

**IPPN**  
**RESOURCE PACK**

**Bereavement,  
Tragedy and Trauma  
in our Primary Schools**

**September 2025**

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### **3.Introduction**

**This is a compilation of the lived experiences of school leaders in managing tragic, traumatic events and incidents, and bereavements of staff and pupils in their schools.**

**In my role as IPPN President 2023-25, I reached out to offer support to schools who found themselves in these very unfortunate and hugely sad situations. I spoke to many school leaders who had to lead not only the school community but the local community in these tragic situations.**

**I asked school leaders who had these lived experiences in their workplaces to put pen to paper to record their thoughts, the strategies they used and how they navigated their way through the saddest of days, oftentimes coping with media, and multiple other challenges in coping with tragedy in the school setting.**

**I hope this Resource Pack will offer a support and Go-To Reference for school leaders. I see it as a Collection of Ideas that might help you in times of need, including some of my own observations and learnings. However, it continues to be a Work in Progress, and I am happy to hear from anyone into the future, who has these experiences and feel they would like to share what they did, to best manage these situations in their schools.**

**I thank most sincerely the school leaders who contributed to this document, sharing their ideas and strategies in managing the darkest and saddest days in our schools, in the hope they might help others.**

***Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine.***

**This piece of work is also in memory of all those in our school communities who passed away unexpectedly and tragically.**

***Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.***

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## **Bereavements at School**

### **Bereavement of a Pupil or Staff Member**

These thoughts/ideas and suggestions are based on colleagues' experiences of the passing of a terminally ill pupil/the tragic or traumatic loss of a pupil outside of school, and the loss of a staff member due to illness.

#### **School A:**

**The passing of a pupil through sickness or sudden death due to an accident or tragedy in or outside school.**

**These are ideas school leaders wanted to share; these are of course only suggestions for consideration based on your own school circumstances.**

#### **How pupils might be supported:**

- *On day following sad news, class seated in circle, lighted candle, extra staff in class to support... Seat was kept in the classroom...*
- *Prayers and acceptance of how sad it is...Pupils talk about their best memories of pupil...class draw a picture of best memory to share with family-possibly take a copy and make a book of best memories to keep in class...relaxing music...*
- *Schoolwork-very light things...try to keep as normal as possible...no heavy asks...*
- *Whole School Prayer/Remembrance Service...prayers and songs...maybe leave out Junior Classes?*
- *Book of condolences for pupils...class/senior classes??? Could be kept in class and read...pupils may need to draft and redraft what they would write...*
- *Pupils with additional needs didn't really understand what was going on, but they needed to be informed and included as children were talking about this on the playground and parents/guardians were talking about this too...*
- *No homework for class...watched calm happy-light video...*

### **How staff might be supported:**

- *Awareness of trauma being experienced by staff...especially Class teacher/SNAs/SET...*
- *Safe space identified for staff who needed time out, kettle...tea...coffee...give time to staff to gather/compose/regulate themselves again...Texts to remind them to look after themselves and to home early after school...*
- *After staff attending the removal, school was open for staff to meet and have a tea/coffee and a chat...*
- *Care Packages...for staff??? Little treats to help them get through the day(s) and for Principal too!!!*

### **Other ideas:**

- *Staff member read a reflection at the Funeral Mass-FLY by Celine Dion*
- *Choir sang Bright Eyes...*
- *School didn't close for funeral; class did a guard of honour as hearse passed by school (parental request...pupil lived very near to school) ...consent needed...this needs to be practiced...same with choir...some pupils/families didn't know the child who passed, so hence wanted their child in school as normal and the decision was made to keep school open*
- *My preference based on experience is parents/guardians bring their own child to the church and best manage their grief...but this may need staff discussion...*
- *Book of Condolences with photo in school foyer for visiting adults with photo...Dedicated area in school with photo etc. maybe after a few months...or so*
- *Everything was agreed with parent(s)/guardians beforehand...*
- *Older pupil-Remembered at 6<sup>th</sup> class graduation...Family invited...*
- *One school got a mosaic commissioned in memory of their pupil...child's name...4/5 qualities...*
- *In another school parents planted a tree...cherry blossom...rose...*
- *Rock garden in memory of pupil-area identified-pupils painted and decorated rocks and create a Rock Garden...*
- *Balloon Release maybe at Months Mind?*
- *Memorial plaque put in school garden on 1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary*

## **School B:**

**Some very thoughtful suggestions from a school Principal whose school suffered the loss of a young pupil outside of school.**

### ***Support for the class:***

- *Leave the pupil's chair in the classroom for a while. In the younger classes put a teddy on the chair so that the children can go and cuddle/talk to it.*
  - *Make a memory box with the class in the weeks after. Put things the child liked and used often into it.*
  - *Book of condolences for parents/teachers and any child that wants to write a message.*
  - *Make a list of vulnerable children who might need more assistance. Look out for good friends, children who have recently suffered a bereavement, children who have recently had a separation in the family and children whose behaviour changes.*
- Use the checklist on the NEPS Responding to Critical Incident document to help monitor those students R14, pg. 69-it is aimed at all children from Junior Infants to Sixth Year so needs to be tailored to the individual circumstances of the school and children. In fact, the whole document is essential reading, especially helpful are R6, R7, R9, R17, R23 & R78.*
- *Ensure you take the child's family off Aladdin before communicating with the rest of the school what has happened.*

### ***Support for staff:***

- *Order lunches for the staff for the week-that way people might eat something and keep their strength up.*
- *SET will not be operating as normal in the aftermath. Use the SET in the classroom as support for the first day or two and try to release teachers if time out is needed.*
- *Book of condolences for staff that want to write a message.*
- *Try not to let staff travel to wake/funeral alone. If they are alone, maybe go for a walk or a coffee with colleagues before getting back into the car. However, if some staff had to travel to both alone, we met somewhere*

*beforehand, and all went together as a staff. Besides driving while upset being dangerous, arriving on your own can be very stressful.*

### **Whole School Considerations:**

- *Blank sketch book of condolences for the whole school (there are lovely Paperchase ones). No child must write in it if they don't want to.*
- *Those that want to, can write a memory, how they feel, a positive message or draw a picture of something that reminds them of the child. They can take as much room as they like on one page.*
- *Each child in the school fills in a star template for display, again with a memory, picture or positive message.*
- *Put up pictures of the child in the school. Not all children remember the child who died and feel guilt that they can't remember their face. A little display of photos with the stars around it is very useful for this.*
- *Rainbows programme to be run in the school for children who need it.*
- *Weaving Wellbeing/Fun Friends/Friends for Life - some SPHE programme, especially targeted at resilience to be taught in all classes.*

### **Awareness of, and suggestions to manage media interest:**

- ***No-one to use their name answering the phone, just 'Good morning, Scoil ..... how can I help you?' in case of journalists and others trying to ask questions.***
- ***Have a look at who is on your Critical Incident Team-Two members of our BoM who are on our Critical Incident team came in on the day and were an invaluable help.***
- ***Your secretary will be inundated. Have a stock phrase, something like 'Please go to our website for our statement' so they don't have to engage with anyone. Ideally, if there is anyone else you can put answering phones, give them the phrase and let them do it. The same with visitors to the door. Use the stock phrase and say the principal is busy. Someone will need to make sure that there are no strangers around the premises.***

***Communicate with staff as much as possible and always impress on them that people will be watching everything that they do and post online for the next while, so keep this in mind.***

- ***If it is a sudden traumatic event, ring the Gardaí before you release anything. (They didn't contact us, and it was lucky that we did get in touch with them before doing anything as they didn't want us to release names in our statement).***
- ***It is essential to have the BoM chairperson/critical incident management team on hand so think of that whilst putting together your team. If there is someone who lives a long way away or won't be able to come at a moment's notice, see if there is anyone else or a substitute you could put on the list.***
- ***“The media will ring and tell you that you must go on their programme to speak about the child, even some very reputable ones that would almost convince you that it is the right thing to do. Say no to absolutely everything, especially in the first few days when you are in shock yourself. Or, if you do want to speak to media, speak to NEPS and the critical incident management team firstly and very carefully craft what you want to say. I did not speak to anyone, but it was made seem I did, by cleverly written articles that quoted the statement.”***

## School C:

### Another Principals' story on the tragic passing of a pupil.

*Just a few thoughts, some may overlap on previous suggestions.*

- *In our case, it was a tragic accident - the school and priest played a central role in the preparation of the funeral Celebration of Life as the family were of another culture and had no immediate family in Ireland (they did however travel to Ireland for the funeral). Priest prepared readings, school prepared a booklet, organised flowers, photographs, etc - it really was full on!*
- *We closed for the funeral - it was easier as all staff wanted to attend funeral (it saved me dealing with the aftermath of who got to go/didn't go!)*
- *Staff went for lunch after the graveyard - this was very positive as school was so busy in the lead up to the funeral.*
- *We asked children from 4th to 6th classes to form guard of honour, wear school uniform, before and after ceremony - on advice from NEPS, parents had to accompany the children and stand behind them in the Guard of Honour. Younger children could go but only if parents deemed this appropriate.*
- *We reserved some seats for the staff and pupils/parents (big church)*
- *I sent regular updates to parents and staff as funeral arrangements were made.*
- *Reminders to staff to mind themselves, left EAS contact details on their desks on Morning 2.*
- *Also informed parents about supports in place - Critical Incident Management Plan, NEPS met with staff at 8 a.m. on Monday morning, etc.*
- *If possible, have an out of hours number for NEPS. They work 5 days. As our incident happened at the weekend, I needed to have them on site on Monday before the children came in. Eventually got in contact with one of the local NEPS psychologists.*
- *The NEPS Dealing with a Critical Incident book was great. I copied the relevant pages for all staff members - this is now their Critical Incident Resource Folder!*

*Also sent home resource sheets to parents which are in this book too.*

- *Class teacher and his sister visited the family. I visited the family with the priest as ceremony was in the church, and he didn't know the family.*
- *Released Statement on school website which kept media away.*
- *It was the child who had passed birthday the week after, I got a local puppeteer in to do performance for the class. They made cards and left them on their late colleagues table (they did this themselves...2nd class).*
- *The months mind is coming up next week - we will remember our deceased pupil at our 1st assembly since the event - a photo, light a candle and say a prayer and leave it lit with a bowl of Forget-me-Knot flowers (I think) ...*
- *In the new school year, we will have a memorial ceremony and unveil something in his memory - this is to be decided.*
- *Our deceased pupil's sister returned to school a week later. Class teacher - one trusted adult – met her every morning and walked her out to Dad every evening. This will probably continue until the end of the school year.*

*It is a terrible time for a school and most particularly for the class teachers involved and the principal who must lead this, park emotions, etc.*

*The week after the funeral is very tough.*

***“I was absolutely exhausted”.***

### **Extra supports needed for School Leaders:**

**One Principal suggested:**

***“For supports for school leaders, I would suggest having an experienced school leader as part of the critical response team. It really would be invaluable. I would also like a more structured aftermath for the school. We are through the trauma now and are trying to heal from it. NEPS don't have time to support us with this as much as we need. Schools should have an assigned psychologist for the aftermath. It absolutely does not have to be NEPS. It should be a grief counsellor or something like it.***

*We are here deciding if the children's grief is normal and natural or if it is something we should worry about, and we are not trained for this. I can ring our psychologist, and she is brilliant, but she is not trained in this either. I find it very haphazard, and it is down to the school to decide on what should be done*

*for the class/friends etc. We have absolutely no training in this. I'm lucky to have the time for this because I am Admin, but a teaching principal simply would not have any time.*

*Lastly, NEPS will tell you many times to make sure your team is ok. It is your job as principal, **but no one checks on you.** I am very lucky that I have a great staff, friends and family that did help me but not every school leader is in a position for this. **When that experienced school leader is assigned to a response team, it would be great if they were to stay in touch a bit like CSL mentoring for a while after.** The principal can't say what they are thinking or feeling to very many and a safe, trusted space where the department urges you to speak to someone would be invaluable.”*

\*Please be aware that should a pupil suffer a fatal accident, and the pupil has school insurance the family may be entitled to a lump sum.

\*A chat with your insurance broker may help with this difficult conversation, and in some situations the insurance company may be able to lead on this.

Please note:

If the bereavement or tragedy happens when school is closed, over a weekend or period of holidays, it may be appropriate to open the school to offer a place for friends and family to gather and support each other.

It may be worthwhile to check in with your local hospice. In South Tipperary they offer grief support for children under 18, this may be the case in other counties.

## **The passing of a staff member- A Principal's story...**

*There is no one size fits all- so much of our context and what we experienced was unique to us- every school will have different circumstances.*

### Challenges as a school leader when dealing with a staff member with a terminal illness

- Timing- trying to gauge the right time to communicate the situation with staff, parents & children
- Managing different views- Naturally, people will have different opinions on when to do the above or on how to approach different aspects of the whole experience
- Communicating sensitively with the family - I was very “lucky” that I had very close connections to our ill work colleague and her family. I can imagine if I hadn't, this challenge would have made the whole situation much, much more difficult
- Fatigue- The emotions involved and the weight you carry trying to support colleagues, parents & children throughout such a difficult time is draining
- What do I communicate & who do I communicate to- I struggled with this until I spoke to the Children's Grief Centre in Limerick & the Bereavement centre in Dublin. The Children's Grief Centre were amazing; they offered so much clarity and clear advice- I cannot recommend their support enough.

### Helpful Steps when dealing with a staff member with a terminal illness

- Work closely with at least one other staff member throughout the “process,” ideally the DP or I.S.L member
- As early as possible, go through the NEPS Critical Incident Management document and prepare a personalised message to parents informing them of the staff members death. Ensure this is kept extremely safe until required.
- Use above document to prepare a pack for teachers (R5 page 58) on conducting a session with children following the passing of a staff member. Again, do this as early as possible and store extremely safely.

- Save a copy of CHILDREN’S UNDERSTANDING AND REACTION TO DEATH ACCORDING TO AGE from NEPS. This will be sent to parents with your pre-prepared message and given to teachers with their “pack.”
- We prepared ourselves as a school for the passing of our colleague using the NEPS document, we found it exceptionally helpful. The DP and I had all the above in place for when it would be required.
- When I knew, the situation was coming to a serious stage, we arranged for the DP and I to meet with all staff in small groups (class teacher & associated support teacher). To arrange these meetings, I spoke to people individually so that I could let them know the seriousness of the situation- this gave them a chance to process the news before they came to meet with the DP & I. It allowed them time to just chat, cry, ask questions etc. in a one-to-one safe space before meeting with the DP a few days later, to go through our plan when the time came. It also helped me get a sense of any staff I needed to keep an extra eye out for.

We had prepared ourselves as a staff for our colleagues passing before we prepared for the time in-between i.e. when we knew she had not got long left.

- Once our colleague was moved to palliative care- we followed advice from the Grief Centre.
- After communicating the news to staff and planning our next steps, we wrote a short letter to parents informing them that our colleague was extremely ill and receiving continuous care in Milford Hospice. We informed parents that on an exact date & time we would be letting each class know in an age-appropriate way that our colleague was very, very unwell- that we didn’t know if she would be okay. We informed parents that if children ask us if she will die, we would be responding by saying we don’t know at this time.
- Class teachers were asked if there was anyone they would like to have in the room during the chat with the children or if they would prefer to be alone with their class.
- We prepared an activity for the older classes following the chat like the advice from NEPS on doing an activity after the time of death.
- The DP & I had a clear plan communicated to staff during our meeting of what would happen should our colleague pass away during school time,

at the weekend or out of school hours during the school week. This included what would happen on the day of the funeral e.g. school will remain open except for the day of the burial.

- We had a room set up for staff to go to if they needed a break which turned out to be very helpful as we had lots of visitors when our dear colleague passed away.
- School ceremony- light for every child, class by class, each child left the light around a picture of our colleague. Each adult left a large candle. I said two of our colleague's favourite prayers- I kept my words brief.
- The pictures of our colleague, flowers & candles were also outside, this was very helpful as it allowed parents and community a space to come and gather.
- A Parent Ceremony was held in the evening. Organised by P.A. Parents left candles & flowers.

### **Practical Suggestions:**

After a colleague passes away, the following might be helpful:

- Please see the Pack for deceased next of kin from INTO- steps that they need to take & some steps the school principal can take which will be very helpful
- Contact Department of Education payroll as quick as possible to notify them so that there are no salary overpayments as this could cause admin difficulties for next of kin down the line

## **Information on the Death of a Teacher / Spouse**

### **1. INTO Death Benefit**

Apply for INTO Death Benefit – The form is sent to the Branch Secretary for signing, and then to the BFC representative for countersigning. A death certificate is not necessary. A notice from RIP.ie will also suffice.

### **2. Gather Certificates**

- At least 4 Death Certs.
- 1 Marriage Cert

These will be needed for various applications.

### **3. Contact the DES**

The spouse or next-of-kin contacts the DES to inform them of the death of the member. The principal of the school may be also able to complete this. This should be done immediately so that payment is not made – otherwise it will need to be paid back.

### **4. Contact Primary Pensions - Spouses and Orphans Pension**

Apply for Death-in-Service Benefit – a Death Certificate will be required.

Application form from the DES for the Spouses and Orphans Pension

- 50% of pension is paid to the spouse
- 50% is divided between up to three children and only up to the age of 21 years, if in full-time education, or up to 16 years if finished full-time education.
- There are specific provisions for incapacitated children.

Primary Pensions,  
Department of Education and Science,  
Cornamaddy,  
Athlone,  
Co. Westmeath.  
Telephone: 0906 – 483993 (2 – 4p.m. daily)

### **5. Widowers' / Surviving Civil Partners' Grant**

The spouse applies to the Dept. of Social Protection for the Widowers' / Surviving Civil Partners' Grant. A Death Certificate is required for this. This is NOT means-tested. It's a once-off payment of €8,000.

Social Welfare Services  
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection  
College Road  
Sligo 1890 500 000

### **6. Lump Sum**

A lump sum will be paid separately to the estate. It will go to probate, and this will take about six months or so.

### **7. Revenue – Tax**

Contact Revenue regarding tax implications.

## **8. Accountant**

Employ an accountant if you can, to look after your revenue for this particular year to ensure that no errors are made.

## **9. Health Insurance**

Deductions may be made from salary. If you're on the same policy – or other members of the family, ensure you plan for it to continue.

## **10. Cornmarket**

Cornmarket (01) 408 6280

There may be life cover included in the following if they were joined:

- Salary Protection – basic of twice salary life cover. It could be three times salary, if the member opted for extra cover.
- AVCs – these are paid out tax-free in the event of death-in-service
- Death in Service Grant- this is typically twice annual salary
- Magister / similar plan for college fees or similar

## **11. Credit Unions**

If your spouse is a member of Comhar Linn Credit Union or another credit union, contact them.

- Any loans are generally wiped out - if insured.
- Shares may be doubled, depending on the credit union.
- Nominees to the account may receive up to €23,000 without waiting for probate.
- Comhar Linn 1850 277 37/ 01-873110.

## **12. Direct Debits; Standing Orders etc.**

If your spouse was responsible for payments from their bank account, you might wish to contact the companies involved to arrange a transfer to your own account, to ensure continuity of services, as there may not be funds to meet these otherwise.

### **Notes for Good Practice:**

- Track each of these on a separate page – log the date of each action taken, with whom you dealt, and any advice given. Take note of phone numbers.

## **13. Emotional and Wellbeing Supports**

Spectrum Life 1800 411 057

Irish Children's Bereavement Network [www.childhoodbereavement.ie](http://www.childhoodbereavement.ie) T: 01 679 3188

## **In the Eye of the Storm: Leadership Through a Critical Incident**

### **Thoughts from a Principal of relevance to all:**

A critical incident, whatever its nature, lands heavily on a community. I recently found myself at the centre of it in my school, carrying both the weight of the decisions and the responsibility for how we would respond. But I quickly realised something significant: I wasn't alone.

This is not a recounting of the incident itself. Rather, it's a reflection on the scaffolding that held us up and made it possible to respond with care and clarity in the face of the unexpected.

### **You Are Not Alone**

In the intensity, it's easy to feel isolated. But support surrounds us if we allow ourselves to reach for it. One of the most valuable early supports for us was National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). From the first call, our psychologist became a steady presence. She guided us step-by-step through how to support pupils, how to communicate with parents and staff, and how to mind ourselves as leaders. In many ways, she held our hand throughout.

That idea, that you don't have to have all the answers, is one of the most powerful things a school leader can remember. Help is there: all you need do is ask!

### **Strength of the Team**

What held us steady was the team around us. We had invested in our leadership team long before the incident: through shared decision-making, team coaching, and ongoing professional conversations about how we work best together.

In the fog of urgency, everyone knew their role, and we backed each other fully. This didn't happen by accident. It was the result of deliberate work and a shared commitment to being better together. **The lesson here? Build your team before you need them in crisis: you'll never regret that investment.**

### **Shared Responsibility**

One of the most stabilising supports came from our Board of Management. From the outset, the Chairperson and members made it clear: this was not mine to carry alone. **There was a deep sense of shared responsibility, not only in decisions, but in the emotional and practical weight of leading a school community through something challenging.**

Having a Board that understands its role, is accessible in a crisis, and is ready to stand beside the principal, not behind, is a significant part of leadership support.

### **The Power of IPPN**

In the days following the incident, I reached out to the Irish Primary Principal's Network (IPPN). This connection was invaluable. Sometimes, just hearing the voice of someone who *gets it*, who has stood where you stand, is enough to steady your thinking.

Within IPPN and among local colleagues, there's a quiet but powerful understanding: we look after each other. Whether it's advice on procedures, a reminder of your next step, or simply the space to say, "this is hard," this network is a lifeline. We must continue to lift each other for sustainability going forward.

## **Compassionate Communication**

One of our priorities during the incident was to communicate clearly, calmly, and compassionately with staff, parents, and pupils. We made space for feelings, while also creating structures to hold the day together. We supported staff through quiet conversations, offered clarity where we could, and ensured visibility of leadership.

## **Looking Back, Moving Forward**

Afterwards, we took time to reflect. The experience reinforced our belief in preparation, not just in plans, but in relationships, trust, and systems.

Leadership can feel lonely, especially in crisis. But it doesn't have to be. With the right structures and people, and a willingness to ask for support, you can lead through the hardest of days with strength and grace.

## Some additional learnings/thoughts:

- **Critical Incident Policy: update and read regularly!**

*In the throes of a critical incident is not the time to discover that a staff member listed is on leave or has retired!*

*In our case, our Critical Incident Policy wasn't something we reached for immediately—because in the moment, you're focused on people, not paperwork. But on reflection, it became clear how important it is that this policy is more than just a document filed away. It needs to reflect the reality of your current school context.*

*It's worth investing the time—outside of crisis—to regularly review and update it. Ask yourself: does this policy reflect what would happen if we had to act on it tomorrow?*

*Even if you don't follow it step by step in the moment, a clear, current, and well-communicated policy gives everyone a shared starting point and confidence in their role, and that makes a difference!*

- There is great value in having an experienced leader on the critical incident team but equally picking up the phone to IPPN will give the same support, as the experience of the Leadership Support Team offers support in a way that many others could not, in terms of understanding the job, the role and the weight of responsibility. I would encourage anyone dealing with a critical incident to contact IPPN and avail of this support, even if it's just a check-in for yourself.
- Health and Safety Statement: consider paying an outside company to complete a health and safety audit and statement. We outsourced ours and the package we chose gave us access to that company throughout the year, termly meetings and check-ins as needed.

When we were dealing with our critical incident, we phoned the company. They gave us unlimited time: they highlighted parts of our documents that supported decisions we were making in the school; they gave us other ways of dealing with the situation; they updated our documents in real time.

Having this support was invaluable, but I understand not every school can avail of a service like this. I don't want to describe it as a luxury for our school as I believe that every school should have access to a service like this. Principals need this sort of specialised service as issues around health and safety have grown so much.

- Don't forget to contact school insurance. They were a great support to us and organised necessary legal advice straight away. I didn't think of this immediately and it was another principal who pointed me in that direction. It's good to talk to colleagues, even if it's to go through a list of what you've done and see what you may have missed!
- As our incident grew from an act of violence, we drew on the support of outside agencies to support the children. The Community Garda Unit came to our school and spoke to classes directly affected. They reassured them in terms of their safety when outside.
- We dealt with a huge outpouring of fear from parents. NEPS advised us on what to say and when to say it. Being consistent was key here. We dealt with parents coming in packs and my advice to anyone dealing with this is to shut it down straight away. I stood my ground with parents and invited them to come in individually if they wished. I highlighted to them how coming in a pack like they did was intimidating for the person on the receiving end and elicited feelings not unlike what we were dealing with.

The standing your ground is my key take away here: it is so easy to get sucked into talking and trying to please everyone. Sometimes you just have to say, 'these are the facts', and stop talking!

They accepted that once they saw that we were taking decisive action.

- When the echoes of violence came in our doors, I was focussed mainly on the children and the staff directly affected. In the business of the first 1-2 days, I missed the impact it had on the wider school. It was a quiet impact, an elephant in the room and a dulling of the atmosphere. As principals we cannot be all things to all people. If I was back there again, I would still prioritise the people I did, but when I did step back, reflect and notice, I also acted. I organised cakes for the staff room, an update on where we were at, and an acknowledgement of the entire team. These little gestures count and the support I received in return was immeasurable.
- **I mentioned in my article building the team, before you need to rely on the team.** I cannot stress this enough, and I encourage all principals to engage with coaching and team coaching as a priority. I wish this service was extended and provided in an ongoing way as it is hugely beneficial. **In terms of sustainable leadership, building capacity in yourself and the team are key ingredients. The more of this you can do when all is going well, the better prepared you will be to deal with the unexpected curve balls that get thrown at school leaders.**
- Weeks after this incident we dealt with echoes of it again. The key support for this has been our **nurture rooms**. We operate two rooms here full-time, and our school couldn't function without them and the support they give in the face of trauma etc. I see them as essential, and we give from our overall SET allocation to have them operating here. I

believe they should be a separate allocation for schools who need them. Our NEPS psychologist agrees, and she is just completing her doctorate on this issue.

- Violence in schools: I spoke at length to our NEPS psychologist about this in the aftermath. She told me that she had said to her boss that they potentially needed to prepare for more of this. The response back was 'no we don't; schools do'. NEPS were invaluable and I couldn't have gotten through it so well without our psychologist's guidance, but this point did stick with me. They will of course continue to support, they will adapt to whatever the situation presented is. But it is *schools who will have to deal with it*. We weren't prepared; we've learned a lot; I fear more is unfortunately needed going forward.

A final key take-away from me. In our case, we had to make difficult decisions around suspension/expulsion. It wasn't straightforward and I learned quickly that for decisions like this, as principal, you can feel very much alone. In our case, we were the 'only show in town' in terms of agencies. I had to decide and stick to it steadfastly. That was easier to do because I reached out to the supports mentioned in my article and I had invested time in building a strong team around me. The support I received was invaluable, and if I could pay that forward in any way to others, I would be delighted to.

## Helpful Resources

[About Us - Childrens Grief Centre | Support Service | Bereavement | Separation](#)

\*The Limerick Grief Centre has an excellent publication that schools can purchase

<https://www.childrensgriefcentre.ie/resources/>

I have seen this book and heard at first-hand how useful it is.... Louise.

A School Principal recommended this book The Next Place as a resource to support parents and all families

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/96598.The\\_Next\\_Place](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/96598.The_Next_Place)

“Oscar’s Kids (International Childhood Cancer Charity) were so supportive prior to child passing and indeed afterwards”.

<https://oscarskids.ie/>

Irish Children’s Bereavement Network

<https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/>

T: 01 679 3188

## Accidents on the School Premises

**Advice from a School Principal in whose school a staff member suffered a very serious accident:**

*The advice to all school leaders & Boards of Management is to do all the necessary Health & Safety Checks at the start of the school year and to ensure all policies and practices are in place to best manage any possible accidents and incidents.*

***It is imperative that the Health and Safety Statement is reviewed and updated at the start of the school year. It is essential that each member of staff is issued with a copy of the Health and Safety Statement that they read it and sign that they have understood it and will comply with it. It is necessary that all applicable Health and Safety Authority (HSA) Risk Assessments are completed as frequently as dictated on the HSA website and the findings implemented/attended to and communicated to staff. Where Statements of Procedure are deemed necessary arising from Risk Assessments e.g. Working at Height, these procedures must be drafted and shared with staff.***

*It is good practice at the first Board meeting of the year to revisit and revise if needed the following policies and to conduct a Health & Safety review of the school campus.*

*Policies and Procedures*

*Policies*

Critical Incidents Policy

Health & Safety Audit (Insurance will help with this)

To ensure compliance with health and safety regulations, a school must implement a comprehensive set of **policies and procedures** that protect the welfare of students, staff, and visitors. These typically align with national health and safety.

Here's an overview of **key policies and procedures** a school should have in place:

### 1. Critical Incident Policy

- **Purpose:** Outlines the school's response to a Critical Incident
- **Contents:**

<https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Critical%20Incident%20for%20T5%202019%20-%202020.pdf>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/services/national-educational-psychological-service-neps/#critical-incidents>

### 2. Health and Safety Policy

- **Purpose:** Outlines the school's commitment to health and safety.
- **Contents:**

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Education/Managing\\_Safety\\_and\\_Health\\_in\\_Schools/Primary\\_Schools\\_Guidelines/Guidelines\\_on\\_Managing\\_Safety\\_Health\\_and\\_Welfare\\_in\\_Primary\\_Schools.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Education/Managing_Safety_and_Health_in_Schools/Primary_Schools_Guidelines/Guidelines_on_Managing_Safety_Health_and_Welfare_in_Primary_Schools.pdf)

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### 3. Risk Assessment Procedures

- **Purpose:** To identify hazards and control risks in various school activities.
- **Includes:**
  - Classroom safety.
  - Off-site trips.
  - Equipment use (e.g., science experiments and workshops).
  - Fire safety.
  - Special needs of pupils (e.g., accessibility, medical conditions).

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### 3. First Aid Policy

- **Purpose:** To ensure prompt and appropriate first aid treatment.
- **Includes:**
  - Location of first aid kits.

- Designated first aiders.
  - Incident reporting procedures.
  - Training requirements.
- 

#### 4. Fire Safety and Emergency Evacuation Plan

- **Purpose:** To protect life and ensure safe evacuation.
  - **Includes:**
    - Fire drill schedules.
    - Emergency exits and routes.
    - Roles.
    - Alarm testing schedule.
- 

#### 5. Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

- **Purpose:** To protect students from abuse, neglect, or harm.
  - **Includes:**
    - Reporting mechanisms.
    - Staff training.
    - Procedures for allegations.
- 

#### 6. Accident and Incident Reporting Procedures

- **Purpose:** To ensure all accidents and near misses are documented and investigated.
  - **Includes:**
    - Use of accident books.
    - Follow-up and preventative action.
- 

#### 7. Infection Control Procedures

- **Purpose:** To prevent the spread of illness.
- **Includes:**
  - Hand hygiene protocols.
  - Response plans for outbreaks (e.g., flu, COVID-19).

- Cleaning and disinfection routines.
- 

## 8. Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Policy

- **Purpose:** To manage chemicals and hazardous materials safely.
  - **Includes:**
    - Safe storage and labelling.
    - Staff training for handling.
    - Safety data sheets access.
- 

## 9. Manual Handling and Working at Height Procedures

- **Purpose:** To prevent injury from physical tasks.
  - **Includes:**
    - Risk assessments.
    - Staff training.
    - Use of appropriate equipment.
- 

## 10. Staff Training and Induction Procedures

- **Purpose:** To ensure staff are aware of health and safety responsibilities.
  - **Includes:**
    - Initial training upon hiring.
    - Ongoing refresher courses.
    - Record keeping.
- 

## 11. Lone Working Policy

- **Purpose:** To protect staff working alone (e.g., cleaners, caretakers).
  - **Includes:**
    - Communication procedures.
    - Check-in systems.
    - Emergency response plans.
-

## 12. Visitor Management Procedures

- **Purpose:** To control who enters and exits the school premises.
- **Includes:**
  - Signing in/out.
  - Visitor badges.
  - Supervision requirements.

**Finally, a word of thanks to the school leaders who took the time to contribute to this document.**

I have no doubt that your time, experience, wisdom and advice will greatly help others.

