



# Ashfield Girls' High School



## Critical Incident Policy





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## CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

## RATIONALE

A critical incident can be defined as a sudden, unexpected and tragic event or sequence of events which causes trauma and confusion within a school community and which overwhelms its normal coping mechanism.

It may affect pupils, staff, parents and governors, may relate directly to The safety of the school community or may involve an incident beyond the school premises.

As a critical incident is likely to have a severe impact upon the school, both in the short and long term, our aim is to ensure that school strategies and procedures are in place to protect the physical and emotional wellbeing of every member of the Ashfield Girls' School Community.

The Critical Incident Policy and Plan cannot cover every aspect of recovery from a critical incident.

Occurrences may arise which cannot be foreseen or considered.

The critical incident may occur during the school day, during the evening, during the school holidays or on a school trip.

It is important that the incident policy is easily understood and swings into action immediately.

The following must be remembered in relation to the incident policy:

- that it is followed as closely as possible;
- that designated personnel understand their tasks and are competent to carry them out;
- that other people do not take unilateral actions;
- that consideration and sensitivity is shown by all;
- that pupils, staff and parents are protected from press intrusion;
- that normal routines be resumed as soon as possible;
- there is a realisation that total recovery may take a long time.

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion. If the incident involves legal action, a precise response to the incident should be known and is able to be verified by more than one person.

## **Aims of the Critical Incidents Policy**

1. To maintain a duty of care
2. To minimise educational and administrative disruption within school
3. To enable normal working to be resumed in the shortest possible time

## **Objectives**

- To ensure that swift and appropriate action is taken in the case of the school being made aware that a critical incident has occurred
- To ensure that the welfare of pupils and staff is paramount
- To ensure that the school responds in a sensitive, consistent and effective manner which reduces confusion, panic and extreme emotion
- To have in place a Critical Incident Management Team, the membership of which is known to all relevant parties (see Appendix 1)
- To have in place a Critical Incident Management Plan, the details of which are familiar to all relevant parties (see Appendix 2)
- To maintain normality, as far as possible, in parts of the school which are not affected and to restore normality as soon as possible to the parts which are affected
- To have immediate access to all relevant contact details (including outside agencies)

- To offer sensitive, non-intrusive support in the short and medium term to all those affected directly or indirectly by the incident

### **EXAMPLES OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS**

A critical incident is likely to involve death or serious injury to one or more members of the school community and, or, their families either at school, journeying to or from school, participating in a school related activity, at home or in some other context.

e.g. In School:

- The death of a student or member of staff through natural causes
- An accident involving a student or member of staff
- A deliberate act of violence such as knifing or the use of a firearm
- A school fire , flood or an explosion in a laboratory

e.g. Out of School:

- Deaths or injuries through accidents
- Suicide
- Civil disturbance

## GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

- The Principal will take charge of the school's response.
- In the case of the Principal being unavailable, the members of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will take charge.
- The Principal's office will be the central liaison point
- The CIMT will assess immediate practical needs
- The CIMT will contact next of kin of those directly involved if required
- A short simple statement of facts will be prepared by the Principal (see Appendix 3)
- All contacts from the media will be dealt with by the Principal
- Secretarial staff taking incoming calls will use a statement agreed by the CIMT
- When necessary, all members of staff will be informed and will be guided in relation to informing pupils
- The CIMT will determine the involvement of parents if appropriate
- Short and long term support will be offered to those affected
- There will be an evaluation of the way in which the incident was managed (see Appendix 4)



## APPENDIX 1

### MEMBERS OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Principal(acting) - Mr P McClintock

Vice-Principal (acting)- Mrs J sharpe

Head of Pastoral - Miss J Friar

Assistant Vice-Principals -

- Ms T Rossborough
- Mrs C Hoey
- Mrs P Doak
- Miss D Dunlop
- Mrs L Christy

Nurse - Mrs N Williamson

Principal's Personal Secretary - Mrs L Snowden

Chair of Board of Governors - Mr M.Frew (or any other board member in his absence)

Other members of staff may be co-opted members of the CIMT as and when required. One/two members of staff may be asked to take responsibility for the normal running of the school whilst the CIMT is engaged in dealing with an incident.)

## APPENDIX 2

### CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

#### In the Event of a Critical Incident:

##### Initial Response

- The Principal should be contacted first (if not available the Vice Principal)
- The Principal (or Vice Principal) should seek to clarify from relevant sources the nature and circumstances of the incident
- The CIMT will meet at the earliest opportunity and agree on procedures for managing the critical incident (See Appendix 4)
- If the incident is on site, health and safety measures will be put in place and the emergency services contacted

##### Longer Term Issues

- School structures and routines will be re-established
- Supportive strategies for pupils and staff will be implemented
- There will be ongoing contact with parents
- Actions taken will be reviewed and policies amended if appropriate
- The PSE and pastoral programmes will be reviewed
- Staff will be mindful of anniversaries and other special dates

The use of appropriate outside agencies is crucial to providing long term support as is the use of appropriately trained members of staff who are known to those in need of help.

## Preventative Strategies

- Regular review of relevant policies e.g. Child Protection, Health and Safety
  
- First Aid training
  
- Fire Drills
  
- PSE Programme
  
- **All members of the critical incident management team must:**
  - have a copy of the Critical Incident Kit and Policy at home and at school
  - be aware of the roles of each part of the plan to enable the school to react swiftly and accordingly
  - have contact numbers of each other for 24 hour contact
  - in the event of a school trip /visit, have access to a list of names for staff and pupils.
  - will have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies
  
- Relevant members of the secretarial staff will have a register of emergency services and relevant outside agencies
  
- Emergency evacuation drills are familiar to all members of the school community and practiced regularly. (see Appendix 5)
  
- Opportunities to explore sensitive issues such as tragedy and death will be built into the PSE and pastoral programmes

## APPENDIX 3

### SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### **After a known fatality...**

We are taking this time to think about ....., a Year 12 who died last night in a road traffic accident. .... was travelling with her family to ..... We do not know any details about the accident at this time except that the rest of the family is safe and no one is injured seriously.

.....'s funeral is being held at ..... on ..... A funeral is a special time to remember a person who has died. The school will let your families know about the specific time and address of the funeral in a written note which will be sent home tomorrow.

Let's take a moment of silence to think of ....., to remember all the good things about her, and to say goodbye. In our silence we will express our loving thoughts.

#### **After a suspected suicide...**

A tragedy has happened. ....., a Year 8 pupil, has died suddenly. Details of ..... 's premature death will not be released to protect the privacy of family members. You will be given information about funeral arrangements as soon as possible.

This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You may experience many feelings within the next few days. Everyone deals with loss differently. It is important to respect the way others grieve. Counsellors are available in ..... Feel free to arrange to go and talk to the counsellors. They want to listen to your feelings and concerns.

**Sample Press Release 1**

Date

School grieves sudden death of pupil

As reported by the PSNI, a pupil at ..... School died tragically on ..... The circumstances of .....’s death are not known at this time and an investigation is currently ongoing.

This is a tragic loss to .....’s family and to our school community. To assist in supporting our staff and pupils through this time of grief, additional trained staff from the ELB’s Critical Incident Response Team have been assigned to the school to provide support. A letter has been sent by the school to parents, informing them of this incident and providing information on the support services available through the school.

A special assembly to remember ..... has been arranged for .....

Contact: ..... Principal, ..... School at .....

**PRO FORMA LETTER (for parents)**

‘With great regret, we have learnt of the death/deaths of ..... and we extend our deepest sympathy to the family circle.

**PREPARED STATEMENT FOR MEDIA**

We are sorry to learn of the tragic.....of .....

We hope at this time the school would be given the privacy needed to support our pupils at this difficult time, etc

NB: If the Principal wishes to comment about the pupil, they may want to gain permission from the family to include:

Sporting achievements

Musical talents

Academic success

Personal attributes

#### **SAMPLE LETTER TO ALL PARENTS**

Date:

Dear Parent/ Carer

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you of the sudden death of NAME, (a pupil in Year ...../ a Year ..... Teacher/ Learning Support Assistant, etc). The children were told this morning by their class teacher/ Principal at assembly.

NAME died of (an asthma attack, meningitis etc) and the children have been assured this is something that does not happen very often. Your child may or may not want to talk about it but it is likely that he/ she will need extra love and support from you in the days ahead. This does not mean that anything is wrong with him/ her. It only means that this traumatic event has been too powerful for him/ her to deal with on his/ her own. He/ she may be feeling anxious. Take time to listen to your child and try to provide a predictable routine for him/ her at home. Avoid too many absences to start with.

We have enclosed an information leaflet for you which may be useful at

this time.

Trained staff from the EANI's Critical Incident Response Team are helping to support us through this difficult time. It is sometimes necessary for a member of the team to speak to a class or individual pupils who may be distressed. He/ she will be guided by the Principal/ class teacher in this. If you do not wish your child to receive such support from the team please contact us immediately.

We are deeply saddened by this great loss but are trying, for the children's sake, to keep the school environment as normal as possible. Our thoughts are with NAME's family at this tragic time and the school community sends them sincerest sympathy and support.

NAME's funeral is on DAY/ DATE at TIME am/pm at (Name of Church or Crematorium). We are in touch with the family regarding their wishes for the school's representation at the Service.

## APPENDIX 4

### Procedures for Critical Incident Management - Key Roles

#### Principal and / a Vice Principal

- Seeks clarification
- Calls emergency services if appropriate
- Summons the CIMT to inform of incident
- Prepares relevant statements/letters for the media, parents, pupils and office staff
- Convenes and informs staff - Assistant + Vice-Principals (cover) Miss D Dunlop
- Contacts the Boys' School

#### Head of Pastoral

- Contacts external agencies - EANI / social services / consulting
- Contacts relevant parents
- Supports the physical and emotional wellbeing of pupils
- Arranges staff line if necessary & appropriate

#### Assistant Vice-Principal (Miss D Dunlop)

- Arranges staff cover if necessary & appropriate

#### Assistant Vice-Principal (Mrs P Doak )

- Liaise with Facilities Manager to ensure access for essential personnel
- Ensure health and safety measures are in place

#### Office Manager

- Ensures phone lines are operative and all office staff available
- Ensures office staff do not vary from the script

#### School nurse

- Liaise with school first aiders to offer first aid as appropriate

#### Other Assistant Vice-Principal

Mrs L Christy

Ms T Rossborough

Mrs C Hoey



Manages the daily arrangements of the school, website / texts to parents / and school information









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