



Glenstal Abbey
SCHOOL

Critical Incident Policy

Version 2.1

December 2025

Document Version Control

Version	Date	Description
1.0	May 2006	Original Version (Crisis Response Policy)
2.0	Dec 2023	Updated version
2.1	Dec 2025	Policy reviewed by Student Support Team with minor updates throughout

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 Management Team (CIMT)

- Headmaster (who is also the Principal) - Chair
- Deputy Principal
- Deputy Head
- Junior and Senior Dean (Assistant Principals 1)
- Guidance Team
- SPHE lead
- Chaplaincy representative
- Health Centre representative
- SEN Coordinator
- PA to the Headmaster
- Houseparent representative

This team reflects the composition of the Student Support 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.

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 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 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 CIMT. Responsibility for declaring a critical incident will firstly rest with the Headmaster. 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 CIMT should meet as soon as is practical in private to discuss, prepare an agreed statement and communicate with the staff, Chair of the Board of Management, parents and students
- Headmaster's Oak Parlour 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. The prepared statement should be available by email, in the Staffroom, at Reception and Monastery Reception. Any press release should be agreed with the family, where relevant (see NEPS Guidelines p.56)
- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, and all other relevant support personnel, are contacted for advice and support
- 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 and the Board of Management are informed by the CIMT
- The CIMT may 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
- A copy of the press release (if issued) should be made available to the school reception and monastery reception

4. Key Roles

While all staff members have a duty of responsibility to all at Glenstal Abbey School, 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 Liaison	Member of the CIMT as agreed
Parent/Guardian Liaison	Member of the CIMT as agreed
Community Liaison	Member of the CIMT as agreed
Media Liaison	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.

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

5. Responsibilities of Key Roles

Team Leader (Headmaster):

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks
- Coordinates communication
- Liaises with the Board of Management
- Liaises with personnel outside the school e.g. the bereaved family, and coordinates communication tasks with NEPS, Tusla, etc.

Garda Liaison (Headmaster)

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

Staff Liaison (Headmaster and DP)

- 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 /boarding house closure, attendance at memorial services, etc.

Student Liaison (CIMT)

- 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

Parent/Guardian Liaison (CIMT)

- 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)

Community Liaison (CIMT)

- 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

Media & Communications Liaison (Headmaster)

- 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

6. 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. Care is needed in the use of the term "suicide;" do not use it until it is established and be sensitive to the wishes of the family. Perhaps use "sudden/tragic death" instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' would not be used, but 'violent death' if such an incident occurred.

7. 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>

8. Review

The Policy will be reviewed every two years after its implementation. This Policy was adopted by the Board of Management in December 2023, and reviewed in December 2025.

The policy will be reviewed again in December 2027.

Signed: 

Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 9 December 2025

Signed: 

Headmaster/Principal

Date: 9 December 2025

Appendix 1

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 students should be given an opportunity to communicate their feelings, insights and observations
- After the initial communication, students 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 students 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 2

NEPS Guideline Supports

- 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 3

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