Critical Incident Management Policy
of

Jesus & Mary Secondary School.
Gortnor Abbey

School Patrons: Le Chéile Schools Trust clg.

This Policy has been approved by the Board of Management at its meeting of

DATE: 26-3-2026

CHAIRPERSON: Paul Mc Dermott

Mr. Paul Mc Dermott

NEXT REVIEW DATE: 26-3-2029

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1. **Introduction:**

This document outlines our management plan for a critical incident in Jesus & Mary Secondary School, Gortnor Abbey and is based on the NEPs school plan template (DES, 2015a). The staff and management of Jesus & Mary Secondary School recognise a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school" DES, 2015b). 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 accident involving members of the school community*
- *An accident/tragedy in the wider community*
- *Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc*
- *The disappearance of a member of the school community.*

Gortnor Abbey has devised the CIMP framed with respect to our school's mission statement:

Jesus & Mary Secondary School Mission Statement:

We are a Christian Co-educational Secondary School. In keeping with the Jesus and Mary Ethos, we are committed to the holistic development of each individual in our community by:

- ❖ Empowering each person to grow in justice, honesty, respect and loyalty to self, family, school and community. Helping all students to achieve full potential at their studies.
- ❖ Promoting an appreciation of Heritage, Culture and the Environment.
- ❖ Providing an atmosphere where religious belief, a sense of responsibility, self- confidence, self-esteem and self-identity are developed.
- ❖ Encouraging participation in all facets of school life - spiritual, academic, sporting, social and cultural.

Jesus & Mary Secondary School, Gortnor Abbey, aims to protect the well-being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. The Board of Management, through ***Caroline Harrison (Principal)*** has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan as one element of the school's policies and plans. If the critical incident is one that affects the whole school community, then the Critical Incident Management Plan is put into action. This ensures that best practice is followed in offering emotional, spiritual and psychological support to all those affected by the tragedy at a critical time in the life of the school.

2. Review and Research

The CIMT have consulted resource documents available to schools on www.education.ie and www.nosp.ie including:

- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013)
- *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (NCCA, 2017)

3. Aim

The aim of the CIMP 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 composure.
- To ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff.
- To help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited.
- To enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

4. 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 which are outlined fully in our Health and Safety Policy, Code of Behaviour, School Guidance Plan and include but are not limited to the following:

- Supervision of students outside class times (before & after school, lunch etc.
- SPHE provision for all students and CPD for staff as appropriate. This programme includes stress/anger/conflict management, decision making, problem solving and mental health related topics.
- Wellbeing programme for first years to promote self-awareness and resilience as well as general self-care.
- Study skills workshops in order to support learning and alleviate exam stress.
- School policy for Child Protection in place, implemented and reviewed annually. Staff and students are familiar with the procedures and the name of the DLP and DDLP
- School policy for Anti-Bullying in place, implemented and reviewed annually
- Student Support Team (formerly Care Team) using the NEPS "Continuum of Support" approach and Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools Guidelines (2014).
- Referral systems for students identified as being at risk
- Staff is informed about how to access support for themselves (www.spectrumlife.ie)
- Resources and training available to staff on the difficulties affecting students at post-primary level available including mental health, depression, anxiety and suicide awareness.
- Links made with external agencies as appropriate and visitors/speakers to school considered in line with circular 0023/2010 – reiterating through SPHE

5. **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 access to a shared digital 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.

Team leader: Ms. *Caroline Harrison, Principal. (In her absence: Taryn Kelly Deputy Principal)*

Role

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting (What's app group)
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS; SEC, Ms Teresa Judge (Psychologist).
- Liaises with the bereaved family

Garda liaison: Ms. *Taryn Kelly, Deputy Principal.*

Role

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

Staff liaison: Ms. Caroline Harrison, Principal.

Role

- 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
- Gathering from staff on the possible identification of vulnerable students, email staff at to anyone who knows someone connected.
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of the Spectrum Life and gives them the contact number.

Student liaison: Ms. Fidelma Carey, Guidance Counsellor/ Ms. Taryn Kelly, Deputy Principal.

Role

- At post-primary level, may co-ordinate information from year heads about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately).
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Maintains student contact records (R1).
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room or meeting room where agreed

Community/agency liaison: Ms. Caroline Harrison, Principal.

Role

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of
  - Key parents, such as members of the BOM & Parents Association
  - Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert to 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: Ms. Caroline Harrison, Principal.

Role
- Visits the bereaved family with the Deputy Principal and one other as appropriate.
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers', Insures is open and available.
- 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 to support for parents (from their critical incident folder)

Media liaison: Ms. Caroline Harrison, Principal.

Role
- 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 a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)
- In the use of social media, turn off all comments.

Administrator: Ms. Marcella O' Connor, School Secretary.

Role
- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
    - Parents or guardians
    - Teachers
    - Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to by the Principal
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts with approval
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records
- Screen phone calls for media.
- Ask for name and number

6. Confidentiality

Management and staff of Jesus & Mary Secondary School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of public statements. No comment approach from all staff. Members of school staff will bear this in mind, and seek to ensure that students do so also, e.g. 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.

7. 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. Marcella O' Connor (School Secretary)** will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

8. Room Allocations

Critical Incident Rooms In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms are designated for the indicated purposes	
Room Name:	**Designated Purpose:**
Staff Room *Year Head Office*	Main room for meeting staff Crisis Response Room
Thevenet Hall/ GYM	Meetings with students
Thevenet Hall/ *Principal's Office*	Meetings with parents
Thevenet Hall/ *Principal's Office*	Meetings with media
Guidance Counsellor's Office	Individual sessions with students
Principal's Office *Quiet Space*	Meetings with other visitors Prayer Room
Home Economics Room	Welcoming Room Refreshments/Hospitality.

Consultation and communication regarding the preparation of this plan

- The staff members were consulted.
- Students and Parent/Guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

- Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.
- Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan.
- All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by Ms. Taryn Kelly, Deputy Principal. A copy will be in the induction handbook.
- The plan will be updated annually in October.

9. CIMT TEAM & Actions:

Critical Incident Management Team		
Role	**Name**	**Phone**
Team leader:	*Ms. Caroline Harrison*	
Garda liaison	*Ms. Taryn Kelly* *Ms. Caroline Harrison*	096 31194
Staff liaison	*Ms. Caroline Harrison* *Ms. Catherine Newman*	096 31194
Student liaison	*Ms. Fidelma Carey* *Ms. Taryn Kelly* *Ms. Catherine Newman* *Ms. Sharon Fleming* *Relevant Year Head*	096 31194
Community liaison	*Ms. Caroline Harrison* *Ms. Sharon Fleming*	096 31194
Parent liaison	*Ms. Caroline Harrison* *Ms. Taryn Kelly* *Ms. Catherine Newman* *Ms. Sharon Fleming* *Relevant Year Head*	096 31194
Media liaison	*Ms. Caroline Harrison*	
Administrator	*Ms. Marcella O' Connor*	096 31194
Funeral Arrangements	*Ms. Taryn Kelly* *Relevant Year Head*	096 31194

Short term actions – Day 1 (Leadership, CMIT)

Task	Name	Completed
Assess the response level required to the incident	Principal	
Confirm the incident/ death has occurred	Principal	
Make contact with the family; gather accurate information from the family or the Gardaí. (Who, what, when, where?)	Principal	

Express sympathy to family, assure then of the school's support, ascertain if name is in public domain, ensure the family know who the contact person in the school is.	Principal	
Contact/ visit the bereaved family, consult with family on school involvement in funeral (family wishes to be respected).	Principal	
Notify BOM. Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly. (What's app message)	Principal	
Set up CIMT room in school, distribute key tasks (including the contacting of external agencies) and prepare guidelines & procedures for staff.	Principal CIMT	
Prepare an announcement for staff/students, distribute procedures to staff for breaking the news	Appendix V	
Arrange a process for dealing with telephone enquiries from anxious parents and have a dedicated extension/teacher/staff member to answer queries (student name not to be given out)	CIMT	
Prepare written/ oral response to the enquiries, prepare media statement (discourage staff/students from engaging with the media). **Social Media posts – Turn off comments.**	CIMT/ Appendix	
Liaise with local organisations as necessary	Principal	

Short term actions – Day 1 (CIMT, staff)

Task	Name	Completed
Plan and hold a staff meeting if required (teaching and non-teaching staff), make a note of any absences/late arrivals to ensure all staff are briefed.	Ms. Caroline Harrison	
CIMT outline schedule for the day and the support available, location of crisis response room.	CIMT	
Arrange supervision of students.	Ms. Taryn Kelly	
Inform students- (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	Ms. Caroline Harrison Ms. Taryn Kelly Ms. Fidelma Carey	
Make students aware of the supports available	*Ms. Taryn Kelly* *Relevant Year Head*	
Compile a list of vulnerable students	CIMT, all staff	
Make decisions on who should attend funeral. Agree if school should remain open in the day of the funeral (recommended to stay open if possible). Clarify funeral arrangements for staff. – See handbook guide.	CIMT	

Plan and hold end of day staff briefing	Principal/CIMT	

Medium term actions – Day 2 and after

Task	Name	Completed
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1, procedures for school involvement in removal and funeral.	Principal/ CIMT	
Students not coping referred to the Guidance Counsellor on an individual basis.	CIMT	
Arrange additional support for students, staff, and parents. Contact additional counsellors if necessary.	CIMT	
Meet whole staff	Ms. Caroline Harrison Ms. Taryn Kelly	
Visit the injured	Ms. Caroline Harrison Relevant Year Head	
Meet external agencies	Principal/ CIMT	
After funeral, CIMT meet to plan critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) response.	CIMT	

Follow up: beyond 72 hours

Task	Name	Completed
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	All staff	
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Ms. Caroline Harrison Ms. Taryn Kelly Ms. Fidelma Carey	
Plan for return of bereaved students (s)	Ms. Caroline Harrison Ms. Taryn Kelly Ms. Fidelma Carey Ms. Maeve Mc Hale Relevant Year Head	
Decide on memorials/ anniversaries	Principal/BOM/ Parents, students, staff.	
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/ BOM	

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

AGENCY	CONTACT NUMBERS
Garda	112/999 096 31371 Crossmolina 096 20560 Ballina
Hospital	094 902 1733 Castlebar
Ambulance/Fire Brigade	112/999
Local GPs	096 56096
Community Care Team	
Child and Family Centre (TUSLA)	094 904 2030
Child and Family Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	Mayo North 096 21511
School Inspector	
NEPS Psychologist	Teresa Judge 087 0520802
DES	094 902 0700
INTO/ASTI/TUI/Fórsa	ASTI 01 604 0160 TUI 01 693 7700 Fórsa 091 778 031
Clergy	096 31677 087 2401899
State Exams Commission	090 6442700
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411 057
Le Chéile Schools Trust	01 538 0104

10. Supporting Documents

ACCS Resources regarding Critical Incident planning and policy development.

Department of Education and Skills (2015a), Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Materials for Schools.

Department of Education and Skills (2015b), Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools.

Department of Education and Skills, (2014), Student support teams in post-primary schools, A guide to establishing a team or reviewing an existing team.

Department of Education and Skills, (2013), Wellbeing in post-primary schools. Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention.

Department of Education and Skills (2010), Circular 0023/2010: Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) & Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools.

Health Service Executive (2011), Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide

IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002), Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines

11. Useful websites

http://www.mayomha.ie/

http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie/mind-yourself/good-mental-health/

http://www.alustforlife.com/

http://www.pieta.ie/

http://www.mindspacemayo.ie/

http://spunout.ie/

Appendix I: Contacting Staff

If the critical incident occurs during term time the steps outlined above in the CIMP will be followed. However if the critical incident occurs over the weekend/ holidays:

Task	Name	Completed
In the case of the death of a student, The CIMT will be informed immediately. Other staff will be informed in due course.	Principal	
In the case of the death of a colleague, staff will be informed by text.	Principal	
Whoever hears the news first to contact the Principal or Deputy Principal.	All	
Contact BOM and Parent's Council Association	Principal	

A staff contact list is available on request but will not be included in the public document.

Appendix II: Breaking bad news to students

Task	Name	Completed
The class of the student who has died should be the first to be told, preferably with the school counsellor present.		
Other classes to be told by staff/ tutors.		
Not every class is going to be traumatised, some students may not even know the deceased, but it is important to acknowledge the loss for the whole school community.		
Tell the class you have sad news and that it is difficult for you to do this.		
Let them know the name of the person the news is about: • What has happened – using correct terms - facts • Who was involved • When it happened • The plan for the day		
Let them know the facts, as you know them (It is important to prevent rumours through misinformation). It is also important that students know that it is not appropriate for them to speak to the media about what has happened. If they are asked they should say they have no comment or nothing to say.		
Only if the tragedy is confirmed as a suicide by the family, can it be relayed as such to students.		
Encourage questions		
Let the class know of common reactions to tragic news (see below). The most common is shock. Expect tears and outbursts.		
Let them know that you will support them. Let them know who else is available to support them. Inform students what supports will be available throughout the day.		
Don't allow a student to leave the classroom alone in a distressed state.		
Students must be supervised within the building in a distressed state.		
If a student is suspected as being at risk the Principal should be notified immediately.		
Be attentive to identify those who are not coping well with the news-refer students for individual attention.		
Let students know where the CIMT room is.		
Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also upset by the news.		
Allow them time (limited) to mingle and talk to one another in groups (avoid hysteria).		
Explain how they can support one another.		
You may need to remind students again who is there to help, as little information is assimilated once in shock.		
A short prayer for the deceased may be appropriate.		
Inform students that their Year Head will keep them up to date.		

Some students may be able to continue and go to class. Bear in mind that some students may not be able to concentrate on the work being done. Subject teachers will need to make allowances for them to talk in groups as the need arises.		
Some students will need to stay with the CIMT for a time.		
Encourage students to stay in school to support one another.		

Reactions to a critical incident:

Students may experience some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

Emotions & thoughts	**Physical**	**Behavioural**
Shock	Tiredness	Nightmares
Fear	Sleeplessness	Social withdrawal
Guilt	Headaches	Over reliance on use of social media
Shame	Stomach Problems	Irritability
Regret	Bowel/ bladder problems	Loss of concentration
Anger	Loss or increase in appetite	Forgetfulness
Tearfulness		Physical/ Verbal aggression
Loneliness		Misuse of drugs/ alcohol
Anxiety		
Mood swings		
Yearning		
Numbness		
Confusion		
Isolation		
Insecurity		
Disbelief		
Denial		
Sense of unreality		
Preoccupation with images of the event/person		

Student Contact Record:

This form can be used by school staff to record the details of students supported following a critical incident. This information should be collated centrally through the CIMT

Name of Staff Member			
Date	Student's name	Class	Outcome (including need for follow up)

Appendix III Letters and information for parents

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, staff and students of Gortnor Abbey have learned of the *(tragic, sudden)* death, untimely passing, of **student X.**

(Give accurate information about the incident if deemed appropriate by the CIMT)

Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the X family. On hearing this sad/ tragic news our Critical Incident Plan was put into immediate operation. The Critical incident Team met to ensure that students affected by this loss are cared for appropriately.

We have shared this information and had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened. School staff members have been available for students on an on-going basis today. Other support personnel (**EDIT*including psychologists etc, according to actual arrangements*) are available to advise staff. This support will continue to be available to advise staff in their support of students*(*EDIT*if appropriate insert how long)*.

Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.

Following consultation with the deceased's family, the arrangements for the funeral are as follows:

Removal:
Church Service:
Burial:

(If planned) A support meeting for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time we can talk further about how to help ourselves and our children. We have enclosed some information that might be of assistance at this most difficult time. If there are any other areas of concern please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Yours sincerely

_____

Ms. Caroline Harrison.

Principal.

Appendix III: Information Sheet for Parents

As you are the natural source of support for your child you may find that he/she will want to discuss some feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully, restating what you hear and repeating it back to them to let them know you are really listening.

You should tell them that it is okay to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. You may also find that your child will look for comfort and support from their friends, this is a natural reaction from an adolescent.

Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult your doctor for a check up. The length for the grieving period varies from individual to individual. If your child remains very distressed after six weeks or so, he/she may need some additional support.

Reactions to a critical incident:		
Emotions & thoughts	**Physical**	**Behavioural**
Shock	Tiredness	Nightmares
Fear	Sleeplessness	Social withdrawal
Guilt	Headaches	Over reliance on use of social media
Shame	Stomach Problems	Irritability
Regret	Bowel/ bladder problems	Loss of concentration
Anger	Loss or increase in appetite	Forgetfulness
Tearfulness		Physical/ Verbal aggression
Loneliness		Misuse of drugs/ alcohol
Anxiety		
Mood swings		
Yearning		
Numbness		
Confusion		
Isolation		
Insecurity		
Disbelief		
Denial		
Sense of unreality		
Preoccupation with images of the event/person		

Appendix IV: Sample Media Statement

It is with profound sadness that the Board of Management, staff and students of Jesus & Mary Secondary School, Gortnor Abbey, heave learned of the tragic death of **student X.**

Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the family and friends of **student X.**

On hearing the tragic news the school enacted their critical incident plan. The Critical Management Team met to ensure that students affected by this loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

The school is offering support for students & staff affected by this tragedy.
Students will attend and participate in the funeral service, in consultation with the wishes of the family.

Our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this tragedy.