parents. This can be given to them at an appropriate time.

Q. Is there a danger that by talking about suicide you make it appear to be an option for others?

A. Talking about the death helps people to make sense of what has happened. People can cope with the truth, but suicide must never be represented as a valid option. There should be no criticism of the person who has died. Separate the person from the behaviour. It is important to talk about how a person can get to the point where suicide may seem to be the only option but emphasise that it is not a good option. Feeling low is usually a temporary thing, whereas suicide is permanent. With suicide the intention may have been to change life circumstances rather than end life. There is always help available if a person can take the step of reaching out for it. Encourage students to seek help if they need it.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Parents:

The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents after a critical incident.

Q. This incident has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?

A. The school will inform students and parents of the core details of the incident insofar as they are known. It sometimes takes some time for the true facts to emerge. In the meantime, it is important to stick to the facts as known. Discourage rumour or gossip as it is often incorrect and can be distressing for the families and friends of those involved.

Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?

A. This will depend on the particular situation. The school will usually put a plan in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion or individual support for students who need it. This support may be offered by school staff themselves, or by staff of other agencies. If there is particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.

Q. How can I help my child?

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up.

Q. How long will the grief last?

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories of other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.

Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?

A. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check up.

Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?

A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP/Child and Family Centre/CAMHS.

Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?

A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.