



Est. 1956

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Critical Incident Policy  
2007



St. Dominic's aims to protect the well-being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

### ***Mission Statement***

*We in St. Dominic's aim to provide a Christian education, inspired by the Dominican motto "Truth", which fosters the education of the whole person.*

#### **Our School Ethos is to:**

*Develop a caring community in the school, exercising concern and respect for the welfare of others in the atmosphere of truth, trust and freedom.*

*Encourage students in the search for truth, underlined by Christian and Dominican values.*

*Develop a curriculum that is flexible, relevant and meaningful, which ensures that all students are challenged to their full potential, academically, socially and spiritually.*

*Recognize and accept differences and appreciate every individual's contribution*

*Promote right relationships based on Christian justice, with God, the Earth and all others.*

*Encourage educational partnerships with parents and the local community.*

*Develop, within all our students, a sense of self-worth and confidence, so that they can make mature and free decisions.*

*Encourage students to promote self control in their behavioural management.*

St. Dominic's has taken a number of measures to create a coping supportive and caring ethos within our school. The school has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of staff and students both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

### **What is a critical incident?**

St. Dominic's understands a critical incident as "an accident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school". Critical incidents may involve one or more pupil, staff, the school or our local community.

- The death of a member or past member of the school community through sudden death, murder, accident, or terminal illness and suicide.
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident or a tragedy in the wider school community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- An accident involving member (s) of the school community

### **Aim:**

Our hope is that in the event of an incident these guidelines will help staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. They should also help us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and to ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited.

### **Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school**

We have put systems in place to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students

### **Psychological Safety:**

St. Dominic's aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for the same through the following:

- Year Head / Tutor Care Teams
- Student Mentor & Prefect programmes
- SPHE Programme
- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying policy
- Guidance policy
- Care-team
- SCP / STAY programme
- Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware and vigilant to their needs
- Staff has access to books and resources which may help and support members of the school community.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of its members.

**Physical Safety:**

St. Dominic's has a Health and Safety policy to ensure the well being of all members of the school community. (Policy available in school office on request)

**Critical Incident Management Team**

St. Dominic's has setup a CI Management team in line with best practice<sup>1</sup> and will maintain this team in future.

- 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 once a year to review and update the plan.
- Each member of the team has a Critical Incident Procedure Document with relevant material to be used in the event of a critical incident.

**Members of St Dominic's Critical Incident Management Team**

Team Leader
Staff Liaison
Student Liaison
Parent & Community Liaison
Media & Communication Liaison
Team Member (Family therapist)
Administrative Tasks

**Roles and Responsibilities of the CI Team**

In the event of a critical incident the responsibilities of each member will be as follows:

**Team Leader**

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Co-ordinates the task of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management, Department of Education & Science and NEPS.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.

**Staff Liaison**

- Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known.
- Gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings
- Gives outline of routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Provides staff with relevant material from the Procedure Pack.

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<sup>1</sup> A critical incident team is a group of individuals from the staff of the school who know the community, the students and each other well enough to make the necessary decisions called for when an incident occurs" (Mary Schoenfeldt).

### **Student Liaison**

- Liaises with other team members to keep them up to date with information and progress
- Alerts staff to vulnerable students
- Provides the students with relevant material from the procedure pack

### **Community Liaison**

- Liaise with students
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies
- Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of :  
Key parents such as members of the parent's council  
Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources

### **Parents Liaison**

- Facilitates "Questions & Answers Meetings"
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides materials for parents from the procedure pack
- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader

### **Media & Communication Liaison**

- In preparing for the role he/ she will consider issues that may arise during an incident and how they might be responded to (e.g., students being interviewed, photographers on the premises etc.)
- In the event of an incident he/she will liaise where necessary with the Communications Section in the DES
- No other Staff member or Student should comment to the media.

### **Administrative Tasks**

- Maintenance of up to date lists of contact numbers of
  - Parents Guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency Support services
- Telephone calls need to be made and attended to, letters sent and materials copied.

The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls and photocopying materials etc.

### **Record keeping**

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

**Letter to parents (Appendix 1)**

A letter will be prepared by the CI team which will include:

- The sympathy of the school community for the affected bereaved family
- Positive information or comments about the deceased /injured persons
- The facts of the incident
- What has been done
- What is going to be done

**Confidentiality and good name considerations**

The school has the responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the person involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind and will ensure that pupils do so also. For instance the term suicide will not be used without the consent of the family involved or until it has been established categorically that the person's death was a result of suicide. The phrase "tragic death" or "sudden death" may be used instead.

**Critical Incident Rooms**

In the event of a critical incident the Prayer Room in St. Catherine's Building and the Interview Room in St Dominic's Building will be reserved and used to meet staff, students, parents, visitors and professionals involved.

## **STEPS IN CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT**

1. Obtain factual information
2. Activate Critical Incident Team
3. Critical Incident Team to meet with support personnel
4. Inform staff at full staff meeting to ensure consistent information
5. Critical Incident Team to prepare a statement to be read to students
6. Inform students in small groups e.g. year / class groups
7. Identify “at risk” students and staff
8. Contact parents & families
9. Allow discussions in class
10. Have debriefing

### ***Guidelines for breaking the news to the students***

- Only if the tragedy is confirmed as a suicide by the family can it be relayed as such to students
- The class of the student, who has died or has been seriously injured should be the first to be told with Counsellor and Tutor / Year Head present
- Other classes to be told by their class teacher
- Not every class is going to be traumatised, some students may not even know the deceased, but it is important to acknowledge the loss for the whole school community
- Tell the class you have sad news, and it is not an easy task to pass this on to them.
- Let them know the name of the person/people involved.
- Let them know the facts as you know them (it is important to prevent rumours by misinformation)
- Encourage questions
- Let the class know of common reaction to tragic news
- The most common reaction is shock
- Expect tears and outbursts
- Don't allow a student to leave the classroom alone in a distressed state
- Students must be supervised within the building while in a distressed state
- Let them know that you will support them
- Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news
- Allow them to mingle and talk to one another in groups
- Explain how they can support one another
- Alert them to the importance of watching out for those who aren't coping well with the news.
- You may need to remind students again who is there to help, as little information is assimilated when one is in a state of shock.
- Let them know where the Crisis Response Team will be ( Prayer room / Interview Room St Dominic's Building)
- Arrange to have refreshments ready also a box of Kleenex

- A short prayer for the deceased would be appropriate
- If the students appear ready a Year Group Assembly may be held later in the day
- Some students may be able to resume normal class activities.
- Some may need to stay with the Crisis Response Team for a while.
- Encourage students to stay in school to support their friends
- Some may need to go home ( only if parents / guardians **come to collect them**)
- Those who return to class may not be able to concentrate on their work.
- Subject teachers will need to make allowances for students and give them the opportunity to e.g. to talk in groups, if the need arises.

### **Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents**

#### **Short term Actions (1<sup>st</sup> Day)**

##### **Gather Accurate Information**

It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident; otherwise rumours will take over and add to the distress of those involved.

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?

##### **Contact appropriate agencies**

- Emergency services
- Medical services
- Health Board Psychology Departments / Community Care Services
- NEPS
- BOM
- DES/ School Inspector

##### **Convene a Meeting with key staff / Critical Incident Management Team**

- Agree a written statement of the facts for staff, students, parents and the media.
- Delegate responsibilities to the Critical Incident Team
- Appoint someone to handle phone enquiries
- Ensure that a phone line remains open and available for enquiries
- Organise the timetable and routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important if this is possible)
- Organise a staff meeting if appropriate. **All staff** should be asked to attend including auxiliary staff. The areas which might be covered are listed below
  - An account of the facts as known

- An opportunity for staff to express their views and their feelings  
**Discussion with the staff about** how the facts will be shared with the students. (There should be an agreed approach to this if possible)
  - An outline for the routine for the day
  - Information for staff about which outside agencies have been contacted or are involved and the supports that will be put in place for both students and staff
  - A procedure for identifying vulnerable students
  - Distribution of relevant handout material
- Organise the supervision of students during any staff meetings
  - Decide whether an outside professional be invited to the staff meeting
  - **Organise timetable for the day** As far as possible maintain normal routines
  - **Inform parents and guardians of students directly involved**

Parents / guardians should be contacted as soon as possible. This first contact must be handled with great sensitivity. *The steps involved are set out below.*

- Agree who should share information with parents
- Make a list of parents / guardians who have been contacted and those who still need to be told to avoid duplication of messages
- Give parents / guardians relevant and factual information
- Set a room aside for distressed students to meet their parents / guardians
- Provide support to parents who are on their own when they arrive at school
- Give telephone for enquiries

#### **Children not directly involved:**

The parents of other children in the school should be informed of the incident and alerted to the possibility that their child may be upset. A letter will be sent to parents stating the facts and brief details of the incident. (It may or may not be appropriate at this point to disclose the names of those involved. The CI team will decide).

#### **Inform Students**

Careful preparation is important when meeting students to inform them of a Critical Incident. Consideration should be given to the age of the pupils and the optimum group size. It is best to do it in class groups or sub-groups. The suitability of the “messenger” should be considered, remembering that it is generally thought that support is best given by the adults known to the child. Any outside “experts” might help by assisting the people undertaking this task to prepare for it and by providing on-going advice and support as they manage it. The nature of the event will clearly have an influence on how students are informed.

#### **The key points and actions in the process are listed below:**

- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours which can cause unnecessary distress.
- Allow pupils to ask questions tell their story and express their feelings.
- Help students to understand that overwhelming feelings are natural and normal.

- Following a critical incident.

### **Make contact with the bereaved family.**

#### **Task Team Leader**

- Confirm that death has occurred
- Convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Team
- Express sympathy to the family assuring them of schools support
- Ensure family know who is the contact person with the school
- Consult with family on school involvement. Families wishes to be respected
- Notify Board of Management
- Discourage any student or staff from dealing with the media

#### **Tasks of Critical Incident Team**

- Prepare an announcement for staff and students
- Plan a staff meeting if required
- Prepare a statement and distribute procedures to class teachers in breaking the news
- Devise a process for dealing with telephone enquiries
- Have a written or/ and oral response to enquiries prepared
- Prepare media statement
- Make decisions about who should attend the funeral
- Decide whether or not the school should be closed on the day of the funeral (notification of closure will be given to parents, visitors and Dublin Bus personnel.)
- Set up Crisis Team Room within the school
- Outline services available to affected students during the first hours
- Assist class teacher of the class affected to break the news
- Have guidelines for staff dealing with students in distress i.e. information on grief responses identifying those who may need counselling and support.
- Take time with the most affected students in Crisis Response Room
- Organise a year group service for mid morning once all students have been notified
- Contact the parents of those students who wish to go home.
- Encourage those who feel able, to return to class
- Meet and support distressed parents and staff.
- Liaise with local clergy re: Funeral

## **Appendix 1**

### **Media & Communication**

#### **Dealing with the media**

Prepare a written statement to include:

- The facts about the incident.
- What has been done already
- What is going to be done
- Positive information or comments about the deceased person

Brief staff and students about dealing with the media. NO STAFF MEMBER OR STUDENT who is not designated by the CI team leader should make a comment to the media

Some points to remember if you are asked to give a live interview:

- Take some time to prepare
- Remember that everything you say is on record and therefore it is better to keep it simple, factual and brief.
- Decline if you are not ready or for other reasons think it inappropriate

## **Appendix 2**

### **Sample Statement for the media**

It is with profound sadness that the Management, staff and the students of \_\_\_\_\_ have learned of the tragic death of\_\_\_\_\_.

Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the family of \_\_\_\_\_.

On hearing the tragic news the Critical Incident Policy was put into immediate operation. The Crisis Response Team convened a meeting to ensure that students affected by this loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

The school is offering counselling and support for students and parents affected by this tragedy. Prayer services have been held with each class in the school. Students

will attend and participate in the funeral service in consultation with the wishes of the family.

Our prayers and support are with everybody affected by this tragedy.

### **Appendix 3**

*Sample letter requesting consent for involvement from an outside professional*

Dear Parents,

Following the recent (tragedy death of X) we have arranged professional support for students in school who need particular help. X is available to help us with this work. This support will usually consist of talking to children either in small groups or on a one-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate. Your son / daughter have been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with the psychologist. If you would like your child to receive this support please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by \_\_\_\_\_.

If you would like further information on the above or to talk to the psychologist please indicate on this slip or phone the school.

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I /WE consent to having our daughter/ son met by a psychologist employed by the Minister for Education & Science.

I/WE understand that my son/daughter may meet the psychologist in an individual or group session depending on the arrangements which are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of student: \_\_\_\_\_

Class/ Year \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like my daughter /son \_\_\_\_\_ to avail of the support being offered by the psychologist.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent/ Guardian

## **Appendix 4**

*Sample letter requesting consent for involvement from an outside professional*

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury etc) of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by the death/events.

(Brief details of the incident and in the event of death perhaps some positive remembrance of the person)

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy.

It is possible that your child has some feelings that he/ she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and to encourage her to express her feelings. It is important to give her truthful information that is appropriate to her age.

If you would like advice or assistance you may contact the following people at the school (details).

Yours sincerely

