

Marist Primary School Critical Incident Management Policy

The Marist Primary School aims to protect the well being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. We aim to create a happy, caring school in which all feel welcome and accepted. As a staff, we are fully committed to the children in our care.

Marist Primary School Mission Statement

The Marist Primary School is a Catholic Primary School. Each child in our care is valued equally. Our aim is to create an environment in which all children will reach their full potential, socially, academically, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

The Marist Primary School has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of staff and students, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

What is a Critical Incident?

The Marist Primary School 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 members of our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- **The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, sudden death, terminal illness, suicide or suspected suicide or other unexpected death.**
- **An accident/tragedy/serious injury involving members of the school community**
- **An intrusion into the school.**
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- **An accident/tragedy/serious injury in the wider school community.**
- **Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.**
- **A major accident/tragedy in the wider community.**

Aim

Recognising that the key to managing critical incidents is planning, the Marist Primary School has developed this Critical Incident Management Policy (“CIMP”). Our hope is that, in the event of an incident, these will help staff to react quickly and effectively and maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. They should also help us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and ensure that the effects on the school community will be limited.

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¹ Source: Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools - National Educational Psychological Services NEPS

Creation of a coping supportive and caring 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 the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

The school has in place the following:

Physical safety

- **Evacuation plans formulated**
- **Regular fire drill occur**
- **Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked**
- **Front gates closed during break times**
- **School doors electronically closed during school day**
- **Playground environment is checked on a daily basis for potential hazards**
- **Playgrounds are adequately supervised**

Psychological safety

The Marist Primary School aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for the same. In addition, the management and staff 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 the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. These include:

- **SPHE programmes are included in the curriculum to address issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, resilience, conflict management, bullying, problem solving, help-seeking, decision making and alcohol and drug awareness. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.**
- **Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person**
- **Our school plan includes an Anti-Bullying policy**
- **Staff is informed of difficulties affecting individual students and is aware and vigilant to their needs**
- **The school has a shared Educational Support Teacher**
- **Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school child**
- **The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students.**
- **Staff are informed about how to access supports for themselves.**
- **There is a care system in place in the school using the “Continuum of Support”.**

Critical Incident Management Team

The Marist Primary School has set up a Critical Incident Management Team in line with best practice² and will maintain this team in the future. In-School Management have access to a critical incident folder which contains a copy of the plan and materials particular to the different roles, to be used in the event of an incident.

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²A 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” (Mary Schoenfeldt)

Roles

Key roles have been identified and assigned as follows:

- **Team Leader** **Principal**
- **Garda Liaison** **Principal**
- **Staff Liaison.....** **Deputy Principal**
- **Student Liaison.....** **Support Teacher**
- **Parent/Guardian Liaison..** **Home/School Community Liaison Coordinator**
- **Community Liaison.....** **Home/School/Community Liaison Coordinator**
- **Media Liaison.....** **Principal**
- **Administrator** **Principal with school secretary**

Team Leader

- » 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 Science, NEPS
 - » Liaises with the family concerned
- A person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis (eg. school closure, attendance at memorial services, etc)*

Garda Liaison (This may be seen as part of the team leader’s role)

- » Liaises with the Gardaí
- » Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked 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 and outlines the routine for the day
 - » Advises staff on the procedures for the identification of vulnerable students
 - » 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 Employee Assistance Service and gives them the contact number.
- A staff member known and trusted by the staff*

Student Liaison

- » Liaises with other team members to keep them updated with information and progress
- » Alerts staff to vulnerable students
- » Maintains student contact records as appropriate
- » Looks after setting up of “quiet” room where agreed

A trusted and familiar figure to the students. A bigger school may need a number of such people

Community Liaison

- » Liaises with agencies in the community for support and liaises onward referral
- » Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies
- » Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- » Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of:
 - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- » Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- » Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support

Someone with good contacts with agencies relevant individuals in the community

Parent/Guardian Liaison

- » Visits the family concerned with the team leader
- » Arranges meetings if held
- » May facilitate questions and answers’ meetings and managed “questions and answers” sessions
- » Meets with individual parents
- » Sets up room for meetings with parents
- » Maintains a record of parents seen
- » Provides appropriate materials for parents from critical incident folder as necessary
- » Ensures that sample letters are prepared and available on the schools IT systems ready for adaption

Someone known to parents. This person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have skills to manage emotional reactions of individual or groups of parents.

Media Liaison

- » In preparing for the role, the person will consider issues that may arise during an incident and how they might be responded to (eg. students being interviewed, photographers on premises etc.)
- » In the event of an incident, the person will liaise where necessary with the Communications Section in the DES, relevant unions etc
- » Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media by phone or in person. A person who is able to set limits without being offensive.

Administrative Tasks

- » Maintenance of up to date lists of contact numbers of
 - Parents/Guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency support services

- » Telephone calls that need to be responded to, letters sent and materials photocopied
- » Ensures that templates are available on the school 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 detailed records of phone calls made and received, emails and texts sent and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions made, 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 will prepare a brief, written statement for the information of the school community to include:

- » The sympathy of the school community for the family concerned
- » Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured person(s)
- » The facts of the incident (if appropriate)
- » What has been done? (if appropriate)
- » What is going to be done? (if appropriate)

Confidentially 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 seek to ensure that pupils do likewise. (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" should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term "violent death" may be used instead.

Critical Incident Room

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

Development and communication of this policy and plan

All staff were consulted and their views considered in the preparation of this plan. Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments. Our school's final policy and procedures in relation to responding to critical incidents has been represented to all staff.

Each member of the critical incident team has access to the Critical Incident Management Policy.

All new staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Staff Liaison Person.

Outside expertise may be called upon if deemed necessary.

Implementation/Review

It will be implemented from 11th May, 2023 and will be reviewed as necessary.

Ratification and Communication

This policy was amended and ratified by the Board of Management on 10th May, 2023. It will be communicated to the school community through the Newsletter in June 2023.