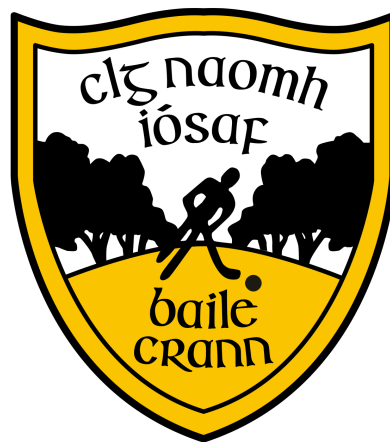


St. Joseph's GAA Club, Ballycran



Club Critical Incident Plan

Date	Primary reason for revision	Current Revision	Author
7-3-21	Draft submission to executive committee	0.1	MGC
19-3-21	Removal of ROI contact names and numbers for final release	1.0	MGC

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Introduction

The GAA reaches into every parish in Ireland and continues to extend its presence overseas with over 400 units now established internationally. Throughout its existence the Association has provided phenomenal support to its members and its communities through good times and bad. It is often during unexpected crisis situations or tragedies that the Association comes into its own by rallying around those affected to provide an appropriate community-based support and response system.

Certain situations, due to their severity or complexity, can overwhelm a Club or County's capacity to respond. These situations are often referred to as critical incidents.

The potential list of 'critical incidents' is non-exhaustive (some examples are outlined later in the document). What one unit may consider a 'critical incident' another may not depending on the situation, the knowledge/experience/personnel they have at their disposal and their capacity to respond. The nature of each response will also depend entirely on the circumstances of the incident – for example whether it happened on club grounds or within the wider community.

Irrespective, it is important to remember that the GAA club or unit is usually just one entity within a community affected by a critical incident (including, perhaps, amongst others, the local school(s), youth club, emergency and primary/secondary care services, churches/pastoral centres etc). No GAA unit is expected to take on the burden of responding alone – help is out there if required. Of the utmost importance is ensuring that any families involved remain at the centre of any response.

Our Club is of the opinion that it is best to prepare for a possible critical incident and thus this plan outlines our approach to such an event.

What are critical incidents?

In defining what is a critical incident, we have to weigh up the nature of the event, the impact across the community and the available resources within our Club to respond to, process and support affected individuals or families through the incident. Having said that, here are a few examples of what might be defined as critical incidents.

- Death or serious injury on or off the playing field
- Exposure to the aftermath of a road traffic accident e.g. the accident scene, the victim(s)
- Personal loss or injury, real or threatened to a child or adult
- Being violently threatened
- Close encounter with death
- Suicide of a club member (this tragic situation can cause extreme distress and confusion for everyone involved. Guidelines developed by professional services highlighting the most appropriate responses following a death by suicide by sporting organisations are available.
- A situation with excessive media interest
- A natural disaster or act of God

Other incidents not covered above but which are associated with unusually strong emotional reactions.

The GAA has provided Clubs with invaluable aids to augment local response to a variety of challenging incidents. These are included as part of this documents appendices.

How do we respond to a critical incident?

If club officers/members/coaches feel excessively challenged or inadequately prepared to deal with a situation it is always better to error on the side of caution.

Effective communication is one of the key principles when responding to a critical incident. Effective lines of communication will help GAA units access any support they need both within the Association and external to it.

When reporting or seeking support a unit should contact their county health & wellbeing committee chairperson in the first instance, who will notify Croke Park if necessary. In extreme cases the club may make directly contact Croke Park for support and guidance.



Figure 1 – communicating a critical incident

Experts have encouraged following these **5 Key Principles** during any crisis situation or critical incident.

- 1. Promote a sense of safety**
- 2. Promote a sense of calm**
- 3. Promote a sense of self-efficacy and collective efficacy (i.e. the capacity to deal with the situation)**
- 4. Promote connectedness**
- 5. Promote hope**

Ballycran's planned response to any potential critical incident manifests itself in our 'Club Critical Incident Response' document that appears on our web site. This is a short relevant document containing key contact names, roles and telephone numbers that can be relied upon to assist the Club in navigating through the initial impact of and ongoing critical incident activity.

A word about the appendices

The following appendices are extracts from the GAA's reference guidelines on understanding and planning for a possible critical incident. These sample letters may need modified/checked due to local circumstances.

Ballycran has avoided documenting contact names and numbers within this document, as these are dynamic pieces of data. For affairs concerning health and wellbeing, the advice is to look up the local telephone directory for any principal contact in health and wellbeing for the local area of South Eastern Health Board. Usually though, as a first port of call for matters concerning our Club, our nominated Doctor will be an approachable starting point.

Appendix 1 - Sample support letter

We are all in shock from the untimely death of _____.

To lose a loved one like _____, a dear friend and teammate, is one of the most difficult life experiences you will have to face.

When the death is sudden and tragic, _____ family and friends must cope with the sadness of their loss plus all their additional heightened feelings like confusion, questioning of self, anger and coming to terms with his death.

Should you wish to speak to someone in confidence about how you feel or if you need help or guidance to come to terms with _____ death, please call:

Samaritans, official helpline of the GAA and available 24-7, on their free-phone number 08457 90 90 90 in Northern Ireland. Or Lifeline is a Northern Ireland crisis response helpline service operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you or someone you know is in distress or despair, call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.

The above is a confidential service available to you and we encourage you to avail of it and call, if you need to talk to someone.

Equally, should you know of any of your friends or colleagues, who are struggling to come to terms with _____ death please encourage them to call also, or talk to a loved one about their feelings. We also ask you to keep an eye out for each other, not to be shy or embarrassed about asking for help and to talk to and support each other during what is a very difficult time for us all.

If there is anything we can do to help and support you please let us know. We will get through this tragic time together.

_____, Chairperson, on behalf of the
_____ Club Committee.

Phone: (insert your number here if you feel it is appropriate for any additional enquiries)

Appendix 2 – Guidelines for dealing with the media following a critical incident

Following a critical incident in which people have died, press interest in survivors and bereaved families can be intense. There are rules and standards the press should follow. All members of the press have a duty to maintain the highest professional standards. The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) is charged with enforcing the 'Editors' Code of Practice'.

Individuals are under no obligation to speak to the media. If someone doesn't want to speak to them - tell them.

When speaking with the media the following are some helpful tips;

- always make a note of the journalist's name and contact phone number at the outset
- consider appointing somebody as a spokesperson for family - this might be a relative or friend, or your solicitor - some support groups have appointed media liaison people who will field questions on behalf of the support group
- don't do anything in a hurry, whatever the journalist says about deadlines
- ask what they want to talk to you about in advance
- ask them to write down the questions they want to ask you in advance
- give yourself time to think about what you want to say
- write down your answers
- ask the journalist to ring you back at a specified time
- ask if you can see what they wish to quote from you before it goes to press - they may not do this, but it will alert them to your concerns about what they are going to publish
- never say anything 'off the record' unless both you and the journalist have a shared understanding of what this means
- remember that a journalist is entitled to report anything you say, so don't mistake them for counselors or friends
- bring the conversation to a close if you are uncomfortable
Sometimes journalists will ask for photographs of you, your loved one, and your family. You may wish to provide these, but remember that you are under no obligation to do so. If you do,

ensure that you have a copy and ask for the photographs and any other personal items that you pass on to be returned.

Appendix 3 – Sample announcement to the media

This can be used as a template by clubs to be emailed, faxed or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the club.

In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals.

This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the affected family and the nature of the incident.

Template:

My name is (Name) and I am the (Role within the club) of (Name) club. We learned this morning of the death of (Name). This is a terrible tragedy for _____ family, our club and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (Name) family and friends.

(Name of person) was a member of (Name) club and will be greatly missed by all who knew him/her. 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 club has implemented our Critical Incident Response Plan.

The club has been open to members, to support them and to offer them advice and guidance. We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you.

Chairperson

Appendix 4 – Good practice guidelines following the death by suicide of a Club member

The death by suicide of a member of a club can have a deep impact on club members, in particular on teammates and coaches.

How a club responds to a death by suicide depends on a number of factors including:

- How well known the person who died was to club members;
- How the club has dealt with past tragedies;
- The leadership shown by key club members; and
- Media coverage of the event.

What to do after a suicide:

Do's

Acknowledge the death

Acknowledge that a club member has died. Please respect that some Families may choose not to describe the death as a suicide.

Acknowledge a wide range of feelings

- Acknowledge that individuals will experience a wide range of feelings and emotions as a result of the death.
- Be gentle with each other – we all grieve in different ways
- The grieving process takes months and years not days and weeks
- Don't blame yourself or anyone else for the death **Try to get the balance right**
- Try to get the balance right between continuing to do normal activities (for example, following the funeral, go ahead with scheduled matches), but also make allowances that motivation

and morale may be low among the team. Try not underestimate young people's natural ability to cope with difficult situations.

Keep an eye out for vulnerable people

Watch out for those who are not doing well or may be at greatest risk, for example:

- Brother and sisters of the deceased person who are also club members;
- Close friends;
- Teammates; and
- Others who may be experiencing difficult life situations at the time. Anyone who may be particularly vulnerable at this particular time may need extra support. Having access to local support services contact details is important. You can usually call on these organisations for advice.

Anticipate sensitive dates on the calendar

Anticipate birthdays, holidays, anniversary dates and other celebratory events where the person's absence from the team will be most felt. Accept there will be times, such as these, when members of the club may benefit from extra support.

Don'ts

Don't focus only on the positive

Do not remember the person who died by only talking about the positive things about them. While it is important to celebrate their sporting achievements and other personal qualities, it is also crucial to talk about the loss. Openly acknowledge and discuss the pain, and heartache, as well as any difficulties the person might have been experiencing, for example mental health issues, but with any discussions also encourage individuals to seek help if they feel the

need to talk to someone.

Be careful how you pay respects

Do not do things in memory of the person like:

- Commemorative matches;
- Number on shirts;
- or Naming a trophy.

A Guard of Honour may be organised for other deaths. However, remember that a death by suicide differs from other deaths. Avoid any activities that glamorise or glorify suicide. The challenge is to grieve, remember and honour the deceased without unintentionally glorifying their death.

Do not over-indulge

Around the time of the funeral and immediately afterwards it is important to ask members and friends to try not to overindulge in alcohol, caffeine or other substances. They may make people more vulnerable at this time.

Helpful short and medium to long-term responses

After a death by suicide, clubs have found the following short-term and medium to long-term responses helpful.

Short-term

Right after a suicide those affected often look for the following:

Information

Clubs have found it helpful to identify what supports are available locally to provide advice, support and care at this time. As a result, many communities have developed local support cards outlining services available in the area. In Northern Ireland 'Z Cards' are available for each Health and Social Care Trust area, providing information on local support services.

Support

The first gathering of the team after the funeral, for example, the first night back at training, may be a difficult time for everyone. Coaches have found it helpful to break the team up into small groups and allow some time to talk about their deceased team member.

Coaches or team leaders may wish to prepare for this by thinking through the types of issues that they think will be raised and how best to create a safe place to discuss these matters. Coaches or team leaders should seek the help of local support services if they feel necessary. Some coaches may not feel comfortable in preparing for such a gathering.

The following topics are usually addressed:

- How to support people who are grieving at this time;
- Looking after yourself during this traumatic time; and
- What to look out for, say and do if you are worried about someone else.

Medium to long-term

In the medium to long-term, develop policies and procedures on suicide prevention as well as other broader areas such as drug and alcohol use. For example, the GAA has developed an Alcohol and Substance Abuse (ASAP) programme, which aims to prevent alcohol and drug problems taking hold in clubs. **Policies** Clubs should develop policies and procedures on suicide prevention as well as other broader areas such as drug and alcohol use. For example, the GAA has developed an Alcohol and Substance Abuse (ASAP) programme, which aims to prevent alcohol and drug problems talking hold in clubs.

Training

Clubs find it helpful to offer training and skills development to coaches and team leaders. Clubs may find it useful to initially look at some form of resilience programmes/training that will help coaches/

members. There is also the opportunity to look at putting in place suicide awareness training in the longer term.

Other situations to note

Discovery of a suicide on club grounds

The following steps should be taken with the discovery of a suicide on sports grounds:

- Give or ask for first aid if there is any possibility the individual may be saved or resuscitated.
- Contact the emergency services immediately • Leave the scene untouched. • Avoid disturbing any evidence. • Keep onlookers away.
- Write down the names of all the staff and team members who witnessed the event or discovered the suicide.
- Tell the closest relative – the Gardaí/PSNI usually do this.

Suicide notes on clubhouse

Once you become aware of the existence of a suicide note, for example, a paper note or a suicide message written on a clubhouse wall, leave it untouched and immediately tell the PSNI. After the personal and legal needs of family and PSNI are met, the club has to decide when and how best to remove the note. For example, one club hired a graffiti artist to work with supporters and young people to replace the note with a positive image, along with contact numbers for support services for young people.

Death by suicide of famous sports people

Deaths by suicide of high profile or famous people can impact on members. Responsible media coverage will help to reduce this risk. Clubs should be aware of the impact an international or national sports star's death by suicide can have, especially on young people who viewed them as a role model. Extra care and supports may be needed at this time.

(HSE, Practical guide on Suicide Prevention in the Community, 2011)

References

Responding to a Critical Incident - A guide for all GAA units and members