

## **St Declan's College**

(Response to crisis situations of suicide, death, accident, attack)

### **Contents**

- 1 Establish Facts
- 2 Immediate Response
- 3 Inform
- 4 Short-term Action
- 5 Funeral Services (where applicable)
- 6 Medium/Long-term Action
- 7 Review

#### **1. Establish Facts**

- Any staff becoming aware of a traumatic incident will inform the Principal or Deputy Principal. The staff text system will be used, particularly during school holiday times, to contact staff (See Appendix A).
- The crisis response team will be convened consisting of Principal, Deputy Principal and Guidance Counsellors. Other teachers will be called on as required e.g. form tutors, year head or members of the Care Team.
- It is crucial that the school has correct and accurate information regarding the crisis. This may involve contacting others such as hospitals, Gardaí, parents etc. (See Appendix B).
- The wishes of the family central to the crisis must always be respected.

#### **2. Immediate Response**

- The crisis response team, led by the Principal, will assign tasks within the group.
- Principal/Deputy Principal will text all staff notifying them to go to the staff room on arrival at school.
- Staff members not present initially will be informed as soon as possible.
- The crisis response team will agree on a common statement with

regard to the crisis.

- Principal will inform staff with as much factual information as possible.
- Class teachers will avail of the written statement “Breaking the news to the students” (See Appendix C).
- School routine for the day will be kept as normal as possible.
- The Principal/Deputy Principal will contact NEPS (See Appendix B).
- The Principal and Deputy Principal will draft a letter for parents and guardians (See Appendix D).
- The Principal will liaise with those at an accident site (in the case of an out of school crisis). Contact numbers for teachers accompanying groups need to be available to the Principal.
- The religion teachers and the local priest will co-ordinate a suitable prayer service
- The Principal will arrange to visit the home of the bereaved with relevant staff if applicable ( Guidance Counsellors/form tutor/ Year Head).

### **3. Inform**

- Staff will be alerted and informed first.
- The chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed.
- Clergy in the local parishes will also be contacted.
- An agreed common statement will be used when informing students and others, thus reducing the spread of rumour. The statement will give the facts as they are known in a sensitive manner, highlighting the supports that will be available and indicating the actions that are planned (See Appendix E). The crisis response team will inform students in the classes most affected by the crisis.
- In dealing with enquiries from the media the Principal or his representative will act as a liaison. Names, addresses and telephone numbers will not be released. Students and staff will be discouraged from dealing with the media. The agreed statement will also be given as a response to enquiries from anxious parents.

#### **4. Short-term Action**

- Pastoral care will be needed for the students, teachers, parents and guardians. On day one of the crisis the Deputy Principal, and School Guidance Counsellor(s) will be free of classes in order to co-ordinate initial counselling for the most affected students. The library will be allocated as a quiet room for the first day of the crisis. Care must be taken to balance the need to continue with the normal routine and the accessibility of support personnel for students.
- All staff will be on alert for students in particular need.

#### **5. Funeral Services (where applicable)**

Families will be consulted as to their wishes in relation to school involvement. The crisis response team will decide which students and staff attend. The Principal/Deputy Principal/Religion teacher will liaise with the family and local clergy. The Board of Management will make the decision as to the closure of the school on the day of the funeral. If the school is to be closed, notification of the proposed closure will be made to parents, guardians, bus drivers and visitors.

#### **6. Medium/Long-term Action**

The crisis response team will monitor students with the support of the entire staff. A day of reflection or retreat may be helpful to the students and classes most affected by the tragedy. The Care Team will communicate with teachers, parents and guardians offering their support. The Guidance Counsellor(s)/ Year Head will arrange to visit the bereaved parents and guardians regularly in the weeks and months following the tragedy where applicable. The Board of Management will encourage and fund specialist training and links with outside agencies in the area of change, loss, death, suicide and crisis issues.

#### **7. Review**

- Procedures will be reviewed annually in the light of experience and suggestions from staff, management, Parents' Council and Students' Council. Other schools and professionals will be contacted.

In the event of a traumatic incident, the Staff Text System will be used to inform all staff. This system contains all of the staff contact numbers. In the event of a crisis the Principal/Deputy Principal will activate the system. This will result in all members of staff becoming informed of any crisis

## **Appendix B Contact Numbers**

Relevant people will be contacted by the Principal or Deputy Principal  
[RELEVANT CONTACT NUMBERS](#)

## **Appendix C “Breaking the News to the students” (for staff)**

(Suggested script)

“I have sad news for the class today. It is difficult to tell you. Yesterday evening a very sad thing happened. A boy in \_\_\_\_\_ year, \_\_\_\_\_, died tragically in \_\_\_\_\_. This is a huge shock to \_\_\_\_\_'s family and to all of us here in the school. The next few days will be very difficult for all of us and it is important that everyone be as supportive to one another as possible. I would like to remind you that help is available here in school for anyone who might be finding it difficult to cope at any time. You should contact any member of staff if you are worried about yourself or another pupil. In particular the guidance counsellor will be available to all students.

Prayer:

Let's say a short prayer for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ family.

E.g. Hail Mary

You may be asked by reporters for details about \_\_\_\_\_. Please do not give any information. An official statement on behalf of the school has been prepared and reporters should talk to the Principal.

It is difficult for me to continue this class, and I know it is difficult for you all, but its probably best for us all if we continue as normally as we can. So let's begin.....”

Notes to teacher:

- Please take note of individual pupils who appear particularly upset and pass the information onto the crisis response team.
- Please do not make any statements to the media. An official statement has been prepared.

## **Appendix D**

### **Draft Letter to Parents/Guardians**

(This is a template - it needs to be adapted to individual circumstances)

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The school has experienced the tragic death of one of our \_\_\_ year students, \_\_\_\_\_. We are deeply saddened by \_\_\_\_\_'s death.

The school staff is helping the pupils to cope with the tragedy.

It is possible that your child may have feelings that he may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and encouraging him to express his feelings. It is important to give students truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

If you feel your child is very distressed and you would like advice or assistance please contact the deputy principal/ guidance counsellor.

National Educational Psychological Service will also be available to support the school.

We would ask you not to talk to the media at this time. A statement has been issued by the school. Queries from reporters should be directed to the Principal.

We will be in contact with you with regard to the funeral arrangements as soon as we know the wishes of the family.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ciaran O Hare, Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Brian Avery, Deputy Principal

### **Second Letter to Parents/Guardians**

#### **RE: Funeral Arrangements**

(if the family wishes the school to attend.)

The school will facilitate the attendance of \_\_\_\_\_ year groups at the funeral service on \_\_\_\_\_, with the permission of parents/guardians.

Bus transport will be provided. Parents/Guardians of other pupils who wish to attend will be asked to make their own arrangements. All pupils attending the service are asked to wear full school uniform.

## **Appendix E**

### **Sample Statement for the Media re: Tragic Incident**

It is with profound sadness that the Management, Staff, Students and Parents of St Declan's College have learned of the tragic death of \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_ Year student. Our sincerest sympathy is extended to the family of \_\_\_\_\_.

A Critical Incident Response Plan has been put in place. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given help to cope at this time. Prayer services have been held in the school.

Our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this tragedy.