



## Clifden Community School Policy and Procedure for Managing a Critical Incident

**A Critical Incident** is an emotionally disturbing or distressing event that may affect the entire school community.

**It may be in the form of:**

**A sudden/traumatic death** (suicide, illness, accident or violence)

or

**A traumatic incident** (such as a shooting, knife attack, intruder, gang related activity, natural disaster, abuse or medical emergency)

### **School Policy**

At Clifden Community School we recognise that it is important to manage a critical incident as effectively as possible. Our school provides a strong support network, in the form of an integrated pastoral care structure. Our critical incident plan reflects this concern for the pastoral welfare of the school community and is intended to support students and staff in the context of a significant crisis. In what may be a situation of shock and confusion our plan is designed to be self-explanatory and systematic, assigning specific roles to designated staff members. It might then, be automatically implemented on the occasion of a crisis, promoting best practice in providing emotional, spiritual, and psychological support to those affected by the crisis.

Our policy addresses the following concerns:

- The maintenance of the school dynamic
- Provision for and supervision of trauma/grief in the school
- Provision for the needs of the family involved and those affected in the school community
- Reduction of the risk of adverse repercussions, such as contagion in the case of suicide
- Implementation of guidelines for dealing with the media

In applying our policy we recognise that every crisis is unique and requirements might vary but we have outlined a number of general guidelines, applicable with minor adjustments to most situations.

As a general guide, we believe that students are best catered for within the school environment, following a traumatic incident. It is part of our policy therefore to keep students in school, as far as possible. On learning of a possible critical incident the sequence of guidelines outlined in this plan should be followed. As **Designated Liaison Person (DLP)**, the Principal must always be informed immediately before anything else is done. The Principal will then co-ordinate the following procedures and delegate where appropriate.

**On discovery of a suspected critical incident it is the first responsibility of any staff member to inform the School Principal immediately (DLP) or in the absence of the Principal, the Deputy Principal (DDL).**

### **The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

- Designated Teachers
- Guidance Counsellor
- Chaplain
- Home-School-Community-Liaison Teacher (HSCL)
- Relevant Year Heads and Tutors
- Deputy Principal
- Principal



In the event of a critical incident, The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will be contacted by text and the CIMT may then contact relevant external personnel.

### Relevant External Personnel/Agencies

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Head Office Connaught Region	01 8892700 076 1108831
Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)	01 460 1150
TUSLA Oughterard	091 557633
Parish Priest Clifden: Fr Ronayne	095 21251
Dr John Casey Clifden Health Centre	095 21224
Dr Mc Loughlin's Clinic	095 21141
Dr Flavin Roundstone	095 35851
Dr Alex Michel Tully	095 43465
Clifden Hospital	095 21301
Ambulance	999
Garda Station Clifden	095 21021
Fire Station	999

### Responsibilities:

The Principal/DLP will coordinate delegation of intervention responsibilities. Leadership/family liaison and communication is the Principal's responsibility too. The Principal will see to the following.

Task	Resource
Obtain verification, clarification of events. For example, confirm the death has occurred. Get accurate information from family or Gardai. <b>Remember that a violent death may require special considerations. Media reactions may follow very quickly.</b>	<b>DLP Principal/DP Appendix 1</b>
Make contact with the family/families involved. Express sympathy to the family, assure school's support, ascertain if name is in the public domain. Ensure family knows who the contact person is in the school.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
If news is received during the day make immediate arrangements to escort involved students/family members home from school.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Notify the Chairperson of Board of Management as a matter of urgency and the other members of the Board as soon as possible thereafter.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Contact National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS).	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Inform CIMT and organise meeting of members.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Inform all other staff members, especially those immediately involved. Inform Parent's Association.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Prepare an announcement for staff/students.	<b>DLP</b>



Plan a staff meeting where necessary (teaching and non-teaching staff).	<b>DLP Principal/DP Appendix 2 (Agenda)</b>
Prepare statement and distribute procedures to class teachers in breaking the news.	<b>DLP Teacher's Pack (p 7-10)</b>
Devise a process for dealing with telephone enquiries from anxious parents/students. Name of any victims or individuals involved are not to be divulged. Have a dedicated extension with a teacher/staff member to answer questions.	<b>DLP Principal/DP/Office</b>
Have written and/or oral response to enquiries prepared.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Where necessary prepare a media statement. <b>The DLP or person designated by the DLP should be the only person to communicate with the media. Discourage any staff or student from dealing with media.</b>	<b>DLP Principal/DP Appendix 3</b>
Make decisions on who should attend if there is a funeral.	<b>DLP Principal/DP with CIMT</b>
Draft letter to parents on the issue: Explain what has happened, give information about the school response and the support available, high-light the needs of students at this time. Parents should feel free to contact the school with their concerns but by means of telephone or small meetings, not large group meetings.	<b>DLP Appendix 4</b>
If there is a funeral, should the school stay opened on that day? If possible the school should stay opened (notification to parents etc. of any closure). Consult with family on school involvement in funeral (family wishes to be respected).	<b>DLP Principal/DP with CIMT</b>
Liaise with leaders in local organisations and management in other schools in the vicinity of Clifden CS as appropriate and necessary.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Contact and liaise with NEPS and the DE on the critical incident. Organise student support-counselling, in school crisis/care stations etc., supervised by CIMT	<b>DLP Principal/DP with CIMT</b>
It is important to retain a semblance of normality. Maintain the school routine within reason but where possible postpone stressful activities such as examinations.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
As a general rule avoid the gathering of large group assemblies within the school in the immediate aftermath.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Avoid memorial activities that might contribute to contagion, especially with respect to suicide, violent death etc.	<b>DLP Principal/DP Appendix 1</b>

#### **Responsibilities of CIMT:**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Resource</b>
Set up CIMT Room in the School.	<b>Guidance office/Other</b>
Outline services available to affected students during the first hours.	<b>Room 17</b>
Open the school if tragedy happens on weekend or during holidays.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>



Assist teacher of the class affected in breaking the news.	<b>Chaplain/Counsellor HSCL/Year Head</b>
Have guidelines for staff in dealing with distressed students i.e. information on grief responses, identifying those with need of counselling and support.	<b>See Appendices</b>
Take time with most affected students in crisis response room-create rota so that an individual teacher is not overwhelmed.	<b>Room 17</b>
Organise a class prayer service or assembly, where appropriate and once all students have been informed.	<b>Principal/Chaplain/Year Head/Counsellor/HSCL</b>
Contact parents where some students request to go home. Students only released into direct care of parent/guardian.	<b>Year Head/HSCL Chaplain</b>
Encourage students who feel able to return to class - where students supported out of class it should be for a defined period.	<b>HSCL/Year Head Chaplain/Counsellor</b>
Meet and support any distressed parents and staff. Parents should only be met in small groups.	<b>Available team members/HSCL</b>
With parent/family agreement, liaise with local clergy as necessary regarding funeral arrangements etc.	<b>DLP/Chaplain</b>
In the event that a bereaved family is not catholic, contact to ascertain wishes regarding service etc.	<b>DLP/Chaplain</b>

### **CIMT: Step by Step**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Resource</b>
Having confirmed what has happened the DLP-Principal makes contact with the family/families of students involved.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
CIMT meet to plan strategy, keeping in mind the guidelines outlined above.	<b>CIMT Room</b>
Key tasks are distributed. Prepare list of tasks.	<b>CIMT</b>
Have all guidelines for teachers ready.	<b>p 6 – 10 of this document</b>
Have written and oral statements for all school communication.	<b>Appendix 3 and 4</b>
Send text for staff to report to the staff room when they arrive.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
Meet staff (note any absences or late arrivals to ensure that all staff know the news).	<b>Principal/DP</b>
CIMT outline to staff the plan for the day and the support available.	<b>CIMT</b>
Location of crisis response room announced.	<b>Room 17</b>
Inform students in small groups: It is best that students be informed and reassured by class teachers. Members of the CIMT will be present when the news is broken to the classmates of the student.	<b>DLP, Class Teacher, CIMT, (see Teacher Pack pp. 9-11)</b>
Inform absent students of what has happened.	<b>DLP/Office/CIMT/HSCL</b>
Deputy Principal to ensure that Chaplain, Guidance Counsellor etc. are free from all other timetabled commitments for the duration of the school day.	<b>Deputy Principal</b>
Plan another update staff meeting later in the day.	<b>Principal/DP</b>



If a death has occurred communicate funeral arrangements to staff when known.	<b>DLP Principal/DP</b>
CIMT meet to plan procedures for school involvement if there are funeral arrangements.	<b>CIMT room</b>
Day2: Students who are not coping are referred to Counsellor/Chaplain on an individual basis. Important for the school to run as normally as possible.	<b>Year Head/Tutor</b>
Day 3: CIMT meet to plan CISD (critical incident stress debriefing) response after the funeral in the next few days (involve Year Head/Tutors at this stage).	<b>CIMT Room</b>
Provide additional support for specific groups: For those closely associated with the incident or those already suffering trauma or bereavement. In case of a suicide: Focus on at risk or troubled students. Provide support for staff members.	<b>DLP/CIMT (See Appendix 1).</b>
Contact additional counsellors should the need arise. Provide longer term support after the immediate emergency or period of grieving is over and pay attention to significant occasions (anniversary, graduation etc.).	<b>CIMT</b>

**Guidelines for teachers. How to inform students.**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Resource</b>
If the CI involves the death of a student, classmates should be informed first, with Chaplain, Counsellor, Tutor (if any) and Year Head present.	<b>CIMT</b>
Other classes may be told by their Tutor (if any) or class teachers.	<b>Tutors/Class Teachers</b>
Not every class may be traumatised, some students may not 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 difficult for you to do this.	
Let them know the name of the person the news is about.	<b>Staff meeting</b>
Begin pre-planned discussion. Let them know the facts, as you have them (it is important to prevent rumours through misinformation). It is also important that teachers and students know that it is not appropriate to speak to the media about what has happened. If they are asked they should say that they have nothing to say.	<b>Staff meeting</b>
Only if the tragedy is confirmed as a suicide by the family, can it be relayed as such to students.	<b>Consult with CIMT</b>
Encourage and address relevant questions.	
Be aware of possible reactions and let the class know of common reactions to tragic news.	<b>See common reactions below</b>
The most common reaction is shock.	
Expect tears and outbursts.	
Inform students that support will be available during the day, give information on student support, crisis care stations etc. Inform them of	<b>CIMT</b>



locations of these care stations and give names at this stage of supporting staff/personnel.	
Only release students from class according to pre-planned system of referral. Don't allow a student to leave the class alone in a distressed state.	<b>CIMT</b>
Students must be supervised in the building while in a distressed state.	<b>Room 17/CIMT</b>
Let them know that you will support them.	
Let them know who else is available to support them.	<b>CIMT</b>
If a student is suspected as being at risk, the Principal (DLP), or where absent, the Deputy Principal (DDLDP) should be notified immediately.	
Be attentive in identifying those who are not coping well with the news - Referral of students for individual attention.	<b>Counsellor/Chaplain</b>
Let them know where the CIMT will be.	<b>Guidance Office/Other</b>
Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news.	
Allow them time (limited) to mingle and talk to one another.	
You may need to remind students again who is there to help, as little information is assimilated once in shock.	
A short prayer for the deceased would be appropriate.	
Inform students that their Year Head will keep them up to date.	
Some students may be able to continue and go to class.	
Some will need to stay with the CIMT for the morning.	
Encourage students to stay in school to support their friends.	
Some students, who may need to go home, may do so in consultation with the Year Head and only if parents/guardians come and collect them. Students must sign out in the office.	<b>Year Head/Office</b>
Those who go to class may not be able to concentrate on the work of the class. Subject teachers will need to make allowances for them to talk in groups as the need arises.	<b>Class Teachers</b>

### Common Reactions on Hearing Traumatic News

<u>Emotional and Physical</u>		<u>Mental and Behavioural</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shock</li> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Guilt</li> <li>• Grief</li> <li>• Tears</li> <li>• Panic</li> <li>• Denial</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Anger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Outbursts</li> <li>• Overwhelmed</li> <li>• Nausea</li> <li>• Fainting</li> <li>• Pain</li> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Weakness</li> <li>• Palpitations</li> <li>• Breathing difficulties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Blame</li> <li>• Poor Concentration</li> <li>• Disorientation</li> <li>• Withdrawn</li> <li>• Restlessness</li> <li>• Let down</li> <li>• Uncertainty</li> </ul>



## Teacher’s Pack

### **Contacting Staff if Incident/Tragedy Occurs During Weekend/Holidays**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Resource</b>
For the death of a colleague the system of informing staff is via the texting service.	<b>DLP    Principal’s    texting service</b>
If it is the death of a student, The Critical Incident Management Team needs to be informed immediately. Other staff can be informed later.	<b>DLP    Principal/Deputy Principal</b>
Whoever hears the news first to contact the Principal/Deputy Principal <b><u>immediately.</u></b>	
Contact the Members of the Board of Management and the members of the Parents Association.	<b>DLP    Principal/Deputy Principal</b>

## **Appendix 1**

### **Special Considerations when Responding to a Violent Death**

In the event of a violent death within the school community it is our policy to follow the procedures for managing a critical incident. What follows are a number of special considerations that might be borne in mind in this type of situation.

- 1. Media Response Plan:** This type of death tends to attract much attention from the media. It is useful therefore to be prepared: nominated spokesperson **DLP** (The Principal or person appointed by the Principal), media statements etc. When dealing with the media it is our policy to stick to the facts, avoid speculation and focus on the needs of the students, families involved and the school community. It is important to be aware that the media will probably seek to interview friends of the victim and those associated with any alleged perpetrator. **It will be emphasised to all in the school community that only the DLP should talk to the media.**
- 2. Repercussions for the School Community:** In planning the school’s response we will recognise that an event of this nature is likely to have various repercussions beyond the immediate shock and grief it causes. The school community will experience a range of emotions that may include fear, anger and disbelief. If the incident involves an alleged perpetrator, who is known to the students, there is a possibility of side taking or retaliation.
- 3. Long Term Effects:** We will also be aware of the long-term impact on the general school body and those involved. Where a violent crime has taken place, special consideration may be required with respect to the family and friends of a victim or alleged perpetrator. A trial will usually reactivate the crisis and this can take place a long time after the event.
- 4. Providing Additional Support for Specific Groups:** Extra support may be required for high-risk groups and those most deeply affected. Witnesses to the event, if any, are likely to need special attention.
- 5. Guiding Parental Response:** Parental response can be a major factor in how students deal with what has happened. The school can help by providing information on how best to cope with the situation; this might include sending information home, arranging for small group meetings in the school and/or counselling as deemed appropriate and necessary.
- 6. Supporting Staff:** Staff are also likely to be deeply affected by such an event. It is important to provide specific support in this respect. Staff are much better equipped to help their students when their own personal needs have been addressed.



## **Appendix 2**

Emergency Staff Meeting (All teachers and staff members)

### Agenda:

1. Inform staff members of all relevant facts relating to the incident.
2. Allow time for staff reaction.
3. Make a list of all students associated with the incident or close to the individual/s involved.
4. Where the incident relates to a suicide, address the issue of contagion: update/compile a list of students at risk of suicide ideation.
5. Plan/review the school response strategy for the following days and weeks including where necessary, the policy with respect to media contact (DLP only to talk to media).
6. Discuss the method of disclosing relevant facts to students: small groups (in-class disclosure by class teachers and pre-planned discussion). Appendix 1
7. Outline the system for referring students from classes to support rooms.

## **Appendix 3**

### Media Statement 1

- It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Clifden Community School, have learned of the tragic death of .....
- Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the family of.....
- On hearing the tragic news the School Trauma Plan was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management Team met to ensure that students affected by the loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community, affected by the loss, are given all the help they need to cope at this time.
- The school is offering support for students and staff affected by this tragedy. Prayer services have been held with affected classes 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 everyone affected by this tragedy.

### Media Statement 2

- It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff, and students of Clifden Community School have learned of the tragic death of one of our students.
- Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the bereaved family.
- On hearing the tragic news the School Trauma Plan was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management Team met to ensure that members of the school community affected by the loss receive all the help they need to cope at this time.
- Prayer services have been held with classes upset by the tragedy and some students will attend and participate in the funeral service, in consultation with the wishes of the family.
- Our prayers and support are with the loved ones and friends of the deceased student.

### Media Statement 3

- It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Clifden Community School, have heard of the tragic news of .....
- On hearing the news the School Trauma Plan was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management Team met to ensure that students and staff affected by this crisis are cared for adequately. Procedures have been put in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this crisis are given all the help they need to cope at this time.



**Appendix 4**

General Letter to Parents/Guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian,

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Clifden Community School, have learned of the tragic death of our student..... Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the.....family. On hearing the tragic news the School Critical Incident Plan was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management Team met to ensure that students affected by the loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community, affected by the loss, are given all the help they need to cope at this time. Prayer services have been held with affected classes in the school and we hope to have a memorial service in the near future. Following consultation with the deceased’s family, the arrangements for the funeral service are as follows:

Removal:

Church Service:

Burial: If your child wishes to attend the funeral service, please inform the relevant Year Head by contacting the Year Head in the usual way. You will also find enclosed some information that might be of assistance at this most difficult time. If there are any other areas of concern please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

**Muslim Death**

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, Staff and Students of Clifden Community School, have learned of the tragic death of .....

.....was a valued member of our school community and we will be holding a memorial to him/her in the coming days. ....was a Muslim student and following that tradition the funeral takes place almost immediately in the mosque in..... We have contacted the mosque and while students may attend the service, female students will not be able to take part in the service or attend the burial in accordance with Muslim tradition. As we are a multidenominational school we wish to respect the faith of all our students and therefore, request that our female students wait to express their sympathy at our school memorial service. We will be inviting ..... family to attend our memorial service here in the school and this will give our students an opportunity to express their sympathy to the family.

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I allow my child to attend the funeral

Parents/Guardians signature \_\_\_\_\_



## Common Reactions on Hearing Traumatic News

(To be included with letter to parents)

As you are the natural support for your child he/she will want to discuss some feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully, restating what you hear them say so they know you are really listening. You should tell them that it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. You may also find that your child will look for comfort and support from their friends, this is a natural reaction from an adolescent. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check-up. The length for the grieving period varies from individual to individual. If your child remains very distressed after six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support.

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Ratified by Clifden CS BOM March 11<sup>th</sup> 2020