

**CARDINAL NEWMAN CATHOLIC  
SCHOOL**

**CRITICAL INCIDENT  
POLICY**

## **Introduction**

**Handling crises is an accepted part of the life of the school.** Some incidents, however, will be more traumatic than others with staff, students and parents experiencing acute or even prolonged distress. Traumatic events may include:

- Serious injuries on trips
- Fatalities
- Serious incidents e.g. major fires, explosions

It is important to recognise that the impact of such events upon the school community will vary. A distinction is made between Critical Incidents and Major Emergencies and each would require a different type and scale of response.

## **Being Prepared for a Critical Incident**

### **What is a Critical Incident**

Critical Incidents entail an involvement in or direct witnessing of a tragic or shocking event and will be managed at the school by the Headteacher, together with support from the CIMT and professionals at the LEA and other outside agencies. Debriefing is a key part of the process in order to prevent the development of distressing reactions and post traumatic stress disorder.

Major Emergencies in which children are involved (e.g. airplane crashes and train crashes) are handled by the emergency services in conjunction with the CIMT. In such circumstances the LEA's Major Emergency Plan would be activated.

## **Key Tasks**

### **Nominate a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

The CIMT for Cardinal Newman Catholic School is:

Peter Evans	Headteacher
Malvina Sanders	Deputy Headteacher
David Walsh	Deputy Headteacher
David Buxton	Deputy Headteacher
Marina Smith	Assistant Headteacher
Paul Miller	Assistant Headteacher
Debbie Whitmore	Director of Finance & Human Resources

### **Identify key responsibilities**

- Press and telephone contact:
- Determine information to be released
- Locate a base to be used and ensure procedures and updated information is located there
- Confirm contact lists, telephone lines etc
- Ensure basic information, contact lists are up to date
- Consider accommodation/facilities required

## **IMMEDIATE ACTION BY STAFF AT THE SCENE**

### **ASSESS THE RISK**

- Safeguard the welfare of the students and adults present at the scene as a priority.
- Contact the appropriate emergency services
- Ensure that any immediate action taken to protect people or property does not give rise to further risk
- Control the flow of information from the students (by means of mobile phones etc)

### **BRIEF THE CIMT**

- Contact the CIMT as soon as possible
- Share information about the incident
- Allocate responsibility for immediate and short term tasks

### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

- Find out what has happened
- Where and when the incident occurred
- Names of those injured. How many people. Extent of injuries
- Current location of those injured; name and contact number of an adult with them
- Current location of those NOT injured, name and contact number of an adult with them
- Who was involved in or observed the incident

# IMMEDIATE ACTION BY THE CIMT

1. Ensure there is no immediate risk to the community
2. Locate the CIMT team and brief the team.
3. Nominate team members to key tasks
4. Arrange telephone communications and agree information to be released
5. If the incident has occurred on a planned school trip, obtain the file from the Business Manager. This will detail contact numbers and details of students and staff on the trip.
6. Contact the families of those involved
7. Inform school staff
8. Inform students
9. Manage the media
10. Inform Governors/LEA etc.

## Contact the Families of those involved

- Get an up to date list of emergency contacts for students and staff
- Note who is at the site of the incident

## Note:

In the event of death, the police will take responsibility for informing relatives in person. Nominate a member of staff to accompany the Police if appropriate. In the event of serious injury, CIMT would make contact, so do so quickly and sensitively. If the person cannot be reached directly, then

- (a) Leave a brief message asking them to call a particular number, making the message simple
  - (b) Use a reliable neighbour or another parent to put a note through the door asking them to telephone the given number
- Prepare what to say with care. Give the facts and express sympathy and concern. Inform parents of the action being taken and, if possible, indicate when further information will be made available. Do not mention fatalities specifically. Avoid references to blame and liability. Remember the Media are likely to elaborate this statement.
  - It may be appropriate to invite parents into the school in readiness for further information. Some people may need immediate emotional support at this stage.
  - Parents will need to know whether to go to the scene of the incident, come into school, or to travel to another location

### **Inform School Staff**

- Provide staff with factual information about the incident, so that they can feel confident about handling questions from students
- Tell them when the information will be updated e.g. break-time
- Encourage staff to refer to the CIMT when in doubt (using an agreed internal line)
- Be aware that staff may also be overwhelmed by the information about the event

### **Inform Students**

- Decide whether it is better to talk to the school in class groups, year groups, or individuals
- Consider asking members of staff who are well known to the students and who feel confident in handling their reactions to do this
- Tell students what has happened and allow them to ask questions

### **Manage the Media**

- Contact the LEA's Press Office for assistance in managing any contact with the media
- The Headteacher should agree with the Press Office the most appropriate spokesperson for the incident
- Prepare a text
- Control all access points to the school, but designate an area to brief the media that allows you some control of them
- Keep the press area separate from the gathering place for students/staff

### **Arrange Telephone Communications**

- Dedicate a particular line to outgoing calls. People wanting to contact the school for details will quickly jam the main telephone line. To avoid this situation use one of the following lines:
  - A telephone plugged into an existing fax line
  - School Caretaker's home telephone line
  - Mobile telephone
  - School payphone

### **The Next Step for the CIMT**

1. Seek support for handling feelings and reactions
2. Inform the wider community
3. Identify contentious curriculum issues
4. Release a more detailed press statement
5. Prepare information for parents

### **Seek support for handling feelings and reactions**

- The Educational Psychology Service can provide support and they have specialist training in critical incident debriefing

### **Inform the wider community**

- The School may wish to contact neighboring schools and community groups if there are siblings of children involved in the incident

### **Identify Contentious Curriculum Issues**

There may be aspects of the curriculum immediately following the incident that could trigger unpleasant reactions. Such sources of reminder could be:

- Literature
- Items in assemblies
- Episodes within the Curriculum

It is important to anticipate these sources and possible reactions.

## **Release a More Detailed Press Statement**

The LEA Press Officer will be an important source of advice on what to say and how to say it.

The CIMT Spokesperson (Headteacher) should consider informing the press not only of the details of what happened but of the actions taken to manage the situation.

Avoid jargon, acronyms etc and use simple everyday language.

Check it for spelling, grammar and general comprehension before releasing it.

If comments are to be made on positive qualities of the School, quotes might be taken from the most recent OFSTED inspection report.

## **Prepare Information for Parents**

It may be sufficient to inform parents by sending a letter with their children. Alternatively the news may be circulated by means of the Newman News. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to call a meeting to the school, especially if the incident is one that will generate concern about an aspect of the school's organisation.

## **SUPPORT AFTER THE EVENT**

Consideration needs to be given to the following:

- Contacts for support and advice
- Debriefing and support for teachers and staff
- Debriefing sessions for students
- Longer Term Support
- Advice to Parents

## **MEDIA**

In facing the media:

### **TRY TO**

- Respond to “what” and “when” questions
- Tell your story concisely, accurately and get the school’s key message across
- Consider, when possible, the needs of the audience
- Choose your own time to report to the Media
- Prepare and rehearse so that everybody is given the same information

### **TRY NOT TO**

- Reply to “how” and “why” questions
- Speculate
- Make off the record comments
- Make promises you may not be able to keep
- Make excuses or blame others
- Respond to unattributed quotes (“one of your staff tells me that.....”)
- Say “no comment” – explain why you cannot comment
- Allow words to be put into your mouth.

## **MONITOR & REVIEW THE POLICY**

The Critical Incident Policy must be reviewed by the Finance & General Purposes committee annually.

All contact details must be updated regularly and changes to the CIMT must be recorded and circulated when an alteration to the team occurs.

The CIMT must carry out a simulation exercise annually to experience how a critical incident might unfold.