

November 2008

St Laurence O'Tooles Girls National School

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

St Laurence O'Tooles GNS aims to protect the well being of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

St Laurence O'Tooles GNS has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of staff and students, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

What is a Critical Incident?

St Laurence O'Tooles GNS 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”.¹ Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school, or our 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 the key to managing critical incidents is planning, St Laurence O'Tooles GNS has developed this Critical Incident Management Policy 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 control. They should also help us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible and ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put systems in place to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

Physical safety:

- Formation of Health and Safety Policy
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Pre-opening morning time supervision in the school yard
- Yard gate closed during school hours. Door open only when supervised by office

¹ Source: Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools – National Educational Psychological Services NEPS.

- Rules of the playground promoting safe play with Yard Buddies and no-running policy.

Psychological safety

St Laurence O'Tooles GNS aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for same.

- SPHE programmes are included in the curriculum to address issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, decision making, and alcohol and drug prevention.
- Our Discipline Policy includes a detailed Anti-Bullying Policy
- Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware and vigilant to their needs.
- Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school child.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students.

Critical Incident Management Team

St Laurence O'Tooles GNS has set up a CI Management Team in line with best practice² and will maintain this team in future. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet once a year to review and update the plan. Each member of the team has an advice and information pack with relevant materials to be used in the event of an incident.

Key roles have been identified and assigned as follows:

- Team Leader *Mr O Riordain*
- Staff Liaison *Ms Henry / Ms Vallely*
- Student Liaison *Ms Lucas / Mrs O Halloran*
- Parent Liaison *Mr O Riordain / Ms Hughes*
- Community Liaison *Fr Tonge*
- Media Liaison *Mr O Riordain / Fr Tonge*

In the event of a critical incident the responsibilities of each role-holder will be as follows:

Team Leader

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Coordinates the tasks of the team.
- Liaises with the Board of Management and Department of Education and Science.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.

² A critical incident team “is 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” (Mary Schoenfeldt).

Staff Liaison

- Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Provides materials to staff from the Ready to Go Pack.

Student Liaison

- Liaises with other team members to keep them up-dated with information and progress.
- Alerts staff to vulnerable students.
- Provide materials for students from the Ready-to-Go-Pack.

Community Liaison

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies .
- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
 - Key parents, such as members of the parents council
 - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources.

Parent Liaison

- Facilitates ‘questions and answers’ meetings.
- Meets with individual parents.
- Provides materials for parents from the CISD Pack.
- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader.

Media Liaison

- In preparing for the role, s/he will consider issues that may arise during an incident and how they might be responded to (eg students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc).
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the Communications Section in the DES.

Administrative Tasks

- Maintenance of up to date lists of contact numbers of
 - Parents or guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency support services
- Telephone calls need to be responded to, letters sent and materials photocopied.

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

Letter to Parents

St Laurence O'Tooles GNS will prepare a brief, written statement to include:

- The sympathy of the school community for the affected/bereaved family
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured persons(s)

- The facts of the incident
- What has been done
- What is going to be done

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 have to be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will see 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

In the event of a critical incident the staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff, students, parents and visitors involved.

Development and communication of this policy and plan

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of the draft plan. Parent representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments. Our school's final policy and procedures in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.

Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by Mr O Riordain