St. Paul's Secondary School

OUGHTERARD, CO. GALWAY H91 PT86

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Critical Incident Policy

A Critical incident is defined as one which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism and function of a school. Examples of incidents include:

- A death of a student or member of staff
- A serious attack involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises
- Serious damage to the school building through fire. flood, vandalism.
- The disappearance or tragedy of a member of staff or a student
- An accident or tragedy which affects the wider community.

Generally critical incidents are unexpected, and key to managing such incidents is planning. This allows the staff to cope more effectively and to maintain a sense of control. This critical incident plan forms part of the school ethos, which is based on the whole notion of care of the individual. We create a physically and psychologically safe environment for all members of the school community. It forms part of an overall suite of measures that contribute to the pastoral care of students, including but not limited to antibullying policies, substance misuse policies, SPHE and indeed the RE programmes. The implementation of this incident plan relies on having a number of key people in place, both internally and externally, who have experience in such matters.

The following persons make up the core Critical Incident Team at St Paul's

Principal – Ms Linda O'Hara

Deputy Principal – Ms Breda-Ann deCourcey

Year Head Concerned

Guidance Counsellor – Mr Gary Begley

Charity No: CHY 17522

SENCO – Mr Niall Malone

RE Teacher – Mr Joseph Merrick

Local Clergy

Roman Catholic Clergy – Fr Michael Connolly, Fr Martin Moran

Church of Ireland Clergy – Rev Lynda Peilow, Rev Carol Reynolds

Christian Community Church – Pastor Luke Swain, Pastor Nick Tuttle

The St. Paul's Secondary School's Critical Incident Policy is available to be viewed by request in the school office.

"Responding to Critical Incidents", NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools were referred to in writing the Policy. These guidelines are available on the Department of Education website:

www.education.ie

Link to Mission Statement

In St Paul's Secondary School we aim to nurture the academic and personal development of each individual in a caring and safe environment. Dealing with trauma, death and loss is inevitable in a school community. The key to managing any critical incident is planning. Having a plan enables the staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. It is hoped that by having such a plan the effects of the critical incident on staff and students are limited and that normality resumes as soon as possible.

In relation to responding to crises, we seek to

- Provide a range of supports for all in the school community to call on in a time of crisis – both in the short and the long term
- Outline a policy for dealing with traumas in the context of our school
- Raise issues of trauma throughout the curriculum
- Review the structures of support and referral available to the school on an on-going basis.

Signed : *Chairperson of Board of Management*

Date : 15th June 2026

Emergency Contact List (Updated April 2026)

Garda Oughterard – 557320, **Clifden** – 095 22500, **Salthill** – 514720

Ambulance and Fire Brigade – 999 or 112

Hospital:	UCHG and Merlin Park 091 424222
Local GP:	Dr. Peter Harte 091 552449
Chairperson:	Córa Ní Loinsigh
School Bus Inspector:	Martin Geraghty
School Transport:	Bus Éireann
State Exams Commission:	090 6483600
DES Communications Unit:	01 8892388
N.E.P.S Psychologist:	Fran Doolan (086 3846339)
Jigsaw Counselling Service:	549252

Clergy **Fr. Connolly** 086 1722253, **Fr Moran** 550106, **Rev Carol Reynolds** 087-6067848, **Pastor Luke Swain** 086 737 1443, **Pastor Nick Tuttle** 086 737 1443

Local Counselling Services	Clann 091 557633
Social Workers Duty Care	091 523122
Head Social Worker	091 551484

Pieta House Suicide and Self Harm Helpline: Call 1800 247 247 or text Help to 51444

Samaritans	Freephone 116123
Childline	1800 66 66 66

As an initial step in any incident the following steps should be completed by the Principal or the Deputy Principal as soon as is feasibly possible:

- Confirm the death has occurred
- Clarify the facts surrounding the death
- Express the sympathy of the school community to the family and assure them of its support
- Meet with the Critical Incident Crisis Team and outline the facts as available
- Prepare an announcement for staff and students
- If the incident occurs at the weekend or during school holidays send a group text
- Convene a special staff meeting
- Contact appropriate external agencies such as NEPS
- Where possible adhere to normal routine, this lessens hysteria
- Cancel all unnecessary activities
- Prepare a media statement in conjunction with the chair of the Board of Management
- Appoint somebody to deal with all telephone queries from parents or media
- Organise who should attend any related event. This should be in consultation with family members of the deceased
- In the event of school closures ensure adequate notification to all parents and to school transport agencies

A more detailed division of duties is set out later in this plan.

The Religious Education department in conjunction with local clergy should do the following:

- Arrange of prayer service
- Spend time with students and staff who are distressed and who are most in need
- Be available to support staff and students both personally and spiritually
- Meet the affected class with the Principal/Deputy Principal/Year Head
- Refer especially vulnerable students to appropriately trained professionals

The aim of the CIMP. The aim 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.

The creation of a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. We have put systems in place to help to 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.

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT). A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

Team Leader

Role

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the task of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management, DES, NEPS, SEC.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.

Garda Liaison

Role

- Liaises with the Gardaí
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison

Role

- Leads briefing meetings for the staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routines for the day
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials for staff (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to the vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of the Employee Assistance Service and gives them the contact number.

Student Liaison

Role

- May co-ordinate information from tutors and year heads about students they are concerned about
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Maintains student contact records (R1)
- Arranges the supervision of a 'quiet' room, where agreed.

Community/Agency Liaison

Role

- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of key parents, such as members of the Parents Council, and of Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Is alert to the need to check the credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

Parent Liaison

Role

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings and manage 'questions and answers'
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensures that sample letters are typed up on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Sets up a room for meetings with parents
- Maintains a record of parents seen
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder).

Media Liaison

Role

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc.)

- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the SEC, relevant teacher unions, etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management).

Administrator

Role

- Maintenance of up-to-date telephone numbers of parents or guardians, teachers, emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts
- Photocopies materials needed.

Confidentiality and good name considerations

- Management and staff of St. Paul's Secondary School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of public statements. Members of school staff will bear this in mind, and seek to ensure that students do so also, e.g. the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. Similarly, the word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.