

# Critical Incident Response Policy.



Davitt College,  
Castlebar,  
Co. Mayo

# **Critical Incident Management Policy**

## **Relationship to schools vision and aims**

In the event of a major crisis at Davitt College it is our fundamental aim to create a coping, supportive and caring environment in the school. In times of tragedy young people need support from adults who know them best. As their teachers we have invaluable experience, competence and skills in dealing with people and in partnership with parents we can offer support, assistance and advice should they experience a critical incident.

## **1. Rationale**

The key to managing a critical incident is planning. While very few schools will experience a major crisis, most schools will experience traumatic situations such as a sudden death of a student or teacher due to an accident or illness. By developing a Critical Incident Management plan we would hope to cope more effectively with the aftermath of such an incident. Having a plan enables staff to respond quickly and efficiently and maintain a sense of control. It will also ensure that normality returns to the school as soon as possible and the effects on students and staff are limited. The plan will very much depend on the nature of the incident.

## **2. Goals**

- To return the school to the pre-incident, normal state as soon as possible
- To reduce the immediate and long term detrimental impact on students, teachers and families
- To put effective plans in place for the first 48 hours and the following three weeks
- To form a team of key personnel
- Identify key tasks that arise in the aftermath of the critical incident
- Identify roles to be fulfilled at the time of a critical incident
- To maintain an up to date list of contact numbers. Numbers are available for:
  - pupils, parents, guardians
  - staff
  - emergency support services (In the Staff room)
  - A copy of these lists can be found in both the Front Office and the Principals Office and responsibility for regular updating is clearly assigned to the Home School Liaison person
- To compile emergency information for school trips. This should include:
  - list of all pupils/staff involved and teacher in charge
  - list of mobile numbers for accompanying teachers
  - up to date medical information on pupils with allergies, epilepsy etc.

### 3. Critical Incident Response Team

The purpose of the team will be to provide leadership in the areas of communication, family liaison and the provision of support services in the event of a crisis/trauma. The team members consist of the following people and must be reviewed yearly.

The key roles which need to be covered are as follows: -

- Team Leader - Bernie Rowland
- Garda Liaison - Caitriona O'Donnell / Bernie Rowland
- Staff Liaison - William Rowan/Joan Walsh/Caitriona O'Donnell/  
Anita Gallagher
- Student Liaison - Brian Murphy/Deirdre Gibbons/Gary Boyle
- Counselling - James Gallagher/Bernie Lennon/Deirdre Gibbons
- Parent Liaison - Mary Gibbons/Tracy Britton/Maria Carey
- External Agency Liaison - William Rowan/Mary Gibbons/Anita Gallagher
- Media Liaison - William Rowan/Bernie Rowland
- Administrator - Mary Nugent
- Care Team - Sarah Sheridan/Mary Gibbons/Frances Groden

Outlined below are some points on the key responsibilities of each role.

#### Roles:

##### **Team Leader- Bernie Rowland**

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team.
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC
- Liaises with the concerned family/families.
- Informs staff of incident.

It is important to consider who will take the lead in the absence of the team leader.

- William Rowan - Deputy Team Leader
- Anita Gallagher - Deputy Team Leader

##### **Garda Liaison – Bernie Rowland/Caitriona O'Donnell**

(This may be seen as part of the Team Leader's role)

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

##### **Staff Liaison – William Rowan/Joan Walsh/Caitriona O'Donnell/Anita Gallagher**

- 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 students.
- Provides materials for staff (from their Critical Incident Folder).
- 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 the TUI Counselling Support for Teachers known as Care Call, contact number 1800 411 057.

### **Student Liaison - Brian Murphy/Deirdre Gibbons/Gary Boyle**

- Co-ordinates information from Tutors and Year Heads about students they are concerned about.
- Communicate this information to the Care Team.
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately).
- Provides materials for students (this document Page 16).
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff and Care Team.
- Looks after setting up and supervision of “quiet” room where agreed.
- The Library is the quiet room. (Page 8).

### **External /Agency Liaison – William Rowan/Mary Gibbons/Anita Gallagher**

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral for vulnerable students.
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support.
- Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies.
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges.
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

### **Parent Liaison – Mary Gibbons/Maria Carey/Tracy Britton**

- Visits the concerned family/families with the team leader.
- Arranges meetings, if necessary.
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage “questions and answers”.
- Manages the “consent” issues in accordance with agreed school policy.
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school’s system and ready for adaptation.
- Sets up rooms for meetings with parents (Parents’ Room & Board Room)
- Maintains a record of parents seen.
- Meets with individual parents.
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their Critical Incident Folder).

### **Media Liaison – Bernie Rowland/William Rowan**

- All communication with the media (newspapers, TV, etc.) regarding the Critical Incident must only occur through the Critical Incident Team Leader or the delegated members of the Critical Incident Response Team.

- Under no circumstances is any staff member of Davitt College to make any comment whatsoever regarding the incident.
- Absolutely nothing should be posted on any social media regarding the incident.
- No member of the press is to enter the grounds of the school without prior arrangement with the Critical Incident Team Leader or the delegated member of the Critical Incident Response Team.
- In the event of an incident, the media liaison will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (no students being interviewed, no photographers on the premises, etc).
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the DES and relevant organisations.
- Will draw up a press statement; give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

### **Administrator – Mary Nugent**

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of: -
  - Parents or Guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency Services
- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of: -
  - Key parents, such as members of the Parents' Council
  - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources e.g. NEPS; NYP; HSE; Doctor; Ambulance Service; Family Centre
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to.
- Ensures that templates are on the school system in advance and ready for adaptation. (See Apendix)
- Prepares and sends out letters; emails and faxes.
- Photocopies materials needed.
- Maintains records.

### **4. Immediate Response**

1. The Principal/Team Leader will call together a meeting of the Critical Incident Team. The team's first tasks will be to establish the facts. It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. Under the guidance of the Team Leader team members will contact persons involved, and others such as hospitals, Gardaí, parents in order to establish the facts.
2. Inform staff via a text message that a Critical Incident has occurred.
3. A common statement will be prepared and agreed by the team. The statement will seek to:
  - Be communicated in a sensitive manner
  - Give the facts as they are known
  - Highlight the support that will be available
  - Indicate the actions that are planned

- In the case of suspected suicide, great care will be taken not to use the term 'suicide' instead a more appropriate term of 'sudden death' should be used.

## 5. Action Plan:

### Inform:

It is vital that all those needing information receive it as soon as it is possible. The statement prepared will reduce the spread of rumour. It will alert and inform staff in the first instance. It will inform the student population. **If at all possible, the students should be told at the same time in no larger than class size.**

In the case where a critical incident has occurred on a school trip, a similar statement is needed to assist those who will be telephoning relatives. It is preferable to have a group of people involved so that all concerned are informed in or around the same time. Some further considerations in contacting parents:

- Offer any practical help needed – transport, telephone numbers, contact names
- Enquire if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support
- Carefully review with the parent that the information given has been fully understood
- Alerting all other involved parents to the trauma will help them when they subsequently make contact with their child

### The Media:

In times of crisis there may sometimes be media interest that will need to be sensitively managed. As the media may approach any member of the school staff it is important that only the designated spokesperson communicates with the media. A particular room has been designated in the school to which the media will be directed for briefing. Under no circumstances should the media be allowed visit other parts of the school.

### Short Term Action:

The action that is needed in the short term will obviously be very dependent on the crisis. The following guidelines are proposed to help us consider our roles in advance of a critical incident. Actions will come under a number of headings:

- a) Students
- b) Staff
- c) Parents

### Students:

- The Principal should inform the immediate class of the student concerned and/or year group concerned at the earliest possible opportunity. She should be prepared to spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to the news of the incident. It would be useful if another member of staff example counsellor or chaplain accompanied the Principal and remained with the class after her departure. In addressing the class, the Principal should tell students of their friend's critical incident and advise that it is an event with which everyone – students and teachers – will find it difficult to cope with. She should also explain the routine for the day and the following days and the arrangements which will be made for students to see the Guidance Counsellor/Chaplain and other support services.
- The most essential quality in adults needed by students is that of listening. The school will put in place a support system for students in this regard. Such a system again will involve those staff who are willing and able to offer support, together with outside professionals where required, time and resources to carry out their role, a method of supporting each other and a review of their effectiveness.
- The school advises caution and sensitivity to students regarding posting/publishing online any content relating to an incident. The school will offer appropriate advice and guidance regarding student online activity at what can be a sensitive time.

### Staff:

Many staff, following a trauma, may need to air their feelings and reactions. It may be helpful to consider a number of options such as: staff meeting, inviting in professional help, a staff prayer service, a simple confidential questionnaire to determine the needs of the staff.

It is important that care be taken of those staff directly involved with the incident that they receive support, are not overworked, and have time to de-brief.

Staff who feel for whatever reason, that they are unable to be involved in the school's direct response to the incident should be able to opt out readily.

Those staff having any concerns about students or others in relation to the incident should have easy access to personnel who can assist them.

Support for teachers - a critical incident may raise painful issues in relation to the student concerned or other personal matters.

Those of the Staff who have a key role in responding to a incident need to be helped in their dealing with the emotional load of such a incident.

### Parents:

The school will have some role to play in supporting parents concerned with the incident. This will vary depending on the **nature of the incident** and the **resources available to the school**.

The school should nominate a number of staff members for parents to liaise with, particularly in regard to monitoring the progress of their children.

Put parents in contact with each other if appropriate.

Discuss with involved parents and/or Parent's Council what action could be taken to support those concerned.

Involve parents/guardians in a school liturgy following an incident.

### Record Keeping:

In the event of an incident each member of the team will: keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc.

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

### Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations:

The management and staff of Davitt 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. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind and will seek to ensure that students do so also. If there is solid information that the death was due to suicide the school will use the words 'sudden or tragic death' to describe this. Similarly, the word "murder" should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. Similarly, it will be replaced with the term "violent death".

### Critical Incident Rooms:

In the event of a critical incident: -

**Room 29** will be the main room used to meet the **Staff**.

**The Hall/Canteen** will be used for meetings with **Students**.

**Parents' Room** and **Board Room** will be used for **Parents**.

**Principal's Office** for dealing with the **Media**.

**Bernie Lennon's Office** will be used for **individual sessions with students**.

**The Library** will be used as a **Quiet/Reflection Room**

**Deputy Principal's Office** – available space for second guidance counsellor / NEPS

## **6. Funeral Services:**

Decide what form of representation is appropriate. It is essential, where possible, to consult the family concerned. Do not presume that the bereaved family will want a very public presence by the school.

Prepare students ahead of the funeral. For some this may be the first occasion they have been exposed to a major grief.

For those students who wish, encourage and assist them to write a personal message of sympathy. Consider also a common expression from students and/or staff.

Check out, perhaps with the funeral directors, the arrangements concerning floral tributes. Any accompanying message should be hand-written.

If possible, representatives of the school should visit the home of the bereaved. If students request to visit the home, phone ahead to check that this is appropriate. Visiting the bereaved may be distressing - support those involved.

## **7. Medium and Long Term Action:**

The following are merely a selection of the possibilities worthy of consideration:

Students returning to school after a critical incident cannot be easily categorised in terms of their needs. Care should be taken to monitor their relationships with peers and teachers, falling behind in academic and other work; involvement in extra-curricular activities etc.

Consider if a special day of reflection/retreat would benefit the class affected by an incident.

When a subsequent bereavement occurs in the school setting, take care to support those who were bereaved previously as this subsequent incident may trigger deep emotional reactions.

The school should consider holding an annual remembrance service for all those connected to the school community who have died. Students and staff can be encouraged to record the names of those who they would like to be remembered.

The school might consider the dedication of a tree, special garden, piece of artwork, notice board to recall those that have died.

## 8. Review:

It is vital to regularly review all these procedures in the light of experience. It is most helpful to take time to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and procedures subsequent to their application. It is also a good idea to make contact with other schools and professionals to compare the effectiveness of their Critical Incident Management Plan and assess courses of action both proposed and taken.

## 9. Conclusion:

It is hoped that the above Plan will be of support in the event of an incident occurring in our school community. It is important to note, however, that these guidelines cannot replace the most vital qualities needed in dealing with such personal issues as death, bereavement and loss - **the sensitivity, care and compassion we offer to one another and our students on a daily basis.**

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Reviewed 23/04/2018

This Policy was reviewed and ratified by the Davitt College Board of Management.

Signed: Ms. Bernadette Rowland  
Bernadette Rowland  
Principal

Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018

Signed: Mr. Blackie Gavin  
Blackie Gavin  
Chairperson  
Board of Management

Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018