



ST. TOLAS NATIONAL SCHOOL

Critical Incident Policy



St.Tola's N.S. aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times, as described in the school's mission statement in the Whole School Plan (WSP). The Board of Management through the Principal has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policies and plans. This plan was reviewed in September 2024 by the Principal, Eileen Smyth.

Our aim is to establish a **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)** to steer the development and implementation of the Critical Incident Management Plan.

Definition of a Critical Incident

The staff and management of St. Tola's N.S. 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 of critical incidents may include any of the following:

1. The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death.
2. An intrusion into the school.
3. An accident involving members of the school community.
4. A major accident/ tragedy in the wider community.
5. Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism or other.
6. A major accident/ tragedy in the wider community.

Aim:

The aim of the **Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP)** is to help the 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 appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the impact on students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a Coping and Supportive 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 physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Physical Safety

The following systems have been put in place to try to ensure the physical safety of students and staff in our school.

- Evacuation plan formulated with school building/ evacuation routes marked on plans around the school. (Please also note Fire Safety Statement)
- Regular Fire Drills occur (Once Termly)



- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked and staff have received training in the use of fire extinguishers
- Pre-opening supervision – all teachers are to be in their respective classes by 8.45am with children accessing the school from 8.55am.
- Children play in designated areas at break times as follows
 - **Small break**
 - 10.30am - 10.45am: Junior Infants, Senior Infants & First Class play inside the tennis court.
 - 2nd, 3rd, 4th 5th & 6th class use the walking track around the pitch.
 - **Lunch break**
 - 12.10pm - 12.30pm: Junior Infants, Senior Infants & First Class play inside the tennis court.
 - 12.10 -12.30pm: 2nd - 6th Class play on the pitch.
 - Children from Blossoms and Gladioli from the ASD classes are continuously supervised at playtime. They integrate where possible.
- Secure doors accessed by bell only during school hours.
- A double lock system has been placed on the door of the Gladioli classroom for children's safety.
- General school rules under the school's behaviour policy to ensure all pupils have a safe environment.

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of St. Tola's N.S. 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 school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Programmes and resources include the following:

1. **Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)** as a subject 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.
2. The school has developed links with a range of external agencies e.g: **NEPS, HSE, NCSE.**
3. Staff are fully compliant with the **Child Protection Procedures** and the name of the Designated Liaison Person (Eileen Smyth) and Deputy Liaison Person (Anne Stenson/Acting DDLP - Laura Kelleghan), with names on notices clearly displayed around the school.
4. The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and deals with incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy.
5. There is a care system in place in the school to include initiatives such as the 'Friendship Bench' with support given by Ms. A. Smith. The following teachers have been trained and delivered programmes to promote well-being and positive choices:



- Fun Friends – Julie Ann Carroll
 - Friends For Life – A. Stenson (On Leave), J. Doherty.
 - Zippy’s Friends – A. Smith. A. Carley
 - Incredible Years Programme – A. Smith, K. Somers
6. **Internet Safety Workshops** and information is provided annually for children from 4th – 6th classes and parents by an outside facilitator experienced in this field.
 7. Mindfulness activities and strategies are incorporated into the daily schedule with Monday Reflections taking place weekly.
 8. The school continues to participate in the ‘**Health Promoting Schools initiative**’ which began in 2016/17.
 9. Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the Principal and the SEN Team, concerns are explored with parents as part of the supportive process. The R23 Model of Listen, Protect, Connect, Model and Teach, p. 92 - 94 (*Ref: Responding to Critical Incidents: NEPs Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools, 2016*) will be utilised by the support team. Where it is deemed that there is a significant/ possible concern for a child who may be at risk, a referral will be made to the HSE or other supporting agency as required by the school’s ‘Child Protection Policy’.
 10. The Board of Management acknowledges its responsibility in promoting the welfare at work of teachers. The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is provided by Spectrum.Life under the logo of ‘Wellbeing Together: Folláinne Le Chéile’.The EAS is a self-referral service where employees have access to a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year providing advice on a range of issues such as wellbeing, legal, financial, mediation, management support etc.

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.

The roles within the CIMT are as follows

1. Team Leader – E. Smyth (Acting Deputy: Laura Kelleghan)
2. Garda Liaison – E. Smyth, L. Kelleghan
3. Staff Liaison – L. Kelleghan, J. Doherty, J. King
4. Pupil Liaison – J. Doherty, JA Carroll, T. Horan
5. Parent/ Guardian Liaison – L. Kelleghan & E. Smyth
6. Community Liaison – K. Somers, S. Wilkinson & B. O’Reilly
7. Media Liaison – E. Smyth, N. Varley, H. Flynn
8. Administrator – Philomena Temple



Each member of the CIMT is responsible as follows:

Team Leader

- Alerts the team members to the crises and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management, DES, NEPs
- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Liaises with the bereaved family

In the absence of the Team Leader, A. Stenson (Acting DP Laura Kelleghan) will fulfill the Team Leader's Role with the support of the staff.

Garda Liaison

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison

- 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 (from their critical incident folder)
- 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 EAS / Carecall and gives them the contact number

Pupil Liaison (Trusted and familiar figure to students)

- Provides materials for students
- Alerts Team Leader and other staff to any vulnerable students
- Maintains student contact records (R1 Form), p. 53
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.

Community/ Agency Liaison

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
 - Key parents, i.e members of informal parent's committee
 - 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

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and arrange ‘question & answer’ sessions (with Team Leader)
- Manages the ‘Consent’ issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensures that sample letters are prepared and available on school’s IT system ready for adaptation (Phil Temple – Secretary)
- 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.)

Media Liaison

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they may 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, relevant teachers unions etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator

- Maintenance of up-to-date telephone numbers of:
 - Parents/ guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those which need a response
- Ensures that templates are available on the school’s IT system and ready for adaptation
- 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, materials used etc. The school secretary, Philomena Temple will have a key role in receiving and logging phone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials etc. All information will remain strictly confidential and subject to the school’s ‘*Data Protection Policy*’ - Guidelines on Good Practice

Confidentiality and good name considerations

The management and the staff of St. Tola’s N.S. 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 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 consent 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 and being mindful of Covid Guidelines, it is proposed that:

- Staff Room – will be the main room used to meet staff
- 5th class room – will be used for meeting with students
- Gym - will be used for meeting with parents
- Gym – will be used for meeting the media
- 'Sensory Room' – will be used for individual sessions with students
- General Office – will be used for other visitors
- Main SEN room - Prayer Room/ Quiet space

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

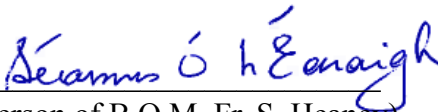
All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/ guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments. Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.

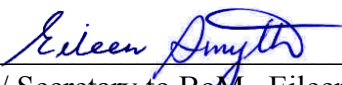
Each member of the critical incident team has access to the plan on the shared drive.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the **Team Leader, E. Smyth**. They will be included as assistants to staff with direct responsibilities for specific areas of this plan.

The plan will be updated annually at the beginning of each academic year.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of St. Tola's N.S. on March 15th 2017 and reviewed in September 2024.

Signed: 
(Chairperson of B.O.M, Fr. S. Heaney)

Signed: 
(Principal/ Secretary to BOM, Eileen Smyth)

Date: 26th September 2024