



# **LARGY COLLEGE**

**UNDER THE AUSPICES OF**

**CAVAN AND MONAGHAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD**

**BORD OIDEACHAIS AGUS OILIÚNA AN CHABHÁIN AGUS MHUINEACHÁIN**

## **CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT POLICY & PLAN**

## **Introduction & Rationale**

*Largy College aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. This is reflected in our Mission Statement, and is further supported by both the school's Health & Safety policy and child protection policy.*

Largy College has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed, with a view to ensuring the physical emotional and psychological safety of staff and students, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

## **What is a Critical Incident?**

In line with the National Educational Psychological Services [NEPS] publication "Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools", Largy College recognises a critical incident to be:

***"An incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping Mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school".***

Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school or the local community.

## **Types of incidents might include**

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide;
- An intrusion into the school;
- An accident/tragedy in the wider school community;
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community;
- An accident involving members of the school community.

## **Aim**

Recognising that planning is the key to the effective management of critical incidents, Largy College has developed this Critical Incident Management Policy (CIMP) and accompanying Plan. Our hope is that, in the event of an incident, these will help staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of professionalism and control. The Policy and Plan should also help the school return to normality as soon as possible and to ensure that the effects on pupils and staff will be limited.

## **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

A Critical Incident Team is defined as:

**“A group of individuals from the staff of the school who know the community, the students and each other well enough to make the necessary decisions called for when an incident occurs”**

Largy College has set up a CIMT in line with best practice and will maintain this team in future. The members of the team were nominated by the Principal and School Management Team. All accepted the nomination and will retain their roles for at least three school year unless, following a Critical Incident, members of the CIMT express a desire to be released from their duties and/or members of the CIMT feel that it would be in the best interest of the overall effectiveness of the CIMP that a person or persons should be relieved of their duties. The Principal, in consultation with the Senior Management Team, will decide on this matter.

Each member of the CIMT will meet at least once a year to review and update the CIMP. Each member of the CIMT will have a copy of the CIMP and a “Ready-to-Go” pack with relevant materials, to be used in the event of an incident.

## **Roles & Personnel**

*Key roles have been identified and assigned as follows:*

- Team Leader ... .. (Principal) Ms Magennis
- Staff Liaison ... .. (Deputy Principal) Mr Killen
- The Bereaved family and Student Liaison ... (Chaplain) Mr Moran
- Community Liaison & Parent. .... (HSCLO) Mr O Mordha
- Media Liaison ... .. (Principal) Ms Magennis
- Administration ... .. (Secretary) Ms Deery

## **Outline of Roles**

### **Team Leader**

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting of the CIMT in the Principal's Office.
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management, the CE and the Department of Education & Science [DES], and the NEPS psychologist.
- In conjunction with the Chaplain, the Team Leader liaises with the bereaved family.
- Only the Principal/ Team leader or one designated by the team leader may be allowed to publically represent the school.

### **Staff Liaison**

- Contacts staff in the event of a critical incident.
- In the absence of the Principal, leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known; gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings;
- Outlines the routine for the day.
- In partnership with Pastoral care team he/she advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Provides information for staff-support services, external to the school.

### **The Bereaved and Student Liaison**

- Sets up and maintains the "Quiet Room" space. (Prayer Room)
- Prepares and provides support for students and teachers, as required.
- Provide crisis counselling therapy.
- Liaise with external therapeutic services that may be provided with in the school.
- Will liaise with the bereaved family and students and co-ordinate a respectful role for the school around funeral arrangements.
- Will organise prayer services at appropriate times within the school.
- Will liaise with closely Team leader.
- Visits the bereaved family
- Liaise with relevant local clergy

**Community and Parent Liaison**

- Liaises with both parents and relevant agencies in the community
- Updates team members on any issues or concerns expressed by others outside school.
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies.
- Compiles and maintains up-to-date lists of all emergency support services and other external community contacts and resources.
- Liaises with school administrator & Principal regarding the content, signing, photocopying and dissemination of “parents’ information letter” – advising parents in the first instance of the nature of the critical incident.
- Facilitates “questions & answer” meetings with groups of parents.
- Contacts/meets with individual parents, especially parents who may be particularly affected by the specific critical incident.

**Media Liaison**

- In preparing for the role, media liaison personnel (normally the Principal) will consider issues that may arise during an incident and how they might be responded to (e.g. pupils/staff being interviewed, photographers on the premises etc.)
- In the event of an incident, media liaison personnel will, where necessary, liaise with the Communications Section of the DES.
- Preparation & publication of obituary (in the event of a Staff member death).

**Administrative & Secretarial Tasks**

- Office administrator will maintain and have available up-to-date lists of contact numbers of parents/guardians, staff and emergency support services.
- Liaise with the CIMT
- Use one nominated school telephone number for incoming “critical incident” calls, the other telephone number to be used for other school business. (Principal’s mobile)
- Keep a written log of all critical incident telephone calls, offers of help & support etc. in the notebook specifically maintained for such an event.
- Ensure that staff knows that all photocopying related to the critical incident gets priority over other photocopying.
- Ensure that number of people and noise level in school office is kept to a minimum.
- Liaise with Principal regarding the procurement of sympathy Cards, floral tributes etc. on behalf of the Board of Management.
- Following a Critical Incident, the Administrator updates the school records and database to reflect any changes. This should ensure that any additional distress to bereaved families is avoided.

### **Record Keeping**

In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions & materials used etc. The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, etc. (see above). All communication record sheets from each of the sub-groups are to be lodged with the Team Leader as soon as possible after a Critical Incident. These will be held on a central file.

### **Letter to Parents**

Using the templates provided the school secretary will liaise with the Principal/Vice Principal regarding the exact content of the brief letter.

It will include:

- the sympathy of the school community for the affected/bereaved family positive information or comments about the deceased/injured
- The facts of the incident
- What has been done
- What is going to be done
- Arrangements regarding attendance and participation at the funeral

### **Confidentiality and good name considerations**

The school has a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that pupils do so also.

[For instance, the term “suicide” will not be used without the consent of the family involved or until it has been established categorically that the person’s death was a result of suicide. The phrases “tragic death” or “sudden death” may be used instead.]

### **Critical Incident Room(s)**

The Principal’s Office is the nominated “Critical Incident Room”. However, in the event of a critical incident, the following rooms will be used:

1. Principal room
2. Deputy Principal room
3. Chaplains room
4. HSCLO room

## **The Response**

### **1. Establish the Facts:**

It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. Therefore it is important that senior and involved staff gather to establish the facts – this may involve contacting others such as hospitals, Gardai, parents.

### **2. An Outline Immediate Response:**

This group will need to agree an immediate plan of action, which may involve:

- Informing students and staff
- Contacting parents
- Alerting relevant local clergy
- Visiting the home of the bereaved – Principal, Year Head, Class Tutor
- Organising a school assembly
- Involving the Pastoral Team, Chaplain, etc.
- Alerting outside agencies such as Counsellors, Samaritans, etc.
- Agreeing a common statement with regard to the crisis
- Assigning tasks within the group
- The availability of a list of useful contact numbers

### **3. Inform**

It is vital that all those needing information receive it as soon as is practicable. A list of the home and mobile telephone numbers as well as e-mail addresses of such people will be prepared. A common statement will be agreed when informing students and others. Such a statement will reduce the spread of rumour. Staff will be alerted and informed in the first instance. If at all possible, the students should be told at the same time in no larger than normal class size.

The statement should seek to:

- Be communicated in a sensitive manner
- Give the facts as they are known
- Highlight the support that will be available
- Indicate the actions that are planned

In the case of a suspected suicide, great care will be taken not to use the term “suicide” until it has been established categorically that the student’s death was a result of suicide.

In the case where an accident has occurred on a school trip, a similar statement will be needed to assist those who will be telephoning relatives. It will be preferable to have a

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group of people involved so that all concerned are informed in or around the same time.  
Some further considerations in contacting parents:

- Any practical help needed will be offered – transport, phone numbers, contact names
- Enquiries will be made to ascertain if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support
- Carefully ensure that the information given has been fully understood
  
- All other involved parents should be alerted to the trauma in order to help them when they subsequently make contact with their child.

**Liaising with the Press:** A member of the school staff (normally the Principal), will be nominated to liaise with the media.

In preparing a press statement consideration should be given to the following:

- Priority to be given to the sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis
- Names addresses and telephone numbers should not be released
- Speculation of any kind should be avoided. Only facts should be given.
- Any likely questions and a response to them
- A time for briefings should be agreed with the press if this is necessary in an ongoing situation
- A specific location for press briefings will be nominated.

Press Statements should be simple and brief. They should express the sorrow of the entire school community at the sudden death of one of their members and it should extend sympathy to the bereaved family. Any statement should be adhered to – and not elaborated on – in all communications with the media and it should be familiar to every member of the school staff.

**Others to be informed:** When possible, the chairperson of the Board of Management and the C.E. should be informed.

Whether the College will remain open or will close as a mark of respect to the bereaved family will depend on the judgement of the Principal and management following consultation with the school staff, Board of Management and the C.E.O. If the decision is to close the school, it will be done ONLY after informing the students of the student's death and of the routine which the school will follow over the coming days. Parents will be formally notified of the school closure.

The College's insurance company and other concerned agencies will be informed if necessary.

#### 4. **Short-term Action:**

Action needed in the short-term will be very dependent on the nature of the crisis.

Actions will come under a number of headings:

- Students
- Staff



***In the event of a death:***

**STUDENTS:**

- The Principal will inform the student body at the earliest possible opportunity. S/He should begin with the deceased student's class or classes. He will be prepared to spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to the news of the death and to allow a normal grieving process to begin. It would be useful if the Class Tutor or another appropriate person such as the Guidance Counsellor or Chaplain accompanies the Principal and remains with the class after departure. In addressing the class, the Principal should tell students of their friend's sudden death and advise that it is an event with which everyone – students and teachers – will find it difficult to cope. He will also explain the routine for the day and the following days and the arrangements that will be available for students to see the Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain and other support services.

- Efforts will be made to sustain an atmosphere where it is “okay” to talk about the experience. This may cause problems for some teachers. However, all staff who are available and willing and others such as Chaplains, etc., will be asked to assist. This will entail sensitivity on the part of Year Heads and Principal as regards time needed for such sharing. Care will be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.

- The most essential quality in adults needed by students will be that of listening. The school will endeavour to put in place a support system for students in this regard. Such a system will again involve those staff that are willing and able to offer support, together with outside professionals where required, time and resources to carry out their role, a method of supporting each other, and a review of their effectiveness. Some training of staff concerning this may be considered.

- Contact with home in the initial stages of a crisis will be encouraged. Parents will need to be able to contact the school if they have information that will help the school in any way in caring for their child.

- The involvement of students in any funeral or other services will be discussed. This requires invitation, planning and review. The families involved will be consulted, the students invited to take part, time given to prepare for this participation and, finally, a debriefing of those concerned. While it would be appropriate for the deceased student's classmates to attend the church services and the burial, it may be inappropriate for large numbers of students to be present. The presence of large numbers of young people at such highly charged events can prove to be inappropriate as well as being upsetting for individual students and for the parents of the deceased student. **At all times the rights of the deceased family to privacy must be respected.**

- The students may wish to organise some service or ritual within the confines of the school. They will be consulted as to the nature of such a service. Such an event may be of great benefit to staff and parents and would be organised through the Chaplaincy service.

- Attention will be given to the possible signs of distress being exhibited by students. A list of indicators may be drawn up. In noticing possible signs, it will be important to say that these are not necessarily indicative of stress in relation to a trauma. Rather they are merely prompts to staff as they “watch out” for the students in their care. Such signs will be related to uncharacteristic behaviour, for example, being unusually quiet. It will be important that staff check out signs with others before drawing conclusions.

- Students will need to be asked their “permission” regarding discussing their feelings and reactions to a crisis. The Principal, Deputy Principal, Year Heads, Chaplain, and Guidance Counsellor are key people in addressing the needs of individual students.

- Freedom to be upset is important for anyone responding to a trauma. The College will endeavour to create a safe atmosphere for this to occur.

- Students not directly involved with the trauma will also be monitored as some may be affected.

- Constant reminders will be given in relation to the supports that are available within the school. Students will react in different ways and at different times in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

- The friends of a bereaved student will be brought into focus, as they can be the best source of support. Often the bereaved student may not wish to speak to an adult and may rely heavily on friends. These close friends will need support as they attempt to find ways to be of help.

- The school chaplain will play an important role in working with the whole school community in coping with grief and will provide an important link to all services available to support staff and students.

#### **STAFF:**

- Many staff, following a trauma, may need to air their feelings and reactions. Various options will be considered in order to address this:

- Care will be taken of those staff directly involved with the trauma that they receive support, are not overworked, and have time to grieve and de-brief.

- Staff who feels for whatever reason, that they are unable to be involved in the school’s direct response to the trauma will be able to opt out readily.

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- Those staff having any concerns about students or others in relation to the trauma will have easy access to personnel who assist them.
- The guidance counsellor, chaplain and other members of the Pastoral Team will be the key resource in the short and medium term response. They will be facilitated, resourced and supported in their task principally by being given time away from normal duties. They will regularly meet with the Principal in reviewing progress. It will be this group, who can liaise with, and support, the other members of staff.
- The Principal will also need to ensure he/she is receiving support. The weight of responsibility surrounding a crisis may be enormous. Principals are often people who are very competent in practically responding to a crisis. Nonetheless, the Principal will need to take care of his own well-being and should seek whatever support is appropriate within and outside the school community.

### **PARENTS:**

- The school will have a role to play in supporting parents concerned with a trauma. This will vary depending on the nature of the crisis and the resources available to the school.
- The school will nominate contact people for parents to liase with, particularly in regard to monitoring the progress of their children.
- Parents will be put in contact with each other if it is appropriate.
- Discussions may be initiated with involved parents and/or Parent's Association as to what action could be taken to support those concerned.
- Parents who wish to be involved in a school service following a tragedy will be facilitated if appropriate. The services of the school chaplain will be made available if required.

### **5. Funeral Services:**

- The form of representation will be discussed with the family.
- Students will be given preparation ahead of the funeral, as far as possible by somebody with experience/training. For some this may be the first occasion they have been exposed to a major grief.
- For those students who wish, encouragement and assistance will be given them to write a personal message of sympathy.

**6. Medium and Long-term Action:**

- Students returning to school after a major accident or bereavement cannot be easily categorised in terms of their needs. The Pastoral Team will be a useful resource in seeking to support each student appropriately. Care will be taken to monitor their relationships with peers and teachers; falling behind in academic and other work; involvement in extra-curricular activities.
- The Pastoral Team will benefit all in the school by constantly reviewing the needs of the students, staff and parents in relation to issues of trauma.
- The Pastoral Team, in co-operation with the Principal, will constantly review curricular provision, specialist staff training and links with outside agencies in the area of change, loss, death and crisis issues.
- The College in consultation with the school chaplain may consider holding an annual remembrance service for all those connected to the school community who have died. Students, staff and parents can be encouraged to record the names of those they would like remembered.

**7. End of day session with teachers**

Sample script for Principal

Thank you all for staying. I know that it has been a difficult day and you may all be tired.

I thought it was important for us just to take a bit of time to check in with each other and to make sure that we are all doing ok.

Provide update on the latest facts as known and outline the schedule for tomorrow.  
Is anyone concerned about anything or anyone?  
(Remind them about compiling a list of students about whom they have particular concerns).

If you are feeling very distressed and would like to talk in confidence to someone, you can access support through the Employee Assistance Service (EAS). The Department of

Education and Science has contracted VHI to provide this service for teachers. A number of sessions may be availed of and it is confidential.

It is staffed by a network of trained counsellors and therapists. You make the contact yourself.

The freephone number for the  
EAS is 1800 411 057.

If the psychologist is offering an end-of-day support meeting, let staff know where it will take place and how soon.

Thank you all for your great work and support today.

**7. Review:**

It will be vital to regularly review all those procedures in the light of experience. The effectiveness of policies and procedures subsequent to their application will be reviewed every two years or after a traumatic event.

This Critical Incidents Plan has been ratified by the Board of Management, Largy College.

**Adopted by Largy College Board of Management:**

Signed: *Brendan Jenkins*  
Chairperson

Date: **11<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

Signed: *Sharon Magennis*  
Principal

Date: **11<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

Proposed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Seconded by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Review Date: February 2017**

**HELPLINES:**

Barnardos 01-4530355

Samaritans 1850-609090

Irish Society for the prevention  
of cruelty to children 01-6767960/01-6794944

Rainbow Counselling Ireland 01-4734175

Childline 1800-666666

Parentline 1890-927277

Aware 01-6766166 1890 303302

National Suicide Bereavement

Support Network 024-95561

The Bereavement Counselling

Service – Dublin 01-8391766

Bereavement Counselling Service 01-6767727

## **EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST**

Resource for schools: R23  
(To be displayed in staff-room, school office and Principal's office etc)  
AGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

GARDA	Monaghan 047 77200 Clones 047 51028
HOSPITAL	Monaghan 047 81811 Cavan 049 4376000
FIRE BRIGADE	999
LOCAL GPS	Dr. Larry Moran & Dr Deirdre 047 51919 Dr. Seamus Clarke 047 52323
HSE/Community Care Team/ Child and Family Centre/ CAMHS	Secretary at Rooskey 047 74200
SCHOOL INSPECTOR/ DES	01 8896400
NEPS PSYCHOLOGIST	Ms Paula Long 049 4325430
DES	01 8896400
INTO/ASTI/TUI	ASTI 01 6040160 TUI 01 4292588
PARISH PRIEST/CLERGY	REV Dick Mohan 047 51048 Fr Cathal Deery 047 51064
STATE EXAMS COMMISSION	090 6442700
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SERVICE	1800 411 057