

TRAUMA/CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN

This policy operates within the framework of the school's Mission Statement and supports the school's fundamental aim to foster the physical, intellectual, moral and emotional wellbeing of its students.

1. Rationale

Recognising that accident, bereavement and trauma can occur in school as in the wider community, it is prudent to anticipate and try to prepare for the consequences of such events in order to lessen their negative impact on the school community.

2. Goals

- To put in place a structure to respond to any significant trauma.
- To put a trauma response team in place.
- To plan for the provision of supports for those involved to call upon in times of crisis.

3. Crisis/Trauma Response Team

The purpose of the team will be to provide leadership in the areas of communication, family liaison and the provision of support services in the event of a crisis/trauma. The team will consist of the Principal and Deputy Principal. Other members of the team will be determined by the nature and extent of the crisis/trauma and will be drawn from the following members of the staff: School Chaplain, Year Heads, Programme Co-ordinators, Guidance Counsellor, teachers and administration staff.

4. Role of the Principal

It is important for the Principal to take TIME for the news to sink in and to decide what he/she must do and what is appropriate to say to all concerned.

- Call together the Trauma Response Team.
- Put together as much factual information as possible.
- Inform staff what has happened.
- Discuss the school routine for the day with the staff.
- Identify particular students, close friends and relatives who may need to be informed individually.
- Inform the students that a student has died tragically and explain that this is something everyone will find difficult to cope with.
- Explain to students the school routine for the day.
- Outline the support and backup which will be available for students.
- Contact local Health Board Crisis Service.
- Make contact with the family of the deceased.
- Meet with key staff who can offer support and decide on a format for this.
- Decide on any arrangements needed for the first day e.g. a prayer service for the student and his/her family.
- Check with the staff during the day and keep abreast of what is happening in the school.
- Be aware of particular teachers who may be particularly distressed e.g. teachers who are recently bereaved themselves or who have had a prior experience of suicide in their family.
- Encourage staff to keep the Principal informed of events during the day.
- Communicate details of the funeral to staff and students.
- At the end of the day review events with staff and make plans for the following day.
- Make staff aware of students who are particularly vulnerable and what supports will be available to them.
- If there is a likelihood of interest from the media discuss strategy to deal with such requests.

5. Immediate Response

The Principal or person in charge will call a meeting of the Trauma Response team.

The team's first task will be to establish the facts. It is crucial that the school has the correct information regarding the crisis. Team members will contact persons involved, and others such as hospitals, Gardai, parents in order to establish the facts.

A common statement will be prepared and agreed by the team. The statement will seek to:

- Be communicated in a sensitive manner
- Give the facts as they are known
- Highlight the support that will be available
- Indicate the actions that are planned
- In the case of a suspected suicide, great care will be taken not to use the term 'suicide' until it has been established categorically that the student's death was a result of suicide.

6. Action Plan

The team will agree an immediate action plan which may include:

- Ensuring that those needing information will receive it as soon as possible.
- Seeking the support of outside agencies such as Counsellors, local clergy.
- Visiting the home/s of the bereaved, organising a school assembly, informing the school's insurers if appropriate
- Organising a school Assembly
- Assigning tasks within the team and to others
- Nominating contact people with whom parents may make contact

7. Students

The team will attempt to alert and inform the staff in the first instance.

The Principal will inform the student body at the earliest possible opportunity beginning with the deceased student's class or year group. The Principal will be prepared to spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to the news of the death. Other appropriate persons may accompany the Principal and remain with the class after the departure of the Principal. In addressing the students, the Principal may tell the students of their friend's sudden death and advise that it is an event with which everyone – students and teachers – will find it difficult to cope with. The Principal will also explain the routine for the day and the following days and the arrangements for students to avail of the counselling/support services which have been arranged for them.

Efforts will be made to sustain an atmosphere where it is 'okay' to talk about the experience. This may cause problems for some teachers. However, all staff who are available and willing and others such as the Chaplain may be asked to lend a hand. This will entail sensitivity on the part of Year Heads and Principal as regards time needed for such sharing. Care should be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.

Listening is the most essential quality in adults needed by the students. The school will endeavour to put in place a support system for students in this regard. Such a system may involve the staff who are willing and able to offer support together with outside professionals where required. Time and resources will be made available to these persons to carry out their role and they will devise a method of supporting each other and reviewing their effectiveness.

Attention will need to be given to possible signs of distress being exhibited by students. In noticing possible signs, it is important to say that these are not necessarily indicative of stress in relation to a trauma. Rather they may be regarded as prompts to staff and school personnel to watch out for students in their care. It is important that staff check out signs with others before drawing conclusions.

Students need to be asked their 'permission' regarding discussing their feelings and reaction to a crisis.

Freedom to be upset is important for anyone responding to a trauma. The school will strive to create a safe atmosphere for this to occur.

Constant reminders will need to be given in relation to the supports that are available within the school.

Students who may not wish to speak to an adult may rely on and receive a valuable source of support from their friends. The school will endeavour to support such friends as they attempt to find ways to be of help.

8. Staff

- In seeking to provide support to staff the following may be considered: staff meeting, inviting in professional help, a staff prayer service, confidential questionnaire to determine the needs of the staff.
- The school management will endeavour to provide support for those staff directly involved in the trauma.
- Staff members who feel unable to be involved with the trauma will be able to opt out readily.
- Those staff having concerns for students or others in relation to the trauma will have easy access to personnel to assist them.
- Staff members, including the Principal, who are directly involved with the students in relation to the trauma will be resourced and supported in their task.
- Staff members directly involved will regularly meet with the Principal to review progress.

9. Parents

- In circumstances where the school need to inform a number of parents of an accident or trauma, a group of people may become involved so that all concerned are informed at or around the same time.
- Further considerations in contacting parents:
 - I. Offer practical help – transport, contact names, telephone numbers
 - II. Enquire if the parent is alone or has someone to offer support
 - III. Carefully review with the parent that the information given has been fully understood
 - IV. Alerting all other involved parents to the trauma will help them when they subsequently make contact with their child.

- The school will endeavour to support parents concerned with the trauma. This will vary depending on the nature of the crisis and the resources available to the school.
- The Trauma response team will nominate contact people for parents to liaise with, particularly in regard to monitoring the progress of their children.
- Parents may be put in contact with each other if this is appropriate.
- The Principal and/or the trauma Response Team may liaise with involved parents and/or the Parents' Association to discuss supportive action for those affected.
- It may be considered appropriate to involve parents in a school liturgy following a tragedy

10. Board of Management

- The Principal will inform the chairperson of the Board as soon as possible after a tragic event.
- The Principal and chairperson will decide if an emergency meeting of the Board is necessary.
- Whether the school will remain open or will close as a mark of respect to those bereaved, will be determined by the Principal and the Board following consultation with the staff.
- If the decision is to close the school, this will be done only after informing the students of the death and of the routine which the school will follow over the coming days.
- Parents will be formally notified of the school closure.

11. The Press/Media

The Trauma Response Team will nominate one person to liaise with representatives of the media.

In liaising with the media consideration will be given to the following:

- The sensitivities and needs of those affected directly by the crisis
- The non-release of names, addresses and telephone numbers
- Reliance on facts and avoidance of speculation
- Prepared responses to likely questions from the media
- Agreed times for press briefings where ongoing briefings are necessary
- Nomination of a specific location for press briefings

The statement to the media will be simple and brief. It will express the sorrow of the entire school community at the sudden death of one of their members. It will extend sympathy to the bereaved family. This statement will be adhered to - and not elaborated on – in all communications with the media. The statement will be made known to all members of the school staff.

12. Funeral Services

- The Trauma Response Team, following consultation with staff members, will decide what form of representation is appropriate. The school's first priority in this regard will be to respect the wishes of the bereaved family.
- Students who are invited and have agreed to participate in the funeral service will be prepared for the funeral service by appropriate staff members. For some students this may be the first time they have been exposed to major grief. Support will be provided for them.
- The school may encourage and assist students to convey personal messages of grief or may consider a common expression from all students and/or staff.
- It may be considered appropriate for representatives of the school to visit the home of the bereaved. Support may be required for those involved.
- Students may wish to organise some service or ritual within the school. Students will receive support and guidance in this matter from the Trauma Response team and others in the school

13. Medium and Long-term Action

Students returning to school after a major accident or bereavement cannot easily be categorised in terms of their needs. Possible medium to long-term action may include:

- I. A day or period of reflection for the benefit of the class or year group affected by the tragedy may be held.
- II. The school will endeavour to monitor the relationships of students affected by the tragedy with their peers and teachers.
- III. When a subsequent bereavement occurs in the school setting, the school will strive to support those who were previously bereaved as this subsequent trauma may trigger deep emotional reactions.
- IV. The school may consider holding an annual remembrance service for all those connected with the school community who have died.
- V. The dedication of a tree, garden or memorial may be considered appropriate.

14. Long Term

In-service training for teachers and staff to help them to explore death, dying and grief with students.

15. Review

The above procedures will be regularly reviewed in the light of experience.

The school will avail of resources from outside and within the school to evaluate these procedures when the opportunity arises.