



# St Mary's Junior School

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## St Mary's Junior School Critical Incident Policy

### Mission Statement:

*'All the parents, teachers and pupils of St. Mary's J.N.S work together to provide a positive, caring, inclusive, safe and happy environment which is both child centred and stimulating. We strive to provide a holistic education allowing each child to reach his/her full potential, thus fostering self-esteem, independence, tolerance and respect for self and others.'*

As such, St Mary's J.N.S aims to protect the well being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

St. Mary's J.N.S 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. We have followed NEPS / DES Guidelines when creating this policy.

### What is a Critical Incident?

As per DES / NEPS guidelines, St. Mary's J.N.S recognises a critical incident to be "an incident of 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:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- Outbreak of disease or major illness in school or community.
- Serious injury sustained by a member of the school community as a result of violence on or off school grounds.
- An intrusion into the school.
- An accident / tragedy in the school or wider community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.

- *The disappearance of a member of the school community.*
- *Unauthorised removal of a student from school.*

### **Aim**

The key to managing a critical incident is planning. Following NEPS Guidelines, St Mary's J.N.S has developed a Critical Incident Management Policy and an accompanying Critical Incident Management Plan which outlines who will do what in the event of a tragedy. Our hope is 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 us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and to ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited.

### **Creation of a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school.**

St Mary's J.N.S has put systems in place to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

### **Physical Safety:**

Issues regarding physical safety are regularly and routinely brought to the attention of the school community. The school has also developed a comprehensive Health and Safety Policy. Other measures aimed at enhancing physical safety include:

- *Evacuation plan formulated.*
- *Regular fire drills occur.*
- *Fire exits and fire extinguishers are regularly checked.*
- *The Fire Alarm is serviced regularly, at least once a year.*
- *School doors are locked during class time and access to the school is monitored by CCTV.*
- *Pupils leaving early will only be released by the secretary when an authorised adult arrives to accompany the child from the premises. The adult is required to record the departure in the 'Sign Out' book.*
- *Comprehensive rules for class and playground developed and included in school discipline policy.*
- *Pupils are reminded of playground and class rules by staff regularly.*
- *Pupils are adequately supervised at all times especially during yard time. Two members of the teaching staff supervise the children during yard time.*
- *First Aid Box maintained and kept in:*
  - (a) *Secretary's Office*
  - (b) *On the wall outside Room*
  - (c) *On the wall outside Room*
  - (d) *On the wall outside Room*
  - (e) *On the wall outside Room*
  - (f) *In the Staff Room*
- *Other related policies include; Anti-Bullying Policy, Sexual Harassment Policy, Child Protection Policy, Dignity in the Workplace Policy etc.*

### **Psychological Safety:**

St Mary's J.N.S aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for same.

The following strategies aim to support and ensure the psychological well-being of our pupils:

- *SPHE is an integral part of the school curriculum and addresses issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem-solving and help-seeking skills etc.*
- *The Stay Safe Programme is taught in its entirety in every year group as per guidelines.*
- *Our Discipline Policy has an approach to bullying.*
- *Staff are fully aware of Mental Health Guidelines.*
- *Some members of staff are trained in Incredible Years, Restorative Practice, Fun Friends, Friends for Life and Zippy's Friends.*
- *Staff have completed 'Introduction to Children First' Programme and renew it every 3 years as per guidelines.*
- *Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware of and vigilant to their needs.*
- *Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school child.*
- *Child Protection Policy; Child Safeguarding Statement.*
- *Some children have access to our Nurture Room with the Support Teacher and SNA.*
- *The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onwards referral of students. These include: NEPS, Túsla Child and Family Agency, CAMHS, Ronanstown Garda Station.*

### **Critical Incident Management Team**

St Mary's J.N.S has set up a Critical Incident Management Team in line with best practice and will maintain this team in future. 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 once a year to review and update the plan. Each member of the team has a Ready-to-Go pack with relevant materials to be used in the event of an incident.

### **Roles**

Key roles have been identified and assigned as follows:

- Team Leader: MAURA O'SHEA, Principal.
- Staff Liaison: MAIREAD BYRNE, Deputy Principal.
- Staff Liaison: JEMMA O'BRIEN, Assistant Principal 2.
- Pupil Liaison: SARAH DREW, Assistant Principal 2.
- Pupil Liaison: LAURA KEAVENEY, Support Teacher.
- Parent Liaison: SARAH MCDONALD, Assistant Principal 1.
- Community Liaison: SARAH MCDONALD, Assistant Principal 1.

- Media Liaison: MAURA O'SHEA, Principal.
- Garda Liaison: MAURA O'SHEA, Principal.
- Administration Tasks: MIRIAM KEARNS, School Secretary.

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

#### 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 Skills, I.N.T.O., NEPS/ other relevant agencies.
- ❖ Liaises with the bereaved family.

#### Staff Liaison

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Provides materials to staff from the Ready-to-Go pack.

#### Student Liaison

- ❖ Liaises with other team members to keep them up-dated with information and progress.
- ❖ Alerts staff to vulnerable students.
- ❖ Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet room' where agreed.
- ❖ Provides age-appropriate materials for students from the Ready-to-Go pack.

#### Community Liaison

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
  - Key parents, such as members of the parents' council.
  - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources.

#### Parent Liaison

- ❖ Facilitates 'questions and answers' meetings.
- ❖ Meets with individual parents and maintain a record of parents seen.
- ❖ Sets up room for meeting with parents.
- ❖ Provides materials for parents from the Ready-to-Go pack.

- ❖ Visits the bereaved family with the Team Leader.

### Media Liaison

- ❖ In preparing for the role, she 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.

### Garda Liaison

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

### Administrative Tasks

- ❖ Maintenance of up-to-date lists of contact numbers of:
  - Parents / Guardians.
  - Teachers.
  - Emergency Support Services.
- ❖ Telephone calls needing to be responded to, letters sent, and materials photocopied.

### 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, materials used etc. The School Secretary, MIRIAM KEARNS, will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

### Letter to Parents

St Mary's J.N.S 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 person(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 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 Parents Room, external building, will be the main room used to meet the staff, students, parents, and visitors involved. In the event of a need to accommodate a second group, the Staff Room will be used. In the event of a need to accommodate a larger group, the school assembly hall will be used.

### **Development and Communication of this Policy and Plan**

All staff members were consulted, and their views canvassed in the preparation of the draft 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 presented to all staff.

Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy, and every staff member has a copy in their Child Protection Folder.

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

Critical Incident Policy to be ratified by Board of Management and reviewed yearly and up-dated as required.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 09/03/2010

Reviewed December 2013

Reviewed November 2016

Reviewed November 2022

Signed: Emma Kiernan

Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: 

Principal.

