

# Critical Incident Policy



Lurga National School  
Gort,  
Co Galway

## Introduction

Lurga NS aims to protect the well being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. Lurga NS has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. This policy sets out procedures to be followed to ensure the physical and psychological safety of staff and students in the event of a critical incident

The Board of Management of Lurga National School have consulted resource documents available to schools on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie) including:

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- When Tragedy Strikes INTO 2000
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools NEPS & DES 2007
- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)
- School Self Evaluation Wellbeing Promotion Process by 2025

## What is a Critical Incident?

Lurga NS recognises a critical incident to be “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school”. Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school, or our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- **Major illness or the outbreak of disease**
- **The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide**
- **An intrusion into the school including an assault verbal or physical on staff or pupils by parents or members of the public**
- **A child protection issue**
- **An accident/tragedy in the wider school community**
- **Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc**
- **The disappearance of a member of the school community**
- **An accident involving members of the school community**

## Aim:

Lurga NS has developed this Critical Incident Management Policy and accompanying Plan, in the hope that, in the event of an incident, these will help staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. They should also help to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and ensure that effects on the children and staff will be limited.

## Creation of a supportive and caring ethos in the school:

Systems are in place to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of staff and children (e.g. Safety

Policy, Fire Drill Policy etc...) We endeavour to follow Hobfoll's Five Principles to guide interventions:-

**1. A SENSE OF SAFETY**

Lurga NS always try to promote a sense of safety by creating a physically safe environment - having regular fire-drills, ensuring that fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked, and enforcing public health recommendations. Our school environment is also to be psychologically safe. We try to foster a safe, and caring culture and climate, ensuring positive relationships between teachers and students, a sense of belonging, and a whole-school ethos that accepts and values diversity.

**2. A SENSE OF CALM**

Lurga NS works with our local Parish Priest along with SPHE and RSE which are key elements of a school's prevention work. These compulsory and required elements of the curriculum support the development of skills in relation to coping, resilience, communication, conflict resolution, and problem solving.

**3. A SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS**

Lurga NS can promote a sense of connectedness through prioritising the development of relationships with children and young people in the school community and planning how to partner with parents and carers. This can also be done through the development of anti-bullying policies and peer support programmes.

**4. A SENSE OF COMMUNITY EFFICACY**

The student support team structure is a key element in promoting self & community efficacy. Lurga NS ensures the provision of appropriate staff training and resources on issues affecting children including: Signs and Symptoms of stress/anxiety/depression; Wellbeing and Mental Health Promotion, & Loss and Bereavement. Staff should also be familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and the critical incidents documents.

**5. A SENSE OF HOPE**

Lurga NS promotes a sense of hope by providing opportunities for the school community to feel safe, secure, and hopeful about the present and future.

**Physical safety:**

- *In the event of a child/children being withdrawn during the school day parents/guardians are required to fill in the "sign in/sing out" folder.*
- *An Evacuation plan is in place if needed (e.g. regarding the child with serious health issues)*
- *Regular fire drills occur*
- *Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked and serviced*
- *Front gate closed during school hours*
- *Exit doors closed during class time*
- *Children are regularly reminded of safety in the playground, in the school car park and when learning outside of the school environment.*
- *The school has a Health and Safety Policy*
- *Fire alarm systems are regularly checked and serviced*
- *Yard supervision is in place at break times*
- *The school has a procedure for the management of injuries*
- *Staff are familiar with their duties as per Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures*
- *The RSE and Stay Safe Programmes are implemented in full*

**Psychological safety**

Lurga NS aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for same.

**SPHE programmes address issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, decision making, and alcohol and drug prevention.**

- **Our Behaviour Policy & Anti-bullying Policy includes an approach to bullying.**
- **Staff is informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware of their needs.**
- **Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school child.**
- **Staff will be cognisant of the different needs of international pupils and special educational needs pupils as appropriate**
- **The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students. For example the Clergy, NEPS, HSE, Cigire, CPSMA, the INTO, the NEWB and Túsla**

### **Critical Incident Management Team**

A critical incident team "is a group of individuals from the staff of the school who know the community, the students and each other well enough to make the necessary decisions called for when an incident occurs. The CI Team comprises all staff members. The members of the team will meet once a year to review and update the plan.

### **Roles**

Key roles have been identified and assigned as follows:

- |                                    |                                 |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Team Leader/Community Liaison    | <i>Deirdre Canny</i>            |
| • Staff Liaison                    | <i>Maeve O'Shea</i>             |
| • Student Liaison                  | <i>Maureen Casey</i>            |
| • Parent Liaison/Community Liaison | <i>Paul Walsh</i>               |
| • Media Liaison                    | <i>Deirdre Canny/Paul Walsh</i> |
| • Administrator                    | <i>Maureen Casey</i>            |

In the event of a critical incident the responsibilities of each role-holder will be as follows.

### **Team Leader/Community Liaison: Deirdre Canny**

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Coordinates the tasks of the team.
- Liaises with the Board of Management and Department of Education and Skills.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies.

### **Staff Liaison: Maeve O'Shea**

- Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.

### **Ready To Go Pack contents.**

- 1 Responding to Critical Incidents *Advice and Information Pack for schools*
- 2 Responding to Critical Incidents *Resources for schools*
- 3 When Tragedy Strikes

### **Student Liaison: Maureen Casey**

- Liaises with other team members to keep them up-dated with information and progress.
- Alerts staff to vulnerable students.
- Provide materials for students from the Ready-to-Go-Pack.

### **Parent Liaison: Paul Walsh**

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of :
  - Members of the BOM
  - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources.
- Facilitates 'questions and answers' meetings.
- Meets with individual parents.
- Provides materials for parents from the Ready Go Pack.
- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader along with the PP.

### **Media Liaison: Paul Walsh/Deirdre Canny**

- In preparing for the role, s/he will consider issues that may arise during an incident 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 Communications Section in the DES.

### **Administrative Tasks: Maureen Casey**

- Maintenance of up-to-date lists of contact numbers of
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency support services
- Telephone calls need to be responded to, letters sent and materials photocopied.

### **Key administration tasks: Maeve O'Shea**

- Contact parents/guardians
- Contact accident and emergency services
- Contact Fr. Tommy- Life or death situation
- Contact I.N.T.O

### **Record Keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc. The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

### **Letter to Parents**

The team leader along with staff will prepare a brief, written statement to include:

- The sympathy of the school community for the affected/bereaved family
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured persons(s)
- The facts of the incident
- What has been done
- What is going to be done

### **Confidentiality and good name considerations**

The school has 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 see to ensure that pupils do so also. [For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used without the consent of the family involved or until it has been established categorically that the person's death was a result of suicide. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead.]

### **Critical Incident Room**

In the event of a critical incident, the staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff, students, parents and visitors involved.

### **Development and communication of this policy and plan**

All staff worked collaboratively in the preparation of the draft plan. Our school's final policy and procedures in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.

Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy.

All new and temporary staff will be issued with a copy.

1. The **agenda** for the meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team should be as follows:
2. **Share the full details of the event.** Agree on what the facts are. These will need to be communicated in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner by all staff to the students.
3. **Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional agencies that should be informed** (check the Emergency Contact List ).
4. During major incidents, phone lines may become busy. So agree which phone line is to be kept open for outgoing and incoming emergency calls. A script for admin staff should developed.
5. Discuss how to deal with the media. Prepare a media statement, if appropriate. We will discuss this further later in the training.
6. **Agree who will liaise with the family.**
7. **Communicate with the wider parent body** - The manner in which information about the critical incident is shared with parents and pupils is very important in terms of minimising the long-term impact of the event on everyone involved.
8. **Plan the procedure for the day** - It is very important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. Therefore, it is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure, which will be comforting for many students.
9. **Decide on how to facilitate the whole staff meeting** - staff may need to be split into two groups to accommodate supervision.
10. **Delegate responsibilities** – review roles and duties on Critical Incident Management Team.

## Agenda For Staff Meeting

The next action is for the Principal to lead a meeting with the whole staff. The purpose of this meeting is to relay facts and to plan the schedule for the day. It is crucial that the staff have accurate facts and are kept updated. This will help to dispel rumours, which may begin to circulate. Consider including the NEPS psychologist(s) in this meeting.

The staff meeting should include the following key points:

1. The **sharing of information** about the incident.
2. The need for **routine** to be maintained in order to provide a sense of security to students, especially younger students.
3. It is ok for staff to be upset, and it is ok that students know and see that they are upset. It may be reassuring for them.
4. **Agree how to share the facts with students** - it is important that close friends are told first and separately. It is not a good idea to break any news in an assembly setting.
5. **Provide literature and resource materials to the staff** from the Resources section in the Guidelines

This may include:

- R5 - A classroom session following a critical incident (page 57)
  - R6 - Children's understanding and reaction to death according to age (page 60)
  - R7 - Stages of grief (page 62)
  - R8 - How to cope when something terrible happens (page 63)
  - R9 - Reactions to a critical incident (page 64)
  - R10 - Grief after suicide (page 65) (only when it is clear that the death was due to suicide and where parents have accepted this)
  - R17 - Frequently Asked Questions for Teachers (page 76)
6. **Supporting students:** A lot of the students may be very upset and will want and need to talk about what has happened. For the majority of students this can be done in the classroom or group setting. It is usually helpful for students to hear others talking about how they are feeling. This normalises their reaction. If a student or group of students are particularly distressed, it is advised to give them opportunities to talk to someone who they know and who will be available over the next days and weeks, for example the student liaison from the critical incident management team. If you are particularly concerned about any individual pupil, please talk to your NEPS Psychologist about this.
  7. Decide whether a **quiet room** or a space within the classroom should be made available for students. This is a place that students can go if they are having difficulty remaining composed in the classroom. It should have tissues, a few stuffed toys, cushions, drawing and writing materials and information leaflets from the Resource Materials section appropriate to the age of the students. A very distressed student may need individual support.
  8. Students **with general learning difficulties** will be at a different developmental level to their peers - see resource '[Supporting students with special educational needs \(SEN\) and additional needs](#) Download [Supporting students with special educational needs \(SEN\) and additional needs](#)(Their understanding of death will be in accordance with

their developmental age. They should be told the news separately so that the information can be given according to their level of understanding.

9. If there are students of various religions in the school, this needs to be taken into consideration in organising prayer services, attendance at the funeral etc. Parents of different religious or national groups may need to be consulted.
10. Media room/Agency room- we will discuss this further later in the training
11. Provide information on the **support services available to school staff.**
12. Agree a time for a **follow-up staff meeting** at the end of the day to provide an update on any developments and prepare for the following day. NEPS Critical Incident Guidelines - End of day template of session with whole staff (page 27)

### **CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

#### **PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE EVENT OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT.**

##### **Short Term Actions (Day 1):**

- Gather accurate information
- Contact appropriate agencies
- Convene a meeting with all key staff / Critical Incident Management Team.
- If necessary, organise the reunion of students with their parents.
- Arrange supervision of students
- Organise timetable for the day
- Hold staff meeting, if deemed necessary
- Inform parents/guardians by means of Family Note/Text-a-Parent Service/School Website.
- Inform students, if appropriate
- Make contact with the bereaved family (if timing is deemed appropriate)
- Deal with the media.
- Designate rooms if appropriate, (a quiet room, room for meeting parents, room for individual and group sessions, a waiting room etc)

##### **Medium Term Actions (24-72 hours):**

- Review the events of the first 24 hours and review the schedule of the day
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, staff and parents, if necessary
- Plan visits to the injured, if appropriate.
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service, if requested/appropriate to do so.
- School closure, if deemed necessary.

##### **Long Term Actions (Past 72 hours):**

- Observe pupils for behavioural changes.
- Support members of the school community still affected and experiencing new problems.
- Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries.
- Continue with help from external agencies where available.
- Update and amend school records.
- Evaluate response to incident and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately.
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure new staff are aware of policy & procedures in this area or of pupils affected by incident
- Alert Principal of receiving school of incidents involving pupils transferring to the new



school

**Evaluation / Review:**

Arising from the experiences gained from the management of a critical incident, changes /modifications may have to be made to the plan as part of an annual review or following the occurrence of a critical incident in the school.

All staff had a role in the implementation of this policy which will be ratified by the Board of Management of Lurga National School at its meetings on the 02<sup>nd</sup> October 2024

Signed: Paul Walsh (Chairperson)

Date: 2/10/24

Dianne Carry

2/10/24

## USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| BARNARDOS                                | 01 4546388                |
| THE SAMARITANS                           | 116123                    |
| CHILDLINE                                | 1800 666666               |
| PARENTLINE                               | 018733500                 |
| AWARE                                    | 01 5240361<br>1890 303302 |
| NATIONAL SUICIDE<br>BEAREAVEMENT SUPPORT | 1800247247                |
| RAINBOWS                                 | 01 4734175                |
| THE BEREAVEMENT COUNSELLING<br>SERVICE   | 0766805278                |

## SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury) of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

*(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost)*

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. *(Elaborate)*

It is possible that your child may have some feelings that he/she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and encouraging them to express their feelings. It is important to give truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school. *(Details)*.

Principal

SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING CONSENT FOR INVOLVEMENT OF OUTSIDE PROFESSIONALS

Dear Parents,

Following the recent (tragedy, death of x) we have arranged professional support for students in school who need particular help. (x...) is available to help us with this work. The support will usually consist of talking to children, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your son/daughter has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with the x..... If you would like your child to receive this support please sign the attached permission slip and return to the school by .....

If you would like further information on the above or to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip or telephone the school.

Principal

.....

I consent to having our daughter/son met by .....

I understand that my daughter/son may meet x..... in a individual or group session depending on the arrangements which are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like my daughter/son .....to avail of the support being offered by x.....

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

