

**St. Cuan's College,  
Castleblakney  
Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.**



## **Critical Incident Management Policy**

**Ratified & Adopted by St. Cuan's College Board of Management: June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017.**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Justin Harkin  
Chairperson

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Collette Kennedy Walsh  
Principal

### **Mission Statement**

St. Cuan College is a Catholic Diocesan Co-Educational College.

St. Cuan's College is dedicated to the academic, social, cultural and spiritual growth of its students. In this pursuit, we are devoted to achieving the highest attainable level of education and promoting the development of

young men and women of strong moral character consistent with the school's Christian tradition.

We endeavour to create a stimulating, respectful and supportive environment for staff, students and families in which all are valued and encouraged to develop and share their unique talents. St Cuan's College promotes further education beyond Leaving Certificate, inviting the local community to join us in our pursuit of personal development - mind, body and spirit.

### **Aim**

The aim of this policy is to enable the students, parents/guardians teachers and management of St Cuan's College to respond appropriately to a critical incident.

### **Definition**

A critical incident is a serious traumatic event which overwhelms the normal school coping mechanisms and causes serious disruption to the running of the school.

This can include the following:

- The death of a pupil or staff member on or off the school premises.
- A serious physical attack on a pupil or staff member.
- A serious intrusion into the school.
- Serious damage to the school building or grounds including fire, explosion, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.

### **Critical Incident Management Team**

The critical incident management team shall comprise of the Principal, the Deputy Principal, the school Chaplain, relevant year heads and any other individual/s that the critical incident management team deem appropriate to include.

In the event of a critical incident occurring

1. The Principal, Deputy Principal or other designated person will gather information as speedily as possible in order to establish the facts surrounding the incident.
2. The Principal, Deputy Principal or other designated person will contact the appropriate emergency services as soon as possible. (List of emergency services and telephone numbers are located in the office of the Secretary, Principal and the staff room.)
3. The Board of Management will be notified. School staff will be notified.
4. A meeting of the school critical management team will be convened to discuss and establish the schools response to the incident. Depending on the nature of the incident the response could include some or all of the following:
  - a. Discuss the school routine for the first and subsequent days trying as much as possible to adhere to normal school routines
  - b. Discuss how students and staff and parents/guardians will be informed of the incident, keeping in mind how certain individuals may be more traumatised than others.
  - c. Decide who will inform the students of the event. This could be done by Counsellors, Chaplain, Principal, Year Heads or others as appropriate. Prepare a statement to be read to the students if appropriate.
  - d. Make a list of parents to be contacted by the schools if appropriate and nominate a number of individuals to complete this task
  - e. Designate one or two individuals to deal with telephone calls and visits from anxious parents/guardians.
  - f. Designate one or two individuals to make contact/visit with the deceased person's family and offer sympathy on behalf of the school. Assure the family of the school's support. Offer the

- schools assistance in a liturgical capacity when and if appropriate.( See liturgical response section later)
- g. Provide a room for parents, who on hearing the news may want to be with their own children or may want to take them home.
  - h. Make contact with the appropriate counselling services. (Numbers and contact details of same are located in the office of the Secretary and Principal).
  - i. Make plans to inform the School Board of Management, school chaplain(s) and other interested parties.
  - j. Designate one or two individuals to deal with media queries. Prepare a media statement if appropriate (See media section later)
5. Assemble and brief the staff on the incident and the school's response as established by the critical incident management team. Staff meeting/briefing may be held at the school outside of school hours. Seek co-operation from staff as appropriate.
  6. Brief students on the critical incident and the school's response as established by the critical incident management team. (See guidelines for dealing with the class room situation later)
  7. The critical incident management team should continue to review and evaluate the Schools response to the incident making amendments and seeking appropriate help from internal and external resources as required. After the critical incident has passed, the team should meet to discuss if any further action is required to deal with the incident - eg monitor student body for signs of distress, deal with anniversaries etc.
  8. School management will arrange staff debriefing, if deemed appropriate.
  9. Finally the critical incident management team should evaluate the response to the critical incident and amend and update the policy/procedures if required.

### **Guidelines for Handling the Classroom Situation**

These are some guidelines which may be useful in the classroom situation when dealing with the death of a student:

- Only if the family confirms the tragedy as a suicide can this fact be relayed to the students.
- The class and friends of the deceased student should be told first by the appropriate people as decided by the critical incident management team. A room/space should be made available for this group for a time and they should be encouraged and given time to discuss/express their feelings.
- Other classes/ groups can be told by the appointed people and again allowed time to express/discuss their feelings etc.

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- Tell the class that some sad news has come to hand.
- Let them know the name of the person involved.
- Tell them the facts as it is important to prevent rumours and misinformation. Read the statement prepared by the critical incident management team.
- Say a prayer for the deceased and / or have a minutes silence as appropriate.
- Students' questions should be acknowledged and answered honestly if comfortable for the teacher. Questions in relation to the rights and wrongs of a situation, particularly a suicide should be averted, focussing instead on remembering the person and the loss and pain of the survivors.
- Discuss normal grief reactions and what students might expect over the coming days. Reassure students that shock, anger, guilt and tears are all part of the normal response
- Encourage students to be supportive of each other and allow them to mingle and discuss the events in small groups for an appropriate period of time.
- Advise students that counselling services will be available to them from teachers and external counselling services as appropriate.

- Don't allow a student to leave a classroom alone in a distressed state. All students must be supervised while in a distressed state on school property.
- Be alert to identify students who are in a particularly distressed state and report details of same to the Critical Management Team for early referral to the appropriate counselling service, Teacher or Chaplain. Ensure that these students' parents or guardians are informed of their distressed state.

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- Students and Teachers should be sensitive to any student returning to school after a bereavement
- On returning to school after a funeral, Teachers should be aware of how sensitive students might be to a deceased students seat and or work on display in the room .
- Make arrangements to return work folders to the deceased family as appropriate.
- Continue to observe students to identify students who remain upset and refer these for further help or counselling as appropriate.

### **Guidelines for a Liturgical Response**

#### ***Prayer Service***

- By the end of the first day or as soon as feasible, a prayer service will be held to remember and pray for the deceased involving all students and staff.

#### ***Funeral***

- The critical incident management team will decide whether to recommend school closure to the Board of Management for a full day, a half day or make an alternative mark of respect on the day of the funeral.
- Participation of students and staff in the funeral ceremonies will be decided only after consultation with the bereaved family. This

consultation will be carried out by those nominated by the critical incident management team . The participation could involve a guard of honour, music, prayers, readings, carrying of gifts, reflections etc..

- Identify and rehearse roles with those who are participating in the funeral.

### ***Memorial Service***

- A special Mass / service will be organised for the whole school in remembrance of the deceased at an appropriate time and the family of the deceased will be invited to attend.
- Decide, in consultation with the bereaved family, whether a suitable memorial in an appropriate location is in order.

## **Guidelines for Dealing with the Media**

### ***General Guidelines***

- The Critical Incident Management Team will designate one or perhaps two competent individuals to deal with the media. Ideally this should include a member of the Board of Management and School Principal.
- Prepare a written statement expressing sorrow at the death and stating that it is a difficult time for the school community and for the deceased's family. State what the school is doing to support students and staff.
- Be co-operative and respectful but speak as if everything you say is on the record.

### **Sample Media Statement**

It is with profound sadness that the management, staff and students of St Cuan's College, Castleblakeney have learned of the death of \_\_\_\_\_ who was a \_\_\_\_\_ at this school.

Our sincere sympathy is extended to the family at this time.

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 services and support to students, parents and staff affected by this tragedy. A prayer service, uniting our school community will be held later today to remember and pray for \_\_\_\_\_

Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone affected by this tragedy

Thank you