



LORETO BALBRIGGAN

Policy for Responding to Critical Incidents

Introduction

Loreto Balbriggan is characterised by a Christian spirit of warmth and care, inspired by the values of the Gospel and the inspiration of Mary Ward. In times of crisis these values provide a backdrop for the practical and organised care that is needed to ensure the best outcome possible for all those touched by grief or unexpected trauma.

The purpose of the Critical Incident policy is to:

- Provide detailed procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident occurring at the school
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all staff
- Ensure the safety and wellbeing of students, staff and their families who may have been affected, and provide a pastoral response in accordance with the ethos of Loreto Balbriggan

This Critical Incident Policy has been developed in dialogue with Staff, Students and Parents of Loreto Balbriggan and having consulted the following documents:

- Responding to Critical Incidents - NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools 2016.
- Continuing the Journey – A Loreto Education
- Loreto Balbriggan's Health & Safety Policy
- Loreto Balbriggan's Code of Behaviour

What is a Critical Incident?

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

Examples may include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, permanent injury, violence, terminal illness, suicide or suspected suicide, or other unexpected death
- A life threatening accident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school causing serious injury.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider school community with direct impact on the school
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

In the event of a critical incident Loreto Balbriggan will immediately put in place the management/ planning team of key personnel known as a CIMT.

ROLE	NAME & EMAIL
Team Leader	Ann Marie McDonough, amcdonough@loretobalbriggan.ie
Garda Liaison	Chris Garvey, cgarvey@loretobalbriggan.ie
Staff Liaison	Ray Friel, rfriel@loretobalbriggan.ie Ciara McGuirk, cmcguirk@loretobalbriggan.ie Geraldine Barnett gbarnett@loretobalbriggan.ie

Student Liaison	Mairead McNally, mmcnally@loretobalbriggan.ie Aishling Costigan, acostigan@loretobalbriggan.ie
Parent Liaison	Abina Ferris, aferris@loretobalbriggan.ie Sarah O'Brien, sarahobrien@loretobalbriggan.ie
Community Liaison	Ray Friel, rfriel@loretobalbriggan.ie Geraldine Barnett gbarnett@loretobalbriggan.ie
Media Liaison	Ann Marie McDonough, ammcdonough@loretobalbriggan.ie
Team Administrator	Rachel Gallen, rgallen@loretobalbriggan.ie

Elaine Kinsella and Mary Harford to sit in with the team as and when necessary to help steer the administrative side of things. Year heads will be called into the team as and when appropriate depending on the critical incident that presents.

The following gives a description of the key tasks attached to each of the roles within the CIMT

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; Department of Education & Skills; National Educational Psychological Service; State Examinations Commission; Loreto Trust liaises with the bereaved family.

GARDA LIAISON

- Liaises with the Gardaí

- Ensures that information about 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 (from their critical incident folder)
- 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 Employees Assistance Scheme and gives them the contact number.

STUDENT LIAISON

- Co-ordinate information from form teachers and year heads about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.

COMMUNITY/AGENCY LIAISON

- 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
- 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

- 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 their critical incident folder).

MEDIA 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.)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the SEC, relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

ADMINISTRATOR

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of parents/guardians, teachers, emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response
- Ensures that templates are available on the schools IT system and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts
- Photocopies materials as needed
- Maintains records.

The composition of Loreto Balbriggan's CIMT is as follows:

- Principal
- Deputy Principal(s)
- Chaplain(s)
- Guidance Counsellor(s)
- Assistant Principals (1)
- Pastoral Care Team
- Health and Safety post holder
- TY Co-ordinator
- Office staff

Separate meetings, if deemed necessary, may be held with some of the following

- Chairperson of Parents' Association
- NEPS Psychologists
- A member of An Garda Síochana

Immediate Role of CIMT

In the event of a critical incident the Principal and/or Deputy Principal(s) will contact and convene a meeting of the CIMT: The Principal or in his/her absence one of the Deputy Principals will chair the meeting. The CIMT will put the Critical Incident Management Plan into operation.

The Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP)

The CIMP is put in place to help Loreto Balbriggan's school management and staff react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident. It is designed to help the school cope with a critical incident, to maintain a sense of stability and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to staff and students.

Activating the Plan

The CIMT will do the following:

- Establish accurate facts about what happened, when it happened, how it happened and the number and names of students and/or staff involved; the extent of injuries and location of those injured
- Agree on the facts as known at that time
- Discuss what agencies must be contacted

- Discuss the need to close the school bearing in mind the benefits of maintaining as normal a routine as possible
- Delegate responsibilities within the CIMT and allocate any necessary jobs to be carried out. These might include contacting relevant embassy or consulate if the incident occurred abroad; visiting incident site and/or hospital; arranging for collection of personal belongings; arranging transport; arranging home visits by staff representatives: deciding on rooms for parents, students and/or media to assemble etc. For some or all of the above it may also be necessary to draw on the assistance of staff members who are not part of the CIMT
- Discuss how to break the news to relatives and close friends: who should do this?
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students
- Call a whole staff meeting (including support staff) for a briefing when the above is done
- Prepare a press statement if necessary
- If appropriate call a school assembly and inform the student population as calmly as possible

Communication with Staff

- Discuss with staff what facts will be shared with students
- Decide on the best way to inform students (e.g. school assembly: class by class/ form teachers). Students may need to be informed in an age appropriate manner
- Agree on schedule for the day.
- Establish contact with absent staff and students. Keep staff updated and dispel rumours daily
- Allow any teacher who feels uncomfortable to opt out of playing a direct role.
- Staff should be advised not to talk to the media or to give photographs to the press

NEPS: National Educational Psychological Service

The services of NEPS are very often required in the case of a Critical incident. What follows is a non-exhaustive list of the types of assistance offered.

- Planning – helping management to assess the significance and impact of the event, to draw up a plan, to mobilise the school's resources and access other support systems

- Information and Advice – providing information and advice to management and staff as they come to terms with the situation
- Support – being available for consultation to school staff as they support the students. This may involve support meetings at the beginning and end of the school day
- Screening – working with teachers to identify students who are most in need of support and developing procedures for reviewing their needs and for referral to external agencies if necessary

Communication with Parents

The CIMT will decide if it is necessary to convene a meeting of parents in order to show support and to disseminate information. The psychologist may attend this meeting to outline the role of NEPS, answer questions and advise how parents can best support their children.

NOTE: Parents not directly affected by the incident, should be advised not to allow their children to be interviewed by the media or to provide photographs or any memorabilia pertaining to deceased staff or students.

Communication with Students

The overriding principle is the need to promote the safety and well-being of students and to prevent further distress. A very distressed student may need individual support. Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what happened and temporarily shelve all academic activities if necessary.

- In times of tragedy, young people need support from adults who know them best.
- The CIMT and the teaching staff (and form teachers in particular) will be in a position to identify vulnerable students) will be best placed to recognize distressed students.
- Partnership with parents is also important in this regard.

Routine for students is very important in times of tragedy. In the hours, days and weeks following an incident, normal routine should be maintained. In a classroom environment reassure the students that it is okay to be upset.

Funerals and Memorial Services following a Critical Incident

The CIMT should

- Designate a suitable staff member to liaise with the family to extend sympathy
- Clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in the funeral
- Decide on who will attend the funeral to represent the school
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths
- The wishes of the families must always be respected (when reasonable and appropriate)

The Media

- If an incident attracts a lot of publicity, local, national or international, the CIMT will decide who will deal with the media. It is recommended that this be done by the School Principal and/or Chairperson of the BoM. Teachers and students should be advised against talking to the media and/or providing photographs or memorabilia of the deceased or injured. The school's social media sites will be temporarily suspended to avoid the downloading of sensitive material pertinent to the Critical Incident.

Offers of Help following a Critical incident

Schools may at times be overwhelmed by many offers of help from individuals and agencies especially when a major incident occurs. The CIMT should co-ordinate offers with the co-operation of NEPS. In the event of a major incident, one dedicated phone line will be opened. All phone calls will be logged and all offers of help from individuals and agencies noted. Over supportive, well-meaning or "interfering" personnel, be they parents, or outside agencies should be discouraged from hijacking the CIMP.

Follow-up

It is essential to return to normal school activity as soon as possible. Students should be reassured that returning to normal school activities is not disrespectful. However, this should not adversely affect the follow up work which may need to be carried out in the weeks, months, years, following a critical incident. This should be done in co-operation with NEPs. The goal of a follow-up is to help the school community cope with the impact of the event in the longer term and to monitor those individuals with ongoing difficulties

- After an incident there will be “normal” distress often lasting several weeks or even months
- Students who show ongoing signs of distress may need to be referred for further professional care with outside agencies
- The CIMT will discuss the return to school of the bereaved students
- In the long term the school may need to consider what to do by way of a memorial.
- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in staff/students
- There is a need to be aware of the impact of calendar dates like birthdays, Mother’s/Father’s day etc.

Review and Evaluation

The Loreto Balbriggan Critical Incident Policy is subject to ongoing review. The CIMT will meet annually to reassess the policy in light of changes in DES guidelines and also to consider its provisions against a backdrop of the school’s ethos.

In the aftermath of a Critical Incident a review is essential and should consider the following questions: -

1. What worked? What did not work?
2. What has the school learned?
3. Were there unforeseen issues?
4. What could be done differently?

Signed 

Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed 

Principal/Secretary to the Board of Management

This policy was ratified by the Board on 8th April 2019.