



CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

2023-2024

There are three parts to this policy:

Part 1 sets out the actions to be taken by the college in the event of a Critical Incident.

Part 2 provides guidance to teachers to assist them in their role in helping pupils and colleagues to cope and

Part 3 sets out the policy for a curriculum enabling pupils to be emotionally competent and providing them with coping skills.

This policy should be seen in the context of the college's Aims and Objectives and other linked policies such as the Pastoral Care Policy and Child Protection Policy. The policy will be reviewed after any critical incident or annually as appropriate.

PART 1: Dealing with a Critical Incident

Aims of the Policy

The aims of this part of the policy are:

- To enable the college to respond to critical incidents in an informed manner.
- To establish procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident.
- To identify the roles of those involved in dealing with a critical incident.

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is not necessarily an event which attracts large media attention or one which involves large numbers of injuries or fatalities. A critical incident is usually sudden and involves significant personal distress. It can be defined as:

“an event or events, usually sudden, which involves the experience of significant personal distress to a level that can potentially overwhelm individuals”

Appendix 1 gives some examples of critical incidents. This is for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered complete or exhaustive.

Dealing with a Critical Incident

Responsibility for enacting this policy lies with the Principal or in his absence the most senior member of staff available. If the Principal is not present, he should be contacted immediately.

Rationale

The college's response to a critical incident should be guided by the college ethos.

The response should therefore:

- Reflect our religious and cultural background
- Respect each individual's rights and sensibilities
- Be on an individual and a community level
- Consider all members of the college community including parents
- Provide a supportive forum for the sharing of views and concerns
- Explain what happened, where and who was involved
- Ensure family members have been notified before any names or information is released.
- If any references are made to individuals they should be simple, truthful and respectful.
- Avoid anecdotes and speculation
- Stress that the college is working closely with all relevant authorities and that the health and safety of pupils is the main concern
- Focus on actions being taken to alleviate the situation
- Use quotes from the members of staff who will be giving any interviews

Immediate Action

The following action should be taken immediately in the event of a critical incident:

- Obtain factual information – who, what, where, when.
- Inform staff
- Inform Board of Governors/CCMS/EA (Western Region)
- Contact families as appropriate
- Convene Critical Incident Response Team (see Appendix 2)

Initial Stage

The Critical Incident Response Team will draw up an action plan to cover the action to be taken on the same day as the incident. In drawing up this Action Plan they will consider:

- How staff, pupils and parents are to be kept informed
- Which pupils and staff are high risk (see Appendix 3)
- How high risk pupils and staff are to be supported
- What support personnel are to be involved
- How support personnel are to be used
- How media interest is to be handled
- How the Action Plan is to be kept under review

(An outline of a possible action Plan is given in Appendix 4)

Staff Communication

As far as possible all staff should be given the same information, e.g. through a staff meeting. Staff should be kept fully informed so that they are in a position to respond to pupils' anxieties and rumours.

When an event takes place outside of college time contact should be made with staff via their mobile phones using the system established in the college.

Regular updates are important. Stating that no new information is available is news.

Parent Communication

Regular contact with parents is more difficult. Parents directly involved should be contacted regularly by phone. This contact should be made by a designated member of the Critical Incident Response Team. As with staff it must always be remembered that the fact that no new information is available is itself news.

A strategy for wider contacts with parents should be put in place. This will normally be by statements released through pupils; however, where circumstances require it other means may be used.

Dealing with the Media

While the presence of the media can add to stress and be seen as intrusive it must be remembered that the media, particularly local broadcasters, can often be the best way of getting accurate information and advice to members of the local community. The media should not be feared. Where possible they should be used to the college's advantage.

N.B. It is essential that no new information is being released via the media. The media should be used to get out information that the college wants, e.g. pupils are safe and secure, and action is being taken.

It is very important in dealing with the media to be as open and honest as possible. Any attempt to keep news secret will allow rumours to flourish and will encourage the media to push harder for information.

The college is perfectly within its rights to stop journalists walking around the college and to deny access to materials such as photographs or pupils' work.

The Critical Incident Response Team should nominate both a spokesperson and a main contact for media queries. All members of staff should be made aware who this contact is and all media queries should be directed to this person. The spokesperson and media contact should be part of the response team.

When representatives of the media contact the college as much information as possible should be obtained, i.e.

- Name of journalist
- Name of organisation/publication
- Phone number
- Email address

In the first instance they should be told that someone will get back to them rather than be put through to someone not prepared.

The media contact must be fully aware of all of the facts before speaking to the media. If a spokesperson is required, he/she must only speak to the media when they are confident that they are in possession of the facts. They should ensure that they are briefed on questions, etc. by the media representative before any interviews.

Drafting a Press Statement

If it is decided to issue a press statement, then the media should be informed that one is being prepared and will be issued shortly. The Press Statement should then be the focus for all press inquiries.

The purpose of the press statement is to:

- Provide information
- Counteract any rumours or other sources of information

The Press Statement should:

- Express the sympathies of the college to victims or families.

Press Interviews

A brief interview with someone authorised at the scene can be a powerful way of defusing rumours and panic. However, media pressure at a difficult time can result in unfortunate statements, it is therefore important that this is controlled. Journalists may approach any member of the school community including pupils either at college or at home. All members of the college community should be made aware of who the college's media contact is and the media person should be directed to them.

Appendix 5 gives a checklist of actions to be taken in relation to handling the media.

Appendix 6 sets out some pointers for those who may have to conduct interviews with the media.

PSNI Contacts

The police information line is a primary source of information for the media. Initial media contact may therefore be through the police. The police press office will liaise closely with the college to ensure briefings are accurate. They may also arrange interviews. The college's media contact person should therefore make themselves known to the police as soon as possible.

In the event of a major incident the police will:

- Control access to allow rescue services to carry out their work.
- Establish a media liaison point.
- Dispatch a media liaison officer.

Secondary Stage

When the initial stages of the incident have been dealt with the Critical Incident Response Team should:

- Call a staff meeting to give all staff as much information as possible.
- Call a debriefing meeting with the staff directly involved in the incident.
- Debrief pupils involved in the incident.

Ongoing Tasks

The effects of an incident may continue for a considerable time afterwards. This should be recognised by having an action plan which stretches as far into the future as is necessary.

This Action Plan should provide for:

- The promotion of discussion in pupil groups.
- Individual and group counselling where required.

External Support

Support is available from a range of organisations.

PART 2: Guidance for Staff

Aims of the Policy

The aims of this part of the policy are to:

- Help staff to develop an understanding of trauma and its impact on pupils and staff.
- Help staff to recognise the signs of distress or grief in pupils.
- To provide staff with strategies to help those experiencing grief or distress as a result of a traumatic event in their life.
- To provide staff with strategies to cope with traumatic events during the ongoing life of the college.

The issues being dealt with here are highly emotional and sensitive. It is recognised that teachers' responses may differ as a result of their own emotional response to such events and perhaps their own life experiences. It is hoped that this guidance will help all members of staff to respond to the needs of pupils experiencing grief or trauma following a critical incident in their own lives or in that of the college community.

Whatever the response of individuals we must ensure that the college community provides all the support it can. When children or adults experience such events it is often the case that the only constant in their life is college. It is essential therefore that the college has processes in place to help. Do nothing is not an option. In the words of Jeremiah (6v.14):

“You can't heal a wound by saying its not there”

It must be remembered that grief and stress do not end when the incident is over. All staff must continue to be sensitive to the feelings of others. While those most at risk will have been identified the impact of a serious incident cannot be predicted. Staff should therefore be alert to the effect on all pupils and staff.

Understanding Pupil Responses to Tragedy

People will respond to a crisis or tragedy in different ways. Some will show their feelings openly while others may exhibit physical symptoms or behaviour changes. Young people's response may vary according to their stage of development.

AGES 9-12

The following stages of grief have been identified for those dealing with tragedy or significant loss:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

We can help those dealing with grief by helping them to work through the tasks of mourning:

- TASK 1 Accepting the reality of loss
- TASK 2 Experiencing the pain of loss
- TASK 3 Adjusting to the new environment
- TASK 4 Investing in new relationships

Identifying those in need of Support

It is a fallacy that pupils will “cry for help”. We must assume that they will not. It is essential therefore that we act on any signs that we see and do not wait for pupils to come to us. It is better that we act in error than regret that we did nothing.

Appendix 3 gives some of the factors which could make pupils particularly vulnerable at a time of tragedy or loss. These are however only guidelines. We must at all times be alert to signs that pupils are in distress. This may come directly, through other pupils or through our own observation of their behaviour.

Signs of Distress

Pupils may show sign of distress in different ways. Teachers should be on the look out for these signs through:

- A fall in quality of work
- Pupils being emotionally sensitive
- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Physical signs of distress
- Questioning of spiritual values

Dealing with those experiencing a Crisis or Tragedy

Teachers should remember that while very often we cannot make things better we can prevent them from becoming unnecessarily worse.

In talking to young people or adults following a crisis or tragedy the following are some **Dos** and **Do Nots**:

DO

- Ask what he/she needs
- Ask what helps and what doesn't
- Create opportunities to talk
- Use age appropriate language
- Be sensitive
- Be genuine
- Be matter of fact and talk in concrete terms
- Check you know what a question is really about and keep answers simple.
- Take the focus off a distressed child by generalising and drawing in other children's stories and experiences
- Use your own support systems.

DO NOT

- Advise them not to worry or be sad.
- Tell them what they should feel or do.

- Don't say that you know how they feel – you don't.
- Don't say you should be feeling better now.
- Don't say at least you are still alive.
- Don't hide your feeling or encourage them to hide theirs.

It may be helpful to understand how people react to grief and disaster and how pupils of different ages are likely to respond differently.

Advice to give to Pupils

The following are some things that pupils can/should do to help them to deal with grief or tragic events. These can be used by teachers to frame the advice they give to pupils.

- Talk about what happened and how they feel.
- Think about the incident.
- Attend memorials.
- Eat properly.
- Take exercise and find time for relaxation.
- Be careful not to use drink or drugs to help you cope.
- Seek help if you need it.

Suicide

This is a very serious and growing problem in our society. Those left behind following a suicide often experience a complicated grief reaction.

The college community can help those experiencing this grief by:

- Acknowledging and marking the tragedy.
- Giving all the information available.
- Keeping some semblance of normality.

In dealing with individuals or groups of pupils following a suicide staff can help by:

- Acknowledging the shock.
- Reassuring them that they are not to blame.
- Giving them time to adjust.
- Allowing them to talk and express emotions.
- Providing information about support service.

Given the seriousness of the current position all staff should be alert to any pupils that may be a risk of committing suicide. If any pupil talks about suicide or self harm this should always be taken seriously.

Reports from other pupils of pupils talking in this way should also be taken seriously. Pupils should be encouraged to report such concerns about their peers. The member of staff concerned should encourage them to talk and express their emotions. They should reassure them that life is worth living.

All such contacts should be reported to the Pastoral Leader immediately.

Classroom Management Following a Crisis

It is important that teachers in the classroom debrief pupils on the particular incident. This will ensure that the facts are clearly established and rumours dispelled. Normal routine should be established as soon as possible although pupils should be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings and emotions. Pupils should not be discouraged from expressing themselves appropriately or asking questions.

Pupils should be encouraged to share stories and feelings. This can help to empower them to deal with the crisis and to obtain closure.

Since concentration and motivation are likely to be effected teachers should avoid introducing new topics or materials at this time. Routine “busy” work would be more appropriate. If there are pupils who cannot or will not work as a result of the crisis, then they should not be forced. Such pupils should be encouraged to talk to someone and perhaps be referred to the college counsellor.

Pupils should be encouraged to resume extra curricular activities as soon as possible following a crisis.

Looking after ourselves

Staff can be as badly affected by tragic events as pupils. We must therefore be aware of our own responses and be alert to the needs of our colleagues. Much of the information and advice given here is generic. It applies therefore equally to ourselves as to pupils.

The guidance contained here should help us to understand our own reactions and so to expect and allow for them in ourselves and others. At all times we must recognise our own limits and seek help and support when we need it.

PART 3: A Curriculum for Coping

Evidence from previous critical incidents suggest that those who have thought and felt through the issues involved around serious injury and bereavement are better able to cope if it happens to them. This highlights the need to provide for pupils a curriculum experience which fosters their emotional well being and provides them with the skills they will need to cope with a range of events which will engender an emotional response.

Aims of the Curriculum

The curriculum will aim to:

- Help pupils to understand the importance of emotional well being for their health outside college and success in college.
- Help pupils to know what contributes to sound mental health and what steps they can take to ensure this for themselves.
- Enable pupils to understand and have empathy for others who do not have good mental health.
- Provide pupils with the opportunity to talk about events in their lives and those of others that cause emotional distress.

- Provide pupils with the opportunities to talk about how they feel under particular circumstances and how others may feel.
- Provide advice and coping strategies for specific circumstances including bullying, bereavement and suicide.

Curriculum Content

The curriculum content will be implemented through the Personal Development programme. This will include a range of activities targeted at the aims for the programme. These activities could include creative writing, drama, art, music, poetry and problem solving activities.

Since the media play such a large part in young people's lives and because they are intimately involved at times of tragedy part of the programme will be aimed at exploring pictures, visual images, perspective and bias in relation to some event.

Classroom Methodology

It is essential that the methodology employed is such as to enable the aims to be met. This will require strategies that enable pupils to be open and to talk in an atmosphere which is safe and secure. This will include the use of circle time, choice time and quiet time.

For those pupils that find it difficult to speak openly about their feelings or discuss particular kinds of events, it may be necessary to use less direct methods such as stories, speech bubbles or captions.

CRITICAL INCIDENT PLAN

Introduction

St Fanchea's College aims to protect the wellbeing of its pupils and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

The school's mission statement states: 'In St Fanchea's College – 'We Believe, We Strive, We Achieve' - to meet the needs of our pupils who are at the centre of every decision we make.'

The Board of Governors, through the Critical Incident Management Team has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) as one element of the school's policies and plans within the Pastoral Care arrangements.

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has been established to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Definition

The Governors and staff of St Fanchea's College recognise a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school". Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils or staff members, or members of our local community.

Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- Security breaches; e.g. An intrusion into the school / vandalism.
- An accident involving members of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.
- Assaults or acts of violence towards pupils or staff members.
- An outbreak of illness or contagious disease on the college premises or affecting pupils or staff.
- A fire, arson attack, explosion, bomb scare, chemical leak, the discovery of hazardous substances on the college site.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- Missing our abducted pupils.
- Natural disasters e.g. flooding or storm damage
- Significant child protection incident

Aim

The aim of the CIMP is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to pupils and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure

that the effects on the pupils and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

Our curriculum and pastoral care arrangements aim to help and support both staff and pupils, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and emotional needs of the school community.

Physical Needs

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- School exit doors are security locked during class time

Emotional Needs

The Governors and staff of St Fanchea's College aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of pupils, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. Further details can be found within other relevant policies such as Pastoral Care, Child Protection and Anti-bullying.

- Consultation has taken place with the whole school community as the Policy and Plan have been developed
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting pupils are available RM Staff area.
- Emotional health and well-being is an integral part of the school curriculum
- The school may use a range of external agencies for support
- Inputs to pupils by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about pupil safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.
- The school has a clear policy on anti-bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a comprehensive Pastoral Care System in place in the school.
- Pupils who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member, concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided.

Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.

- Members of staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. Members bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the team and were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet biannually and after an incident to review and, if necessary, update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy, a site plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Preparation of CIMP

Roles

The key roles covered are as follows:

- Team Leader – Mr Collins
- PSNI liaison – Miss Sarah Tierney
- Staff liaison – Mr Collins
- Pupil liaison – Ms McGarrity/Mrs Gallagher/Mrs Teague / Mr Duffy
- Parent liaison – Ms McGarrity/ Mrs Gallagher/Mrs Teague / Mr Duffy
- Community liaison – Ms McGarrity
- Media liaison – Mr Collins
- Administrator – Secretary – Mrs Cadden
- College Chaplain – Fr Raymond Donnelly

[For key responsibilities of each role see Appendix 1]

Record keeping

In the event of an incident Booklet 2 will be completed regularly throughout the incident as a record of the actions and procedures undertaken.

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

Confidentiality

The management and staff of St Fanchea's College have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements.

Critical incident rooms

In the event of a critical incident the following rooms will be used:

- the Staff Room - to meet the staff
- the Assembly Hall - for meetings with pupils
- the Lecture Drama room - for parents
- the Principal's office for media (if required)
- Mrs Dundas's room for other visitors

[Immediate, short and medium term actions are detailed in appendix 3]

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

- All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Parents were also consulted and their comments requested by the draft policy being made available
- An audit of the school's current arrangements was completed in preparation for formulating the policy and plan
- Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.
- Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan.
- All new and temporary staff (as appropriate) will be informed of the details of the plan by the Assistant Principal, Ms McGarrity
- All teachers and support staff have a resource pack for supporting children in class
- The plan will be reviewed and, if necessary, updated bi-annually and after an incident

References

The CIMT has consulted resource documents provided to schools as well as publications listed in the resources section of this book.

These include:

- SELB Critical Incident Response Manual & Resources Disk
- Document draft: Every School a Good School - A guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools DE – PEHAW Work Stream
- Protecting Life in Schools – DE - PEHAW Work Stream
- Community Response Plan - Protect Life Strategy

- When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools (INTO/Ulster Teachers Union 2000)
- Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools (NEPS 2007)
- Winstonswish Foundation, help for grieving children and their families. www.winstonswish.org.uk
- A national charity committed to improving the mental health of all children and young people. www.youngminds.org.uk
- The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) is a multi-professional federation of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people. www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk
- Cruse Bereavement Care exists to promote the well-being of bereaved people and to enable anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Appendix 1

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM MEMBERS

Team leader

The Principal – Mr Collins

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Governors
- Liaises with the bereaved family

In the absence of the team leader, the Assistant Principal (Ms McGarrity) will assume the lead.

PSNI liaison

- Miss Sarah Tierney liaises with the PSNI
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

Staff liaison

- Mr Collins leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Refers staff to materials from their critical incident folders
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of Staff Care Services and gives them the contact number.

Pupil liaison

- Ms McGarrity, Mrs Teague, Mrs Gallagher and Mr Duffy alert other staff to vulnerable pupils (appropriately)
- Provides materials for pupils (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of pupils seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Community/agency liaison

- Assistant Principal (Ms McGarrity) maintains up to date lists of relevant contact numbers such as emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Coordinates the involvement of agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name/visitor badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

Parent liaison

- Ms McGarrity, Mrs Gallagher, Mrs Teague and Mr Duffy arrange parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

Media liaison

- Mr Collins will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management). He will consult Communications Officer CCMS/EA (Western Region).
- Where appropriate, may liaise with the CCMS/ EA (Western Region). Legal Services and relevant teacher unions.

Administrator

- Mrs Cadden will maintain up to date telephone numbers of
 - Parents or guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to
- Ensure that templates are on the schools' system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepare and send out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopy materials needed
- Maintain records of all correspondence

College Chaplain

Fr Raymond Donnelly assisted by Mr James Duffy, RE Department will ensure the spiritual needs of pupils, parents, staff and others are addressed as necessary.

Reviewed and Updated: Y McGee / M Collins / P Maguire

This policy will be reviewed every year

Date of next review – September 2024

Principal Date

Chair of the Board of Governors