ANNAGH NATIONAL SCHOOL

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Annagh NS Whole School Critical Incidents Policy

Introductory Statement:
At Annagh N.S., we are dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of our pupils and staff by fostering a safe, tolerant, and caring environment. This policy supports the school community in managing crisis situations to ensure this goal is achieved in the event of a critical incident within our learning community.

Rationale:

The Board of Management, in consultation with the principal, staff, and Parent Community, has developed a critical incident plan. A Critical Incidents Management Team has been formed to oversee the plan's development and implementation.

Definition of a Critical Incident:

Annagh NS staff and management define a critical incident as an event or series of events that overwhelms the school's usual coping mechanisms. Critical incidents may involve one or more students, staff members, or members of the local community. Types of incidents may include:
• The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide, or other unexpected death;
• An intrusion into the school;
• An accident involving members of the school community;
• An accident or tragedy in the wider community;
• Serious damage to the school building caused by fire, flood, or vandalism;
• The disappearance of a member of the school community.
• A weapon or dangerous item being brought onto the school premises by a pupil either knowingly or unknowingly.

Aims:

• To develop a plan that enables school management and staff to respond swiftly and effectively, maintaining a sense of control during an incident, and ensuring that appropriate support is provided to students and staff.
• To minimise impacts.
• To restore normality as quickly as possible.
• To foster a supportive and caring ethos within the school.
• To establish systems that help build resilience in both staff and students, ensuring both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Key Principles:
The National Education Psychologist Service (NEPS), in Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines (pg. 19), has outlined suitable responses to different levels of critical incidents as follows:

• **Response Level 1**: the death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; the death of a parent or sibling; a fire at the school not resulting in serious injury; serious damage to school property; the discovery of a weapon or other dangerous item on the premises brought in by a pupil that could cause serious harm or injury to the pupil or others.
• **Response Level 2**: the sudden death of a student or staff member
• **Response Level 3**: an accident or event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving a number of schools.

Overarching Framework
The NEPS Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resource Materials (2016) publication provides a framework for primary schools to handle critical incidents. Annagh NS is already implementing a whole-school approach to well-being as outlined in our School Self-Evaluation document for 2025/2026. Annagh NS intends to update our school policy to incorporate all our initiatives in this domain. Annagh National School's Critical Incident Policy is crafted to align our practices with NEPS training, Responding to Critical Incidents.

What action do I take?
• For an incident requiring a Level 1 response, it may be sufficient to talk to the psychologist on the phone. If you find a weapon or dangerous item, contact the Gardaí and refer to Tusla if there is a child welfare concern.
• In the case of an incident requiring a Level 2 & Level 3 response, make contact with NEPS.
Depending on the incident, at least one psychologist will visit the school.

Physical safety, **e.g. (see Health & Safety policy)**
• Evacuation plan formulated,
• Regular fire drills occur,
• Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked and
• Rules of the playground are established and maintained (see Code of Positive Behaviour).
• In the event of discovering a weapon or harmful object on the school premises:
- secure the object,
-remove it and keep it safe,
-contact the parents and the Gardaí if necessary.

Psychological safety
The management and staff of Annagh NS aim to use available programmes and resources to support the personal and social development of students, enhance a sense of safety and security in the school, and provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

• Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the school's work. It is covered in the curriculum through resources such as Bí Folláin, Bí Cineálta, Stay Safe, Walk Tall, and others, which collectively address issues like grief and loss,

communication skills, stress and anger management, resilience, conflict resolution, problem solving, help-seeking, bullying, decision making, and preventing alcohol and drug misuse. Promoting mental health is a core aspect of this programme. • Staff members receive training relevant to their roles in delivering the SPHE curriculum.
• Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and know how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
• The school has established links with various external agencies, such as NEPS, HSE, and Túsla.
• The school maintains a clear Bí Cineálta policy and addresses bullying in accordance with this policy.
• Pupils with emotional difficulties are supported by our SET, following the new guidelines (Circular 64/2024). The SET works in collaboration with the principal and class teacher. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, referrals are made to relevant agencies.
• Staff can access support for themselves via the Employee Assistance Service (0818327327).

Critical Incidents Management Team (CIMT):
A CIMT is established according to best practice. Members are selected voluntarily and will serve for at least one school year. The team will meet annually in September to review and update the policy and plan. Each member will have a copy of the critical incident policy and access to relevant resources.

Team Leader: Caroline O'Dea (principal)
Deputy Team Leader: Ann Marie Doyle (deputy principal)
Media, Communications and Garda Liaison: Caroline O'Dea
Staff Liaison: Caroline O Dea / Ann Marie Doyle
Family Liaison: Deirdre Flanagan/ Áine McMahon/Noel Kelly
Student Liaison: Ann Marie Doyle/ Áine McMahon/Noel Kelly
Pastoral Care: Fr. Donagh O Meara
B.O.M. Rep: Mrs Mary Killeen (Chairperson of BoM)
Community/Agency liaison: Caroline O'Dea / Ann Marie Doyle

Roles and Responsibilities:
Team Leader
• Alerts the CIMT team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting;
• Co-ordinates the tasks of the team;
• Liaises with the Board of Management, DES and NEPS;
• Liaises with the bereaved family;
• Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff.

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 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 EAS (Employee Assistance Service) and gives them the contact number.

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

Student Liaison
• Alerts other staff to vulnerable students;
• Provides materials for students, as appropriate;
• Looks after setting up and supervision of a 'quiet' space.

Community/Agency Liaison
• Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
• Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
• Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

Family Liaison
• Visits the bereaved family with the team leader;
• Arranges parent meetings, if held;
• May facilitate such meetings and manage 'questions and answers';
• Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy;
• Ensures that sample letters are typed up on the school's system and 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 relevant teacher unions etc.;
• Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management) or delegate this task to another responsible party.

Administrator (Nessa Sexton, Secretary)
• Maintains up-to-date lists of contact numbers of;
- Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources,
- Parents or guardians,
- Teachers
- Emergency services;
• Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support;
• Reminds agency staff to wear name badges;
• Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to;
• Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation;
• Prepares and sends out Aladdin notifications, letters or emails
• Photocopies materials needed;
• Maintains records.

Pastoral Care

- One-to-one meetings with individuals,
- Informing parents,
- Pastoral advice and
- Visiting families affected.

Record keeping (Everyone)

- In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, communication sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used and materials used.
- The CIMT will collate all records after the event and these will be stored in the principal's office, in a secure locked cabinet.
- Templates of letters are on file and ready to be sent following an incident.

Confidentiality and Good-Name Considerations:

The management and staff of Annagh NS 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 seek to ensure that students do so as well. For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is solid 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:

The SEN room will be the main room for meeting staff and hosting other visitors. An empty classroom will be the main room used for meetings with students. The hall will be the main room for meetings with parents (depending on the size of the meeting) and for the media. The office will be the main room used for individual sessions with students.

Consultation and Communication Regarding the Plan:

All staff members were consulted, and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan.
Our school's final policy and plan for responding to critical incidents are reviewed annually.
Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the plan details at induction.

Timetable for Review:

The plan will be reviewed as needed and amended as required after the Critical Incident Management Team meets to review the policy.

Ratification:

The policy was originally ratified in 2015, reviewed in 2019, 2024, and 2026
This revised policy was ratified by the Board of Management on the 30/09/26

Signed__Mrs Mary Killeen_____Date__30/09/26_____
(Chairperson BoM)

Signed_Caroline Tubridy O'Dea_____ Date___30/09/26_____
(Principal)

Appendix A - Action Plan
The key resources available to the school referred to in the Action Plan are:
Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools
https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-ServiceNEPS-/neps_critical_incidents_guidelines_schools.pdf

Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Materials for Schools
https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-ServiceNEPS-/neps_critical_incidents_resource_material_schools.pdf

Short Term Actions – Day 1

Task	**Resources**	**Name**
Gather accurate information	Guidelines for Schools, p. 20	C. O Dea
Who, what, when, where?	Guidelines for Schools, p. 20	C. O Dea
Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly	Guidelines for Schools, pp. 20, 21 and 22	C. O'Dea
Contact external agencies, Including chairperson	See Emergency Contact List	C O'Dea
Arrange supervision for students		A.M. Doyle
Hold a staff meeting and distribute relevant literature	Resource Materials for Schools: R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R19	A.M. Doyle
Agree schedule for the day	All staff	All staff
Inform students – (close friends and Students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)		Class teachers & SEN teacher
Compile a list of vulnerable students	Resource Materials for Schools, R.16	Class teacher/ SET
Contact / visit the bereaved family	Guidelines for Schools, p. 26	C O'Dea / D Flanagan
Prepare and agree media	Guidelines for Schools, p.	BOM, C O'Dea

statement and deal with the media	43 Resource Materials for Schools: R6	
Inform parents		D. Flanagan/ A McMahon
End-of-day staff briefing (remind members of the team to record events)		C O'Dea/ A.M. Doyle
Send a letter of consent to parents regarding NEPS	Resource materials for Schools: p.43, R2, R3, R4, R5	C.O Dea / N Sexton

Summary Checklist for Principals: Day 1

1. Gather the facts – what has happened, when, how, where and who is injured or dead.
2. Is it an incident requiring a NEPS Response at Level 1, 2 or 3?
3. Who do I need to call (Emergency Contact List)
4. Meet with the Critical Incident Management Team.
5. Meet with other agencies, if involved, to agree on roles and procedures.
6. Photocopy appropriate literature.
7. Arrange for the supervision of students.
8. Address the staff meeting.
9. Identify vulnerable students.
10. Inform students.
11. Draft a media statement (see R6).
12. Prepare for a media interview (see Section 9).
13. Draft a letter to parents (see R2, R4 and R5).
14. Meet with the CIMT to review the day and arrange a meeting for the following morning.
15. Meet with the staff group.
16. Make contact with the affected family/families.

Medium-term Actions (Day 2 and following days)

Task	**Resource**	**Name**
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Guidelines for Schools, p. 27	C O'Dea
Meet external agencies	Vivienne, Louise (or designee)	C O'Dea
Meet whole staff	Matt	A.M. Doyle
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	Resource Materials for Schools, R14	C O'Dea/ D Flanagan
Visit the injured		C O'Dea / A M Doyle
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements		D. Flanagan / A McMahon
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service		C O'Dea

Make decisions about school closure		BOM / C O'Dea

Follow–up (beyond 72 hours)

Task	Resource	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress		Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals		A McMahon
Plan for the return of bereaved student(s)	Resource Materials for Schools, R13	Class teachers
Plan for giving a 'memory box' to bereaved family		CIMT Team
Decide on memorials and anniversaries		BOM, staff, parents & students
Review response to the incident and amend plan		Staff/BOM
Resources for children	Resource Materials for Schools, p. 43-50	Class teacher