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St. Attracta's Junior National School
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CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

September 2017

Introduction:

St. Attracta's J.N.S. aims to protect the wellbeing of our pupils & staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment in which to learn and work. The B.O.M., through the Principal, has drawn up the following Critical Incident Management Plan to support our school community in the event of a critical incident taking place. A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has been established to steer the development and implementation of the Critical Incident Management Plan.

This document was compiled with reference to: Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for schools (published by Dept of Education and Skills (DES) and National Education Psychological Service (NEPS), 2016.

<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Responding%20to%20Critical%20Incidents.pdf>

1. What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school.

Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, their family members or members of the local community.

Examples:

- 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.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.

1.1 Aims:

The aim of the CIMP are to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable the school to maintain a sense of control and to ensure appropriate support is offered to students and staff-thus ensuring that the impact on students and staff is limited. It should also enable the school to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

1.2 Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in St. Attracta's Junior N.S.

The Board of Management in St. Attracta's Junior N.S. has put systems/policies in place 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 including:

1.2.1 Physical Safety:

Health and Safety Plan

Regular fire drills occur

Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked

Regular servicing of boilers takes place

School doors are locked during class time

Appropriate break-time supervision is in place

Specific plan in relation to the management of pupils with SEN

Systems are in place for the admission and dismissal of pupil

1.2.2 Psychological Safety:

The management and staff aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion:

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school.

Issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help seeking and bullying are addressed in the SPHE curriculum. Promotion of mental health/developing positive self-esteem is an integral part of this provision.

- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- The Stay Safe programme is implemented in full

- The Child Protection Policy is reviewed annually
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Procedures and the name of the Designated Liaison Person.
- Appropriate books are available in the school library to reinforce the SPHE curriculum
- A Pastoral Care Policy which supports pupils, staff and parents is in place
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies including, NEPS, HSE Social Workers, Tusla,
- 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 (See DES Circulars 0022/2010 (Primary))
- The school has a clear anti-bullying policy which is reviewed annually.
- There is a care system in place in the school using the 'Continuum of Support' approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published in 2007 for primary schools
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated Support Teacher/Principal. Concerns are explored and appropriate measures are taken to ensure that the appropriate level of assistance is provided. Parents/Guardians are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency
- Staff is informed through the Pastoral Care Policy how to access support for themselves

2. Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) has been established in line with good practice. The members of the team will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will review and update the Critical Incident Policy and Plan bi-annually or subsequent to a critical incident taking place. The CIMT will consist of the following:

- Chairperson of the Board of Management
- The Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Chaplin, if required

The role of the Principal/Deputy Principal is normally one of leadership, family liaison and communication. The role of the Chaplin and relevant others relates to counselling and support.

2.1 Leadership/Family Liaison/Communication

When a critical incident occurs the Principal/Deputy Principal in conjunction with the Chairperson of the BOM, will take actions which may include the following (depending on the circumstances).

- Confirm the event, and clarify facts surrounding event.
- Activate the Critical Incident Management team.
- Express sympathy to family/families involved and assure them of the school's support.
- Ensure that the family knows who is the contact person with the school (normally a member of the CIM Team)
- Set up a crisis team room to which queries, phone calls etc will be directed. Devise a process for dealing with telephone enquiries from parents and media
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls.
- Liaise with the Gardaí / Emergency services.
- Make contact NEPS psychologist and assess the necessity of NEPS intervention.
- Decide how information will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school) and prepare a briefing document.
- Have a written and/or oral response to enquiries prepared
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, and outline how news will be communicated to pupils
- Contact parents if children request to go home
- Notify Board of Management
- Prepare a media statement (Appendix 1)
- Discourage pupils and staff from dealing with the media

2.2 Responsibilities for Principal and/or Chaplin

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students in the hours immediately following the incident
- Assist class teacher of the class affected by the breaking news
- Have guidelines for staff to deal with pupils in distress
- Monitor vulnerable students.
- Facilitate prayer service as appropriate.
- Meet and support distressed parents
- Co-ordinate the involvement of agencies.
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies.
- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal).

- Consult with family around involvement of school e.g. a funeral service.
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any other pupils affected by critical incident.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contacts with them individually and
- Advises Staff of the availability of Employee Assist Service (EAS) and provides contact details
- A list of counselling services outside school will be available to parents where necessary, as sometimes a child may need further or longer periods of counselling. 'Rainbows Ireland' supports children in such circumstances.

Bearing in mind that St. Attracta's Junior NS caters for children in Junior Classes, it is deemed appropriate that the class teachers/support teachers support them in the event of a critical incident. Teachers will have a key role in identifying children who are vulnerable, and providing age-appropriate teaching resources/activities from the critical incident folder.

3.0 The CIM Team: step by step approach in the event of a death of a member of the school community.

- The Principal, having confirmed the death makes contact with the family
- The CIM Team meet to plan strategy, bearing in mind the guidelines outlined above
- Key tasks are distributed
- Prepare/distribute guidelines for teachers
- Prepare written and oral statements ready for all communications within the school and for possible media enquiries.
- Arrange for a Staff briefing to be held as soon as possible
- CIM team outline the plan for the day and the support available
- Class teachers break news to classes, with the assistance from the Chaplin if appropriate
- Plan a further Staff Meeting if necessary to update staff and/or make decisions
- Clarify funeral arrangements with Staff when known
- CIM Team meet to plan for school involvement in the ceremony
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3.1 Short term Actions- First 24 hours:

The age of the pupils in St Attractas Junior School will influence the way in which bad news is shared with the pupils, both in terms of information imparted and language

used. The following guidelines are suggested to assist teachers in breaking bad news to the children in their care:

- The class which is directly affected by the incident should be the first to be told preferably by their own teacher or the Principal
- Other classes with then be told by their own class teachers
- Teachers will share the facts surrounding the death with them having consideration for the age of the class in question and answer any questions that the children might have.
- The teacher will discuss the feelings that people have on hearing bad news, including sadness, shock, fear, worry etc. A teacher can expect that some children will be distressed and he/she must be conscious of being available to comfort and reassure them.
- Children will be allowed to mingle and talk to each other or engage in drawing/painting activities in which they can express their thoughts and feelings
- Teachers will endeavour to observe children's behaviour, with a view to identifying those who are in distress
- In response to distress teachers should show genuine care and concern for those affected by being available to allow pupils to express their feelings and encourage as much talk as possible. Notwithstanding this teachers should also endeavour to resume normal classroom routines as quickly as possible.
- Teachers will liaise with parents as appropriate
- Where it is considered that individual children might need further or longer periods of counselling parents will be directed to services such as 'Rainbows Ireland'.

3.2 Medium term actions (24-72 HOURS)

- Consultation with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service.
- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral.
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if appropriate and if agreed by bereaved family.
- Facilitation of students'/staffs' responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, book of condolences, etc.
- Consider appropriate ritual within the school.
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team and review the events of the first 24 hours.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.

- Arrange in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission.
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc.
- Request a decision on school closure (if appropriate) from school management.

3.3 Longer term actions:

It is important that after a critical incident, that with time a de-briefing occurs for pupils and staff. In particular, staff should be kept informed of the on-going counselling and support that is available for both themselves and the pupils. Close attention to, and observation of pupils who are deeply affected by such incidents must be observed and recorded.

If, over a prolonged period of time, a pupil continues to display any of the following, he/she may need assistance from the HSE. Constant communication with family is essential.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism.

3.3.1 Staff:

In the event of any critical incident within the school the above actions attempt to serve pupils and staff alike in their dealing with a tragedy. Nevertheless each individual member of staff will deal with such an incident in their own way. It may be useful for staff to be aware of their own reactions when it comes to such a psychological trauma. Staff should be helped to understand their own emotional reactions, to plan for balance in the aftermath of the incident and to create a support system in the School. Staff are made aware of the availability of personal assistance through the Employee Assistance Scheme (DES). This can be accessed at no cost by email: easb@vhics.ie or by telephone on 1800 411057.

Copies of relevant resources are included in 'Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for schools'.

3.3.2 Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately.

- What went well?

- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

3.3.3 Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future:

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where Appropriate
- Ensure that new staff is aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal having consulted the pupil's parents/guardians, should/may brief the Principal of the new school.

4.0 Memorials and Remembrances:

In aftermath of the critical incident the CIMT will consider appropriate ways to deal with how to deal with sensitive matters arising from the event. These may include:

- How to mark anniversaries, which may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time.
- Sensitivity surrounding significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.
- Care for the deceased possessions, bearing in mind the wishes of the family

5.0 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,

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

6.0 Confidentiality:

The management and staff have 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 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 phrase ‘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. Given the age of the pupils in the St Attracta’s Junior School, it is incumbent that all communication with the children will be age appropriate in terms of information imparted and language used.

7.0 Critical incident rooms:

In the event of a critical incident the following rooms will be used:

Meeting Room: Meeting with CIMT, BOM, PA representatives

Staff Room: Meetings with staff

School hall: Meeting for parents/Media

Resource Teacher Rooms: Meetings for individual pupils

Meeting Room: Meetings for agency staff e.g. NEPS etc

Office: Administration

8.0 Consultation/ Communication:

All staff were consulted and their views sought in drawing up this plan. The views of the parent body and the members of the BOM were also sought and the ratified document has been uploaded to the school website.

All existing staff have being given a copy of the ratified document, while new staff are informed of the details of the plan by the Team Leader.

9.0 Review:

This plan will be reviewed in the 2019/20 school year, or in the event of a Critical Incident taking place prior to that date.

9.0 Ratification and Review:

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of St. Attracta's JNS., Meadowbrook on **19th September 2017** and will be reviewed before the end of January 2020, or in the event of a the CIMP being activated prior to this date.

Signed: *Paddy Gough*

Paddy Gough, Chairperson, BOM

Tommy Neary

Tommy Neary, Principal

APPENDIX 1: MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT RE. CRITICAL INCIDENT IN ST ATTRACTAS JUNIOR NS:

My name is _____ and I am the _____ of St. Attracta's Junior National School. We learned this morning of the death of _____ . This is a terrible tragedy for family (ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events and our sympathy and thoughts are with _____ family and friends.

_____ was in _____ class and will be greatly missed by all who knew him/her.

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.

We are most appreciative of the many offers of support that has been offered to us since the events of the past number of hours have unfolded, and our Critical Incident Management Plan has been implemented.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) 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 2: LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS-SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT

(SCHOOL LETTER HEAD)

Dear Parents/Guardian,

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

Support structures have been put in place to help your child cope with this tragedy **(elaborate)**

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions s/he may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is age appropriate.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to express feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or 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 reaction. Over the course of the coming days, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.

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

(OPTIONAL)

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

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

We would also ask you to monitor your child's use/access to social media at this time, and to engage with them about what they read.

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

Tommy Neary

Principal

APPENDIX 3: LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS – VIOLENT DEATH

(SCHOOL LETTER HEAD)

Dear Parents/Guardian,

I am writing to inform you of a very sad event that has occurred in our school community.

(name of deceased and his/her connection to the school) relationship lost his/her life as a result of a violent incident earlier this week. We in St. Attracta's Junior NS are profoundly saddened by this untimely death.

We have shared this information, and have had discussions with the children about this, and school staff are supporting the children in an age appropriate manner since we became aware of the incident. Other support personnel **(including psychologists etc., according to actual arrangements)** are available to advise staff on how best to address this difficult situation with the children.

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.

This death may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Some children/young people may be afraid for their own life and for the lives of those they love. Take time to listen to their fears and reassure them that what has happened is rare.

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 regret later.

In these times, people tend to turn to social media to see what other people are saying, or to find out more. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive about posts on social media sites at this time.

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

Yours Sincerely,

Tommy Neary
Principal

APPENDIX 4: EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

(To be displayed in school office and Principal's office)

AGNECY	CONTACT NUMBER
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Garda	6665600
Hospital (Tallaght)	4142000
Fire Brigade	6734000
Local GP	
HSE/Primary Care Team/Primary Care Centre/CAMHS/ Resource officer for Suicide Prevention	2164500
School Inspector	
NEPS Psychologist	087 6501970
DES	8896400
INTO	8047700
Parish Priest	086 1700090
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057

