



**Villiers School**  
**Critical Incident /**  
**Student Support Policy**  
**2020**

## **1. Mission Statement**

***'Villiers provides a broad and balanced education within a caring community. Our aim is to develop life and learning skills in order to face the challenges ahead with awareness and integrity'.***

In accordance with our mission statement, all students will be encouraged to perform to the best of their ability, regardless of innate academic ability or family background.

In keeping with our mission statement Villiers School aims to protect the wellbeing of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. A critical incident / student support team has been set up:

- to develop a school structure to lead the response of the school to a critical incident
- and to work in a cooperative way with students experiencing intense stress.

A critical incident is an incident or sequence of events that overwhelm the normal coping mechanism of the school.

Types of incidents might include:

- the death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident / tragedy in the wider community
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

The above list is not exhaustive. The Critical Incident Plan may not be enacted in all instances.

## **2. Aim**

This policy is written in accordance with *Responding to Critical Incidents NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools*. (DES 2017)

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Responding%20to%20Critical%20Incidents.pdf>

### **Critical Incident**

The aim of the Critical Incident Plan is to help staff and management to react quickly and effectively and to maintain control of the situation in the event of a critical incident. The plan will also help the school to return to normality as soon as possible and alleviate the affects of the incident on staff and students.

## **Student Support**

The aim of the Student Support Team is to help to identify and support students who are experiencing intense stress. This can include exploring their concerns and endeavouring to provide the appropriate level of assistance. Where necessary the team will liaise with tutors, parents / guardians (parents) and outside agencies. The Team will meet on a regular basis, usually once a week during school term.

The Student Support Team is comprised of members with prior experience and interest in student well being and welfare.

### **3. Critical Incident / Student Support Team**

Ms. B. Callender	School Nurse
Ms B. Fitzpatrick	School Nurse
Mr. S. Hanna	IB and International Student Director
Mr. Tom Jones	Year Head and Attendance Officer
Mr. J. McNair	School Chaplain
Ms. Zara Philips	SEN Coordinator
Ms. M. Quinn	Deputy Headmistress
Ms E. Sheridan	Career Guidance Counsellor
Ms. J. Storey	Headmistress

### **4. Resources**

Villiers School will endeavor to use available programs and 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.

These include:

- SPHE program
- Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures
- Staff and Student Awareness Days - Health Awareness Day, Drugs Awareness Day, Safety Awareness Days, Wellbeing Day
- Parent Evening
- Guest Speakers
- Input by internal and external speakers
- Pastoral Care System
- Anti - Bullying Policy
- Staff Meetings
- Assemblies
- Health and Safety Policy
- Supervision Rota
- School Counsellors, nurses and pastoral team
- Staff Inservice

- Wellbeing Policy
- Extra-Curricular Programme

## **5. Critical Incident Plan**

In the event of a critical incident the Critical Incident / Student Support Team (CISST) and school management (Headmistress and BOM) will implement the Critical Incident Plan.

### **5.1 Record keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of calls made and received, letters and emails and messages sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc.

### **5.2 Roles and responsibilities**

#### **Team Leader: Mary Quinn**

- Liaises with Headmistress and Board of Management
- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting (M. Quinn Office)
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the bereaved family (if relevant)
- Liaises with the Gardaí (if relevant)
- Ensures that information about the incident or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared

#### **Staff Liaison: Mary Quinn, Jackie McNair, Liz Sheridan**

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outline the routine for the day(s)
- Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials for staff (from their Critical Incident folder)
- Keep staff updated as the day(s) progress(es)
- Keep alert to vulnerable staff members and make contact with them individually
- Advise staff of the availability of the EAS (Employee Assist Service) and provide the contact details.

#### **Student Liaison: Barbara Fitzpatrick, Bev Callender, Liz Sheridan, Jackie McNair, Tom Jones, Zara Philips**

- Co-ordinate information from tutors, year heads and other staff members about students for whom concern has been raised
- Alert other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provide materials for students (from their critical incident folder) and suggestions for counseling or other support where appropriate

- Keeps record of students seen by external agency staff
- Look after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room (The Sanctuary)

**Community / Agency Liaison: Barbara Fitzpatrick, Bev Callender, Liz Sheridan**

- Contact emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Keep alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinate the involvement of these agencies the community
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies

**Parent Liaison: Jackie McNair, Mary Quinn, Tom Jones, Jill Storey**

- Visit the immediate family (if relevant)
- Arrange parent meetings (if relevant) and facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Manage the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensure that sample / template letters are on file, on the school system
- Set up room for meetings with parents
- Maintain a record of parents seen
- Meet with individual parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their Critical Incident folder)

**Media Liaison – Liz Sheridan , Jill Storey**

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers etc)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the Department of Education, State Examinations Commission; relevant teacher unions, etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, arrange media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management) Room 11b Craft Room
- The management and staff of Villiers School have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements.

**Administrator – Mary Quinn (with the help of administrative staff)**

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of:
  - PTA
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency services
- Take telephone calls and note those for which a response is required
- Ensure that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepare and issue letters, emails and other necessary notifications
- Maintains records
- Maintain Critical Incident Folder

## **6. Actions**

### **Short Term Actions: Day I**

- Gather accurate information  
Who, what, when, where?
- Convene a Student Support Critical Incident Team meeting (M. Quinn's Office)
- Contact external agencies
- Arrange supervision of students
- Hold staff meeting and give out staff handouts – (Staff Room)
- Agree schedule for the day (could include assembly/prayer service per year group/Form/whole school if deemed beneficial)
- Inform students – (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be informed separately)
- Inform parents
- Compile a list of vulnerable students
- Contact/visit the bereaved family
- Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media
- Hold end of day staff briefing

### **Medium term actions: Day II and following days**

- Convene a CISST meeting to review the events of Day 1
- Meet external agencies
- Meet whole staff
- Arrange support for students, staff, parents
- Visit the injured
- Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements
- Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service (with family)
- Make decisions about school closure (Board of Management). Consider boarding students including international students

### **Follow-up: Beyond 72 hours**

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress
- Liaise with agencies regarding referrals
- Plan for return of bereaved student(s)
- Decide on memorials and anniversaries, for example, Ecumenical Remembrance Service organised by School Chaplain Jackie McNair in November each year. Staff and students will have an opportunity to sign a remembrance book and light a candle for the deceased
- Review response to incident and amend plan

## **7. Handout for Parents**

**Q. This critical incident which occurred in the school has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?**

A. You will receive a letter from the Headmistress, which will deal with this. The information conveyed to you has been carefully gathered and is factual. The letter may also detail the school's plans to keep you informed in the immediate aftermath of this incident.

**Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?**

A. Yes but this will often depend on the particular situation. Some possibilities are:

- The school has already embarked on a response to the incident by activating its Critical Incident Team.
- Various outside agencies have been contacted so help will be available from these.

**Q. How can I help my child?**

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss some feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully, restating what you hear them say so they know you are really listening. You should tell them it is OK to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up.

**Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?**

A. No we cannot be certain but grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check up.

**Q. How long will the symptoms of grief last?**

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died.

**Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?**

A. If your child remains very distressed after six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. It is best to seek more help through your GP/Health Board.

**Q In what ways are adolescents different from other children?**

A. During adolescence young people have very confused feelings about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time too the individual may be orienting more towards his/her peers and away from family, so do not feel rejected if they look to friends for their support and comfort. Just be available and tell them so.

## **8. Handouts for Teachers**

### **Q. I would like to opt out of support type work for personal reasons. Is this okay?**

A. Yes but please also consider that students need to be with people they know and trust. It has been found that their teachers are the best people to support them in school in times of distress. Accordingly, all teachers and other school staff members are encouraged to help the students at these times. However, nobody should be obliged to do this work and people should feel free to opt out of it if they so desire. You would need to be in attendance at staff meetings where information is disseminated in relation to the incident, in order to stay in touch.

### **Q. I have no qualifications to help out in this area. Don't you think the job should be left to the experts?**

A. You probably have more skills here than you realise. Your experience, competence and skills as a teacher and as an expert in dealing with children and young people are invaluable. Most importantly, the students know you. Experience shows that people grieve best with someone they know. Pupils need a safe environment in which to grieve and that security is often provided by the familiar face of the teacher in the first instance.

### **Q. What should I do in the classroom that could be helpful?**

A. You should acknowledge the situation and clarify the facts, as they are known. Honesty is essential. Encourage questions so that the students have a clear understanding. You should try to establish normal routines as soon as possible – but balance this with allowing students opportunities to discuss the incident and to express their thoughts and feelings. Encourage them to resume extra-curricular activities and help them to identify where they can go to for support. Encourage them to be supportive of one another.

### **Q. What are the signs of grief that I may notice in students?**

A. After bereavement a student may become withdrawn or aggressive, show anger, have mood swings or lack concentration. Try to handle all these changes with patience, do not seem surprised by them and do not get cross. If pupils come from a background where there is family breakdown, serious illness, alcohol or drug related difficulties, then you need to watch out for them.

### **Q. What skills do I have that are important?**

A. Listening skills are probably the most important as people who have experienced loss or trauma generally feel that talking helps them to cope with their feelings. When it is clear that a student wants to talk, try to make the time. Be reassuring and patient while gently encouraging them to talk about the loss. Reassure the student that you are there to help.

### **Q. Is there any one important thing I should say?**



A. Yes – emphasise that grieving is a normal healthy process following a critical incident. It is the person's way of coping with the event. It is not like depression, which is abnormal. People often need this kind of reassurance because of their confused state.

**Q. What if I think that some students are not grieving normally?**

A. There is no such thing as a 'correct' way to grieve. Some people cry, some laugh, some show no reaction. The important thing is that all these different ways are natural and normal and you should try to help the pupil understand this.

**Q. Is it a good idea to organise a classroom session following a critical incident?**

A. Some schools do and they have found this to be very effective. There are notes on working in this way included in the pack. An advantage here is that students may feel safe and secure with their classroom teacher rather than being with an adult they do not know.

**Q. What should I do if I feel that a student needs more professional support?**

A. Discuss the issue with the Headmistress, Guidance Counsellor or School Chaplain. They in turn may wish to discuss it with the NEPS psychologist and the parents. The outcome may be a referral through the GP to the appropriate service.

**Q. What is the overall message in helping bereaved children?**

A. It is normal and you will get through this difficult time and we are here to help if you need support. Let us take care of each other. Talk to us if you or a friend needs help.

**Q. When should I get back to a normal teaching routine with a class?**

A. It is important to give students sufficient time and space to share their feelings and come to terms with what has happened. However, it is also important to move towards a normal routine as soon as possible. Getting on with the regular and familiar pattern of school life helps reduce stress. Avoid introducing new material in the immediate aftermath of an incident or bereavement as grief and shock can interfere with concentration and motivation. It is often a good idea to ask the students themselves about returning to the normal routine.

**Q. What do I do about the empty chair/a student's belongings etc?**

A. A helpful strategy might be to involve students in a discussion about what to do about the chair. This might also present an opportunity to move to a new phase in the process. With regard to belongings, it might be useful to put together a folder of the student's work for the parents. This could be given to them at an appropriate time.

**Q. Is there a danger that by talking about suicide you make it an option for others?**

A. Talking about the death helps people to make sense of what has happened. People can cope with the truth. It is important to talk about how a person can get to the point where suicide seemed to be an option but to emphasise that it is not a good option. There is always help available if a person can take the step of reaching out for it.

## 9. Emergency Contact List

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Contact Number</b>
Garda	Mayorstone 061 456 980 Henry Street 061 212400
Hospital	St John's Hospital 061 462 222 University Hospital Limerick 061 301 111
Fire Brigade	(061) 407 100
School GP	Treaty Medical 061 328328
HSE	Roxtown Health Centre 061 417 622
Community Care Team	061 483 660
Child and Family Agency	St Camillus Hospital 061 588688
CAMHS	(061) 483 388
NEPS	0761 108561
DES	(090) 648 3600
SEC	090 644 2700
Clergy	Dean Niall Sloane 086 8288579
Employee Assistance Service	1800411057
Electrician	Leslie Cowpar 087 674633 Kieran Lynch 087 2583482
Plumber	Dick Conway 061 377243
Guardian Agency	Nora Gallagher 085 7224273

**10. Recording Template Sheet for Student Support Team**

Student Support Team Meeting Draft Template

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by \_\_\_\_\_



Concern

Action

Communication to Year Head

Review

Tread Softly Board



## 11. Sample Letters ( taken from NEPS Guidelines 2017)

### 11.1 SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a tragedy, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves (brief details of the incident and, in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost). Where text/social media are used for communicating with parents this content will help with drafting.

*(School Contact Details) (School Crest) Dear Parent/Guardian*

*The school has experienced (the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.) of Name of student(s). We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.*

*Our thoughts are with (family name).*

*We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy (elaborate). It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions s/he may like to discuss with you.*

*It is important to give factual information that is age appropriate.*

*You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to express feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or be fearful, anxious, or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short term reaction. Over the course of the coming days, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.*

*Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.*

*(Optional)*

*An information night for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given.*

*We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.*

*Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.*

*If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school (details).*

*Principal's signature*

## 11.2 SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - VIOLENT DEATH

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a violent death, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves. (Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).

*Dear Parent/ Guardian*

*I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened.*

*A child/young person from the neighbourhood, the sister/ brother of (name of student), a student here at school, was killed as a result of (a violent attack, violent incident in the street etc.) earlier this week. We are all profoundly saddened by his death.*

*We have shared this information and had discussions with all of our students so that they know*

*what has happened. School staff members have been available for students on an on-going basis today. Other support personnel (including psychologists etc., according to actual arrangements) are available to advise staff in their support of students.*

*The death of any young person is tragic, but a violent death is even more difficult. It is hard to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to accept that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it.*

*This death may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Some children/young people may be afraid for their own life and for the lives of those they love. Take time to listen to their fears and reassure them that what has happened is rare.*

*We have enclosed some additional information that may be useful during this time.*

*The media are in the vicinity of the school and may approach you or your children. You need not respond to their questions if you are approached. We will not allow the media to interview your child at school and our general advice is that you should not let your children be interviewed. They are not mature enough to judge what to say and may say something they will regret later.*

*In these times, young people tend to turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive about what your son/daughter might post to others.*

*Our thoughts are with (family name) and with each of you. Sincerely  
Principal's name*

### 11.3 Sample Announcement to the Media

This can be used as a template by schools to be emailed, posted on the school social media site or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the school. In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals.

This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the victim's family and the nature of the incident.

*My name is (Name) and I am the principal of (Name) School. We learned this morning of the death of (one of our students or Name of student). This is a terrible tragedy for family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (Name) family and friends.*

*Name of student/students was a (give year group eg Form I student) and will be greatly missed by all who knew him. We have been in contact with his/her parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.*

*Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school has implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.*

*Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and (insert other information if relevant) have been with us all day supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time.*

*The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event.*

*The school has been open to parents to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.*

*We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time. Thank you.*

## **12. Useful websites and helplines for accessing resources (taken from NEPS Guidelines 2017)**

NEPS has identified the following websites which schools may find helpful. However, all materials should be reviewed by school management to ensure that they conform to school ethos and policy before they are used.

### **12.1 Training - [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie)**

- ASIST Training: ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) is a two-day interactive workshop in suicide first-aid. It is suitable for all kinds of caregivers - health workers, teachers, community workers, Gardaí, youth workers, volunteers, people responding to family, friends and co-workers. It is free of charge. If you'd like to make a difference in your community, you may wish to access ASIST training and learn how to help. Information can be obtained on the website of the National Office for Suicide Prevention.
- SafeTALK: SafeTALK 'suicide alertness for everyone' is a half day training programme that prepares participants to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources. These specific skills are called suicide alertness and are taught with the expectation that the person learning them will use them to help reduce suicide risk in their communities. Participants learn how to provide practical help to persons with thoughts of suicide in only a few hours. Following a SafeTALK workshop you will be more willing and able to perform an important helping role for persons with thoughts of suicide.

### **12.2. Websites**

- Barnardos provide resources and advice on [www.barnardos.ie/resources](http://www.barnardos.ie/resources), [www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp](http://www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp)
- The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) is a multi-professional federation of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people. [www.irishchildhoodbereavementnetwork.ie](http://www.irishchildhoodbereavementnetwork.ie)
- Cruse Bereavement Care exists to promote the wellbeing of bereaved people and to enable anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss. [www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)
- The Professional Development for Teachers (PDST) Health and Wellbeing Team provide support for teachers at primary and post-primary level in physical education (PE), social personal and health education (SPHE) which includes anti-bullying, child protection, mental health and wellbeing, relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and other SPHE related areas. Supports offered to schools include in-service for principals, co-ordinators, teachers of SPHE, whole staff groups; programme planning; school policy development; schools visits. [www.pdst.ie](http://www.pdst.ie).
- The former SPHE Support Service has been integrated into the Health and Wellbeing team of the PDST. Visit [www.sphe.ie](http://www.sphe.ie) for further information and to book post-primary SPHE courses.

- The National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) was established to oversee the implementation of 'Reach Out' the National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention, and to co-ordinate suicide prevention efforts around the country. The NOSP works closely with the HSE Suicide Prevention Officers. Up-to-date contact details for suicide prevention officers can be found on the NOSP website [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie)
- The Irish Association for Suicidology (IAS) sets out to be a forum for all individuals and voluntary groups involved in any aspect of suicidology for the exchange of knowledge gained from differing perspectives and experiences [www.ias.ie](http://www.ias.ie)
- Irish Hospice Foundation - [www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)  
Lifelines supports all people who are affected in anyway by self-injury within the United Kingdom and beyond. It supports people who self-injure, and their family and friends. [www.selfharm.org](http://www.selfharm.org)
- Winstonswish Foundation, help for grieving children and their families. [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)
- Resources and support for those dealing with suicide, depression or emotional distress, particularly teenagers and young adults. [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)
- A national charity committed to improving the mental health of all children and young people. [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
- An Irish website covering all aspects of health, lifestyle, culture and craic. It's an online youth information centre, a magazine, a health clinic, a contact directory, a youth media forum a take action initiative, a community building place and lots more. [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)
- A site that focuses on issues relating to youth in Ireland today. [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)
- An Australian site that helps young people through tough times. [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)
- Mental Health Ireland aims to promote positive mental health and to actively support persons with a mental illness, their families and carers by identifying their needs and advocating their rights. The pro teen matters web magazine, which is created by young people for young people, has information about physical and mental health, frequently asked questions, competitions, jokes and stories. [www.mentalhelathireland.ie](http://www.mentalhelathireland.ie)
- Non-judgemental information and support. [www.gayswitchboard.ie](http://www.gayswitchboard.ie)

### 12.3 Helplines

Remind students that if they need someone to talk to, at any time of the day or night, they can ring either:

- Childline: 1800 666 666 (free calls, no phone credit needed)
- The Samaritans: 116 123 (free calls, no phone credit needed)



### **13. Review**

This policy was reviewed in February 2020 and is next due for review in February 2022