

Critical Incident Policy

Monkstown Educate Together NS



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Introduction

Monkstown Educate Together National School (METNS) aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. Our Mission Statement is:

‘METNS strives to create a happy, safe, inclusive and nurturing environment where the uniqueness of each child is celebrated. We aim to provide a space where children are educated and where all members of the school community can grow, develop, and achieve their full potential. We aspire to excellence in an atmosphere of respect, openness and joy’.

The Board of Management, through Rosario Kealy (Principal), has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan as one element of the school’s policies and plans.

Review and Research

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) have consulted resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie and www.nosp.ie including:

- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (National Educational Psychological Service, (NEPS, 2016)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (International Auditing Standards (IAS), National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (Department of Education and Science (DES), Department of Health (DOH), Health Service Executive (HSE, 2013)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools-Guidelines 3 for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE, 2015)

Definition of ‘Critical Incident’

The staff and management of METNS 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*

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



Creation of a 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

METNS has recently updated the following policies in order to be prepared in the case of a critical incident occurring in the community; Health & Safety policy, Child Safeguarding Statement, Extra Curricular policy (ECA), Physical Intervention procedures.

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Pre-opening supervision in the school yard (8.20-8.30am)
- Front gate closed during school hours
- External school doors closed during class time
- Rules of the playground – include details

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of METNS 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.

For example, in METNS;

- 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 some specific areas such as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and some are trained in the area of self-harm.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies.
- 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).
- The school has a clear policy on positive behaviour 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 (available on www.education.ie).
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (Student Liaison: Deputy Principal, Dolores O'Donnell/Molly Boydell), 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 are informed about how to access support for themselves.

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 an essential documents pack for use in the event of a critical incident. This contains a copy of the statement and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Team Leader: (Principal: Rosario Kealy/Deputy Principal: Dolores O'Donnell)

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; NEPS.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.
- Liaises with the Gardaí.
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is investigated for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison (Principal: Rosario Kealy/Rosie Doyle)

Role

- 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 Employee Assistance Service (EAS) and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison (Deputy Principal: Dolores O'Donnell/Molly Boydell)

Role

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately).
- Maintains student contact records.
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.



Community/Agency Liaison (Principal: Rosario Kealy/Deputy Principal: Dolores O'Donnell)

Role

- 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 (Rosario Kealy/AnnMarie Kenrick/Deirdre Sheehan)

Role

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader.
- Arranges parent meetings, if held.
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'.
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy.
- 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 (Principal: Rosario Kealy/Deputy Principal: Dolores O'Donnell)

Role

- Keeping in mind the definition of a critical incident, the media liaison will consider issues that could arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc).
- In the event of an incident, the media liaison will liaise where necessary with the DES; relevant teacher unions etc.
- The media liaison will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

Administrator (Joan Zeevy/Rosie Doyle)

Role

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 - Parents or guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services.
- Takes telephone calls and notes for 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.
- Photocopies materials needed.
- Maintains records.



Record Keeping (Principal: Rosario Kealy/Deputy Principal, Dolores O'Donnell)

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

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

Management and staff of *METNS* 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	Main room for meeting staff
Hall or specific assigned classroom	Meetings with students
Hall or The Den	Meetings with parents
Hall	Meetings with media
The Hub (Resource Rooms)	Individual sessions with students
Room 3	Meetings with other visitors



Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan

- All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.
- The METNS 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 will be informed of the details of the plan by the principal: Rosario Kealy. The plan will be updated annually (September)

Critical Incident Management Team		
Role	Name	Phone: All phone numbers kept on hardcopy in office
Team Leader	Rosario Kealy	
Garda Liaison	Rosario Kealy	
Staff Liaison	Rosario Kealy/Rosie Doyle	
Student Liaison	Dolores O'Donnell/Molly Boydell	
Community Liaison	Rosario Kealy/Dolores O'Donnell	
Parent Liaison	Rosario Kealy /AnnMarie Kenrick/Deirdre Sheehan	
Media Liaison	Rosario Kealy/Dolores O'Donnell	
Administrator	Joan Zeevy/Rosie Doyle	



Short term actions – Day 1

Task	Name
Gather accurate information	
Who, what, when, where?	
Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly	
Contact external agencies	
Arrange supervision for students	
Hold staff meeting	All staff
Agree schedule for the day	
Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	
Compile a list of vulnerable students	
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	
Inform parents	
Hold end of day staff briefing	



Medium term actions - (Day 2 and following days)

Task	Name
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Team leader
Meet external agencies	
Meet whole staff	
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	
Visit the injured	
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	
Make decisions about school closure	BOM

Follow-up – beyond 72 hours

Task	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	
Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family	
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BOM