

Critical Incident Response Plan

DONABATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



This policy is to be reviewed by the Board of Management every year.

This Policy was agreed on:

28/1/25

Signature:

(Chairperson to the Board of Management)

M. Farrell.

Donabate Community College

Donabate Community College is a post primary college, which opened in August 2008 under the Patronage of County Dublin VEC, now DDLETB. The college is co-educational and aspires towards excellence in a caring and supportive environment.

As Donabate Community College will be catering in the foreseeable future to an ever-increasing population growth within its catchment area, the Board of Management will review the Enrolment Policy on a yearly basis.

The Board of Management is committed to the successful implementation of recent legislation, in particular the Education Act (1998), the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) and the Equal Status Act (2000). The Board fully subscribes to the principles of partnership, accountability, transparency, inclusion and respect for diversity, parental choice and equality.

College Mission

The Board of Management will promote Excellence. Our aim will be to create, with the assistance of parents/guardians, responsible citizens with pride in their community. The development of the whole person will be based on personal responsibility, interdependence, respect for people and respect for property. Our college will seek to instil integrity, value discipline and punctuality and facilitate the best in academic and non-academic areas. We will value our culture, our tradition, be inclusive of religious beliefs and will seek to be a caring and compassionate community where justice and truth will be the central elements.

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Review and Research

The following documents have been consulted (available on www.education.ie and www.nosp.ie) while developing this plan:

- Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines and Resources for Schools (NEPS 2016)
- Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines (IAS, National Suicide Review Group (2002)
- Suicide Prevention in the Community - A Practical Guide (HSE 2011)
- Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DE, DOH, HSE 2013)

Definition of a Critical Incident:

An incident may constitute a critical incident, requiring a response as laid down in this policy document, which:

- Is sudden and unexpected
- Endangers or threatens a person
- Overwhelms the usual coping mechanisms
- Causes severe disruption and is traumatic

Donabate Community College recognises the trauma caused by a critical incident challenges individuals mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually and will affect the normal functioning of school.

An incident may occur that causes trauma to an individual. Such incidents need to be acknowledged and to be regarded seriously by management and staff. The individual staff member/student needs support and help. However, for the purposes of this document, such an incident does not necessarily constitute a critical incident.

Donabate Community College is a college of the community and is also a community in itself. Its members, staff and students, share common aims promoting and protecting the wellbeing of all in our community. Therefore, critical incidents become the concern of all. In the event of a critical incident, our response will ensure that the community is safe, supported and informed and aims to provide strategies/structures for follow-up and review.

Aims of the Response Plan

This Critical Incident Response Plan aims to help school management, existing pastoral care systems 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.

Creation of Supportive and Caring Ethos in Donabate Community College

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.

Physical Safety:

- Evacuation plan formulated (including our students in wheelchairs)
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Individual subject plans include subject specific safety statements
- Appointment of a Health and Safety officer

Psychological Safety:

The management and staff of Donabate Community College aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance an ethos of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school curriculum by issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and the Guidance department are trained in interventions for suicidal students.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies, including: Pieta House, Jigsaw, CAMHS, HSE, DDLETB Psychological Support Services & Cross Care. Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content, and the expertise of the provider.
- The school has a counter bullying policy and coordinator.
- There is a check and connect system coordinated by the Guidance Department.
- The Student Support Team meets weekly to coordinate responses to student needs. Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (e.g. guidance counsellor or support teacher), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- A referral system has been established and students have access to the Guidance Counsellor through a referral from their Year Head or through a self-referral system.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves.

Critical Incident Response Team

Role	Phone Number
Principal	8436726
Deputy Principal	8436726
Deputy Principal	8436726
Guidance Counsellors	8436726
Facilitators	8436726

A copy of this document will be in possession of every member of the CIR Team. It is also available on our website.

The CIR Team is responsible for the management and delivery of the CIR plan. Confidentiality is fundamental principal of the good working of CIR Team.

Function:

1. Implement a critical incident response tailored to the particular incident, which has occurred
2. Assimilate and verify all available information in relation to the incident
3. Identify key areas that need to be acted upon
4. Decide on the particular actions that need to be taken and by whom
5. Plan follow up
6. Monitor and evaluate the execution of the plan
7. If necessary, liaise with the Psychological Support Service

How:

- One team member, typically the Principal, should try to verify all the information as early as possible, before the team meets to decide on a plan of action
- All members of the team are contactable out of hours and can convene a meeting as early as possible
- Responsibilities for implementing the decisions of the team will be delegated to individual team members and small back up groups formed
- Each team member has his/her own back-up group and is familiar with the CIR plan. Team members can consult with their groups to identify/modify actions that need to be taken
- Team meets as often as is necessary during the course of the day to update information and modify plan
- Team ensures there is communication with staff, observing confidentiality of the situation
- Team meets in the short term to monitor progress and plan further actions eg. funeral services, student support, staff support, assemblies etc.
- Team meets to look at long-term implications and 'closure'.
- Team evaluates the plan and makes recommendations on improving the response.

School Principal

The School Principal is the chairperson of the CIR and is also the designated Liaison Person (DLP).

Team Leader	Principal
Role	Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting Coordinates the tasks of the team Liaises with the Board of Management, DDLETB, DE, SEC Liaises with the bereaved family Confirms the event and clarifies the facts Convenes a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team Activates the Critical Incident Response Plan Co-ordinates and delegates tasks Liaises with family, Board of Management, DDLETB and Support Agencies Provides follow-up support Reviews and evaluates the plan Keeps written records of phone calls, letters, meetings interventions etc.
Garda Liaison	Principal
Role	Liaises with the Gardaí Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared
Staff Liaison	Deputy Principals /Year Heads / Guidance Counsellors
Role	Implement the Critical Incident Response Plan as outlined by the Principal Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, and outlines the routine for the day Meet with Year Head. Tutors. advises them of the Critical Incident Response Plan 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 Are alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually Advises them of the availability of the DDLET Psychological Support Services

Meet with tutor groups and limit the adverse effects of the incident
 Support vulnerable students/ teachers
 Tries to maintain normal school routine as far as possible
 Keeps written records of phone calls, letters, interventions etc.
 Keeps minutes of individual meetings
 Identifies rooms which may be used for various purposes- individual and group support sessions; meeting parents; a quiet room; a waiting room etc.

Parent Liaison	Principal
Role	<p>Liaises with the bereaved family Contact with parents to be maintained through link person as frequently as desired by parents</p>

Media Liaison	DDLETB
Role	<p>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)</p>

Administrators

Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents or guardians - Staff members - Emergency services - Students <p>Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to. Ensure that telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls. Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation. Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts, ensuring that the affected parties are removed from the mailing list. Photocopies materials needed Maintains records Liaises with Principal Keeps written records of phone calls, letters, meetings interventions etc.</p>
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Record Keeping

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

Marcella McNally will both have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

Guidance Counsellor will keep records of student meetings.

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations:

Management and staff of Donabate Community College 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.

Critical Incident Rooms

In the event of a critical incident, the following rooms are designated for the indicated purposes:

Room	Designated Purpose
The Hub	Immediate gathering space for staff and students & wider community. <i>Hub door will be opened to receive students</i> <i>Hub kitchen used by the Parents Council for refreshments if needed</i>
Staff Room	Main room for meeting staff
B36/37 or Assembly Area	Meetings with Students
Board Room	Meetings with Parents
Guidance Offices	Individual sessions with students
Board Room	Meetings with other individuals

Short Term Actions

Task	Name	Notes
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Gather accurate information – phone the parent if necessary	Principal	
Inform SMT	Principal	
Phone key personnel who were working close with the child	Principal	
Inform and convene a CIRT meeting – clear time and place	Principal	
Contact external agencies	Principal	
Arrange supervision for students	Deputy Principal	
Contact staff / Hold staff meetings	Principal	Text to staff advising them to check their emails at their convenience as a ‘very serious incident’ has occurred. Staff should be given an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions.
Agree schedule for the day	Principal	
Inform students	SST and other relevant staff	Close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately
Compile list of vulnerable students	SST	
Prepare and agree media statement / social media response	Principal & Public Relations Officer(s)	Post on social media if appropriate. This should consist of a generic image (a sunset or a candle) with the following text: <i>Our school community has suffered a tragic loss. Our doors will be open ____ from ____ for any of our students who wish to gather.</i>
Inform Parents	Principal	
School to be opened as soon as it safe to do so, preferably the next day.	Principal, Deputy Principals	Hub is to be used as a gathering space Parents Council contacted and asked to provide tea and coffee as appropriate Memory box for students to write on slips of paper provided The community will be informed of this via our social media pages and a text to parents. Text: <i>Our school community has suffered a tragic loss. Our doors will be open ____ from</i>

Parents Council Contacted	Principal, Deputy Principals	___ for any of our students who wish to gather. Asked to provide tea and coffee as appropriate
Hold end of day staff meeting	Principal	Staff should be given an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions.

Medium Term Actions (Day 2 and following days)

Task	Name	Notes
Convene a CIRT meeting to review the events of day 1	Principal	
Meet whole staff	Principal	An emergency meeting called in the staff room for anyone who can make it at 8.15am. Check in from the principal, outline what will be happening in the coming days and explain Year Heads will be visiting all rooms in the first class. If students are asking what happened or seem curious, try to answer them with facts, for example: <i>We have had a tragedy as a school community and one of our students has died. People are feeling very sad so please be patient and kind to each other today particularly. As I'm sure you understand, I don't want to talk about this too much more as it is very hard to talk about, but your year Head will be around soon to talk to you. If you want to talk to someone, you can call down to the Guidance Department any time today, you don't need an appointment.</i>
Arrange support for students	Principal, Deputy Principals, Guidance Counsellors	Emergency check in meeting with Year Head of any siblings in the school and a plan made to support them and their immediate friend group. This will be done in consultation with parents. The affected year group a chance to come together for 15 minutes in B36/37 or the hub social space, have a cup of tea and a quick chat from their Year Head. Explain: <i>Classes will be returning to normal, this may sound strange, but we know the best thing for you is to return to normal, even though some</i>

		<p><i>of us might feel there will never be normal again. This does not mean we have forgotten, and we are all here together to support each other. If anyone needs to talk today, go to an adult you trust. The Guidance Department are always here, and you can call into them if you would like to, you don't need to make an appointment today.</i></p>
Year Head and Guidance or SMT to visit every class in their year group in the first morning back	Principal to coordinate	<p><i>As a school we have faced a tragedy, and some people might be feeling sad this morning. School will be carrying on as normal, this does not mean we have forgotten, this means we know what best is returning to routine and being together. If anyone needs to talk today, go to an adult you trust. The Guidance Department are always here, and you can call them if you would like to.</i></p>
Arrange support for staff	Principal	Check in of the key personnel who worked with the student. Opportunity to go for coffee together offered if appropriate
Visit the injured	Principal	Two people at least to visit the house if appropriate Hamper to be sent to the house if appropriate
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	Principal	Contact with parents to be maintained through link person as frequently as desired by parents
Comment to be left on rip.ie if appropriate	Principal	Guard of honour if parents feel it is appropriate. Students are notified by their Year Head on their Teams page. Students are asked to wear full uniform.
Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	Principal	If funeral is outside of school time: Two people representing in the school to attend If funeral is inside school time: Buses provided for year group and year head and tutors freed up to go
Make decisions on school closure	Principal & DDLETB	

Follow Up – Beyond 72 hours

Task	Name	Notes
Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Year Head, Tutors, Class Teachers, Guidance Department	
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Principal Guidance Department	
Plan for return of bereaved student(s)	Principal Guidance Department Appropriate Year Head	
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	BOM, staff, parents and students	A person/s are identified to remain as a link person for the critical incident. Points to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Graduation ○ Results day
Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff / BOM	

Consultation and Communication regarding the CIRP plan:

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff. Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan.

New and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan. The plan will be updated every two years or as matters arise.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST FOR PRINCIPAL

- Gather the facts - Who? What? When? And Where?
- Consult Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools <https://assets.gov.ie/40700/21b5193521d147c890b4309fe4bfce9d.pdf>
- Is it an incident requiring a NEPS Response at Level 1,2 or 3?
- Convene the Critical Incident Management Team

- Meet with other agencies, if involved, to agree roles and procedures
- Have administration staff photocopy appropriate literature
- Arrange for the supervision of students
- Agree content of communication for school social media site, if appropriate
- Address the staff meeting
- Identify vulnerable students
- Draft a media statement
- Prepare for a media interview
- Draft a letter to parents
- Meet with the staff group
- Make contact with the family impacted by the Critical incident.
- Meet with the CIR team to review the day and arrange an early morning meeting for the following day
- Maintain the normal routine if at all possible

Reference Table (Jan 2025)

Role	Name	Phone Number
Principal	Principal	8436726
Deputy Principal	Marian Flynn	8436726
Deputy Principal	Caitríona Rooney	8436726
Guidance Counsellors	Alice Chaloner & Lillian Mc Grotty	8436726
Public Relations Officers	Niamh Collins & Aisling Cleary	8436726
Administrator	Marcella McNally	8436726
Facilitators	Assistant Principals / Programme Coordinator (of group most affected), referred to in this Policy as Facilitator	8436726