



Critical Incident Policy

2024

School Name:	Greenhills Community College
School Address:	Limekiln Avenue, Walkinstown, Dublin 12.
School Details:	Greenhills Community College is an all boy's Secondary School under the Trusteeship of the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB).
School Management:	The Board of Management of Greenhills Community College is a statutory Board appointed pursuant to the provisions of the DDLETB.

Mission Statement

Greenhills Community College endeavours to be a caring community seeking to stimulate and foster the physical, intellectual, moral, emotional and spiritual growth of our students. Our aim is to develop each of our students as a whole person by promoting an atmosphere of respect, honesty and fairness in which all the school community can achieve their full potential.

Note:

This policy document is divided into 3 parts:

1. Critical Incident Policy
2. Procedures in the event of a Critical Incident
3. Appendices

Part 1 – Critical Incident Policy

Introduction

Greenhills Community College aims to protect the wellbeing of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. In accordance with our Mission Statement “we work together to create a positive and affirming teaching and learning environment in which our pupils are encouraged to reach their full potential in all aspects of their lives. An awareness of the needs of everyone in our community is recognised and respected.”

Accordingly, the school has 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.

In the event of a Critical incident the following Critical Incident Management policy is in place.

Aim

The aim of the Critical Incident Management policy is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of critical incident, to enable us to maintain good management and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having this policy in place will help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited and effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Scope

This policy applies to all students and staff in the school. While the procedures outlined focus primarily on the care and support of students, these procedures can be easily adapted to be used in the event of a Critical Incident involving a member of staff.

Definition of Critical Incident

Greenhills Community College recognises a Critical Incident to be “a traumatic incident or sequence of events that severely challenges the normal coping mechanisms of the school, and disrupts the normal running of the school”.

Critical incidents may involve students, staff, the school or the local community.

Examples of a critical incident may include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- The death of a member of the school community, through sudden death, accident, violence, suicide or suspected suicide
- A serious accident involving members of the school community
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding, vandalism etc.
- Bomb Scare
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- A fatal or near-fatal physical attack on a student or staff member

Creation of a Supportive and Caring Ethos in the School

Systems are in place to help to build resilience in both staff and students, 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

To ensure the physical safety of all who attend and visit the school a number of systems are in place which are detailed in our Health and Safety policy. These include:

- Formulation of an Evacuation plan
- Regular fire drills
- Fire exits and extinguishers regularly checked
- Corridor and door duty
- A number of staff trained in First Aid
- CCTV

Psychological safety

The school aims 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.

Examples include:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is 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; 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 have access to training for their role in SPHE
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and some are trained in interventions for suicidal students

- The school has developed links with a range of external support agencies
- 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.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- There is an effective Student Care programme in place in the school
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. Counsellor), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. Each member of the team has a dedicated Critical Incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident. For this year, the school's Care Team will be the CIMT.

The Critical Incident Management Team consists of the following personnel:

- The Principal: Ms Noirin Lannon
- The Deputy Principal: Ms Geraldine Leahy
- The School Guidance Counsellor(s): Caroline Golden Brady & Catriona Rodgers
- The DDLETB Psychological Support Services
- The Home School Community Liaison : Katie Galvin
- The School Policy Co-ordinator (Administrative Role): Ms Noirin Lannon & Ms Geraldine Leahy
- Other personnel relevant to the management of the incident
Year Heads: Maria Donoghue & Tadhg Farrelly

Tutors: Sophie Whelan, Damien Lee, Samantha Finn, Siobhra O'Brien, Neil Browne, Iona Brady, Cian Dunne, Louise Scully, Claire Kelly, Nina Noble.

- AEN Department: Ciaran Stone (SEN Coordinator), Josephine Healy, Bernie Healy, Damien Lee, Iona Brady, Louise Scully, Sophie Whelan, Samantha Finn, Nina Noble, Pauline Fagan, Cian Dunne

Should a critical incident occur, the Principal/Deputy Principal will act as Team Leader and members of the CIMT will be assigned various roles and responsibilities in accordance with their training and expertise.

Should a member of the team feel they are not in a position to fulfil their role they have a professional obligation to absent themselves from the team at the time.

Outlined below are some of the key responsibilities of members of the CIMT should a Critical Incident occur. These responsibilities are grouped under the headings of specific roles but may be carried out by one or more members of the CIMT as designated by the Principal/Deputy Principal.

Team leader: Ms Noirin Lannon/ Ms Geraldine Leahy

- Alerts the team members to the critical incident and convenes a meeting.
- Coordinates the tasks of the team.
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DDLETB; Psychological Support Service.
- Liaises with the Gardaí.
- Ensures that information to be shared is factual and accurate.
- Leads briefing meetings for staff and outlines the routine for the day.
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses.
- Media liaison, if required.

Staff Liaison: Ms Noirin Lannon/ Ms Geraldine Leahy

- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students.
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder).
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Advises staff of the availability of the EAS and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison personnel: Mr Ciaran Stone & Mr Tadhg Farrelly

- Co-ordinate information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about.
- Alert other staff to vulnerable students.
- Provide materials for students (from their critical incident folder).
- Keep records of students seen by external agency staff.
- Look after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed.

Community/Agency Liaison: Ms Noirin Lannon/ Ms Geraldine Leahy

- 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 Liaison: HSCL

- Visits the bereaved family.
- Arranges parent meetings.
- Sets up room for meetings with parents.
- Maintains a record of parents seen.
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder).

Administration: Ms Noirin Lannon/ Ms Geraldine Leahy

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers.
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation.

- Prepares draft letters, emails.
- Assists in organisational arrangements.

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

The school accepts its 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 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' will not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

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.

Consultation and Communication of the Policy

Staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

Each member of the CIMT will keep a hard copy of the policy at home and in their office. The policy is accessible to all staff in the Policy Folder on the shared drive. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan.

All members of the CIMT and the Teacher in Charge (in the absence of both the Principal and Deputy Principal) will ensure they have the contact details of the school caretakers and all members of the CIMT.

This policy will be updated annually by the CIMT and the Guidance and Counselling departments.

Critical Incident Rooms

In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms are designated for the indicated purposes

Room Name:	Designated Purpose:
<i>Staff Rooms</i>	Main room for meeting staff
<i>Room 7</i>	Meetings with students
<i>Board Room</i>	Meetings with parents
<i>Board Room, Junior School</i>	Meetings with media
<i>HSCL Office</i> <i>Year Heads Office</i>	Individual sessions with students
<i>Board Room, Junior School</i>	Meetings with other visitors

Critical Incident Management Team

Role	Name	Phone
Team leader:	<i>Noirin Lannon</i>	
Garda liaison	<i>Noirin Lannon</i>	
Staff liaison	<i>Geraldine Leahy</i>	
Student liaison	<i>Ciaran Stone, Tadhg Farrelly</i>	
Community liaison	<i>HSCL</i>	
Parent liaison	<i>HSCL</i>	
Media liaison	<i>Noirin Lannon</i>	
Administrator	<i>Noirin Lannon & Geraldine Leahy</i>	

Part 2 - Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident:

Short term actions – Day 1

Task	Name
Gather accurate information	<i>Noirin Lannon & Geraldine Leahy</i>
Who, what, when, where?	<i>Noirin Lannon & Geraldine Leahy</i>
Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly	<i>Noirin Lannon</i>
Contact external agencies	<i>Noirin Lannon</i>
Arrange supervision for students	Geraldine Leahy
Hold staff meeting	All staff
Agree schedule for the day	CIMT
Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	Ciaran Stone, Tadhg Farrelly
Compile a list of vulnerable students	AEN Department
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	Noirin Lannon
Inform parents	Noirin Lannon
Hold end of day staff briefing	<i>Noirin Lannon & Geraldine Leahy</i>

Day 1: Immediate Actions – before School commences

On notification of a critical incident the Principal will convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team to:

- Establish accurate information
- Assign roles and responsibilities
- Agree schedule for the day
- Contact external agencies, as appropriate
- Arrange for supervision of students
- Hold staff meeting – with a briefing to staff from a counsellor on how to manage classes, if required (See Appendix A17)
- Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)
- Compile a list of vulnerable students
- Contact/visit the bereaved family
- Inform parents
- Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media, if required

- Hold end of day staff briefing

Medium term actions - (Day 2)

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

Medium-Term Actions (24 - 72 Hours)

- Review the events of the first 24 hours:
- Reconvene the Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Meet with external agencies, if required
- Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments
- Be sensitive to how all staff are coping on a personal and professional level
- Update media, if necessary
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Plan for reintegration of students and staff (absentees, injured, siblings, etc.)
- Plan visits to injured
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements
- Decide attendance and participation at funeral in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close friends
- Request a decision on school closure from the DDLETB, if appropriate

Follow-up – beyond 72 hours

Task	Name
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class Tutors & Class teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Guidance Department
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	Noirin Lannon, Year Heads
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM/Staff, parents and students
Review response to incident and amend plan	Management Team, Staff, BOM

Long-Term Tasks

In the aftermath of a critical incident:

- Keep in contact with the family/families concerned
- Monitor students for signs of stress
- Liaise with agencies, if required
- Be sensitive to occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries etc.
- Organise school services/memorial as appropriate
- Provide appropriate support
- Evaluate response to incident and amend critical incident plan accordingly
- Inform new staff and students if appropriate

Part 3 – Appendices

The appendices that follow are intended to act as a resource to be used by the CIMT in the event of a Critical Incident. They are intended to act as a guide rather than a direction. The appendices included are:

- A1 Agenda for Meeting with Critical Incident Management Team – Day 1
- A2 Announcing the death of a student to students
- A3 Minute Silence – On the day of prayer service for a student who has died
- A4 Direction to students on forming a Guard of Honour at a Funeral
- A5 Sample letter to parents – sudden death/accident
- A6 Sample letter to parents - violent death
- A7 Sample announcement to the media
- A8 Announcement to Students
- A9 Agenda for Staff Briefing
- A10 Useful Contact Numbers
- A11 Emergency Contact Numbers
- A12 Staff Trained in First Aid
- A13 Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness
- A14 Critical Incidents during Certificate Examinations
- A15 Critical Incidents during School Holidays
- A16 Resource Hand-out for Teachers

(Additional resources can be found in “Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools” and “Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Materials for Schools” Department of Education and Science 2007.)

Appendix A1

Agenda for Meeting with Critical Incident Management Team – Day 1

- Share full details of the incident
- Agree on the facts.
- Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional ones that should be informed (check Emergency Contact List)
- Plan procedures for the day
- Discuss issues relating to school routine, including school closure. Remember it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. It is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students. Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what has happened.
- Consider cancelling any planned event(s).
- Discuss how to break the news to relatives and close friends and who should do this.
- Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students. Class groups are often best, rather than large assemblies.
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students.
- Plan a whole staff briefing (including ancillary staff). This may need to be done in two groups depending on the arrangements for the supervision of students.
- Agree the text of a letter to be sent to parents.
- Discuss how to deal with the media. Prepare a media statement, if appropriate.
- Delegate responsibilities to the appropriate critical incident team member or key personnel
- Discuss which room(s) will be available to external agencies.
- Decide if the prayer room should be made available for students.
- It is generally recommended that this is available for the week following the incident and that its use is then reviewed.
- Discuss the issue of consent for students who may need to be seen by the psychologist and arrange for the consent form to be photocopied and sent to parents.
- Agree the next meeting time for the Critical Incident Management Team.
- Agree a time for a follow up staff meeting at the end of the day. This gives an opportunity for the Principal to update staff on any developments. It also allows time for preparation for the following day. Lastly, it gives staff a chance to share their experience and to wind down after the day.

Appendix A2

Announcing the Death of a Student

For Registers

Dear Students

As some of you may have heard we are all very sad to hear of the death of one of our _____ year students, *Name*.

Name was a lovely student and known to a lot of students and staff in the school. This is a very sad time for all of us and our thoughts are with *Name*'s family at this time.

Details about counselling available, prayer room, prayer service, funeral arrangements etc.

Principal

Appendix A3

Minute Silence – On the day of prayer service for a student who has died

Note to be inserted into Registers at Morning Registration

To all students:

As you know we are all very sad to hear of the death of one of our ____ year students, *Name*.

Name was a lovely student and known to a lot of students and staff in the school. This is a very sad time for all of us and our thoughts are with *Name*'s family at this time.

As a mark of respect to *Name* and his/her family, all students and staff are asked to observe a minute silence today at 12.00pm. A prayer will be said over the intercom and then everyone will be asked to pause for a minute of silence in memory of *Name*.

Thank you,

Principal

Appendix A4

Direction to students on forming a Guard of Honour at a Funeral

Purpose of going to the funeral: You expressing your sorrow – But also supporting the family and above all respecting the wishes and traditions of the family

In the case of school – added dimension – You are representing the school. You are doing this by forming a guard of honour

This is a ceremonial event only done on very important occasions – we will practise this shortly. For a guard of honour – It is respectful and dignified and uniform. So:

- No chewing
- Absolutely no talking/whispering
- Standing up straight
- No phone or other distraction
- Absolute full uniform from head to toe
- Tidy appearance
- Walk in formation
- Follow instructions of teachers

Appendix A5

Sample Letter to Parents – Sudden Death/Accident

This letter can be used as a template in informing parents of a tragedy, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves.

Dear Parents

The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of *Name of student(s)*. We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost).

Our thoughts are with (family name).

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. *(Elaborate)*.

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings. All students are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for students to have difficulty concentrating or to be fearful, anxious, or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reactions. Over the course of the days to come, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings while supporting him/her.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

(Optional) An information night for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, further information about how to help students in grief will be given.

We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school. *(Details)*.

Yours Sincerely

Principal

Appendix A6

Sample Letter to Parents - Violent Death

This letter can be used as a template in informing parents of a violent death, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves.

Dear Parents

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened.

(Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, who is the brother of _____, a student here at school, was killed as a result of (a violent attack, violent incident in the street etc.) earlier this week.

We are all profoundly saddened by his death.

We have shared this information and have had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened. School staff members have been available for students on an on-going basis today. Other support personnel (*including psychologists etc., according to actual arrangements*) are available to advise staff and, where necessary, to talk to students. This support will continue to be available for (if appropriate insert how long).

The death of any young person is tragic, but a violent death is even more difficult. It is hard to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to accept that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it.

We have enclosed some additional information that may be useful during this time.

The media are in the vicinity of the school and may approach you or your children. You need not respond to their questions if you are approached. We will not allow the media to interview your child at school and our general advice is that you should not let your children be interviewed. They are not mature enough to judge what to say and may say something they will regret later.

Our thoughts are with (family name) and with each of you.

Yours Sincerely

Principal

Appendix A7

Sample Announcement to the Media

This can be used as a template to be emailed, faxed or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the school.

In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals.

This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the victim's family and the nature of the incident.

My name is (Name) and I am the Principal of Greenhills Community College. We learned this morning of the death of (one of our students or *Name* of student). This is a terrible tragedy for *Name's* family, our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (*Name*) family and friends.

Name of student/students was a ___ year student and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

We have been in contact with his/her parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school have implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the DDLETB Psychological Support Service and (insert other information if relevant) have been with us all day supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time.

The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event.

The school has been open to parents, to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.

We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you

Appendix A8

Announcement to Students

- To reduce the potential for creating a highly charged emotional atmosphere, the school will inform students in small groups e.g. close friends, tutor groups etc. in their regular classroom setting. The best person to communicate the news will normally be the tutor or the Year Head.
- Teachers will be given a carefully worded announcement to read aloud in classrooms.
- Announcements will be simple, straightforward and sincere. When making the agreed announcement teachers will pass on the facts that are known, never speculate on the cause or causes of the incident and be truthful when questions cannot be answered.
- Teachers will make the announcement simultaneously, where possible, to ensure that students attending school hear about it at the same time. Before making any announcement teachers will be mindful of vulnerable pupils in the group including those recently bereaved, those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language. After the announcement teachers will allow sufficient time for students to begin to discuss their feelings. Advice and resources will be provided by the Guidance and Counselling departments, if required.
- Students who are absent from school due to illness, work experience, educational trips or suspension should also be informed. This is of particular importance if a student has died and the absent pupil is in the same class or is a known friend. In such a case, early contact should be made with the student's parent by the class tutor.

The following example provides a suggested structure for an announcement and is not intended to be adhered to rigidly.

After A Sudden Death

Sadly a tragedy has happened in our school community. _____, a 3rd year student has died suddenly. We want to respect the family's need for privacy at this time but you will be given information about funeral arrangements as soon as possible.

This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You may experience many feelings within the next few days. Everyone deals with loss differently and it is important to respect the way others grieve. We want to listen to your feelings and concerns so support staffs are available in _____. Feel free to arrange to go there and talk to someone.

Appendix A9

Suggested Agenda for the first Staff Briefing

The initial briefing will:

- Give a brief statement of factual information;
- Outline the school's response and proposed plan of action;
- Outline staff responsibility for monitoring student and staff welfare;
- Identify vulnerable students who may be at risk;
- Clarify specific responsibilities for staff;
- Advise staff on procedure for dealing with media enquiries;
- Advise staff on agreed procedure for informing pupils and parents;
- Inform staff of the resources and support services that are available;
- Advise staff of time/place of next briefing and debriefing session.

Appendix A10

Useful Contact Numbers

Barnardos	1850 222300
The Samaritans	1850609090
Childline	1800666666
Parentline	1890927277
Aware	016766166 1890303302
National Office for Suicide Prevention	01 6201670
Rainbows	014734175
Bereavement Counselling Service	018391766
Bereavement Counselling	016767727
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057
Pieta House	01-6010000
JIGSAW	01 5380087
Teen Counselling Clondalkin	01 5574705

Appendix 11

Emergency Contact Numbers

Crumlin Garda Station	01 6666200
Ambulance	999
Fire Brigade	999
Tallaght Hospital	01 4142000
Parish Priest	01 5555199 / 01 6261010
Department of Education and Skills	0906442700
Psychological Support Service	Tel: (01) 4598446

Appendix A12

Staff Trained in First Aid

The following staff members have completed a First Aid Course and trained to use the defibrillator:

Noirin Lannon

Pauline Fagan

Mary McMahan

Teresa Byrne

Ger McDevitt

Appendix A13

Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

The school's response to bereavement will be sensitive to different religious beliefs and different traditions amongst students and staff. For example, attendance at a Christian service may not be acceptable to parents whose children are of other religious beliefs, or of none. This may result in the non-attendance of some students.

The school is also mindful of different cultures and of differing religious beliefs and rituals that exist around death.

If students are to attend a funeral rite of a religion or denomination other than their own the Chaplain or a member of the Religion Department will meet with them as a group to explain the funeral ritual and service.

Appendix A14

Critical Incidents during Certificate Examinations

The examination period is a time when the staffing arrangements and the organisational arrangements in schools are different from those in place during the rest of the year. If a critical incident happens at this time, complexity is increased because of the extra pressures that exist and the need to enable as many students as possible to proceed with their exams.

- If the State Examinations are in progress, in the event of a Critical Incident, the School Examinations Secretary will contact the State Examinations Commission as soon as possible.
- Students will be offered support from available personnel in the school.
- If at all possible, students should be encouraged to complete their exams. If a student needs to leave the exam hall due to distress, a member of staff may be able to help them settle down so that they can return to the exam. It is vital that they are accompanied at all times in order to preserve the integrity of the examinations.
- All extraordinary queries relating to the examinations will be referred to the State Examinations Commission.
- If someone is very upset, it may be necessary for the School Examinations Secretary to arrange for a separate centre to be set up in such circumstances.

Appendix A15

Critical Incident during a Weekend or School Holiday period

Should a Critical Incident occur during a school holiday period the following procedures will apply:

The school will be opened for a period of time.

The Principal will convene a meeting of available members of the CIMT.

Staff, the Board of Management, the DDLETB and the Psychological Support Service will be informed.

Arrangements will be made to offer support to students and staff.

Appendix A16

Hand-out to guide tutors and teachers in managing a class group in the event of a Critical Incident

The aim of the class is to break the news of the incident and give the students the opportunity to discuss it and share their thoughts and feelings in a safe and secure environment.

Step 1: Give the facts in a calm and low voice

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- When it happened
- Dispel any rumours
- The plan for the class/day

I have something very sad to share with you...

I am feeling very sad about what's happened. Let's spend some time together now helping each other to talk about it.

Step 2: Allow the students to speak about their experience of what has happened if they wish.

This is intended to help them feel less alone. Some students may not be able to verbalise so it may be easier for them to write it down or draw how they feel.

Step 3: Normalise the reactions.

(Hand out *Reactions to a critical incident* can be used as a reference for teachers during this part of the class if necessary)

- Explain that everyone reacts differently.
- Some people may feel sad, scared, angry, tearful, regret, shame, lonely etc. and some people may feel fine, numb or nothing.
- Some people may have a behavioural/physical/thought/feeling reaction (see hand out).
- All these reactions are normal and perfectly fine.
- These reactions will change or pass over time.

Step 4: Help to identify coping strategies.

Give out hand out *How to cope when something terrible happens*.

- It is important to help the students to regain a sense of control over how they feel.

Step 5: Close the class.

End the class by talking about the future.

- What would be helpful for the students over the next few classes/days?
- Reiterate that their responses are normal reactions to abnormal circumstance.

REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

Feelings -

Fear
Guilt
Shame
Regret
Anger
Tearfulness
Loneliness

Behavioural -

Nightmares
Social withdrawal
Over reliance on use of social media
Irritability
Loss of concentration
Forgetfulness
Physical/Verbal aggression
Misuse of drugs, including alcohol
Anxiety
Mood swings
Shock
Yearning
Numbness
Confusion
Isolation
Insecurity

THOUGHTS

Thoughts -

Disbelief
Denial
Sense of unreality
Preoccupation with images of the event/person

PHYSICAL

Physical -

Tiredness
Sleeplessness
Headaches
Stomach Problems Bowel/
Bladder problems
Loss or increase in appetite

HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

- Reach out – people do care
 - Talk to your friends, family and teachers - talking is the most healing medicine
 - Remember you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy
 - It is ok to cry
 - It is ok to smile
 - If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently
 - When the stress level is high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings with alcohol and drugs. This complicates the problems, rather than making it better!
 - Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?
 - Spend time with people who have a positive influence on you
 - Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even if you're not sure
 - Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful
 - Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat good foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk
 - Sticking to your “normal” routine helps. Try to keep busy
 - Take time out – go for a walk or kick a football
 - Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself - like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc.
- Laughter is good medicine. It's ok not to feel sad
- Use of social media can help but do not rely on it as your only source of support.
 - Useful websites: www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.