

TERENURE COLLEGE
CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT POLICY¹²

¹ Reviewed Summer 2009
Updated Sept 2011

² Updated September 1 2013
Updated Dec 1 2016
Updated Oct 2017
Updated Sept 2021
Updated Sept 2022

Terenure College Critical Incident Plan and Policy

Terenure College aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. We seek to do this by our '*genuine concern and respect for each individual in their care*'³. The College, has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) as one element of the schools policy to address this key area for us as a place of education.

The staff and management of Terenure College have formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students, and the creation of a supportive and caring ethos in the school, in ordinary time as well as in the event of a critical incident. They have established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

What is a Critical Incident?

The staff and management of Terenure College recognise a critical incident to be “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school”.⁴ Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- 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
- 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

Aim of our Critical Incident Policy.

The aim of this policy is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to make a return to normality as soon as possible.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school.

We have put systems in place to help 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.

³ Mission Statement for Terenure College

⁴ Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools – NEPS. 20070

Physical safety:

Ref. to Health & Safety policy

- An evacuation plan has been formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- There is a daily supervision rota in the school – pre-school, break times, lunchtimes and after school (This is posted in both staff rooms)
- The side gate to the College is locked during school hours
- The school yard is closed to traffic from 9 a.m. to 2.45 p.m. (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) and 9 a.m. – 12.45 p.m. (Wednesday)
- Rules for the yard/classrooms – pupils are informed as to their behaviour in the school building and in the school yard. A copy of these basic rules is on display in each classroom and is also contained in the School Journal which every pupil is required to have. These rules, regulations and guidelines for behaviour have been formulated in a Code of Discipline which is posted home to parents who sign an acceptance letter and return it to the College. Year Heads remind pupils of these rules etc. during assemblies that are held from time to time during the course of the year.

Psychological safety.

The management and staff of Terenure College aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and other issues and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. This is done in the following ways:

Some suggestions follow:

- Social, personal and health education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and alcohol and drug prevention. Promotion of mental health is included in this provision.
- Staff has access to training for their role in SPHE.
- The College has adopted the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures. The guidelines have been presented to the staff and each person has received their own copy. These guidelines include details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary/post primary school student are available.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and interventions for suicidal students.

- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies e.g. NEPS, Lucena Clinic etc.
- 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 Section 7 of *Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools*)
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy. All staff and students are aware of this policy. (ref. Bullying Policy)
- There is a Pastoral Care system in place in the school (ref. Pastoral Care Policy)
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. guidance counsellor or support teacher or chaplain etc.), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. 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 annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Roles.

The key roles which need to be covered are as follows

- Team leader
- Garda liaison
- Staff liaison.
- Student liaison
- Parent liaison
- Community liaison
- Media liaison
- Junior School liaison
- Administrator

Team leader. (A person who carries authority and can make decisions during a crisis (e.g., school closure, attendance at memorial services, etc.))

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team

- Liaises with the DES; NEPS; SEC
- Liaises with the bereaved family

In the absence of the team leader i.e. the Principal, the Deputy Principal will assume these roles. Where both the Principal and Deputy Principal are unavailable the role will be assumed by the Pastoral Care Co-Ordinator until either of them arrive.

Gárda liaison (This may be seen as part of the team leader's role)

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths is checked out before being shared

Staff liaison (A staff member known and trusted by the staff.)

- To ensure that all staff (insofar as is possible) are contacted by phone to inform them of the nature of the critical incident that has happened. They should enlist the help of other members of the critical incident team to do this.
- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually. Advises them of availability of EAS and gives them the contact number.

Student liaison (A trusted and familiar figure to the students. A bigger school may need a number of such people.)

- At post-primary level, may co-ordinate information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed

Agency liaison (Someone with good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community)

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
 - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert of the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

Parent liaison (Someone who is known to the parents. This person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have skills to manage emotional reactions of individual or groups of parents.)

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

Media liaison (Someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media by phone or in person. A person who is able to set limits without being offensive)

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the SEC; relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 - ❑ Parents or guardians
 - ❑ Teachers
 - ❑ Emergency support services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to. In the immediate aftermath of any incident it may be necessary to have several people taking phone calls. Anyone carrying out such a function will report the outcome of all calls to the Administrator.
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

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, material used etc.

Ms Emer McElduff will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc. She will be assisted in the logging of phone calls where necessary.

Confidentiality and good name considerations.

The management and staff of Terenure College 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 the 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 phrases '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.

Critical incident rooms.

In the event of a critical incident,

- The Old Library will be the main room used to meet the staff,
- Lecture Hall (where necessary), base classrooms for meetings with students,
- Parlour for parents,
- Parlour for press,
- One to one room, group room, chaplaincy for individual sessions with students, and
- Parlour for other visitors
- Oratory

Report

A log of everything that we do should be kept and stored in a file/folder so that a critical incident if it occurs is recorded in its entirety. This report can be then used to assess our response to a critical incident and provide the basis on which we can evaluate any such incident.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Principal and Deputy Principal at the new staff induction meeting which occurs prior to the beginning of the academic year.

This plan will be updated and reviewed at the start of each Academic year by the CIMT.