



# JOHN SCOTTUS SECONDARY SCHOOL

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## Crisis Response Policy

### John Scottus Secondary School

John Scottus School offers a vision of education which gives young people the self mastery, strength of character and compassion to contribute meaningfully to the world around them whilst at the same time fulfilling their own unique set of talents and qualities.

It is an education based on the belief that each child can come to discover their innate gifts, that each child can come to contribute something exceptional and that each child has at their heart a limitless potential.

Central to the ethos of the school is the development of character. Character building is described as the development of good habits such as the ability to be still and self-aware, to attend to the present moment, to participate in the spirit of enquiry and to unite with others around. These habits of attention, enquiry, stillness and unity will provide the foundations for academic excellence, a life of meaningful purpose and a life journey of Self-Discovery.

Mindfulness along with philosophy and meditation are considered the three key aspects in the journey of character building and the development of these habits. The mindful motto of the school is "Delight in the present" and the belief is that when a child comes to know their true Self it is possible to delight in the present every moment of every day.

### 1. Introduction:

In John Scottus Primary School we aim to protect the well being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment as outlined in our school philosophy statement.

The BoM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a Critical Incident Management Plan. They have established a Critical Incident Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

### What is a Critical Incident?

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school'.

### Examples:

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease (Foot & Mouth)
- Criminal incidents (e.g. Dunblane shooting, Shooting at first communion in Ballymun.)
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. 'Navan bus crash')

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- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster (e.g. school ceiling collapsing in Cork)
- Disappearance of student from home or school (e.g. Middleton incident in Cork)
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, tsunami

## **Crisis Response Team – A Framework**

At the core of the framework are the members of the team who carry out the following roles:

- Leadership
- Communication
- Student Liaison/Counselling Role
- Family Liaison

### **Leadership Role**

The particular role of the principal lends itself most clearly to being a supportive presence to others in the school. This is shown through acknowledging the feelings of those in any way effected providing informal/formal opportunities for people to chat and discuss the incident and its impact on them.

### **Communication Role**

In times of crisis there may sometimes be media interest that will need to be sensitively managed so that the involvement becomes part of the support effort rather than an unhelpful intrusion. The person in the communication role will also have a major responsibility to support the other the other members of the Crisis Response Team involved in communicating with staff, parents and students. The person selected needs to be comfortable with appearing on television and radio as they, with the principal, should be the only points of contact with the media. They will be responsible for preparing and updating press releases and statements to the school community.

### **Student Liaison/Counsellor Role**

A pivotal role in the crisis team will be the school counsellor who will have responsibility to manage the range of counselling services required during times of trauma. Integral to the role of the counsellor is the relationship that is built up with the students particularly in the area of social and personal development. They have a role in supporting those students at risk and are also best placed to be a resource to staff and parents in a variety of ways.

### **Family Liaison Role**

The link and involvement with the bereaved family is essential. The designated staff member in the family liaison role is an important resource inn the response of the school to the bereaved family and to other families who may be distressed. The impression the family forms from meeting this person will influence their perception of the entire school's response to the death of their child. This underlines the importance of communicating in a sensitive manner.

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## 2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

### Team Leader:

#### Intervention

- Confirm the event and gather accurate information
- Activate the Critical Incident response team and call meeting. Specify time and place clearly.
- Clarify facts surrounding event, who, what, when, where so as to avoid rumours
- Contact the Chairman of the Board of Management
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Make contact with relevant agencies NEPS etc. Arrange to meet as appropriate.
- Arrange supervision for students;
- Agree Schedule for the day
- Organise timetable. Maintain normal school routine where possible. Organise special cleaning if necessary
- Identify high risk / vulnerable students
- Organise support for students and staff. Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff

#### Communication – Ensure the following

##### Strategy

- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school) media etc.
- Who do I need to call personally? Appoint somebody to deal with phone enquiries and agree what is being said

##### Staff

- Inform staff, convene staff meeting, if appropriate Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, (outline the routine for the day, personnel required etc.
- Agree on statement of facts

##### Families

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Contact / visit family to express sympathy
- Inform parents/guardians and students (close friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately.
- Draft letter to parents

##### Postvention :

- Reconvene critical incident management team
- Check how each person on team is coping
- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students and develop plan for going forward

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- Review list of vulnerable students
- Visit the injured
- Consult with the bereaved family regarding funeral attendance, etc Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan and previous days actions daily
- Draw up schedule of actions required today, outstanding items
- Make decision about school closure - BOM
- Give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions
- Evaluate Plan, what went well, what gaps, what was helpful or not
- Review Plan with external agencies
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made
- Plan for the return of bereaved / injured students
- Decide on future Memorials / Anniversaries
- Is there any unfinished business ?

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## **Communication Role:**

### **Intervention**

- With Team, prepare a media statement and deal with media
- Refer to Media Briefing, see Appendices
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Respond to media
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact / outgoing calls
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies
- Note what done, when, who contacted etc
- Note any offers of help received
- Use email, text, website and social media to update school community

### **Postvention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

## **Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:**

### **Intervention**

- Liaise with NEPS regarding their participation, personnel and counselling for staff, parents and pupils
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures and develop plan for going forward
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information to parents and students (copying from resource books etc)
- Provide counselling to students and staff
- Liaise with external agencies as appropriate
- Close friends and special needs pupils may need to be told separately

### **Postvention**

- Monitor class most affected
- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress, physical, emotional, absenteeism etc
- Refer as appropriate
- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Arrange support / information / de-brief meetings for students as appropriate
- Plan for giving of "Memory Box" to bereaved family
- Facilitation of students responses eg Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences etc
- Review response to incident and evaluate and amend Plan
- Decide on memorials and anniversaries
- Plan for re-integration of students and staff ie absentees, close friends, siblings, injured etc and liaise with them on return

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- Ensure new staff are aware of any children who were involved in incident, be sensitive to anniversaries etc.
- Liaise with external agencies as appropriate

### **Family Liaison Role:**

#### **Intervention**

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service and agree on attendance and participation
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident

#### **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

## **Crisis Response Team: Action Plan**

### **SHORT TERM ACTION PLAN**

- Collect as many facts about incident as possible. Agree information to be shared with parents /students / media etc.
- Gather CIP team for meeting and delegate responsibilities
- Contact BOM liaison
- Contact appropriate Emergency, Medical and Support agencies
- Share full details of the event with team
- Contact grieving family
- Discuss how to deal with media. Prepare media statement for fax/email and briefings.
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Make decisions about school closure and school inspector
- School closure / routines /calendar events etc
- Arrange supervision of students, merge classes etc.
- Additional personnel required, supervision/support/admin etc
- Identify vulnerable students
- Inform parents / students / media
- Plan a whole staff briefing (including all ancillary staff).
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person

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- Agree text of letter to be sent to parents
- Keep records of all students seen by staff or agencies. Who told what/when/by whom
- Agree next meeting time for tomorrow
- Review outstanding items from today
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service. The Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's possible involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths
- Use email, text, website and social media to update school community

### **MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)**

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
  - Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
  - Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
  - Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate)
- Request a decision on this from school management
- Use email, text, website and social media to update school community

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## **LONGER TERM ACTIONS**

### **Monitor students for signs of continuing distress.**

If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the Health Board. Constant communication with family is essential. Some signs of distress may include:

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

### **Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately**

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

### **Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future**

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staffs are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school

### **Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events)**

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
- Plan a school memorial service
- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

## **Policy Approval Date**

Approved by the Board of Management of John Scottus School on : October 2016



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## **Appendix A: Critical Incident Management Team**

Leadership Role:	Dr. Declan Kelly (Principal)
Communication Role:	Dr. Declan Kelly, Geert van de Belt
Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:	Philip Brady, Emma Maguire Timmins
Family Liaison:	Margaret Telford
Board of Management Rep:	Austin Colfer
Parent Rep:	Michelle Madden
Patron Rep:	Brendan Tangney

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## Appendix B: Emergency Contact Numbers

<b>Ambulance</b>		<b>999 Or 112</b>
<b>Garda</b>	Irishtown Station	<b>(01) 666 9600 or 999</b>
<b>Hospital – Children</b>	Temple St Children’s Hospital	<b>01 878 4200</b>
<b>Hospital - Adults</b>	St Vincent’s University Hospital, Elm Park, D4	<b>(01) 221 4000</b>
<b>Fire Brigade</b>	Donnybrook Fire Station, Main Street, Donnybrook, D4	<b>(01) 673 4000</b>  <b>999</b>
<b>Local G P</b>	Dr O’Grady, Donnybrook	<b>(01) 269 3347</b>
<b>Safety Officer</b>	Geert van De Belt	<b>086 173 4394</b>
<b>Health &amp; Safety issues</b>	Geert van De Belt	<b>086 173 4394</b>
<b>First Aider</b>	Ed Pender	<b>085 249 6611</b>
<b>Child Protection issues</b>	Dr. Declan Kelly	<b>086 171 3476</b>

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## Appendix C: Media Briefing

- Principal will be spokesperson (Leader) and may seek advice if appropriate.
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Clear statement with BOM
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
  1. What happened, where and when, who was involved?
  2. What is the extent of the injuries?
  3. How many are involved and what are their names?
  4. Is there a risk of further injury?
  5. What agencies have been contacted already?

### Do's and Don'ts of dealing with media :

Do write a press statement	
Do consider contacting the INTO etc for advice and guidance	
Do use careful and sensitive language	
Do keep it short	
Do regard everything as recorded and quotable (generally the media will)	
Do ask whether there will be the possibility of editing the interview	
Do ask in advance for an outline of the questions that you will be asked	
Do avoid sweeping statements and generalisations	
Do avoid being drawn into speculation	
Do protect families privacy	
Don't go into personal details of those involved	
Don't read the statement to camera	
Don't engage in rambling discussions afterwards	
Don't use "No comment"	
Don't respond to quote from others	
Don't answer any questions you don't know the answer to	
Don't make "off the record" comments	

### Sample announcement to the Media :

My name is xx and I am the Principal of John Scottus Primary School. We learned this morning of the death of (one our students or name of student). This is a terrible tragedy for ..... family /families, our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (name) family and friends.

[Type text]

Name of student/students..... with a (... A x year boy....) 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 have implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Services (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 this tragic event.

The school is 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.

[Type text]

## Appendix C: Letters to Parents

### *Sample letter in the event of a tragedy*

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced (*.....the sudden death, accidental injury*) of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by the death/events.

*(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost.....)*

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 that he/she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and encouraging them to express their feelings. It is important to give them truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

If you would like advice or assistance you may contact the following people at the school.

*(Details.....)*

Yours sincerely,

Principal

### *Sample letter requesting consent for involvement of outside professional/s*

Dear Parents,

Following the recent (tragedy, death of X) we have arranged professional support for students in school who need particular help. (X ..... ) is available to help us with this work. This support will usually consist of talking to children, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your son/daughter has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with the psychologist. If you would like your child to receive this support please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by.....

If you would like further information on the above or to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip or telephone the school.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

.....

I/We consent to having our daughter/son met by a psychologist employed by the Minister for Education and Science.

[Type text]

I/We understand that my daughter/son may meet the psychologist(s) in an individual or group session depending on the arrangements which are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of student:

Class/Year:

Date of Birth:

I would like my daughter/son ..... to avail of the support being offered by the psychologist.

Signed.....(Parent/Guardian)

### *Sample letter in event of sudden death / accident*

Dear Parents

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

Brief details of the incident, and in the event of death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost.

Our thoughts are with (family name)

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy (elaboration)

It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their age.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging them to express their feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or to 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 reactions. Over the course of the days to come, please keep an eye on your child and support them in expressing their feelings.

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

? An information night for parents is planned for .....time/place. At that time, further information about how to help children in grief will be given.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Principal

[Type text]

### *Sample letter to parents in event of violent Death*

Dear Parents

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

(Give accurate information about the incident but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed)

A child / young person from the neighbourhood, who is a brother of ..... A student here in the 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 have 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 and, where necessary, to talk to students. This support will continue to be available for (.... Appropriate length of time).

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 that they will regret later.

If planned..... a support meeting for parents is planned for .... Date/place.... At this time we can talk further about how to help our children and ourselves.

Our thoughts are with (family name ) and with each of you.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

[Type text]

## Appendix D: Useful Resources:

### Websites

SPHE Regional Development Officers	<a href="http://www.sphe.re">www.sphe.re</a>
Suicide Prevention Officers	<a href="http://www.nosp.ie">www.nosp.ie</a>
The childhood bereavement Network	<a href="http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk">www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk</a>
Cruse Bereavement care	<a href="http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk">www.crusebereavement care.org.uk</a>
National Office for Suicide Prevention	<a href="http://www.nosps.ie">www.nosps.ie</a>
Irish Association for Suicidology	<a href="http://www.ias.ie">www.ias.ie</a>
Irish Hospice Foundation	<a href="http://www.hospice-foundation.ie">www.hospice-foundation.ie</a>
Support for people who self-injure and their family	<a href="http://www.selfharm.org">www.selfharm.org</a>
Support for grieving children and parents	<a href="http://www.winstonswish.org.uk">www.winstonswish.org.uk</a>
Support for suicide, depression or emotional distress	<a href="http://www.papyrus-uk.org">www.papyrus-uk.org</a>
Mental health of children and young people	<a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk">www.youngminds.org.uk</a>

### Resources for Schools

INTO/Ulster Teacher Union (2000).

*When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools.*

ASTI (1997).

*Guidelines for Schools on How to Respond to the Sudden Unexpected Death of a Student.*

City of Dublin VEC Psychological Services.

*Coping with a Major Crisis.*

City of Dublin VEC Psychological Service.

*When Something Terrible Happens...*

Pat Donnelly, Barnardos (2002).

*Someone to Talk To: A Handbook on Childhood Bereavement.*

Luke Monaghan (1999).

*Suicide Bereavement and Loss: Perspective and Responses.*

Siobhan Foster Ryan and Luke Monaghan (2001).

*Echoes of Suicide.*

The Irish Association of Suicidology, National Suicide Review Group (2002).

*Suicide Prevention in Schools: Best Practice Guidelines.*



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William Yule and Anne Gold (1993).  
*Wise Before the Event. Coping with Crises in Schools.*

Pub. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.  
Available from Solas, Barnardos Christchurch Square, Dublin 8.  
*Death – Helping Children Understand.*

### **Resources for Children**

G. Perkins and L. Morris (1991).  
*Remembering Mum.*

Pub. A & C Black (Children under 7 years).  
J.M. Kremetz (1991).  
*How It Feels When a Parent Dies.*  
London: Orion Children's Books (age 7 – 11).

S. Wallbank.  
*My Father Died and My Mother Died.*

Cruse – Bereavement Care (11 years –).  
Judith Bisignano (1991).  
*Living with Death (A Workbook for 12 – 15 year olds).*  
Pub. Good Apple, USA.

Noirin Hynes and Margarita Synott.  
*Death and Dying: A Resource Pack.*  
Available from the Marino Institute of Education.

### **Resources for Parents**

Helen Fitzgerald (1992).  
*The Grieving Child – A Parent's Guide.*

Pub. Simon and Schuster, New York.

Christy Kenneally.  
*Sorry for Your Trouble – Helping the Bereaved (a tape).*

Allison Wertheimer.  
*A Special Scar: The Experience of People Bereaved by Suicide.*

Pub. Routledge, London 1991.  
Sharry, John & Reid, Peter & Donohue, Eugene (2001).  
*When Parents Separate: Helping Your Children Cope.*  
Pub. Veritas Publications, Abbey Street, Dublin.

[Type text]

## Appendix E – Teacher FAQ

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

A. Because 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, as long as they themselves are in a position to do so.

### **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 (See Appendix 4). 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. 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.

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

A. Discuss the issue with the Principal or guidance counsellor. 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. You will get through this difficult time and we are here to help if you need support. Take care of yourself and look out for 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.