

## CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY -Edmund Rice Secondary School



**School Name:** Edmund Rice Secondary School, Carrick on Suir.

**School Address:** Mount St. Nicholas, Carrick on Suir, Co. Tipperary.

**School Details:** ERSS Carrick on Suir is a Voluntary Roman Catholic Secondary School under the trusteeship and the patronage of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. The school is grant aided by the Department of Education & Skills and is a single sex (boys) school.

**School Management:** The Board of Management of ERSS Carrick on Suir is a statutory Board appointed pursuant to the provisions of the Education Act 1998.

### **Mission Statement:**

Inspired by its founder, ERSS Carrick on Suir aims to *"To provide a caring Christian community which celebrates effort and talent in an environment of hope and happiness"*

### **Ethos:**

As an Edmund Rice School ERSS Carrick on Suir seeks to promote the five key elements of an Edmund Rice School as espoused by the ERST Charter:

- Nurturing faith, Christian spirituality and Gospel-based values
- Promoting partnership in the school community
- Excelling in teaching and learning
- Creating a caring school community
- Inspiring transformational leadership

**Please Note:**

Personal data collected about prospective students/students and their parents/guardians will be retained and used strictly in accordance with the provisions of GDPR legislation as introduced 25<sup>th</sup>. May 2018. Further details on data protection are set out in the school's Data Protection Policy.

Edmund Rice Secondary School Carrick-on-Suir aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by always providing a safe and nurturing environment. Edmund Rice Secondary School has established a Student Support Team (SST) and a Critical Incident Management Team which are responsible for prevention, intervention and postvention in relation to students whose welfare is deemed to be 'at risk' and in the event of a critical incident (CI). A CI management policy is included in this document as one element of the school's policy and practice. This policy aligns with our core values of excellence in education, care, community, equality and respect.

**Definition of a Critical Incident**

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school.

Examples of a critical incident might be:

- The death of a member/members of the school community through accident, illness or suicide
- A serious accident or tragedy in the school community
- A serious accident or tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- A physical attack on a staff member or student
- Intrusion into the school.

## **The Role of the School**

The school can offer security at a time of insecurity. It is within such a normal environment that students and staff can best be helped to deal with traumatic reactions to critical incidents. Most incidents require a multi-dimensional approach involving all aspects of the community. If teachers, students and parents receive information and support they can become important agents of recovery, dispelling rumours and encouraging coping throughout the community. It is recognised that the first 48 hours are crucial and that the first three weeks following a critical incident is a time of vulnerability for staff and students.

## **Aim**

The school community will need support in the event of a tragedy. When such a tragedy happens, it is essential that the effects of it are not ignored. The aim of the Critical Incident Policy is to best facilitate the management of such an incident. It is vital that the principal and staff are given support to manage the crisis at school level. Once this is achieved, staff can seek to re-establish control and confidence which can then be passed onto students. It is vital to prevent or minimise a mass hysterical grief reaction.

## **Action Plan**

While a particular school's response to a critical incident is dependent on the individual school context, many of the actions herein are based on best practice as detailed in the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) document, Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools (DES, 2016).

Relevant sections of this document are referenced throughout this policy.

## **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

### **Purpose:**

- By identifying key roles in advance there is clarity about who will do what, when and how
- No one person should be overburdened
- Staff may need to be supported
- Nothing is forgotten or left to chance.

**Members:** The Critical Incident Management Team is comprised of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Year Head (if applicable) and other members of the staff/members of the Student Support Team.

### **In relation to responding to a C.I. the school will seek to:**

- Provide a range of supports for members of the school community to call upon in a time of crisis and in the longer term.
- Have in place a policy for dealing with critical incidents in the context of the school.
- Regularly review the structures of support and referral available in the school.

## **CREATION OF A COPING SUPPORTIVE AND CARING ETHOS IN THE SCHOOL**

Systems are in place to help to build resilience in both students and staff, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

### **PHYSICAL SAFETY**

Measures to address the physical safety of the school community include the following:

- An Evacuation Plan has been formulated. This plan is brought to the attention of all staff and students during the school year.
- Fire drills are held at least once a term.
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly inspected.
- CI drills take place annually.
- Parents/guardians, where appropriate, are informed of the pre-opening supervision arrangements, whereby students can gain access to the school building from 8.00 am and where supervision is in place (15 minutes before school begins, at breaktime and at lunchtime)
- Expectations of general student behaviour, encourage positive relations and promote the wellbeing of the whole school community and prohibit bullying in any form.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY:

The management and staff of Edmund Rice Secondary School 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 through the following:

- Guidance and Counselling is a key resource available to all students in the school.
- Social, Personal and Health Education are integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; wellbeing; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying /cyber bullying and decision making. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role through training e.g., SST/SPHE, etc.
- A Student Support Team (SST) is in place in the school to respond to day-to-day challenges of a psychological nature.
- Relationships and Sexuality Education is timetabled for all Senior Cycle students.
- Staff receive regular reminders about the Child Protection/Safeguarding Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.  
The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is the principal, Ms. Majella Gleeson and the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDL) is the deputy principal, Ms. Linda Barry.
- Students who are identified as being at increased risk are referred to the Student Support Team where concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents may be informed and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff members are informed about how to access support for themselves through employee assistance provision. <https://www.spectrum.life/eap/>
- The school has a clear policy on Anti-Bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy including cyber bullying.
- Staff members accept their role in the care of students and colleagues.
- The school recognises that staff is a key resource in promoting our characteristic spirit.
- Resources on supporting those in difficulty in the schools will be accessed when require) d.
- Several staff members have availed of Suicide Awareness Training – Living Works Start – Suicide Prevention Skills Training Programme  
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/training/types-of-training/>
- The school has links with a range of external agencies.
  - NEPS
  - CAMHS

- Barnardo
- Belong To
- HSE

The involvement of external service providers is decided in the context of what Edmund Rice Secondary School Carrick-on-Suir is already offering, building, where appropriate, on programmes already set in place. Inputs by external providers are considered carefully taking account of the safety and well-being of students, the appropriateness of the content of materials provided, and whether such materials are based on sound evidence.

All provider organisations are expected to supply evidence showing how they quality assure their services. All practitioners within those organisations, whether employed or acting in a voluntary capacity, are expected to be bound by professional and regulatory standards, to have successfully undergone appropriate vetting procedures, demonstrate expertise and experience of working in similar settings and with similar target groups, provide references from reputable agencies, have public or professional liability insurance and follow a recognised ethical code.

#### Critical Incident Management Team:

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. **The CI team will have access to the CI shared drive which contains the school's policy, plan, and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.**

School Year 2023/2024: (names to be filled in)

Role in CI	Who	Summary of key roles (see pages 82-85)	Which resource documents may they need:
Team leader			
Garda Liaison			
Staff Liaison			
Student Liaison			
Parent Liaison			
Community Liaison			
Media Liaison			
Administrator			
Garda Liaison			

Roles outlined in “Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resource Materials (pages 82 – 85).

<https://assets.gov.ie/40700/21b5193521d147c890b4309fe4bfce9d.pdf>

#### 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, material used etc. The school secretary (name) will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials etc.

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

The management and staff of the Edmund Rice Secondary School, Carrick -on-Suir 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' 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:**

**Staff Room** - will be the main room used to meet the staff.

**G.P.** - for meetings with students

**Visitors Room/ Room 9** - for parents

**P.E. Suite** - for media

**Guidance Office** - for individual sessions with students

**Principal's Office/ Deputy Principal's Office** - for other visitors

### **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 a personal copy of the plan.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Deputy Principal, all staff should have digital access to a copy of the CI Plan.

The plan will be updated annually (each September)



## Immediate / Short Term Actions

### 1. INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE INCIDENT

#### Step 1: What type of response is needed?

- Response Level 1: the death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; the death of parent/sibling; a fire in school not resulting in serious injury; serious damage to school property.
- Response Level 2: the sudden death of a student or staff member.
- Response Level 3: an accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving a number of schools

#### Step 2: Should a psychologist be involved?

- Consider the nature of the event and how your school is coping. What support do you need from NEPS and/or other agencies?

#### Step 3: How does the CIMT assess the needs of the school?

- Is there a feeling of being overwhelmed by this event?
- Has there been a previous incident? How recent? What kind of incident? If more than one, how many? (If the school has experienced a recent incident or several incidents staff may be exhausted or distressed. On the other hand, they may feel more experienced and better able to deal with the situation).
- Is there a critical incident plan/team in place?
- Is there a good pastoral care system in the school? • Is there significant media interest in the incident?
- Are other agencies already involved?

#### Step 4: What action does the CIMT take?

- For an incident requiring a Level 1 response it may be sufficient to talk to the psychologist on the phone.
  - Refer to **Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools (2016)**. The psychologist will refer to these and talk you through relevant sections. A copy of these has been made available to all schools. It is also available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) by following the links to NEPS.
- In the case of an incident requiring a level 2 or level 3 response, contact NEPS. Depending on the incident at least one psychologist will visit the school.

### 2. INITIAL ACTION PLAN

- Gather accurate information-dispel rumours.
- Establish the facts - what, when, how, number and names of children/staff involved, extent of the injuries, location of the injured
- Contact appropriate agencies - Emergency services

- Convene a meeting with key staff / CIMT
- Meet with wider staff group
- The school may need to contact parents.
- Gardaí should NOT interview students on school premises
- Management should strive to maintain a normal routine if possible.

### 3. MEETING WITH STAFF GROUP

- Teachers need accurate facts and need to be kept updated
- May need to see staff in two separate groups so children can be supervised
- Identifying vulnerable staff members (see page 25 of NEPS Booklet)
- Schedule for day - may be helpful to meet again briefly at the end of the day
- Agree with staff how students are going to be told (agreed memo/statement)
- Relatives need to be told separately

### 4. STUDENTS (Year Heads and Class Teachers should seek guidance when speaking to students – R5 of NEPS Booklet)

- It is best to keep students on school premises
- Let them talk in natural groupings
- Give them up to date information
- Assure them that life goes on. Every effort will be made by the school and support personnel to reassure and support students as they deal with the crisis at hand.

### 5. VULNERABLE CHILDREN

In an incidence of death or other emotional trauma the school community will endeavour to be particularly mindful of the following:

- Close friends or relatives of deceased
- Children who have been bereaved in the past especially bereaved by suicide
- Children who experienced a recent loss, e.g. death, divorce, separation.
- Children experiencing serious difficulties within their homes, e.g. mental illness, child protection issues.
  - Children with a history of mental health difficulties including children with a history of suicide attempts/self-harm.
  - Children with a history of substance abuse.
  - Non-communicative children who have trouble talking about their feelings - including children with ASD, less fluent English speakers and less able children.

## 6. CONTACT WITH AFFECTED FAMILY/FAMILIES

- Home visit in first 24 hours by 2 staff representatives within 24 hours if appropriate.
  - Liaise with family about funeral arrangements, clarify their wishes regarding the school's involvement.
- Plan visits to those who are injured – key personnel to visit home/hospital etc
- Be aware of cultural differences, different religious traditions, rituals.

## 7. NORMAL REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT (R9 from NEPS Booklet)

- Feelings: e.g. guilt, confusion, numbness etc.
- Thoughts: e.g. disbelief, preoccupation with images of event/person etc.
- Physical Responses: e.g. tiredness, sleeplessness, headaches etc.
- Behaviour: e.g. nightmares, over dependency, loss of concentration, aggression, withdrawal etc.

## 8. SUICIDE

- 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. Maybe use sudden death instead.
- Primary prevention is recommended - systems for identifying and supporting vulnerable students.
- Clear procedure is needed for any child who a staff member is concerned about.

### Medium Term Actions

The Principal or Critical Incident Team Leader would conduct the meeting (an agenda page 23) <https://assets.gov.ie/40700/21b5193521d147c890b4309fe4bfce9d.pdf>

to review what has been done to date.

- CIMT continues to meet daily until normal functioning resumes
- Review decision about closure of school
- Tasks for day-liaison with family and media
- Funeral arrangements in conjunction with the family make decisions around attendance and participation in the funeral service.

- Schedule for day
- Staff meeting
- Review vulnerable students and staff-plan how to monitor over next few weeks
- Prepare for return of bereaved children and siblings.

### **Longer Term Plan**

- Monitor students, meet with appropriate staff to review the list of affected staff and students.
- Memorials - returning belongings to family
- Anniversaries, Significant dates
- De-brief, Evaluate Response - Amend Plan (CIMT)
- Inform new staff
- Follow-up care – discuss referral procedures and when an onward referral may be indicated.
- Watch for - hostility, hero worship, shock, grief, guilt, blame, numbness, copy-cat
- Care for principal and CIMT
  - Prepare for the return of the bereaved student (s) (Section 1 R11) – discuss what to do with respect to events that the deceased student would have been part of eg Matches, Competitions, Awards Ceremony, Exam Results etc.

**NEPS Responding to Critical Incident Guidelines and Resources for Schools:**

<https://assets.gov.ie/40700/21b5193521d147c890b4309fe4bfce9d.pdf>

**Page 53 R1** SAMPLE STUDENT CONTACT RECORD

**Page 54 R2** SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT

**Page 55 R3** SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - VIOLENT DEATH

**Page 56 R4** SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA

### Short term actions – Day 1

<b>Task</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>
Gather accurate information/facts	CIT
Contact appropriate agencies	Principal
Convene a meeting with key staff	Principal/Deputy Principal
Arrange supervision of students	Deputy Principal
Hold staff meeting & keep staff updated	Principal
Organise Timetable for the day	Deputy Principal
Inform parents/parents council	School Secretary
Inform students	Relevant Year Head
Make contact with the bereaved family	Principal
Dealing with the media	Principal
Taking care of vulnerable students	Guidance Counsellor and Student Support Coordinator

Meet parents/groups of parents	Deputy Principal
Setting up an incident room	Deputy principal

Medium Term Actions & Roles Assigned 24-72 Hours


Task Name	Person Responsible
Review the events of the first 24 hours	CIT
Arrange support for students/parents/teachers	Guidance Counsellor
Plan the reintegration of staff and students	CIT
Plan visits to the bereaved/injured	Principal/Deputy Principal
Liaise with family regarding funeral arrangements	School Chaplin
Attendance and participation at funeral service	School Chaplin in discussion with family
School arrangements	Whole Staff Meeting



**Approval:**

This policy has been distributed to staff for their approval.  
Amendments have been made after consultation with these stakeholders.

This policy has been ratified by the Board of Management of ERSS Carrick-on-Suir;

Chairperson: 

Date: 7/2/2024

This policy will be due for review on:

Date: Feb 2026