

# Mount Temple Critical Incident Management Policy



Reviewed between October 2022 and January 2023 - Updated June 2023

## 1. Introduction

Mount Temple's ethos states that:

*All of us are different, all of us are equal.*

*We respect this diversity. We work to create an environment in the school where all members of the school community feel safe and protected, and enjoy learning, teaching, working and extra-curricular activities. We expect tolerance, politeness, courtesy, co-operation and respect for others and their property.*

Mount Temple recognises that traumatic events – such as suicide or the death of a student, staff member or parent – can have a major effect on the school community. A tragedy outside the school community may also affect school life and incidents not involving death may have considerable impact.

### Definition of a Critical Incident

The staff and management of Mount Temple recognise a critical incident to be “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school”. Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. Types of incidents might 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/tragedy in the wider community*
- *Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.*
- *The disappearance of a member of the school community*

This policy provides a framework for dealing with any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school. It is based on the values set out above and aims to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Mount Temple has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students during the normal course of the school day and in the event of a critical incident e.g. Health and Safety Policy, Anti Bullying Policy, Code of Behaviour, Child Protection, etc.

## **2. Critical Incident Management Response Team**

The Response Team is a core group that will provide direction, guidance, containment and support when a critical incident occurs. The response team is assembled by the Principal with members selected on a voluntary basis. Roles are retained for at least one school year. Members may include the Principal, Deputy Principals, Chaplain, Guidance Counsellors, Dean of Students, Year Heads, Form Teachers, SNAs and other staff or members of the school community as appropriate. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan.

## **3. Incident Prevention and Management**

Guidelines for identifying and assisting students at risk and for responding to and managing critical incidents are set out in the **Appendix**. However, an overall approach is already followed in the school community. The core values of the school – as outlined in the mission and vision statement above and articulated in the Learning Policy – mean that Mount Temple strives to be a supportive, respectful, caring place for all.

The following, while not exhaustive, are key elements in a school-based approach to prevention and management of critical incidents.

- Pastoral care of at-risk students, through the student support team. The care system in place in the school uses the NEPS "Continuum of Support" approach.<sup>1</sup>
- Provision of counselling and psychological support, both within the school and through outside referral.
- The deepening of religious faith and other beliefs and value systems and the appreciation of the meaning of life, especially through religious education classes, assemblies and acts of worship.
- The promotion and development of positive personal and mental health, especially in SPHE classes by addressing issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Online materials on difficulties affecting the primary/post primary school student are available
- Adherence to the school's Health and Safety Policy.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.
- In-service training provision for staff.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and some are trained in interventions for suicidal students.

<sup>1</sup> NEPS available at:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-File-Guidelines.pdf> Also Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools 2014 available at: [https://www.education.ie/en/ScSee DES CSee DES Circular 0023/2010 \(Post-Primary\) ircular 0023/2010 \(Post-Primary\) hools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-Teams-i n-Post-Primary-Schools.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/ScSee%20DES%20Circular%200023/2010%20(Post-Primary)%20Circular%200023/2010%20(Post-Primary)%20Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-Teams-in-Post-Primary-Schools.pdf)

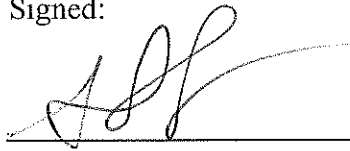
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies – D.N.E.D.A.T.F, Mater, CAMHS, NEPS, Jigsaw, Pieta House.
- Other initiatives, such as Rainbows, dealing with support for those suffering bereavement and loss.
- Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the providers.<sup>2</sup>
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- All School Trips are carried out in accordance with the Trip policy.

#### 4. Policy Evaluation

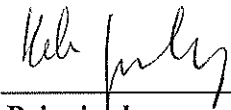
This policy should be reviewed regularly and following a critical

incident. Date of next review: 2025

Signed:

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**Chairperson**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**Principal**

21/6/23  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

<sup>2</sup> DES Circular 0023/2010 (Post-Primary) available at:  
<https://sphe.ie/downloads/Circulars/DES%20CIRCULAR-0023%20APRIL%202010.pdf> 3

# Appendices

## **APPENDIX I Critical Incident Management Guidelines**

### **1. Prevention**

#### **1.1 Identifying students at risk**

Every member of staff can contribute to identifying students at risk. As they are in daily contact with the students, teachers are best placed to observe potential warning signs of suicidal or self-harming behaviour. In outlining the following signs, it is important to remember that no one factor can offer conclusive evidence, but may be indicative of a student in need.

- Significant change in behaviour, particularly if the student becomes withdrawn
- A fall-off in school performance
- Substance and alcohol abuse
- Episodes of anxiety and depression
- Withdrawal from favourite activities
- Risk-taking or aggressive behaviour evident in the classroom context
- Recent loss or break-up of a close relationship
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness, hopelessness or loss of self-esteem - these may be manifest in the written or art work of the student
- Unusual neglect of personal appearance and hygiene
- Preoccupation with or statements about suicide
- Change from depression to sudden elation and no longer preoccupied with suicide

#### **1.2 Referral of student at risk of suicide**

Initially, the student will be referred promptly by a staff member to the Guidance Counsellors or Principal. Other staff may also initiate or support referral. In some instances, students may refer themselves directly to the Principal or Guidance Counsellors.

Following initial referral, contact will be made with a parent or guardian, GP, mental health service, social worker, child psychologist/counsellor and NEPS psychologist as appropriate. A fast-track approach must be used through the referral process.

Students may be referred for professional help outside the school and parental liaison with the school, through the Year Head and Guidance Counsellors, Deputy Principals and Principal is highly desirable.

### **2. Response and Management**

After a tragedy or critical incident, the following guidelines should be followed.

#### **2.1 Team Leader - Principal**

- Confirm death or incident has occurred – establish and verify the facts
- Mobilise the Response Team, convene a meeting, consider appropriate responses and co-ordinate tasks of the team.
- Liaise with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC; ACCS and external

agencies.

- Liaise with the bereaved family, express sympathy and assure them of the school's support.
- Coordinates the involvement of external agencies.

#### **Garda liaison: Principal**

- Liaise with the Gardaí
- Verify accuracy of information about deaths or other developments before it is shared.

#### **Staff liaison: Principal**

- Brief staff generally on facts as known, provide opportunity for staff to express their feelings and ask questions, outline the plan of action for the day.
  - Meet with key staff who can offer student support and decide the format for this
  - Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually to give support eg recently bereaved members of staff or those who have had experience of suicide or sudden death in their family
  - Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
  - Provides materials for staff.
  - Keeps staff updated as the day progresses.
  - Advises staff of the availability of the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) and provides the contact number.
  - Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
  - Ensures that sample letters are typed up, and are shared with other members of the critical incident team via the shared digital critical incident folder.
- school's system ready for adaptation.

#### **Media liaison: Principal**

- 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 prepare a press statement if appropriate, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise with the family of the bereaved and in circumstances where it is deemed appropriate, and with the consent of the family, will prepare a statement for social media to inform the past pupils of the school (i.e. Facebook - past pupils group).

#### **Exceptional Closure Request: Principal/Chairperson of the Board of Management**

- In the event of an incident where it is deemed appropriate by the Board of Management to seek permission from the Department of Education for an "exceptional closure" of the school. An email shall be sent from the Chairperson of the Board of Management to [schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie](mailto:schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie).
- Where a closure has been sanctioned staff, students and parents will be informed of the details via email and via the school app/website.

**2.2 Student liaison:** Student Support Team: May coordinate 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 the shared digital critical incident folder)
- Maintains student contact records.
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' rooms where required.

**2.3 Parent liaison: Chaplain**

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents.
- In the event of an incident, communication to the wider parental body will occur in a timely manner. All communication will be agreed by the Principal and will be organised to be sent at a specified scheduled time from the individual Year Heads parent/guardians mailing lists.
- Where appropriate, follow-up communication may be sent via email and/or via the school app.

**2.4 Community/agency liaison: Secretarial Staff**

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
  - Key parents, such as members of the Parents Council
  - Previous staff and staff on leave of absence
  - 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
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies
- Where appropriate, make contact with previous staff and staff on leave of absence to inform them of the incident.

**Administrator: Secretarial Staff**

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of parents or guardians ,teachers and emergency services
- 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 letters, emails and texts
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

## **2.5 Overall Response Team**

- Meet to consider appropriate response
- Prepare a short statement for classes, including a short prayer/reflection if appropriate
- Decide a strategy for communicating and for supporting those who are to deliver the message
- Designate a room(s) for distressed students to meet with the Student Support Team.
- Help to identify vulnerable students and how onward referrals are made
- Assist in drafting an appropriate letter to parents regarding the death or incident and deciding school arrangements
- Consider school involvement in the funeral, respecting family wishes eg guard of honour, readers, prayers
- Liaise with HSE personnel and NEPS psychologist if desired
- At time of inquest, anniversary or significant dates, recognise the support needs of the family and school friends eg arrange family visit a few days prior

## **2.6 Teaching Staff**

- Read announcement from the Response Team, using the deceased person's name
- Acknowledge the deceased in class. Have a moment's silence or say a short prayer.
- Do not speculate about the death with students. Give honest answers. All questions put by students should be acknowledged.
- The topic of suicide may arise and should be addressed, but teachers must keep the focus on suicide in general and not on the death of the specific person. Do not get drawn into arguments with anyone who believes suicide 'is a brave and noble act'. Focus on the loss and pain of those left behind. Discuss normal grief reactions and what students might expect over the following days. Reassure students that anger, guilt, and tears are all part of a normal response.
- Be alert to any mention of copycat tendencies or mention of similar incidents from the recent past and bring such matters to the attention of the Student Support Team.
- Encourage students to be supportive of each other
- Teachers should feel free to express their own feelings, as professionally appropriate.
- Advise students of teachers who are available to help them deal with their fears and worries
- Identify and notify the Response Team of vulnerable students or students who are distressed. These students may need individual support
- Parents or guardians of distressed students should be contacted and advised of the situation before the end of the school day

## **2.7 Special Needs Assistants**

SNAs have a strong, decisive role to play in crisis intervention and may be the closest staff to a student. SNA members of the response team, and other SNAs, will be an integral part of the response, and will be supported in this role.

## **2.8 Other Staff**

Administrative, caretaking and canteen staff also have a crucial role to play in any post-crisis intervention. They will be informed by the Principal or Response Team of the facts of an incident and the messages to students, parents and others in the school community. Appropriate support will also be provided.

## **2.9 State Examinations**

If a critical incident occurs during state examinations, the school will mobilise the Response Team and give support to students as in term time, where practicable.

## **2.10 Outside School Term**

If a critical incident occurs during a holiday period, the school will, if judged appropriate by the Principal or Deputy Principals, contact Response Team members and carry out the following.

- (i) Verify the facts.
- (ii) Express sympathy to family and assure them of the support of the school.
- (iii) Prepare a statement for the media if appropriate.
- (iv) Try and arrange for key members of staff to attend the funeral.
- (v) Consider the involvement of mentors or other students as appropriate e.g. readings, prayers, guard of honour.
- (vi) Prepare a plan for the support of vulnerable students on return to school.

## **Record Keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc.

The school secretarial staff will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

## **Confidentiality and good name considerations**

Management and staff of Mount Temple Comprehensive have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of public statements. Members of school staff will bear this in mind, and seek to ensure that students do so also, e.g. 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.



## APPENDIX 2

<b>Critical Incident Rooms</b> In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms are designated for the indicated purposes	
<b>Room Name:</b>	<b>Designated Purpose:</b>
<i>Staff Room</i>	Main room for meeting staff
<i>Classrooms, Temple Hall Counselling Rooms</i>	Meetings with students
<i>YH Room Staff quiet Area Library</i>	Meetings with parents
<i>Principal's Office</i>	Meetings with media
<i>Counselling</i>	Individual sessions with students
<i>rooms Library</i>	Meetings with other visitors

**APPENDIX III**

<b>Critical Incident Management Team</b>	
<b>Role</b>	<b>Name Phone</b>
<b>Team leader:</b>	<i>Helen Gormley</i>
<b>Deputy Team Leaders</b>	<i>Mary Byrne Gareth Borland</i>
<b>Garda liaison</b>	<i>Helen Gormley</i>
<b>Staff liaison</b>	<i>Helen Gormley</i>
<b>Student liaison</b>	<i>Suzanne Rock, Philip McGovern, Jennifer Lenihan</i>
<b>Parent liaison</b>	<i>The School Chaplain And Jeff Murray</i>
<b>Media liaison</b>	<i>Helen Gormley</i>
<b>Administrator &amp; Community Liaison</b>	<i>School Secretarial Staff</i>

## APPENDIX IV - Plan of action

### Short term actions – Day 1

<b>Task</b>	<b>Name</b>
Gather accurate information	
Who, what, when, where?	
Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly	
Contact external agencies	
Arrange supervision for students	
Hold staff meeting	
Agree schedule for the day	
Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)  Compile a list of vulnerable students  Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	
Inform parents via the individual year heads mailing list	
Hold end of day staff briefing	

## Medium term actions - (Day 2 and following days)

Task	Name
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Team leader
Meet external agencies	
Meet whole staff	
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	
Visit the injured	
Liaise with the bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements. Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	
Make decisions about school closure	BOM

## Follow-up – beyond 72 hours

Task Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)
Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family
Decide on memorials and anniversaries BOM/Staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan Staff/BOM

# APPENDIX V

## EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

AGENCY	CONTACT NUMBERS
Garda	Clontarf 01 8664800 Head office 01 8660000
Hospital	Beaumont 01 8093000 Temple St 01 8704200
Fire Brigade	01 2224000
Local GPs	
HSE	Ballymun 8467000 Summerhill 01 9211500
Community Care Team	Summerhill Tel: 01 921 1500
Child and Family Centre	Ballymun Joy McGlynn 01 8467129
Child and Family Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	North Inner City 01 879 6800 Dundale (01) 8771552 Ballymun 01 846 7219
School Inspector	
NEPS Psychologist	Dublin Region 0761 108673
DES	Damage to schools Deirdre Bane 057 9324442 Evelyn Lynam 057 9324348
Board of Management	Rev Anne Lodge
Clergy	Rev. Lorraine Ritchie Rev. Lesley Robinson

State Exams Commission	0906442700
Reasonable Accommodation	090 6442782
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057
Parents' Association Audrey Cepeda	

Dublin North East Drugs and Alcohol Task Force	8465070
Jigsaw	8465070

Pieta House (Santry)	8831000
Pieta House (Collins Ave)	8840532
ASTI	6040160

TUI	1850 453545
School Governance	schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie
ACCS	01-460-1150
NEPS : Rhona Larney	0872110817

## Review and Research

The CIMT have consulted resource documents available to schools on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie) including:

- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group, (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH, HSE 2015)

## APPENDIX VI – Evacuation Procedure



On hearing the fire alarm the following must be procedure must be followed:

### Students

- Do not panic
- Place bags etc on desks to keep the floor clear.
- Exit the room through the designated fire route, this may be at the back of the classroom.
- Proceed to the Assembly Point, walking quietly in single file and in an orderly manner.
- On arrival at the Assembly Point line up in your form group alphabetically, facing away from the school building.
- If you notice that anyone is missing inform your tutor straight away.
- Keep quiet so that you can hear the roll call and any announcements.
- Do not re-enter the school building until you have been told to do so.
- Make your way back to class using the quickest possible route.

### Staff

- Instruct students to pick up their bags and place them on top of their desks.
- Instruct students to move out of the room using the fire exit and to follow the fire evacuation route.
- Check the room is vacant and close windows and doors, DO NOT LOCK DOOR
- Monitor students on their way out to the Fire Assembly Point
- If you are a Form Tutor register with Pamela and collect your class roll sheet from the office staff.
- Complete and return the roll sheet to the office staff.
- Inform the Principal or Deputy Principals if any student is missing.
- If you are not a Form Tutor, register with Pamela and help to ensure that students are co-operative and that they are standing in lines.
- If you are not teaching the lesson during the Fire alarm, help to keep order when students and staff are instructed to return to class by remaining outside with students while those teaching return to their classroom.



## **APPENDIX VI – Lockdown Procedure**

In the event of an intruder entering the school, it is the responsibility of the member of staff who encounters the intruder to contact a member of the Critical Incident team by phone. The following lock down procedure will be implemented:

- i. A member of the Critical Incident Team will alert the school community of a 'lock down' incident by using the intercom system. The code 'Plan B' will be repeated three times.
- ii. A text message 'Plan B' will be sent (group text on Vsware) to all staff members.
- iii. Teachers will lock their classroom doors, switch off the lights and ensure students are not in front of windows and are behaving in a calm and quiet manner.
- iv. Teachers do not open their classroom doors until the All Clear has been given.
- v. Teachers not in classrooms e.g on pitches will go as quickly as possible to the changing rooms and lock the doors.
- vi. At the end of the lockdown incident a member of the Critical Incident Team will signal the environment is safe by intercom or a text message.
- vii. All staff and students will then assemble on the grass pitch for roll call.

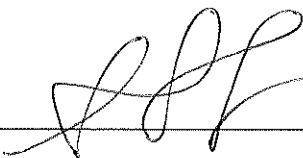


## Consultation and communication regarding the plan

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.

Reviewed and approved by the Board of Management of Mount Temple School.



Rev. Prof. Anne Lodge                      Date  
Chairperson of Board of Management

Mrs Helen Gormley Date  
Principal, Mount Temple.

