

Bellaghy Primary School

Critical Incident

Emergency Contact numbers

Contact	Name	Number
Police	Magherafelt	0845 600 8000
Fire		999
Ambulance		999
Chair of BOG	Mr Timothy Dowie	07592911285
Education Authority	EA	94482200 (ABC) 25653333 (Co Hall) 25661111 (Ballee Centre)
Behaviour Support	Claire Bell TASH	38314457 02838314461
School Psychologist	Dr Anthony Murphy	87726430
School EWO	Elaine Donald	870868588
EA OFFICER - CPSSS Child Protection	Margaret, Heather, Elaine, Colleen, Paula	95985590
Social Services	Gateway Team	94424459 03001234333 (SPOE) Out of hours 95049999
Local Hospital	Antrim Area Hospital	94424000
Clergy	Canon Colin Welsh	07540073475
School Nurse	Nuala	79634831
Bellaghy Surgery	Doctor	79386228

Bellaghy Primary School Checklist For Action

Task	Time	Who
Obtain factual information (Who/what/when/where)		
Contact EA		
Inform Staff		
Contact families		
Call staff meeting to give information		
Inform pupils		
Identify high risk pupils and staff		
Promote discussion in classes		
Identify the need for group or individual support		
Organise Support		

RATIONALE

A critical incident can occur at any time within or outside the school environment. This policy is in place so that staff can react effectively to a critical incident, follow the correct procedures and reach a desired outcome.

Aims of Policy

- To recognise what a critical incident is
- To develop an understanding of trauma and its impact on pupils and staff
- To enable staff at Bellaghy Primary School to respond to a critical incident in an informed and effective manner

Examples of Critical incidents

In School

- Death through natural causes
- Traffic accident
- Serious accident
- A deliberate act of violence
- A school fire
- Outbreak of disease
- Disappearance of a child from school

Out of school

- Deaths or injuries on school journeys
- Tragedies involving children from many schools
- Civil disturbances involving bomb etc
- Suicide
- Sexual, physical, psychological, abuse
- Disappearance of a child from home
- Death of someone from within the school community

Definition of a Critical Incident

A critical incident is not necessarily an event which attracts large media attention and many fatalities. "It is an event or events, usually sudden, which involves the experience of significant personal distress to a level that can potentially overwhelm individuals"

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD in children

For PTSD to be present an individual must experience an event outside the normal range of usual human experience and which would be “markedly distressing to anyone.”

PTSD in children for example:

- An event posing a serious threat to one’s life or well being
- An event which presents the possibility of serious threat or harm to loved ones
- Sudden destruction of one’s environment
- Witnessing someone being killed or injured as the result of violence

Specific Symptoms of PTSD:

The individual re-experiences the event in some way -

- Recurrent or intrusive recollections of the event
- Recurrent dreams of the event
- Acting or feeling as if the event were recurring
- Intense distress at reminders of the event

The individual persistently avoids stimuli associated with the event and experiences a general numbing of emotion -

- Avoidance of thoughts/feelings/activities/situations
- Inability to remember aspects of the event
- Markedly reduced interest in significant activities
- Restricted range of affect
- Sense of foreshortened future

The individual experiences symptoms of increased arousal -

- Difficulty sleeping
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hyper vigilance
- Exaggerated startle response

Possible indicators of PTSD in Pupils

- Crying
- Thumb sucking
- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Fear of being left alone or of strangers
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Clinging
- Immobility

Vulnerability Factors for PTSD

- Existence of an older trauma
- Experience of abuse
- Existing emotional or psychiatric problems
- Special needs/low ability
- Lack of family support
- Children who are less confident and less socially skilled

Protective Factors against PTSD

- High ability
- Good social skills
- High self esteem
- Supportive family

Helpful Strategies for Children who have PTSD

- Talking about the traumatic incident to family, peers, teachers, other professionals
- Re-establish and maintain routines
- Eat healthy meals, exercise and get enough sleep
- Know what is “normal” after a disaster
- Redefine Priorities

Helpful Strategies for Working with Children suffering from Trauma

- Talk to children about their feelings; set a good example by talking about your own feelings
- Children need

- frequent attention
 - a lot of reassurance
 - physical safety and comfort
 - temporary relaxation of expectations
- Be available for the person
 - Above all, don't be afraid to listen to the person; don't feel that there are "taboo" subjects
 - Answer any questions honestly; say "I don't know" when you don't know the answer

Some Definite "Don'ts"

- Don't advise the young person or their family not to worry or to be sad
- Don't tell them what they *should feel or do*
- Don't say that you know how they *feel* - you don't
- Don't say "You should be feeling better now"
- Don't say "at least you're still alive"
- Don't hide your feelings or encourage the family to hide their feelings from the child
- Be aware that in school, behaviour and work will suffer, as will concentration and motivation

Classroom management following a crisis

- Normal routine should be established as soon as possible although pupils should be given an opportunity to discuss the incident and express their feelings and emotions. Pupils should not be discouraged from expressing themselves appropriately or asking questions
- Share stories, eg 'Always and Forever', 'Goodbye Mousie' and 'Badger's Parting Gifts' are available in school and deal sensitively and age appropriately with death of a family member and bereavement
- Share feelings
- For younger children or those with special needs, availability of toys that encourage play re - enactment of their experiences and observations during the crisis can help integrate these experiences
- For those who can't or won't talk, don't force them. Suggest others they can talk to

Staff

How are staff affected?

- The impact of staff will depend on their involvement in the incident and will vary according to their experience and training, coping skills, past trauma and current stresses. A critical incident places great burdens on individuals and the whole system, especially if there is a high media attention and staff numbers are reduced. Not only do teachers have to deal with their own stress, they also have to deal with the stress of many pupils and parents. The work is physically and emotionally draining. Principal and teachers will be exhausted by the many duties they have to undertake including - attending funerals, identifying bodies, meeting public dignitaries, fund raising and visiting the injured and bereaved.

How can you tell if staff are affected?

- Symptoms may not be “clinical” but they make life miserable for staff, their family and colleagues. Teachers may be hypersensitive to any remark, feel burned out, cynical, anxious and depressed. They may displace anger onto others, especially the “system”, the Principal and school authorities. After many incidents, even smaller scale events, there is evidence of staff absenteeism, breakdown, illness, resignation and loss of motivation.

Who is responsible for staff care?

This is the joint responsibility of

- BOARD OF GOVERNORS, PRINCIPAL & STAFF COLLEAGUES: being mindful of each other, creating tolerance of different reactions to stress, sharing information and ideas, keeping a watchful eye on each other, co-operating for the good of all staff.

Who Can Offer Support?

Seeking support and back-up for decisions is good management. People under stress are not always capable of judging their own stress levels and their perceptions can be distorted by the re-triggering of personal issues and anxieties.

Support is available from the following:

- Unions
- Care Call
- Board of Governors
- Education and Health advisors/Inspectors/Educational Psychologists/Employee Assistance Officers/Welfare Officers
- Other school Principals and staff
- Health Boards
- Mental Health agencies

- Peer support groups;
- School crisis management consultants
- Private Counsellors and therapists.

Checklists

By going through the checklists, the school will realise what it is already doing well and what needs attention.

SAFETY PROCEDURES

- Check regularly that buildings, playground equipment, fire exits, burglar/fire alarms, etc are in good and safe condition. If repairs have to be undertaken, see that they are attended to promptly.
- Ensure systems are in place to admit visitors to the school, monitoring of entrances and exits, type of information required from a caller to the school before access is granted, extra vigilance of strangers or irregular events around the school.
- Act promptly if you suspect anything out of the ordinary.
- Ensure systems are in place for school evacuation.
- Know what is happening in the community.
- Ensure procedures are in place for dropping off and collection of children at peak times. Regular monitoring of these procedures is crucial.

PROCEDURAL CHECKS Prepare, practise and maintain:

- Health and Safety procedures, fire drills, etc.
- Child protection procedures
- Procedures for dealing with bullying and discrimination (race, gender, disability, age, religion)
- School trips and fieldwork safety guidelines and procedures
- Critical incident management procedures from rescue through to recovery
- Contact address lists and telephone numbers for staff and pupils

SOCIAL SAFETY

- Create an atmosphere where children, parents and staff feel they are safe
- Check different religious beliefs about death
- Create shared understandings between parents, staff and pupils about values and codes of behaviour
- Create and practise respect and inclusiveness for all members of the school community
- Create consistency but act with flexibility, according to the circumstances
- Create open lines of communication using external and internal resources
- Be clear about boundaries, what is negotiable and what is not. Be aware of consequences of actions
- Keep an eye on the needs of different classes and staff
- Build healthy, positive links between home, school and community

- Do not avoid difficulties - deal with them at an early stage and avoid problems developing
- Create a spirit of inquiry - teachers should not be expected to know everything, children and parents can find answers too

REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Board of Governors.

Policy Reviewed - September 2024
Review Due – September 2025