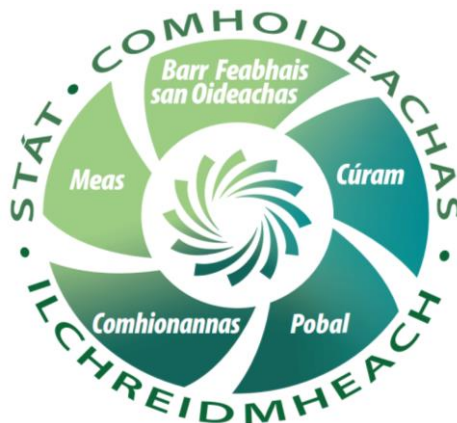




***Critical Incident  
Management Plan (CIMP)  
2024-2025***



## Core Team: Principal, Deputy Principals, Education Officer LMETB

<b>Critical Incident Team</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Contact No. 1</b>	<b>Contact No. 2</b>
Kevin Joyce	Principal		042 9376246
Rosanna Hart	Deputy Principal		042 9376246
Sinéad McDonnell	Deputy Principal		042 9376246
Deborah McMahon	Guidance Counsellor		042 9376246
Sandra Woods	Guidance Counsellor		042 9376246
Karen McMullen	Guidance Counsellor		042 9376246
Sharon Boyle	Assistant Principal		042 9376246
Shane Brennan	Assistant Principal		042 9376246
Sinéad Brennan	Assistant Principal/SEN		042 9376246
Joe Corcoran	Assistant Principal		042 9376246
Olivia Cosgrove	Assistant Principal		042 9376246
Sheena Gartland	Assistant Principal		042 9376246
Paul Malone	Assistant Principal		042 9376246
Jessica McCartney	Assistant Principal		042 9376246
Sheila McDonald	Assistant Principal		042 9376246
Ciara Harkin	Home School Community Liaison		042 9376246
Amanda McDonnell	SEN / Learning Support		042 9376246
Carol Ann Farrelly	SEN / Learning Support		042 9376246
Geraldine Guerin	SEN / Learning Support		042 9376246
SPHE	Grace Byrne		042 9376246
Paul Harkin	Health & Safety Officer		042 9376246
<b>Additional Supports</b>			
Chairperson of BOM	Siobhán Greer		042 9376246
Niki Heatley & Lauren McKeown	School Administration		042 9376246
Gerard McEaney	Caretaker		042 9376246
Eamonn Sheridan	Caretaker		042 9376246
Anchor Buses Seamus Keenan	Buses		042 9371893
Mr. Kevin Breen	Bus Inspector		0818836611

## Contacting Bush Post Primary Staff

A Staff group email and a whole staff group text will be set up in school to enable all members of staff to be informed if a critical incident occurs. Text to parent may also be used in a critical incident if it can be of assistance in the event of a critical incident.

## Introduction

In Bush Post Primary we are a learning community committed to the development of the whole person within a context which values each of its members. In Bush Post Primary we have a vision that all of our students will develop a love of learning and a keen sense of social responsibility through a positive and happy school experience. We hope they will develop as caring, well-adjusted individuals, who will succeed in life and contribute positively to the wider community. Our caring and dedicated staff is committed to helping each student achieve his/her potential.

In keeping with our School Mission Statement and the *Education and Training Board of Ireland, (ETBI)*, 'Core Values' of 'Care, Community, Equality, Respect and Excellence in Education', the Board of Management is committed to the care of staff and students in our school. This policy refers to the response taken by this school should a critical incident occur. As each critical incident will require the school to respond in a manner appropriate to that particular incident at that time, this CIMP is intended to serve as a general outline of procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident occurring.

## Definition

For the purposes of this policy, a critical incident is defined as any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and/or disrupts the running of the school and/or attracts public/media attention on the school e.g.

- The death of a member of the school community through natural causes (e.g. illness), an accident, by a deliberate act of violence or by suicide
- A serious accident involving pupils or staff either onsite or offsite
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

- A fire or explosion in the school
- Serious damage to the school through flooding or vandalism
- An intrusion into the school
- Threats of harm to students, personnel and/or facilities
- Outbreak of a communicable illness or disease
- Serious accident or tragedy in the wider community
- Use of weapons or explosives in or near the school
- Civil disturbances including terrorism

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

### ***Aim of the CIMP***

The aim of this 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 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 effect a return to normality as soon as possible. This CIMP aims to help Bush Post Primary's school management, staff and students manage the crisis and its aftermath by providing a clear set of procedures that unify the best response to any critical incident.

### **Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school**

At Bush Post Primary we have put systems in place to help 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.

### ***Physical Safety:***

Bush Post Primary has developed a Health and Safety Policy and the following are examples of other measures taken regarding ensuring physical safety of members of the school community:

- Evacuation plan developed
- Regular fire drills occur followed up by review and evaluation
- Regular Health and Safety audits
- Fire exits and extinguishers regularly checked
- Supervision in the early morning, break time, lunch time and after school
- Sign in/Sign out systems for students at main reception area

## **School Educational and Sporting outings & School Tours**

- It is the responsibility of the teachers taking Bush Post Primary students on any trip to send notification in writing to parents and guardians outlining the details and activities involved in the educational outing and seeking permission for the student to travel. The method of reply must provide a space for any medical conditions to be highlighted and returned to the teacher organizing the trip
- It is the responsibility of parents and guardians to make tour teachers aware of any medical conditions before their child travels on a school trip by returning the reply slip
- As there are a large number of sports outings each year, the teachers coaching each team must select their panel at the start of the school year and send a permission request, as above, which seeks permission for the student to attend all matches, throughout the academic year, with the teachers coaching that particular team.
- If a teacher takes a student or a number of students away from timetabled classes on an education or sporting outing, they must inform all staff of the list of students involved, in writing, and post the list of students leaving school on the notice board in the Staff Room. (As per our fire safety procedures).

### ***Psychological Safety:***

The management and staff at Bush Post Primary aim to use available resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. Examples at Bush Post Primary include:

- Student Support Team at the school which meets on a weekly basis and more often if required. The Student Support Team members are: Mr. Kevin Joyce (Principal), Ms. Rosanna Hart, (Deputy Principal), Mrs. Sinéad McDonnell (Deputy Principal), Ms. Sinéad Brennan, (SEN Department), Ms. Ciara Harkin (HSCL), Mrs. Deborah McMahon, Ms. Sandra Woods and Ms. Karen McMullen (Student Support & Career Guidance Counsellor)
- Full time Guidance Counsellors
- Year Head & Class Tutor System
- Social Skills Development groups organised by the SEN Department
- Timetabled SPHE classes for all students
- Timetabled Guidance classes for all Senior students

- Cineáltas (Anti-Bullying) Policy, Anti-Bullying/Friendship Week, Anti-Bullying Co-Ordinator & Anti-Bullying Team
- Staff access to training for SPHE
- Staff training and awareness of the Child Protection Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures
- Range of Wellbeing themed weeks over the course of the school year which may include Positive Mental Health Week and Anti-Bullying Week
- Staff training around positive mental health, suicide awareness, eating disorders and depression etc.
- Availability of booklets, resources and information on difficulties affecting post primary students available within the school
- Development of links with a range of external agencies, Men's Development Network (White Ribbon Programme), TUSLA, CAHMS
- Regular updates and reminders to students and staff regarding accessing support for themselves
- School Wellbeing Policy and Co-Ordinator.

### ***Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)***

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. Members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan.

### ***Best Practice in Managing Critical Incidents***

The key to managing a critical incident is planning. NEPS Psychologists report that schools that have developed school policies and a CIMP are able to cope more effectively in the aftermath of an incident. Having a plan enables staff to react quickly and effectively to maintain a sense of control. It may also ensure that normality returns as soon as possible and that the effects on the students and staff are limited.

***Research suggests that an effective response by the school during the first 48 hours is crucial.***

To ensure this occurs, Bush Post Primary will carry out the following on an annual basis:

1. Form a CIMT to include: the Principal, Deputy Principals, Assistant Principals, Guidance Counsellor, Home School Community Liaison Officer, SEN Co-Ordinator, SPHE Co-Ordinator, Representative of the Board of Management (Chairperson), and

Representative of Administrative Staff (School Secretaries & Caretakers). (See front cover of policy for Bush Post Primary's CIMT and contact details).

2. Maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers for Staff, parents/guardians of students and the emergency support services
3. Maintain a texting system for staff and parents/guardians so that information can be conveyed should a CI happen outside of normal school hours
4. Copies of the CIMP and the Database of Contact Numbers will be kept in the Administrative Officer and the Principal's Office
5. Copy of School Layout will be retained in the Administrative Office and in the Principal's Office
6. In the case of school tours, the tour leader will compile an information pack to include:
  - *Name of the tour leader,*
  - *A list of all participating teachers and pupils*
  - *Contact numbers for teachers and pupils*
  - *Relevant medical information on pupils and permission forms from parents/guardians in case of a medical emergency*
  - *Insurance details and copy of itinerary.*
  - *A copy of this file will be left with the Principal and in the Administrative Office prior to departure.*
  - *A school mobile phone will also be made available to staff for international outings and trips.*
7. All staff will be made aware of the Health and Safety Policy, the Fire Evacuation Procedures, the location of defibrillators and the names of those trained in their use and in First Aid. These lists will be posted near the defibrillators, in the staffroom, in the Administrative Office and attached to this document
8. Staff will be reminded of these procedures at the initial staff meeting annually and this information will be included in the staff manual which is available on SharePoint.

### **Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident**

On notification of a critical incident, the Principal will contact the Core Team and convene a meeting of the CIMT to plan school management's approach for dealing with the specifics of the critical incident. The CIMT meeting will:

- Ascertain the facts

- Make contact with the families concerned
- Consider which agencies need to be contacted and contact appropriate agencies (e.g., NEPS, DES)
- Agree on a statement of facts for staff, pupils, parents/guardians and the media and inform these parties as appropriate and ensure that these will be delivered to staff and students in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner
- Inform staff, students, BOM, Parents Association, LMETB. Regarding informing students, class groups are better than larger assemblies
- Plan a whole staff briefing considering supervision arrangements
- Consult staff and students if there is an event scheduled such as educational outing, sports competition etc.
- Identify high risk pupils
- Agree the text of a letter/text message to be sent to parents/guardians
- Discuss how to deal with the Media. **The Principal will deliver all statements to the news and media**
- Appoint one/two persons to deal with phone calls if necessary
- Delegate appropriate responsibilities to the CIMT members and organise timetable/supervision rota for the day
- Organise support and rooms for counselling and assistance where appropriate. Consider which room will be allocated to school personnel, which room will be allocated to external agencies and which room will be allocated to students as a 'quiet room'. Organise supervision for the 'quiet room' and set up sign in/sign out procedures for same. A similar room may be set up for staff
- Consider letters of consent/phone calls to parents/guardians for students to access the services of the school psychologist
- Appoint a member of the CIMT to compile a list of all students who access the services of the school psychologist/external agencies
- Endeavour to maintain the regular school routine, if possible
- When appropriate arrange for representatives from the school to visit the home(s) of the person(s) concerned
- Agree the next meeting time for the CIMT/key staff
- Arrange a follow up staff meeting at the end of the day

***In the event of death:***

- Inform staff and pupils of the funeral arrangements



- Arrange involvement in the liturgy if agreed with the bereaved family.  
Consider different religions, and none, in the school when deciding which students should attend etc.
- Facilitate staff and pupils' response e.g., book of condolence, BOM, LMETB, Parents Association, Student Council vote of sympathy, flowers
- Support distressed pupils and staff
- Ensure counselling service is available
- Care of the deceased person's possessions in keeping with parents/guardians' wishes
- Facilitate return to school of siblings and close friends
- Monitor siblings and friends of the deceased
- Update and amend school records and inform the DES.

**Key Organisations and Key Personnel Contact Details**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Contact Number</b>
Emergencies dial	999	-
Louth County Hospital	042 9334701	042 9385400
LOL Hospital Drogheda	041 9837601	-
Daisy Hill Hospital Newry	048 30835000 ext2347	048 3985 5000 main hospital
Dundalk Fire Station	1890 202303	999
Carlingford Medical Centre	042 9373617	Local GP
Dr John McKeown	042 9373110	Local GP
Carlingford Garda Station	042 9373102	-
Omeath Garda Station	042 9375175	-
Dundalk Garda Station	042 9335577	-
Anchor Buses Seamus Keenan	087 2536077	042 9371893
Fr Malachy Conlon PP	087 2385940	-
LMFM	041 9832000	1850 715958
Dundalk FM	042 9395100	info@dundalkfm.com
Martin G O'Brien	046 9068200	CE LMETB
Fiona Kindlon	042 9334047	Director of Schools
LMETB Chapel St Dundalk	042 9334047	-

**Appendix**

Please find attached a printed copy of the Department of Education & NEPS's publication

‘Responding to Critical Incidents Resource Materials for Schools’, which includes draft press releases and media templates which can be adapted by Bush Post Primary School for use in any critical incident.

### ***Follow Up Actions***

The Principal and the CIMT will engage in follow-up work in the weeks, months and years following a critical incident. The purpose of this follow-up will be to help the school community cope with the impact of the event in the longer term and to monitor those individuals with ongoing difficulties. The school will also take decisions regarding reviewing the Critical Incident Policy and plan memorials where appropriate.

Following a critical incident, it is expected that there will be 'normal' distress among a number of students, especially close friends or relatives. Within approximately six weeks most students will have returned to normal functioning. However, if students continue to show significant signs of distress a number of weeks after the incident, they may need to be referred on to other external agencies. The CIMT will decide on the appropriate steps that need to be taken for particular students on an individual basis.

### ***Medium Term Actions regarding a CI***

It may sometimes be the case that the first day following a critical incident is quite calm as people may be in shock. In Bush Post Primary we realise that day two may be a day when more support is needed as the news begins to sink in. The CIMT will continue to meet each day until the school returns to normal functioning

The CIMT will also consider the following:

- Preparation for the return of a bereaved student
- Discussions around a memorial for a particular student. A representative from the school will liaise with the relevant family in this regard
- Discussion around upcoming events that the deceased student would have been part of including: awards ceremonies, how to manage exam results, Graduation and Debs nights etc.
- Discuss the management of exam results and the return of practical work submitted to the SEC. The SEC will be notified of the need to attend to the issuing of results of a deceased student
- Return personal belongings to the family or families
- Mark the school's calendar in advance with the anniversary date. Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students or staff, and they may need additional support at this time. The school may decide to acknowledge the anniversary and will link with the family on any proposed commemoration
- Sensitivity around birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day

**Review & Evaluation of the CIMP**

Following a critical incident, the CIMT will evaluate the school’s response to the critical incident and will amend the CIMP where appropriate. A selection of review and evaluation questions which will be utilised include:

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most helpful?
- What was least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there anything outstanding that requires follow up or review?

**Consultation and Communication regarding the Plan**

All staff were consulted, and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parents/guardians’ 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 the Principal.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on ..... 2024

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal/Secretary to the Board of Management)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of next review: September 2024**



## **Board of Management Policy Consultation**

**Please present this form to your BOM when considering the policy at BOM level for ratification**

<b>School:</b>	<b>Bush Post Primary School</b>
<b>Policy:</b>	<b>Critical Incident Policy</b>

### **Staff Consultation:**

<i>Date of Final Consultation:</i>	2024
<i>Proposed By:</i>	(Staff Member)
<i>Seconded By:</i>	(Staff Member)

### **Student Consultation:**

<i>Date of Final Consultation:</i>	2024
<i>Proposed By:</i>	(Student Council)
<i>Seconded By:</i>	(Student Council)

### **Parents Consultation:**

<i>Date of Final Consultation:</i>	2024
<i>Proposed By:</i>	(Parents Representation)
<i>Seconded By:</i>	(Parents Representation)

# Appendices

## R5

### A CLASSROOM SESSION FOLLOWING NEWS OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Normally, the class teacher, class tutor or other teacher who knows the students should be the person to inform them of the events and lead the classroom session. Students generally feel safe and secure with someone they know. If the teacher feels uncomfortable with this role another staff member may share the task. Teachers should have the opportunity to opt out of this work if they feel unable to handle it and other arrangements should be made for that class group.

The aim of the session is to break the news to give the students an opportunity to discuss what has happened and to express their thoughts and feelings in a secure environment. The teacher needs to listen and be empathic.

The session needs to be tailored to the age and developmental level of the class group.

The outline of the session is as follows:

- STEP 1 Giving the facts and dispelling rumours
- STEP 2 Sharing stories and allowing and encouraging the sharing of thoughts and the expression of feelings
- STEP 3 Normalising the reactions
- STEP 4 Worries (for younger children)
- STEP 5 Advising about social media usage
- STEP 6 Empowerment
- STEP 7 Closure
- STEP 8 Free Time
- STEP 9 Recovery

#### STEP 1

##### Giving the facts and dispelling rumours

Tell the students in a calm, low key and factual voice

- What has happened
- Who was involved
- When it happened
- The plan of the day

##### Sample Script

*I have something very sad I want to share with you. **The factual information agreed upon by the staff e.g. (name of student)**, who attends our school and was missing, has been found. You will probably be aware, through social media, that he is dead. Yesterday, the Gardaí found his body. They are investigating what has happened and will let us know as soon as they find out more information.*

*I am feeling very sad about what's happened. Let's spend some time together now helping each other to talk about how we feel about what has happened.*

## STEP 2

### Sharing stories

Take some time for discussion. Students may wish to tell their story of the event. As a result they will feel less alone because of their common shared experiences. Assisting them to verbalise their experiences helps their recovery. For those students who find it difficult to verbalise their experiences, or for students with learning difficulties, it may be helpful to allow them to express their feelings and recount their experiences in other ways. Writing stories or using art can be particularly helpful, especially for younger students. A number of materials that can be used are suggested in Section 11, R24. Give the students a choice as to how they want to represent their experiences. Have a box of tissues at hand.

#### Sample script

*To help us today, we are going to make a memory box for **(name of deceased)**. You can draw a picture of a time you remember with **(name of the deceased)** or write a poem or a letter to him. If you like we can put these in a nice box and give it to **(name of deceased)** family sometime soon. This will help them to see how important **(name of deceased)** was.*

## STEP 3

### Normalising the reactions

Tell the children that they will all react differently to what has happened and that there is no right or wrong way. List some possible feelings and reactions, (see R9). Explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Let the students know that the reactions or symptoms will go away in time. Tell them that if the symptoms haven't gone after a few weeks, they should let you or their parents know. In addition to conversations they may have with friends on social media they may need to talk to someone in person about how they are feeling. Depending on the incident and the age of the students distribute handouts R7, R8, R9, R10.

## STEP 4

### Worries (for younger children)

#### Sample script

*You may be worried about **(name of the deceased)** - that they might be sad or lonely or hungry or cold. When someone dies they don't feel cold or hungry or feelings like that anymore.*

*You may be worried that the same thing could happen to you or someone in your family. What happened to **(name of deceased)** doesn't happen very often.*

If the classmate has been ill, you could say. He was very sick and the chances of this happening to someone else you know are low.

## STEP 5

### Advising about Social Media Usage

Discussions may begin with an outline of the various social media currently being used by members of the group. The value of these as a way of keeping in contact with and supporting friends should be acknowledged. Students may be asked for experiences of ways in which such communication has helped them as well as examples of ways in which it has gone wrong. Media involving live communication such as Skype or Viber are generally more conducive to support and less open to misunderstanding than text-based means. Students will be encouraged to consider how much social media usage is too much, particularly late into the night. More guidance on social media use is contained in R22.

## STEP 6 Empowerment

Help the students to identify strategies that they might use to help manage their reaction, for example, talking to family and friends, getting enough sleep, taking plenty of exercise and appropriate use of social media - may all help. If appropriate, students can share strategies that worked for them in other stressful situations or brainstorm ideas as to what might help. Overall, it is important to help the students regain a sense of control.

## STEP 7 Closure

End the session by focusing on the future. Depending on the nature of the incident, help the class/group decide what they would like to do about various issues, e.g., what to do about the person's empty chair, about writing cards or letters. Reiterate the message that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances.

## STEP 8 Free Time

After the discussion the teacher may want to allow the student's some play time in the playground or free time in the classroom or an agreed area, depending on the age.

## STEP 9 Recovery

It may be useful to continue to do these activities at intervals during the days following and to intersperse them throughout the curriculum in the coming days.

Normal routines should generally be returned to as soon as possible.

- Students should be encouraged to resume sports and other extra-curricular activities
- It is appropriate that the class curriculum is adjusted or adapted. For example, teachers should avoid presenting new learning material for a while following an incident as concentration may be impaired
- Use opportunities which arise within ordinary class work, where coping and support can be reinforced
- Students could be encouraged to discuss how to avoid future crisis and lessons learnt from their experiences. There will also be opportunities for structured discussion within the school's social, personal, and health education programmes. Social Personal & Health Education (SPHE) curriculum time is an ideal context in which to offer support.



# R6

## CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND REACTION TO DEATH ACCORDING TO AGE

(This may be used with various groups and individuals)

Children's understanding and reaction to death will depend on their age and their developmental stage. The following are guides only as children will differ in their reactions and grasp of events for a range of reasons other than age alone.

### AGES 0 – 2 YEARS

- Infants do not understand the meaning of death
- They may display anxiety when separated from a loved one
- They may appear upset, subdued and uninterested in their surroundings.

### AGES 2 – 5 YEARS

- No understanding of the permanency of death
- May search for the missing person from a loved one
- May feel responsible for the death in some way
- May become apathetic and depressed
- May regress to an earlier stage of development e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting, tantrums or may become clingy
- May develop fears of going to sleep
- May worry that other loved ones may die.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Continuity of normal routine e.g. mealtimes and bedtime
- Offer physical comfort
- Explain the death in clear, simple language, using words like "dead" and "died" - Do not use terms like "gone to sleep" or "passed away"
- You may need to repeat the same information again and again
- Permit them to ask questions and be consistent in your answers
- Reassure them that they had nothing to do with the death and of the wellbeing of other family members.

### AGES 5 – 9 YEARS

- Beginning to realise the permanency of death, but their idea of life after death is still vague
- May have concerns about how the deceased is feeling or what he/she is thinking in the grave
- May have a lot of questions about aspects of the death e.g. how the person died, what they looked like, the funeral, heaven, coffins
- The reaction of their peers is important, they may feel 'different' to them
- Their peers may be awkward about the death and avoid contact
- They may become the target of bullying.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Encourage the child to talk and cry about the deceased if they wish to, otherwise respect their silence
- Answer questions and provide as much factual information about the death as possible
- Reassure them that thinking and feeling ceases after death
- Be vigilant in relation to bullying.

## AGES 9 – 12 YEARS

- Understand the finality and universality of death
- Awareness of their own mortality and may worry about their own death
- May display psychosomatic symptoms i.e. physical complaints like tummy aches
- May wish to stay at home close to parents
- May display anger.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Dispel fears about their own health or the health of other loved ones by offering reassurance
- Encourage them to go to school
- Allow them to express their anger, offering appropriate ways to do so.

## ADOLESCENTS

- Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults
- May have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
- Death adds to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents
- May appear to not care about the death
- May seek support outside of the family.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Offer them time to listen
- Allow them to express their grief in their own way
- Be prepared for mood swings
- Don't feel left out if they seem to value their friends more than their parents
- Children's use of social media should be monitored and supported by parents.

If parents are grieving themselves, they may be emotionally unable to support their other children. In this instance, another supportive adult in the child's life, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours may need to offer emotional support.

It should be remembered that for children with special educational needs, their understanding of what has happened will be in line with their developmental age.

# R7

## STAGES OF GRIEF

(This may be used with various groups and individuals)

Grief is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Although there are distinct phases in the grieving process, people go through these stages in different sequences and at different paces. Generally the grieving process in adults is thought to take about two years, while with children and adolescents it may be over a more extended time-frame with different issues arising as they go through developmental milestones.

### Denial, numbness, shock (up to 6 weeks)

- Death of the person may be denied
- Emerging feelings may be suppressed
- Refusal to talk about the death
- Bereaved keeps very busy to avoid thinking about the death
- Bereaved may show signs of confusion and forget everyday routines
- Children in shock may display either silent withdrawal or outbursts of crying.

### Acute grief/searching and longing for deceased (6 weeks to 4 months)

- Acute sadness – crying
- Physical pangs of pain including loss of appetite and disturbed sleep
- Emotional pain accompanied by dejection, hopelessness, lack of concentration
- Fears of life after death, nightmares, ghosts
- Disorganisation
- Strong guilt feelings and questioning of self and others, particularly in the case of a sudden death
- Feelings of anger at the departed for leaving them
- Bereaved may reject offers to comfort them.

### Adaptation to life without the deceased (6 months to 18 months)

- People begin to adjust to their lives without the person who is gone
- Sense of isolation
- Fearful of forgetting the deceased
- Less crying and irritability
- Exacerbation of existing personality problems. Children with low self-esteem may be at a greater risk of emotional/behavioural difficulties.

### Normalisation of life

- Getting on with life
- Returned sense of humour and play
- Able to participate emotionally in new relationships
- Changed relationship with the deceased – able to think of the deceased without pain
- Reduction in physical/emotional symptoms
- Less guilt.

# R8

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## HOW TO COPE WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENS

- Reach out – people do care
- Talk to your friends, family and teachers - talking is the most healing medicine
- Remember you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy or mad
- It is acceptable to cry
- It is acceptable to smile
- If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently
- When the stress level is high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings perhaps with alcohol and drugs, this complicates matters rather than bringing relief
- Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?
- Spend time with people who have a positive influence on you
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even if you're not sure
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful
- Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk
- Sticking to your "normal" routine helps. Structure your time – keep busy
- Take time out – go for a cycle or kick a football
- Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen – like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc. Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits
- Use of social media can help but do not rely on it as your only source of support
- Useful websites: [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie); [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie); [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.

## REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing 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.

### FEELINGS

Fear	Insecurity
Guilt	Mood swings
Shame	Shock
Regret	Yearning
Anger	Numbness
Tearfulness	Confusion
Loneliness	Isolation
Anxiety	

### BEHAVIOURAL

- Nightmares
- Social withdrawal
- Over reliance on use of social media
- Irritability
- Loss of concentration/forgetfulness
- Physical/Verbal aggression
- Missuse of drugs, including alcohol

### PHYSICAL

- Tiredness
- Sleeplessness
- Headaches
- Stomach problems - Bowel/Bladder problems
- Loss or increase in appetite

### THOUGHTS

- Disbelief
- Denial
- Sense of unreality
- Preoccupation with images of the event/person

# R10

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## GRIEF AFTER SUICIDE OR SUSPECTED SUICIDE

Remember there is no right or wrong way to react when someone you know dies. People will have many different reactions to what has happened.

- Know that you can survive, even if you feel you can't
- You may feel overwhelmed and frightened by your feelings. This is normal. You're not going crazy; you are grieving
- You may not feel a strong reaction to what has happened. This is normal
- You may experience feelings of guilt, confusion, forgetfulness and anger. Again these feelings are all normal
- You may feel angry at the person who has died, at yourself, at God, at everyone and everything. It is ok to express it
- You may feel guilty about what you did or did not do. Suicide is the act of an individual, for which we cannot take responsibility
- You may never have an answer as to "why" but it is ok to keep asking "why" until you no longer need to ask or you are satisfied with partial answers
- Sometimes people make decisions over which we have no control. It was not your choice
- Feeling low is temporary, suicide is permanent. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If you are feeling low or having a difficult time, ask for help
- Allow yourself to cry, this will help you to heal
- Healing takes time. Allow yourself the time you need to grieve
- Every person grieves differently and at a different pace
- Delay making any big decisions if possible
- This is the hardest thing you will ever do. Be patient and compassionate with yourself
- Spend time with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk and who also understand your need to be silent
- Seek professional help if you feel overwhelmed
- If you are thinking of trying to kill yourself, you must talk to a trusted adult
- Avoid people who try to tell you what to feel and how to feel it and, in particular, those who think you should "be over it by now"
- Ask in school about a support group for survivors that provides a safe place for you to express your feelings, or simply a place to go to be with other survivors who are experiencing some of the same things you're going through
- Allow yourself to laugh with others and at yourself. This is healing
- Useful websites: [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie); [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie); [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)

# R11

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## REINTEGRATION OF THE BEREAVED CHILD IN SCHOOL

Some suggestions are offered here which may help prepare the school and the bereaved child for their return to school. They will help to ensure that the individual, the other students and the staff feel more comfortable and at ease.

- Visit the bereaved student at home to see what s/he would like to happen when they return to school
- Talk to the student's class about how people are affected by grief and encourage them to share their own feelings. Ask about how they have coped with bereavement in their own lives and what has helped
- Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to come back to school. Ask how they would like to be treated if they were returning to school after a death. This might be done in pairs or small groups, thus encouraging all to be involved. It will also ensure that a range of preferences are expressed, reinforcing the fact that different people will have different preferences as to how they are treated. Some people may want to discuss what has happened, while others may want to be left alone. In general bereaved students say that they would like others to treat them as before rather than being 'over-nice' to them. However, it is a delicate balance as they don't want people to behave as if nothing has happened at all
- It may help if, in advance of the student's return to school, classmates have sent cards or notes or drawn pictures for the bereaved classmate. This will let her/him know that they are in their thoughts
- When they return, acknowledge their loss "I'm sorry that (name of deceased) died. I know that you are sad. It is ok to cry". (In Post-Primary schools, check that this is done in the first class of the day and not in every class
- Teachers can express their own sympathies separately once the general re-entry to class has been managed
- When the student returns, they may have difficulty concentrating or joining in class activities. Be understanding
- Allow them access to a 'quiet room' where he/she can go to be alone. You might suggest: "We can set up a signal for you to use if you need to leave the class at any time". (Ensure supervision)
- Link the student in with the guidance counsellor for support if needed
- Listen when they want to talk: "If you need to talk at any time, I am here to listen"
- Carry on normal routines and normal approaches to discipline
- They may have difficulty completing homework and assignments: "If you are having difficulty doing your homework it is ok to do as much as you can for a while"
- Allow them as much time as they need to grieve.

# R12

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## WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

- Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal
- Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them
- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, taking exercise, or talking
- Understand that there is a wide range of emotions associated with grief and that some children and young people may be more likely to express emotions like anger rather than sadness. Recognise that displays of risky behaviour, defiance or aggression may be your child's way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and/or fear they are experiencing. Notice their emotional state, help them label what they are feeling, and show empathy and understanding so they feel less alone with their emotions.
- When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back
- If you are out for a long time, telephone and reassure them
- Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light
- Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen
- Work with the school support services and other available services
- As well as advising your child about appropriate use of social media, monitor their use, particularly during this vulnerable time. Useful website: [www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie)



# R23

## TEACHERS HELPING STUDENTS IN TIME OF CRISIS OR EMERGENCY

### 1.LISTEN 2.PROTECT 3.CONNECT 4.MODEL & 5.TEACH

THINK ABOUT your students' "DIRECT EXPERIENCE" with the event i.e. FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE of the event (physically experiencing or directly seeing it as it happens).

After the event, changes can happen in students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Your students may worry about family members, classmates, friends, or pets they care about, and may worry that it will happen again. Common reactions to crises and emergencies include trouble sleeping, problems at school and with friends, trouble concentrating and listening, and not finishing work. Your students may become more irritable, sad, angry, or worried as they think about what has happened, and as they experience recovery efforts after the event.

When students share their experiences, thoughts and feelings about the event, LISTEN for RISK FACTORS for adverse reactions.

Risk factors that may indicate a need for counselling referral for students include:

- loss of a family member, schoolmate, or friend
- observing serious injury or the death of another person
- family members or friends missing after the event, past traumatic experiences or losses
- getting hurt or becoming sick due to the event
- home loss, family moves, changes in neighbourhoods/schools, and/or loss of belongings.

If a student has had any of these experiences, you may wish to consider referring her or him to the HSE services. Your NEPS psychologist will be available to provide support and advice. Now that you know what can affect your students after a disaster, school crisis, or emergency, you're ready to **Listen, Protect, Connect, and Model & Teach**

### 1.LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

The first step after an event is to listen and pay attention to what they say and how they act. Your students may also show their feelings in non-verbal ways, like increased behavioural problems or increased withdrawal.

Let your students know you are willing to listen and talk about the event, or to make referrals to talk to an appropriate professional, if they prefer it. Use the following questions to talk with your students. You can listen for clues that indicate when students are having a hard time. Write down a few examples that may be helpful to note:

- What might be preventing a student from coming to or staying in school?
- What might be preventing a student from paying attention or doing homework?
- What might be preventing a student from returning to other school based activities?

Listen, observe, and note any changes in:

- Behaviour and/or mood
- School performance
- Interactions with schoolmates and teachers
- Participation in school-based activities
- Behaviours at home that parents/guardians discuss with you.

## LISTEN **2. PROTECT**, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

You can help make your students feel better by doing some or all of the following:

- Answer questions simply and honestly, clearing up any confusion students may have about what happened
- Let your students know that they are not alone in their reactions
- Provide opportunities for your students to talk, draw, and play, but don't force it
- Talk to your students about what is being done by the school and community to keep everyone safe from harm
- Watch for anything in the environment that could re-traumatize your students
- Keep your eyes and ears open for bullying behaviours
- Maintain daily routines, activities and structure with clear expectations and consistent rules
- Make adjustments to assignments to be sensitive to students' current level of functioning
- Limit access to live television and the Internet that show disturbing scenes of the event
- Remember, what is not upsetting to adults may upset and confuse students, and vice versa
- Encourage students to "take a break" from the crisis focus with activities unrelated to the event
- Find ways for your students to feel helpful to your classroom, the school, and the community
- List other things you do that help your students feel better. Sharing this list with other teachers may increase ideas to help your students.

## LISTEN, PROTECT **3.CONNECT**, MODEL & TEACH

Reaching out to people in your school and community will help your students after a school crisis or emergency. These connections will build strength for everyone. Consider ways to make some or all of the following connections:

- "Check in" with students on a regular basis
- Find resources that can be supportive to your students and staff
- Restore interactive school activities, including sports, club meetings, student projects, and student councils, coaches, etc.)
- Encourage student activities with friends, including class projects and extracurricular activities

- Empathise with your students by allowing a little more time for them to learn new materials
- Build on your students' strengths by encouraging them to find ways to help them use what they have learned in the past to help them deal with the event
- Remind your students that major disasters, crises, and emergencies are rare
- Discuss feeling safe and times they have felt safe
- List programs and activities that connect you and your students with the community
- Share your list with other teachers to create a larger list of activities and resources.

## LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT **4.MODEL** & TEACH

As you help your students after a disaster, crisis, or emergency, your efforts may be more successful – and you may be less stressed – if you keep in mind:

- It is good to be aware of your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions, these can be seen and may affect your students
- How you cope and behave after an event will influence how your students cope and behave. Your students will be watching you for both verbal and non-verbal cues
- Monitor conversations that students may hear
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation, but demonstrate how people can come together to cope after such an event.

## LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & **5.TEACH**

Talk to your students about expected reactions after a crisis (emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and physiological). There are "normal" reactions to abnormal events.

- Different people may have very different reactions, even within the same family
- After the event, people may also have different amounts of time they need to cope and adjust
- Encourage your students to identify and use positive coping strategies to help them after the event
- Help your students problem-solve to get through each day successfully
- Help your students set small "doable" goals and share in these achievements as "wins" for the students and your classroom
- Remind students that with time and assistance, things generally get better. If they don't, they should let a parent or teacher know
- Over time, you, your students, their families, your classroom, can EXPECT RECOVERY.

*Adapted by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) for Irish schools from Psychological First Aid materials developed by the American Red Cross (2014 and FEMA, see [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)). We acknowledge with thanks.*