



Glenstal Abbey
SCHOOL

Critical Incident Policy

Version 2.0
December 2023

Document Version Control

Version	Date	Description
1.0	May 2006	Original Version (Crisis Response Policy)
2.0	Dec 2023	Updated version

Introduction / Rationale

Glenstal Abbey School seeks to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. This policy seeks to support school management, administration and staff at Glenstal Abbey School in the event of a critical incident.

The policy is based on the 2016 Guidelines from NEPS, which are available on the Department of Education and Skills website www.education.ie.

The Critical Incident Team

Headmaster (who is also the Principal) - Chair, Deputy Principal, Deputy Head, the Junior and Senior Dean (Assistant Principals 1), Guidance Team, SPHE lead, Chaplaincy representative, Health Centre representative, Head of Special Needs, PA to the Headmaster; housemaster representative. (Add ? Fr Abbot or another representative of the monastery)

This team reflects the composition of the Pastoral Care Team which meets regularly regarding student pastoral matters, so is already a functioning group. This group will steer the development and implementation and review of the Critical Incident Management Plan for Glenstal Abbey School .

Best practice: On an annual basis, the Headmaster will run a 'Critical Incident' event exercise, to test policy, procedures and practice. The chair of the BOM will be notified in advance of the date and time of this exercise and, on its completion, the chair will be notified in writing, with an assessment of its effectiveness or otherwise. The exercise will be reviewed with the CIMT. The policy will then be reviewed and updated by the policy formulation team.

1. Definition of Critical Incident

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of incidents which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school. This includes any tragedy such as the sudden, unexpected death of a student or students or staff member(s). The sudden death of a student or staff member, whatever the cause, has a major effect on the whole school community. The school's response should be based on an initial assessment of the gravity of the incident.

2. Relevant Reference Documents

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) should consult resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie, (NEPS), and www.nosp.ie (National Office for suicide Prevention), these include:

- 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)
- NEPS offers online training suitable for all staff on <https://www.wtc.ie/31-wtc-programmes/news-wtc/403-neps-new-critical-incident-e-learning-course-2.html> (Appendix 5)
- The CCR Health and Safety policy, will be used to support critical incidence, where relevant.

3. Suggested Sequence of a Response to a Critical Incident

Initial Assessment of the Incident

This assessment is undertaken by members of the Critical Incident Management Team. Responsibility for declaring a critical incident will firstly rest with the Headmaster & Principal. In the absence of the Headmaster this responsibility will devolve in sequence, as follows: Deputy Principal or Deputy Head depending on the time of day/ week.

All staff members should be aware of the contents of the NEPS Guidelines: Responding to Critical Incidents 2016, and follow these as pertaining to the relevant response levels.

Response Level 1: The death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill/ death of a parent/sibling; a fire in the school not resulting in serious injury; serious damage done to school property; an attempt by a student to take their life; a bomb scare; a flood.

Response Level 2: The sudden death of a student or staff member.

Response Level 3: An incident or event involving a number of students; a serious fire; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving a number of schools.

Subsequent actions:

In the event of a tragedy (having alerted the appropriate emergency services where necessary), and dealt with the incident :

- The Headmaster should verify the facts as soon as possible, and communicate to the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)
- The Critical Incident Management Team should meet as soon as is practical in private to discuss, prepare an agreed statement and put in train communication with the staff, Chair of the Board of Management, parents and pupils.
- Headmaster's study will be made available as an incident room for collecting information or making difficult phone calls.
- Each incident is different and specific tasks should be assigned to members of the CIMT, and Assistant Principals, where relevant. The prepared statement should be available by email, in the Staffroom and at Reception. Any press release should be agreed with the family, where relevant (see NEPS Guidelines p.56).
- Depending on the level of the incident the staff should be informed at an emergency staff meeting and/or by a notice.
- Students are informed, as relevant. If it is deemed necessary to inform students in class groups some or all of the following resources from the NEPS guidelines should be made available to staff.
- Parents, the Board of Management and Parents Association Committee are informed by the CIMT, assisted by Year Heads.
- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, and all other relevant support personnel, are contacted for advice and support.
- The CIMT should contact other schools who have been through a similar situation to find out lessons learnt.
- Communication is key, and should be maintained with all stakeholders for a significant time.
- All support given should be maintained for a significant length of time as advised by relevant professionals.
- The process is stepped down upon agreement of the Headmaster and Chair of the Board of Management.
- A report is written afterwards, submitted to the Board of Management, and the policy updated where necessary.

4. Key Roles:

While all staff members have a duty of responsibility to all at CCR in a critical incident situation, the following are the **key roles** which need to be covered and are as follows:

- TEAM LEADER: Headmaster
- GARDA LIAISON: Headmaster
- STAFF LIAISON: Headmaster and Deputy Principal
- STUDENT, PARENT / GUARDIAN, COMMUNITY LIAISON: : Headmaster and Deputy Head/ Guidance team/ Chaplains/ House Master on duty – as agreed
- MEDIA LIAISON ADMINISTRATOR: Headmaster
- ADMINISTRATOR: PA to the Headmaster

In the absence of any member on the CIMT, the next most senior relevant staff member fills the role, as suggested in brackets above.

5. Responsibilities of Key Roles –

See Appendix 1

6. An example of procedures to deal with a Critical Incident: e.g. A Student Attempt at taking their own life

See Appendix 2

7. Examples of Critical Incidents regarding Actions and Communication

See Appendix 3

8. NEPS Guideline Supports

See Appendix 4

9. Confidentiality and good name considerations

The management and staff of Glenstal Abbey School 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 so 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 consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' would not be used, but 'violent death' if such an incident occurred.

10. Consultation and communication regarding this policy

- This policy is available on the school website
- All new Board of Management staff will have this policy highlighted to them by the school's Headmaster, Deputy Principal, Deputy Head as relevant
- Sample Letters, all Relevant Communications and Press Statements available online in NEPS Guidelines
- This is the link to the resources that NEPS provide on the DES website <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/40700/21b5193521d147c890b4309fe4bfce9d.pdf#page=null>

11. Review

The Policy will be reviewed every two years after its implementation.

This Policy was adopted by the Board of Management in December 2023

Signed:



Chairperson of Board of Management

Date:

11/12/2023

Signed:



Headmaster/Principal

Date:

11th Dec. 2023

Appendix 1 – Responsibilities of Key Role Holders

In the event of an incident, each member of the CIMT will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters, emails and texts sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc., and records of actions will be retained, with a report compiled and filed with the Board of Management at the soonest date.

Key responsibilities of each role:

Team Leader:

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting Coordinates the tasks
- Liaises with the Board of Management; Liaises with personnel outside the school e.g. the bereaved family

Garda Liaison

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about e.g. 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 as appropriate
- 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 advisory services and gives them the contact details
- A person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis e.g. school closure, attendance at memorial services, etc.

Student Liaison

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident resources)
- Maintains student contact records
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Community / Agency Liaison

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of 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

- Oversees relevant communication to parents
- Undertakes action as relevant - e.g. Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers' sessions
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensures that sample letters are prepared and available on the school's IT system ready for adaptation Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from the school's critical incident resources)

Media & Communications Liaison

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc.)
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the State Exam Commission – if affecting state exams, relevant teacher unions etc.

Administrators:

- Have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, and all administration work
- Maintain up to date telephone numbers of such as:
 - Parents/guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services
- Take telephone calls and note those that need a response
- Ensure that templates are available on the schools IT system and ready for adaptation
- Prepare and send out letters, emails and texts
- Photocopy materials as needed
- Maintain records
- Record keeping

Appendix 2 - An example of procedures to deal with a Critical Incident:

e.g. A Student Attempt at taking their own life

- Contact the medical experts straight away and phone for an ambulance
- The Medical Centre nurse when on duty or a senior Housemaster, or one of the PCT (during the school day) will control the situation until the ambulance arrives
- Parents of the student should be contacted immediately. The facts should be communicated in a sensitive manner. **Give the facts as they are known**. Highlight the steps taken and the actions that are planned
- The DLP should be informed, who should contact TUSLA, in consultation with the DDLP and Chair of the Board, where relevant
- Relatives, within the school, should be identified and informed in advance of the general student body, with parents' consent
- Board of Management Chair should be informed of the incident as soon as possible
- The CIMT will debrief and continue to manage the situation gathering all information for a written report
- A written report of the incident and action taken should be given to the board in due course
- Staff and students should be given an opportunity to communicate their feelings, insights and observations through the Counselling Services

WHAT TO DO:

TAKE IT SERIOUSLY – have a talk with the young person keeping some principles in mind:

- Remain in control – don't panic, act slowly
- Encourage expression of feelings and accept them (give time)
- Avoid judgemental comments or empty reassurance
- Avoid promises you can't keep (e.g. secrecy; call me any time; confidentiality)
- Empathise and let them know you care (biggest single preventative is knowing someone cares)
- Encourage them to see a counsellor or therapist (carefully)
- Inform Parents and Management of school
- If seriously worried, don't leave them alone

- Seek advice and support yourself (nobody should carry the worry about a suicidal youngster alone)

WHAT NOT DO TO:

- Don't assume a youngster is not the "type" to commit suicide
- Don't leave a child/teenager alone if you believe the risk of suicide is imminent
- Don't act shocked at whatever is told to you
- Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong. This may make him/her feel more guilty and intensify the depression
- Don't take responsibility for "saving the youth", get additional help
- Don't feel that you have to have an answer to all the child's questions. If you do not know the meaning of life, say so. Make it clear that you are there to help, not to solve problems
- Don't be afraid to be the first to mention suicide. Generally it comes as a relief to the youth that you are willing to discuss the subject
- Don't deny or cover up the youngster's feelings or intentions. Don't be judgemental. Acknowledge his/her feelings without reinforcing the negative. "I believe you are feeling miserable right now. Let's talk about it"
- Don't abandon the youth because the problems are too overwhelming. Follow through in getting him/her help. Don't be another loss or rejection to him/her
- Don't wait too long because you hope he will get over it. It can't hurt to talk about his feelings

Indicators and Intervention Measures

Suicide / attempted suicide is a particularly traumatic event in the life of any school. A study conducted in Ottawa, Canada, revealed a number of behaviours which can be exhibited by those contemplating suicide. School staff may find this list and the suggested forms of intervention helpful.

Ottawa Pointers

- Loss of interest in usual activities.
- Withdrawal from social contact.
- Difficulty in concentrating, problems with judgement and memory.
- Dramatic fall-off in school performance.

- Feelings of sadness, emptiness, hopelessness may be expressed in essays.
- Sleep disturbance – decreased, or sometimes increased.
- Increased overt displays of anger and rage, verbal or physical.
- Excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Promiscuous behaviour.
- Uncharacteristic delinquent behaviour/thrill seeking.
- Lack of supportive relationships with friends or family.
- Previous suicidal threats, gestures, attempts.
- Statements, verbal or written, reveal a wish to die or preoccupation with death.
- Nihilistic comments – life is meaningless, filled with misery.
- Gestures to be noticed – self mutilation, scratches.
- Planning for death, making final arrangements, giving away treasured possessions.
- Suddenly becoming cheerful after long depression (relief when decision taken)

Appendix 3 - Examples of Critical Incidents regarding Actions & Communication

1. A Student Death

- Contact the bereaved family. Express sympathy and assure them of the school's support. Ensure that the family knows who is the contact person in the school (Headmaster/ Deputy Principal/ Deputy Head/Chaplain/ Guidance)
- Relatives, within the school, should be identified and informed in advance of the general student body
- The agreed statement should be communicated in a sensitive manner. **Give the facts as they are known.** Highlight the support that will be available. Indicate the actions that are planned

Follow Up

- Staff and pupils should be given an opportunity to communicate their feelings, insights and observations
- After the initial communication, pupils should be allowed to stay behind if they so wish. Members of the Pastoral Teams and Counselling Department should be available to counsel as required
- An Assembly for each Year with prayers should take place
- A Liturgy for the particular Year including the class representatives of all Years could be organised – this would include others who wished especially to go

- A Book of Condolences would be opened and located in the Sacro Speco
- A welcome team would be present, at the chapel
- The School would close for the funeral

2. A Staff Death

- Staff to be informed in advance of student body
- Ensure that staff and pupils are given an opportunity to communicate their feelings, insights and observations
- The agreed statement should be communicated in a sensitive manner. ***Give the facts as they are known.*** Highlight the support that will be available. Indicate the actions that are planned

Follow Up

- A Mass for all the staff including class representatives from each Year (and others who wished especially to go)
- Arrangements on the day of the funeral at the discretion of the Headmaster, Principal
- A Book of Condolences would be opened and located in the Sacro Speco
- A welcome team would be present, at the School Chapel
- The School would close for the funeral

3. Death of a member of Student's Family

- If during the school day, in consultation with family, it would be decided when student should be informed and by whom.
- Establish if a student has relations in the school who should also be informed.
- Appropriate condolences expressed to family and students.
- Student's teachers would be informed and appropriate notice circulated to all staff
- Decision of CIMT as to how closest friends, student's Year Group and the general student body would be informed.

Follow Up

- Funeral arrangements would be made known to Staff and Students.
- On the day of the funeral , closest friends would attend, where appropriate.

- Students R.E. class may attend a Mass during R.E. class time on the day of funeral.
- On a student's return to school, the R.E. Teacher would begin R.E. class with appropriate prayer.
- A further Mass may be offered in consultation with the student, with R.E. class and/or close friends.
- Students would be informed of the continuing support available to them.

What to Look Out For in those Grieving and how to Support:

Those grieving may need professional help particularly if some of the following persist for a period of time after the death.

Some signs of the need to talk to someone, or seek professional help.

- A prolonged loss of interest in daily activities
- A prolonged change in appetite
- Disruptive sleep patterns – unable to sleep
- Persistent self-blame or guilt
- Withdrawal from friends, hobbies, school activities
- Prolonged fear or anger
- Behaving as a much younger child

Help should be sought immediately if there are signs of:

- Risk-taking behaviour, reckless driving, alcohol or drug abuse
- Self-destructive behaviours – self harm
- Expressions of suicidal thoughts
- Giving away belongings

If the critical incident occurs during the course of a school day, each Year Group, after the facts have been verified, will have an Assembly at which:

- A prepared written statement will be read out by the Headmaster
- A mass/assembly/prayer meeting will take place
- Parents/ Guardians to be informed
- Depending on the gravity of the incident students should be informed in class groups or in an Assembly of the directly-affected Year group. This will take place in the Boardroom
- Members of the Monastic Community, R.E. and Pastoral Departments will lead these liturgies

The Headmaster or his nominee, should deal with all media enquiries. (For advice on dealing with the media see NEPS Guidelines 44-46). Decisions on attendance at funeral service should be made in consultation with the family.

Depending on the gravity of the incident the CIMT meets to review the actions taken and consider the need for medium and long term actions

Appendix 4: NEPS Guideline Supports

NB Reference book needed for staff

- A classroom session following a critical incident (pg. 57-59)
- Students' understanding and reaction to death according to age (pg. 60-61)
- Stages of grief (pg. 62)
- How to cope when something terrible happens (pg. 63)
- Reactions to a critical incident (pg. 64)
- Grief after Suicide (to be used only when it is clear that the death was due to suicide and the parents have acknowledged this.) (pg. 65)
- Frequently Asked Questions - Teachers (pg. 76-77)
- Teachers helping students in a crisis or emergency (pg. 92-96)

Appendix 5 - NEPS eLearning Course for Schools: Responding to Critical Incidents

- This course is designed to support school staff in preparing for and responding to critical incidents
- The course is based on the 2016 publication 'Responding to Critical Incidents: NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools'
- It is aimed specifically at a school's Critical Incident Management Team, but open to all interested staff
- The format allows for self-directed, self-paced learning
- The course incorporates the voice of schools who have experienced critical incidents
- It consists of 10 modules and takes approximately 34 hours to complete
- A certificate is awarded upon completion
- Downloadable resources are available to save for future reference

- The course will be available in English and Irish
- NEPS will periodically offer an optional follow-up webinar for those who have completed the online training and have indicated that they would like additional support (based on demand)
- A summary PowerPoint presentation is available upon completion for participants to
- share with their school community as part of a whole staff input/training
- For any questions about completing this course, or if you encounter any difficulties with the registration process, please email NEPSelearning@education.gov.ie