

COOLE NATIONAL SCHOOL



Garadice,

Kilcock,

Co. Meath.

Tel: (046)9557538

Email:

cooleschool@gmail.com

Website: www.coolens.ie

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

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CONTEXT

The mission of Coole National School is to provide quality, holistic and inclusive education for the community. Our aim is to create a safe and caring environment, which encourages pupils to reach their full potential in an atmosphere of mutual regard.

A critical incident is “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelm the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school.”

ESTABLISH FACTS

Any staff member becoming aware of a traumatic incident * will inform Principal or Deputy Principal. The crisis response team will be convened consisting of Principal, Deputy Principal, and Chairperson.

A full staff meeting will be held as soon as possible (8:30 a.m.) before the normal school day begins, when the CI occurs after school hours during the school week. A file containing all relevant contact numbers, templates of letters to staff, media, parents and guardians, and specific roles of members of the Critical

Response Team will be made available to those on the team. The CRT will consist of the **Team Leader (Principal) and in her absence, Deputy Principal), the Staff Liaison Person- **Mary McHale** , the Parent Liaison Person – **Ms Colette Brogan**, the Community Liaison Person **Ms Louise Cassidy**– and the Media Liaison Person – **Ms Helene Quigley** who (in her absence the Principal) will also take on the responsibility of media access to the school.**

1 Source: *responding to Critical Incidents in School*, National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS)

It is critical that the school has correct and accurate information regarding the crisis. This may involve contacting others such as hospitals, Garda, parents (contact numbers). The family's version of a tragic death must be respected.

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

The Crisis Response Team will assign tasks within the group.

Principal will inform staff with as much factual information as possible.

Deputy Principal will place a notice in prominent positions notifying all staff to go to the staff room on arrival at school.

The crisis response team will agree on a common statement with regard to the crisis.

School routine for the day will be kept as normal as possible.

Staff members not present initially will be informed as soon as possible.

Class Teachers will avail of the written statement: "*Breaking the news to students*" (See Sample A below)

The Principal will co-ordinate a suitable prayer service and arrange to visit home of the bereaved with other staff.

The Deputy Principal will contact NEPS Psychologist.

The Principal and Deputy Principal will draft a letter for parents and guardians. (Sample B below)

The Principal will liaise with those at an accident site (in case of an out of school crisis) Contact numbers for teacher accompanying groups need to be available to Principal.

When the critical incident occurs in the school itself, during the school day, the following steps will be taken in addition to the procedure above.

1. The site of the incident will be out of bounds to the general school population.
2. In the case of a critical incident involving a student, his / her Class Teacher will be informed by the **School Chaplain** or in his / her absence by the Principal or Deputy Principal. The Chaplain will then meet the class group most directly affected by the critical incident and in the company of the Class Teacher inform them of the incident.
3. A suitable room will be made available to that class group for the rest of the day. Some students may wish to go home and may do so if signed out by a parent or guardian.
4. Chaplains **and Guidance Counsellors** may be called on by the Principal, or in her absence by the Deputy Principal to offer professional support to students who wish to meet them. Rooms will be made available for such meetings. **Records will be kept of visitors and passed to the Crisis Response Team later.**

INFORM

Staff will be alerted and informed first. The chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed. An agreed common statement will be used when informing students and others, thus reducing the spread of rumour. The statement will give the facts as they are known in a sensitive manner, highlighting the supports that will be available and indicating the actions that are planned (Sample C below). Principal, Deputy Principal and Chaplain will inform students in the classes most affected by the crisis.

In dealing with enquiries from the media the Principal and her representative will act as a liaison. Names, addresses and telephone numbers will not be released. Students and staff will be discouraged from dealing with the media. The agreed statement will also be given a response to enquiries from anxious parents.

SHORT TERM ACTION

Pastoral care will be needed for the students, teachers, parents and guardians. On day one of the crisis the Principal, will be free of classes in order to coordinate initial counselling for the most affected students. Care will be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.

All staff will be on the alert for students in particular need.

FUNERAL SERVICES (where applicable)

Families will be consulted as to their wishes in relation to school involvement. Students will need to be prepared emotionally for the ritual of the funeral. Principal and Deputy Principal will decide which classes attend. The Principal will liaise with family and local clergy. The **Board of Management** will make the decision as to the closure of the school on the day of the funeral. If the school is to be closed, notification will be made to parents, guardians, bus drivers and visitors of the proposed closure.

MEDIUM / LONG TERM CLOSURE

The entire staff will monitor students. A day of reflection or retreat may be helpful to the class most affected by the tragedy. The Board of Management will encourage and fund specialist staff training and links with outside agencies in the area of change, loss, death, suicide and crisis issues.

As part of the SPHE syllabus lessons will be taught in each school year on change with emphasis on problem solving techniques and on the services available both in school and in the wider community.

Teachers will be encouraged by the Principal or Deputy Principal to be alert to behaviour that would suggest that students might be at risk and to pass on such concerns to the relevant staff , Principal, Resource Teachers **who will deal with them to the best of their ability and where appropriate refer the person in need for further professional help.**

REVIEW

Procedures will be reviewed annually in the light of experience and suggestions from staff, management and Parents' Council. Other schools and professionals will be contacted.

Ratified by the BOM in September 2024

Reviewed June 2024

