

Policy & Procedures to Deal with a Critical Incident

Within any school there will be occasions when individuals, or groups of individuals, are affected by traumatic events, as indeed, there will be occasions when members of the school need to respond to circumstances created by tragedy, disaster or a threat to the safety and well-being of pupils and/or staff. Forward planning for such an event may help the school to cope more effectively and may also play a part in reducing distress.

Risks

During the course of their work teachers may be at risk from e.g.

- Verbal abuse
- Threats
- False allegations
- Assaults
- Vandalism, or
- Other forms of intimidation

This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, members of the school staff or other persons whose business brings them about the premises. Such behaviour may also occur in respect of contact with the teachers during the discharge of their duties elsewhere, e.g. supervising visits.

Policy

Employing authorities and the Board of Governors are conscious of their obligations under the Health & Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. As part of their Health and Safety Policy and in relation to paragraph 1 above Employing Authorities and relevant bodies are committed to:-

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- Promoting preventative measures;
- Supporting staff who have been subjected to belligerent behaviour, inline with "Security and Personal Safety in Schools"

Promoting Preventive Measures

The operation of the school's policy on the discipline and pastoral care of its pupils may expose a teacher's person or property to harm or loss from either a pupil or a parent, a guardian or other adult.

(i) Involving Pupils

The school will explain to the pupils its rules and the reasons for these. Sanctions for infringement of the rules should include provision for the suspension or expulsion of any pupil who has behaved violently towards a member of the staff.

(ii) Involving Parents

The school issues and explains to parents its policy for the discipline and pastoral care of the pupils. In the interests of avoiding any misunderstanding, arrangements will be made to permit individual parents to seek clarification of the policy.

The policy will, in specific terms, contain a clause denying access to any pupil by any unauthorised adult. In the case of separated parents the school will establish who has the legal rights of access. Parents are issued with forms regarding who is responsible for the collection of their child and consent forms annually.

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Access to teachers are included in the school procedures and in any event limited to an "appointment only" basis where the circumstances of a meeting are likely to provoke a confrontation.

(iii) **General Prevention**

The school has an open door approach, although clear guidance on access to the Principal and teachers have been made available to parents annually.

Arrangements within the school building for summoning the assistance of another teacher or the Principal will be agreed and clearly understood by all staff e.g. classroom assistant and telephone system

The telephone number of the local police station will be available:-
Telephone 08456008000.

The operation of these arrangements will be reviewed and updated in the light of experience.

Staff are advised that they should not be alone or in a remote area of the premises if (no one is around) or after dark.

In the Event of an Assault

- Try to remove yourself from immediate risk and if necessary seek appropriate assistance. If this is not possible, try to place a barrier between you and your assailant.
- Do not threaten or use physical force other than to defend yourself and those in your charge.

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- If, in the last resort, it is necessary to use force to defend yourself against imminent injury, restrain your action to the minimum to protect your person or the persons in your charge.
- Note details of the assailant and any witnesses.
- As soon as it is practicable, report the incident to your principal, who shall inform the Employing Authority, Police and if necessary, your family/friends.
- Do not admit any liability. Do not make any formal statement until you have received advice from your Union representative.
- Consider whether it is appropriate to have photographic evidence of the injuries sustained in an assault.

Supporting

The timing and application of a range of options available to the Principal as the agent of the Employing Authority will depend upon individual circumstances. These will include for example:

- Issuing warnings on the possibility of prosecution
- Delivering a written notice excluding an assailant from the school premises
- Requiring that a prior appointment or other pre-conditions be met before access to the school is restored.

In addition the Employing Authority will:

- Consider and, where appropriate, investigate all reported incidents of violence (Incident Report Form). A formal letter of warning may also be sent to anyone issuing threats etc. to a teacher

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- Notify the police of all cases involving assault
- Issue detailed advice in relation to the handling of specific allegations against staff
- Provide training in matters such as the handling of aggression
- Monitor the effectiveness of any measure taken
- Update advice where appropriate by issuing general guidelines to schools

Purpose

1. To enable the rapid identification of potential critical incidents
2. To enable a quick and effective response to circumstances which are of crisis proportions, or may develop into a crisis situation
3. To clarify roles in the handling of a critical incident
4. To ensure that appropriate personnel and support agencies are identified, so that provision is in place to minimise resultant distress and suffering.
5. To develop positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, thus enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a Critical Incident.
6. To promote active coping skills within the PDMU curriculum including circle time and assemblies.

Guidelines

- In the event of clear evidence being available that immediate physical safety may be compromised (e.g fire) the person receiving

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the information will, as appropriate, set in motion the evacuation procedure and contact the Emergency Services prior to informing Senior Management. (See Fire Drill Procedures).

- Upon receiving an indication of a potentially critical incident, the person concerned will request accurate, factual information and relay it immediately to Senior Management.
- The Principal (or in her absence, the Deputy) will assume control and co-ordination of the response to the incident, delegating tasks as appropriate and identifying an intervention team.
- Initial briefing of all staff will take place as soon as possible, in order to limit the spread of damaging rumour.
- The Principal will inform pupils of the outcome of the incident, after which, as normal as possible routine will be maintained.
- A list of possible support agencies will be available and parents will be advised of support/counselling services.
- The need for support for staff is recognised.
- In the event of an incident arousing media attention, all communication with the media will be through the Principal or Chair of Governors as agreed. All staff will be reminded of this fact at the initial briefing.

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CHECKLIST

Task:	Time Scale:
1. Obtain factual information at start of crisis	within hours
2. Senior Management meet with support personnel	within hours
3. Establish an Intervention Team	within hours
4. Contact families	within hours: Continue until all informed
5. Call a staff meeting to give information	same day (if practicable)
6. Inform pupils in small groups	same day (if practicable)
7. Arrange a debriefing meeting for staff involved in disaster	same day (if practicable)
8. Debriefing for pupils involved in the disaster	as soon as possible (allowing for health and safety)
9. Identify high-risk pupils and staff	next few days
10. Promote discussion in classes	next few days and weeks
11. Identify the need for group or individual treatment incrementally	over days or weeks after disaster
12. Organise treatment, etc.	as required

Responding to a Critical Incident

Developing Support Systems

Internal Support Systems

In responding to a critical incident schools and their staff have a key role to play. They are a source of continuity, support and security. With appropriate preparation, planning and information they can be

“important agents of recovery, dispelling rumour and encouraging coping throughout the community” (When Tragedy Strikes 2000 pg.20)

A critical incident team formed within the context of a school may include a range of personnel including the following:

- Teaching staff
- Board of Governors
- Education Welfare Officer
- Educational Psychologist
- Non-teaching staff
- Clergy
- WELB Critical Incident Response Team

It is important to develop these relationships and discuss roles in advance of a critical incident.

Considerations for Forming a Critical Incident Team

See Critical Incident management Plan- Key Actions. Stages 1 - 5. (Appendix A)
Stepped procedures to be followed once a situation has occurred and Checklist for
Principals. (Appendix B)

- ✓ Have individuals volunteered to be a part of the team?
- ✓ What training do they feel they need?
- ✓ How can you meet their training needs?
- ✓ Can you match natural abilities to roles within the team?
- ✓ Can time be made available for meeting training needs?
- ✓ Can you offer your team additional support re: timetabling and other duties during a critical incident?
- ✓ Can you monitor inclusion in team when a member of staff is overloaded or emotionally vulnerable due to other circumstances?

External Supports

There are a range of external supports that can offer a variety of advice and guidance, which a school can access at the time of a critical incident.

See Appendix C- External Supports/Register of Support Services/WELB
Critical Incident Response Team

They can be divided into four categories:

- WELB Support Services
- Health & Social Services

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- Voluntary Sector Organisation
- Other Services

1. WELB Support Services

- Schools' designated EWO or Educational Psychologist Rachel Giles and Claire Coburn

- WELB Critical Incident Team

Contact: Arlene Wright (Chief EWO) - 028 8241 1411

Ann-Harte Henderson WELB 82411411

Claire Coburn Senior Educational Psychologist

Board HQ - 028 8224 1411

- Behaviour Support Team

Contact: Helen McCloskey BST (Knockavoe) - 71383975

- Outreach Services
- Social Services 02882254500
- Contact: Health & Safety

Contact: Owen Doody Board HQ 8241 1411

2. Health & Social Services Trust

- Family GP - Contact specific to local area
- Community Mental Health Services
- Social Services - Child Protection Dept - Godfrey Young 82411411
- Community Paediatrician (school doctors)

Contact information can be obtained from www.wacy.PC.ORG

3. Voluntary Sector

Examples of Voluntary Agencies

- Cruse Bereavement Care
- Victim Support

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- Relateteen
- NSPCC Counselling Service
- Tara Centre
- Aisling Centre
- Contact Youth - Belfast

Contact information can be obtained from www.wacy.PC.ORG

4. Other Services

CCMS: Staff Welfare Officer - Mary Keegan - 028 8772 7935
 Health & Safety Officer - Gerry Corr - 028 9042 6972

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Advice on 'Dealing with the Media' is attached in Appendix D.

Appendix E Advice for all staff on talking with pupils, sample letters to parents.

Appendix F Telephone tree

Appendix G Telephone Log

Monitoring and Review

(a) This policy will be monitored annually by the Principal and Board of Governors.

(b) It will be reviewed and, if desired, revised every two years.

Signed: _____(Chairman, Board of Governors)

Date: _____