



St Fergal's College CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Our Mission Statement

St. Fergal's College is a co-educational school that aims to provide a quality education for all our students in a caring and respectful environment. We enable students to develop fully a sense of their own unique worth by providing a broadly based curriculum, which fosters intellectual, spiritual, moral, emotional and physical growth. We are committed to promoting good relationships between students, staff, parents and our community. We aim to create a safe, healthy, learning environment that nurtures self-discipline and encourages our students to take responsibility for their own learning. We aim to educate our students not only for now, but also for life.

St Fergal's College 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 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 Fergal's 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".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 of managing critical incidents is planning, **St Fergal's College** has developed this Critical Incident Management Policy and accompanying Plan. Our hope is that, in the event of an incident, this will help staff to react quickly and effectively and 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 measure to address both the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

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



Physical safety:

- *Regular fire drills occur*
- *Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked*
- *Supervision of the school and perimeter during break times and before and after school*

Psychological safety

St Fergal's College 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 an approach to bullying.*
- *Staff are kept 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 post primary school child.*
- *The school has developed links with outside agencies that may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students.*

Critical Incident Management Team

St Fergal's College has set up a CI Management Team in line with best practice² and will maintain this team in future. The members of the team are also the members of the Student Support Team. The members of the team will meet once a year to review and update the plan.

Key roles have been identified and assigned as follows:

Team Leader	Carole Devine
Convenor/Administrator Tasks	PJ Delaney
Staff Liaison	Fergal Ryan
Student Liaison	Clodagh Kennedy
Parent Liaison	Stella Fitzgerald
Community Liaison	Jessica O'Brien
Media Liaison	Paul O'Dea
Counselling/Pastoral Care	Aishling Phelan/Rachel Dunne

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 1993).



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.

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 contacts them individually.

Student Liaison

- Liaises with other team members to keep them up-dated with information and progress.
- Alerts staff to vulnerable students.

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 Ready To Go Pack (NEPS)
- 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



St Fergal's College, Rathdowney, Co. Laois

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

The Critical Incident Team 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 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.]

Funeral Arrangements

The Principal and Deputy will call to the home of the deceased to sympathise with the family on behalf of the school community. They will liaise with the family on any funeral arrangements. Each situation will be taken as a unique case – on some occasions a class or a year group or whole school may attend a funeral- each situation is different and will be decided on in consultation with the family.

Social Media

In the event of a critical incident, we ask that insensitive or inappropriate comments not be posted on social media.

Critical Incident Room

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

Development and communication of this policy and plan

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. A copy of the critical incident plan will be included in the staff handbook.

In the event of a critical incident the critical incident team will give appropriate advice and direction. It is imperative that all the stakeholders do not deviate from same.



Approval

Previously approved by the BoM on the 04/10/2022

Ratified by the Board 04/12/24

This policy has been approved by St Fergal's College Board of Management.