

Critical Incident Policy Scoil Mhuire Junior

Scoil Mhuire Junior N.S. aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. In 2022 the Board of Management, through Caitlin O'Connor, has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan as one element of the school's policies and plans.

Review and Research

The CIMT have consulted resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie and www.nosp.ie including: (**Edit* Add/delete as necessary*)

- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 201 6)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 201 5)
- Responding to Critical Incidents during School Closures and Public Health Restrictions arising from COVID-19 (NEPS 2020)

Definition

The staff and management of **Scoil Mhuire Junior N.S.** 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 students 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, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

Note:

- *Students and staff have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in the incident and need to be sensitive to the consequence of any public statement.*
- *The term "suicide" will not be used without the consent of the people involved or until it has been established categorically that the person's death was a result of suicide. The term "tragic death" or "sudden death" may be used instead.*

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 students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects

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on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Physical safety

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- School doors locked during class time from 9.15am

Psychological safety

The management and staff of **Scoil Mhuire Junior N.S.** aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- 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 the primary school student are available
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies – NEPS/NDT/Primary Care
- Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers. See DES Circulars 0022/2010 (Primary) or 0023/2010 (Post-Primary)
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published on 2007 for primary schools and 2010 for post primary schools. See also Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014). These documents are available on www.education.ie
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member, HSLC 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.
- Staff is informed about how to access support for themselves.

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Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

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

Team leader: Caitlin O'Connor

Role

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management, DES and NEPS.
- Liaises with the bereaved family

Garda liaison is 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: Bairbre Elwood

- 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 EAS and gives them the contact number
- Draws teachers' attention to Teacher Wellbeing and Self Care during the Covid-19 school closure.
- Share with staff any resources being forwarded to parents.

Student liaison Bairbre Elwood

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder) – practical approaches to
- Maintains student contact records (Resource 1 attached). Manage anxiety; DES resources will be shared (advice for young people during Covid-19 eg breathing techniques, relaxation techniques, coping statements, doing exercise (where appropriate).
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed
- In accordance with school policy, staff may decide to link directly with students via telephone, video link or email.

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- Remind students that maintaining communication is important for wellbeing, and encourage them to keep in touch with close family and friends, whilst observing HSE guidelines. Remind students and staff that others are available to provide support.
- Reassure students of their resilience and ability to cope. Encourage them to think of times and ways that they have coped in the past and to identify

HSCL

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

Parent liaison HSCL

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader, at all times, any restrictions relating to visiting homes will be adhered to
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- 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 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 Louise Moore

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)
- In the event of an incident liaises, where necessary, with the Communications Sections in the DES/INTO/CPSMA.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator Role - School Secretary

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 1. Parents or guardians
 2. Teachers
 3. Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts

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- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

Letter Templates

Templates are available in 'Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines and Resources for Schools' and are attached her as appendices.

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.

Diane Acheson and Rachel Hedley will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters/emails/Aladdin Connect messages, photocopying materials, etc.

Confidentiality and good name considerations

Management and staff of **Scoil Mhuire Junior** have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of public statements. Members of school staff will bear this in mind, and seek to ensure that students do so also, e.g. the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, *and* that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

Critical Incident Rooms	
In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms are designated for the indicated purposes	
Room Name:	Designated Purpose:
Staff Room/Either Hall	Main room for meeting staff
Either Hall	Meetings with students
Either Hall	Meetings with parents
Principal's Office/Either Hall	Meetings with media
SEN Rooms	Individual sessions with students
Principal's Office/SEN Rooms	Meetings with other visitors


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Consultation and communication regarding the plan

Staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan.
Parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by Caitlin O'Connor.

The plan was ratified on 25/10/22

Signed 
Chairperson

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Appendix 1 Sample Letter to Parents – Sudden Death/Accident

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.

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 him/her to express feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or 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 reaction. Over the course of the coming days, 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.

Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.

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

Yours sincerely

Principal's signature

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Appendix 2 Sample Letter to Parents – Violent Death

Dear Parents

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

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 ongoing basis today. Other support personnel (*including psychologists etc, according to actual arrangements*) are available to advise staff in their support of students.

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.

In these times, young people tend to turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive around what your son/daughter might post to others.

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

Yours sincerely

Principal's name

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Appendix 3 Sample Announcement to the Media

My name is Caitlin O'Connor *and* I am the principal of Scoil Mhuire Junior 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 has 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.

