



# **KILLYLEA PRIMARY SCHOOL**

*'Together We Achieve More'*

# **MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS POLICY**

**JANUARY 2014**

## KILLYLEA PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Guidelines for school on how to respond to the sudden unexpected death of a pupil or member of the school community.

#### ***Introduction***

Every school is unique and has a distinct ethos and culture. These guidelines have been drawn up to assist the Principal and School Staff who are faced with the sudden unexpected death of a student or member of the wider school community. They are not comprehensive, but hopefully will assist in the management of a critical incident.

#### ***Immediate Steps in the event of a Critical Incident***

The following are steps to consider immediately upon hearing of a Critical Incident and are not in any order of precedence.

The Principal and members of staff should take time to work out what steps will be appropriate in their particular circumstances and should aim to implement these steps efficiently and sensitively. Obtain as much **factual** information about the death as possible. This step is important as it will determine what is to be told to the pupils and how it should be told. Having factual information concerning the tragedy will prove useful in countering misinformation among pupils concerning the manner of the young person's death, which can contribute to an atmosphere of hysteria. At all stages, the rights of the deceased family to privacy must be respected. Great care should be taken not to use the term 'suicide' until it has been established categorically that the student's death was as a result of suicide.

#### ***1. Decide on the school routine for the period up to the burial of the deceased student.***

The Principal and members of the school staff should discuss and decide on a routine for the school to follow during the period up to the burial of the student. This routine will reflect the decision taken concerning closure of the school, participation of pupils in church services, procedure for informing classmates and the wide school community including the role of the Pastoral Care Co-ordinator, class teacher, arrangements for external assistance for the pupil from the Personal Development Services, other relevant school staff, Chairman or Vice Chairman of Board of Governors

#### ***1. Decide on whether the school will remain open or closed***

Whether the school will remain open or will close as a mark of respect to the bereaved family will depend on the judgement of Principal, Chairman of the Board of Governors following consultation with the school staff. If the decision is to close the school, it is advisable to do so **ONLY** after informing the pupils of the Pupil's death and of the routine which the school will follow over the coming days. Parents should be formally notified of the school closure.

#### ***2. Decide on the arrangements for the participation of pupils in church services.***

The presence of pupils at a service and burial may be inappropriate for primary school children as well as being quite upsetting for individual pupils. Pupils may contribute to the church service through the purchase of a wreath and at a later stage, take part in a special service organised by the school.

#### ***3. Decide on how the school community should be informed of the pupil's death.***

The school community should be informed of the pupils death at the earliest possible opportunity. Many pupils and teachers will already have heard the news of the death prior to coming to school. The

Principal should inform as many teachers as possible upon their arrival at the school and then proceed to address the deceased pupil's class. The Principal should be prepared to spend a reasonable amount of time with the students to allow them to react to the news of the death. It would be useful if the class teacher or Chairman of the Board of Governors and a representative from the PPDS be available if anyone wishes to speak to them individually.

#### **4. *Decide on a strategy for dealing with the media***

It is likely that the local media will be interested in the sudden death of a young person. It is advisable that Principals and School Staffs be prepared for every eventuality and accordingly devise a strategy for handling media enquiries. Such a strategy is essential to protect the privacy of the bereaved family and to ensure that this trauma is not added to by speculative media stories. It is also important that the school and members of the teaching staff do not become embroiled in media commentary concerning the death of the young person. It is recommended that a simple statement be prepared, expressing the sorrow of the entire school community at the sudden death of one of their members and extending sympathy to the bereaved family.

This statement should be adhered to and not elaborated on – in all communications with the media and should be familiar to every member of the school staff. It may also be necessary to advise students that innocent remarks to the media concerning the death of their peer could be misconstrued and could lead to considerable distress for individual students and for the bereaved family.

#### **5. *Consider the counselling services which may be required in the school.***

Consideration should be given to counselling services which may be required by pupils and teachers in the aftermath of the pupil's death. The Principal should discuss this matter with the Pupil and Personal Development Advisor and the Chairman of the Board of Governors.

#### **6. *Visit the family of the deceased student.***

As leader of the school community, it is appropriate that the Principal visit the family of the deceased student at the earliest opportunity. Principals should be prepared for the fact that this visit will be difficult, the parents of the student will inevitably be distressed. None the less, it is important that the Principal and some members of the school staff visit the home of the deceased student and that they participate in the church services and the burial.

#### **7. *Issues for Consideration in the Long Term***

In the weeks following the student's death, a concentrated effort should be made by the Principal and the teaching staff to return to the normal school routine. At the same time, it may be appropriate to decide to initiate a review of aspects of school policies and that all staff are given encouragement to contribute to the review process.

#### **8. *Review of school's response to Critical Incident***

The Principal and staff should meet to analyse their response in the aftermath of the pupil's death. Consideration should be given to monitoring and assisting the pupils who are considered to be particularly affected by the death.

#### **9. *Personal Development, Mutual Understanding***

The pupils will continue with the PDMU programme providing them with information and by developing their self esteem and their sense of self worth so that they are empowered to take decisions which will

contribute to their long term physical and mental health. Advice will be available from the Pupil Personal Development Services on issues such as mental health.

**10. Review of home-school community relationships**

The development of good communications with parents and responding to the needs of a local community are increasingly part of the school's role. In the aftermath of a tragic event such as the sudden unexpected death of a student, it is important to consider the school's relationship with the broader community particularly in terms of the quality of its communications with parents and the degree of familiarity of parents with the school services and policies. Parents also need to be reassured that the school is a caring place where the teachers are responsive to pupils needs and are concerned about pupils welfare in the broadest sense.

**11. Review of extra curricular activities and pupils mentor systems**

The range of pupils skills and talents in the school is enormous. All pupils are given the opportunity to develop their skills and talents both inside and outside the classroom. The quality of the school's extra curricular provision can have a significant impact on the quality of the overall learning environment, on staff – pupil relationships and on pupil morale and motivation. Pupils participation in extra curricular activities enhances their self-esteem and their sense of engagement in the overall life of the school. The recent establishment of the school council will be developed over the coming years as a form of a parallel pastoral care system for pupils and also as a means for developing pupils' leadership skills.

***The Critical Incident Policy will be amended and updated on a regular basis to meet the needs of an ever changing and developing school.***