



Errigal College Letterkenny

Critical Incident Policy

*Based on "Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools".
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).*

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Proposer:	Joanne Donaghy
Seconder:	Gina Grant
Chairperson of the Board of Management:	Donal Coyle
Principal:	Danny McFadden
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Mission Statement

Errigal College aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

Our Mission Statement affirms that we aspire:

To enable each student to achieve his/her educational potential, in partnership with parents, based on the principles of caring, dignity, mutual respect and equality.

We are an ETB school, state, co-educational and multi-denominational, underpinned by the core values of:

- Excellence in Education
- Care
- Equality
- Community
- Respect



Review and Research

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) should consult resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie and www.nosp.ie, these include:

1. Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016).
2. Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002).
3. Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011).
4. Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013).

Other useful documents may be found on websites listed on pages 95 and 96 of the Responding to Critical Incidents - NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools.

What is a “Critical Incident”?

The staff and management of Errigal College 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. Examples may 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.
- A major accident/tragedy in the wider community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.

Aim of the Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP)

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 affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

To maintain and promote a supportive and caring ethos in the school, we have put systems in place to help 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

Some current measures in place include:

- Evacuation plan.
- Regular fire drills.
- Regular fire exits and extinguishers checks.
- Pre-opening supervision.
- VSware (school information management system) rolls taken every class.
- Emergency contact numbers recorded for all staff and students.
- Visitor sign in at reception and badges required.

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of Errigal College 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.

Some current measure in place include:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. 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 are addressed in the SPHE curriculum. 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 Procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the post 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, and some have attended specialist training such as ASIST provided by the HSE.
- 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 0023/2010 (Post Primary).
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy.
- The school has a robust Student Support Team (SST) who meet weekly and whose duties are in line with guidance published in Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools: A Guide to Establishing a Team or Reviewing and Existing Team (2021).
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. guidance counsellor or support teacher), concerns are explored, and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents/guardians are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.

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.

Preparation of CIMP:

We have assigned the following staff to the relevant roles:

- Team Leader - Principal, Deputy Principal or Acting Principal on the day.
- Garda Liaison - Principal, Deputy Principal or Acting Principal on the day.
- Staff Liaison - Principal, Deputy Principal or Acting Principal on the day or Staff Welfare Officer Margaret Russell Kelly.
- Student Liaison - Guidance Counsellors – Ms Donna Mc Gowan Brennan and Mrs Tara Mc Laughlin.
- Parent / Guardian Liaison - HSCL Ms Margaret McAteer.
- Community Liaison - HSCL Ms Margaret Mc Ateer.
- Certified Critical Incident Stress Management Team Members- Ms Donna McGowan Brennan and Ms Leanne Wray.
- Media Liaison - Donegal ETB.
- Administrators - Ms Catriona Kelly and Mrs Michelle Mc Fadden.

Other members of the CIMT team may be the relevant Year-head of the students involved, Mr Michael McMeniam (SPHE Co-ordinator), Ms Vicki Raine (SEN Co-ordinator), Ms Leanne Wray (ASD Coordinator) and the SNAs of any students involved.

Key responsibilities of each role

The key responsibilities of each role are outlined below:

Team Leader

A person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis (e.g. school closure, attendance at memorial services, etc.).

- 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; ETB.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.

Garda Liaison (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

A staff member known and trusted by the staff.

- 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 (critical incident folder/ shared drive).
- 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 Scheme (EAS) and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison

A trusted and familiar figure to the students.

- This person may coordinate information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about.
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately).
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder).
- Maintains student contact records.
- Looks after setting up and supervision of a 'quiet' room where agreed.

Community / Agency Liaison

Someone with good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community.

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers.
- Key parents, such as members of the Parents Association.
- 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/Guardian Liaison

Someone known to parents. This person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have skills to manage emotional reactions of individuals or groups of parents.

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader.
- Arranges parent meetings, if held.
- May facilitate such meetings and manage 'questions and answers' sessions.
- Manages 'consent' issues re: sharing of information.
- Ensures that sample letters for parents are prepared and available on the school's IT system 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).

Certified Critical Incident Stress Management Team Members

These team members have a level 8 certificate in Critical Incident Stress Management accredited from the Carlow Institute of Technology.

- Provide support and guidance to the CIMT.
- Facilitate individual and group support sessions.

Media Liaison

- All incidents will be referred to the Donegal ETB for any media statements or interviews.
- 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, will liaise where necessary with the SEC, the Donegal ETB and relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will provide the Donegal ETB with relevant information needed to draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews.

Administrator

- Maintenance of up-to-date telephone numbers of
 1. Parents or guardians.
 2. All staff.
 3. Emergency services.
- Take telephone calls and note those that need a response.
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts.
- Photocopies materials as needed.
- Maintains records.

Record keeping

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters, emails and texts sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc. The school secretaries Ms Catriona Kelly and Ms Michelle Ferry 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 Errigal 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. For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is confirmed 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 Staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff.
- The Guidance Counsellor's offices and the library will be used for meetings for individual sessions with students.
- The Principal's Office for parents and for individual visitors.
- SEN office for media.
- Deputy Principal / HSCL Office - for other visitors.

Consultation and Communication

All staff were consulted, and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

Our school's 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 Mr. Danny Mc Fadden.

The plan will be updated annually; January 2025.

Checklist for Reviewing the Policy and Plan

	Item	Checked	Who?
1	Has serious consideration been given to the school's approach to prevention?		
2	Has the school defined a critical incident and given examples?		
3	Have key roles been clearly identified and the assigned tasks outlined?		
4	Have staff members been nominated to each of the assigned roles/tasks?		
5	Are the personnel suitable?		
6	Has each member of the team compiled their emergency pack (photocopies of relevant handouts)?		
7	Has contact been made with external agencies?		
8	Is the Emergency Contact List (Section 11, R21) appropriate and complete?		
9	Are letters and press releases readily available on school headed paper, for adaptation to suit the particular circumstances?		
10	Are telephone numbers on contact lists up to date?		
11	Have all the staff been consulted about the plan/policy?		
12	Has a date been set for a review of the plan?		
13	Who will be given copies of the plan?		
14	Where will copies of the plan be kept?		
15	Have parents been consulted about the plan?		
16	Have the students been consulted about the plan?		

Critical Incident Management Team

Role	Name and Email address	Phone Number
Team Leader	Danny Mc Fadden – [REDACTED] Deirdre Markham - [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Garda Liaison	Danny Mc Fadden – [REDACTED] Deirdre Markham - [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Staff Liaison	Danny Mc Fadden – [REDACTED] Deirdre Markham - [REDACTED] Margaret Russell-Kelly - [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Student Liaison	Donna Mc Gowan-Brennan - [REDACTED] Tara Mc Laughlin - [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Parent Liaison	Donna Mc Gowan-Brennan- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Tara Mc Laughlin - [REDACTED] Margaret Mc Ateer - [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Community Liaison	Margaret Mc Ateer - [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Media Liaison	Martin Gormley - [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Administrator	Catriona Kelly/Michelle Mc Fadden – [REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

Emergency Contact List

(To be displayed in staffroom, school office and Principal's office etc.)

Agency	Contact Number
Garda – Letterkenny	██████████
University Hospital Letterkenny	██████████
Fire Brigade	██████████
Ambulance Service	██
Donegal ETB – CE – Ms Anne Mc Hugh Donegal ETB – Director of Schools – Dr Martin Gormley Donegal ETB – Buildings – Mr Patricia Patton Donegal ETB – Head Office	██████████
NEPs – Mr Martin Gallen	██████████
CAMHs	██████████
Jigsaw	██████████
TUSLA – Duty Social Worker	██████████
TUI	██████████
State Examinations Commission	██████████
Department of Education	██████████
Employee Assistance Service	██████████

Signed: Donal Coyle
(Chairperson of the Board of Management)

Signed: Danny McFadden
(Principal)