Guidance Note on the preparation of a

Critical Incident

Management Plan

January 2013

Critical Incident Management Plan

> **Notice**: This resource is intended to assist schools in devising their own procedures for managing critical incidents. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided, schools are advised to consult up to date circulars, recent legislation or guidelines from relevant agencies if they have specific queries regarding this topic.
> *This note is for guidance only and does not purport to be a legal interpretation.*

1. *Why have a Critical Incident Management Plan?*
"The key to managing a critical incident is planning. NEPS psychologists report that schools that have developed school policy and a **Critical Incident Management Plan** (CIMP) are able to cope more effectively in the aftermath of an incident. Having a plan enables staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. It may also ensure that normality returns as soon as possible and that the effects on students and staff are limited".
Responding to Critical Incidents, Guidelines for Schools (Section 3.1), NEPS, 2007

Schools should put such a plan in place if they have not already done so.

2. The following documents are essential reference documents, both at planning stage and in the event of a critical incident:

- **Responding to Critical Incidents - Guidelines for Schools, NEPS, 2007**
- **Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2007**

3. Each of the following issues should be considered by the school and are dealt with in more detail below:

> *A. Creation of a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school.*
> *B. Defining a critical incident.*
> *C. Creation of a critical incident management team.*
> *D. Development and communication of the plan, including short term action, medium term action and follow up action.*
> *E. Administrative tasks.*

A. *Creation of a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school:*

In reviewing the school's vision/mission statement, has consideration been given to the following?

- o Elements that contribute to the creation of a psychologically safe environment
- o Integration of SPHE programmes in the curriculum addressing issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, self esteem, coping skills …
- o Incorporation of mental health issues into regular SPHE provision
- o Creation of a physically and psychologically safe environment (*Refer to school's Code of Behaviour, Anti Bullying Policy ,Health and Safety Statement)*
- o Provision of staff training and resources
- o Systems and procedures for the identification of students at risk
- o Procedures to link with external agencies
- o Provision of a system to ensure staff members are familiar with *Children First- National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011.*
- o Support for staff, if required e.g. Employee Assistance Service :
  Carecall 1800 411 057

B. *Defining a critical incident:*

At the outset of the development of the plan it is important for the school to define what is meant by a critical incident. "In general it is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school" *Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools, NEPS, 2007, p.15.* List the types of critical incidents that may arise, e.g.

- *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 intrusion into the school*
- *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*
  - Are staff members familiar with the Guidelines and Resource Materials from NEPS?
  - What role can the NEPS psychologist play in critical incident planning? *(p. 15 Guidelines)*

C. *Creation of a critical incident management team:*

"Principal will play a key role, being responsible for many of the tasks." *Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools, NEPS, p.16*
  - A planning team of key personnel should be formed *(p. 16)*
    - How will team members be selected?
    - How long will they serve on the team? *("at least one full school year", p. 16)*
  - The team should meet annually to update and review the plan. When will the team meet?
  - Roles of the team: Who will do what, when and how? In deciding on the assignment of roles, the school must take into account such issues as school size and the number of staff. Consider the following possible roles: team leader *(p.19-29 Guidelines),* garda contact, staff contact, student contact, parent contact, community/agency contact, media contact, and administrator. Refer to R21 in *Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2007.*

D. *Development and communication of the Critical Incident Plan:*

As with all School Planning, it is the responsibility of the Board of Management to arrange for the preparation and review of the School Plan. For guidance in the development of a **Critical Incident Management Plan** (CIMP), refer to *Templates R21 and R22 Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2007.*

  - Are all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) consulted in the drafting of the plan?
  - Are parent representatives consulted?
  - Does the plan include short term, medium term and follow up actions – refer to pages 19 - 26 Guidelines ; pages 27 ; pages 28 -29 respectively
  - How are non English speaking parents, or parents from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, consulted?
  - Are clear guidelines outlined in relation to short term, medium term, and long term actions that may be required? *(p.19-29 Guidelines)*
  - Is there a plan for evacuation included in the school's critical incident plan?
  - Will the school remain open? *(Refer to p.21 Guidelines)*
  - Are there particular issues that need to be addressed in the event of a
    1. Suicide/suspected suicide?

2. Road traffic accident?
3. Violent death? *(p.30-42 Guidelines)*
   - What procedures will be adopted for dealing with the media?
     (Refer to p.43 – 45 Guidelines)

Communication and availability of plan (Refer to Page 17 Guidelines)

- Is the plan readily accessible to all members of staff?
- Do members of the critical incident management team have a copy of the plan?
- Do all staff members have a copy?
- Who will communicate this plan to new and temporary staff?
- How will this plan be communicated to parents/guardians?
- Will a letter be written to all parents/ guardians, seeking advance parental agreement to a pupil being seen by a NEPS psychologist? (Refer to p.11/12 *Responding to Critical Incidents, Guidelines for Schools* and R3 *Responding to Critical Incidents, Resource Materials for Schools).*
- Will template letters be available, just necessitating amendment if a crisis arises? Refer to p.17 Guidelines.

E. Administrative Tasks:

Contact numbers

- Maintaining an up to date list of contact numbers. Numbers should be available for:
  - Pupils, Parents/Guardians, Staff
  - Emergency support services *(Refer to R23 in Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2007)*
- Who will compile and update these lists regularly? Where will these lists be kept? Who has access to these lists?
- Are those with access to these lists aware of their obligations under the Data Protection Act? (i.e. to use this data only in ways that are consistent with the purpose/purposes for which it is kept).
- Who will contact the general parent body in the event of an emergency? What will be communicated? By what means e.g. text a parent/letter?
- Where will the list of emergency support services be displayed?

Resources

- What resources can be prepared in advance of an incident? e.g. templates for letters to parents, templates for press releases, list of emergency contact details, checklist for first 24 hours, map of school building? …
- Can a plan of the school building, with exits highlighted, be displayed?
- Is it possible to assign a room that could/will be used should a critical incident arise?
- Can a dedicated phone line be made available?
- Can packs containing the Critical Incident Plan and the NEPS Guidelines and Resources be prepared in advance and placed in a designated place for speedy distribution?

Information for school trips

- Who will compile list of all pupils/staff involved and the teacher in charge?

- o Who will compile list of mobile phone numbers for the accompanying teacher/s?
- o How will the school ensure that it has up to date medical information on pupils?

Record keeping

- o What records will be kept in the course of a critical incident?
- o What format will be used to record these? How long will the records be kept?
- o Who is responsible for these records? Who will have access to these records?

Reference Section

- Responding to Critical Incidents – Guidelines for Schools and Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2007
- Responding to Critical Incidents – Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2007
- CPSMA Management Board Members' Handbook, 2012 p.170

Websites

DES – NEPS	www.education.ie
Health and Safety Authority	www.hsa.ie
Allianz *(Church and General)*	www.allianz.ie
CPSMA	www.cpsma.ie