

PORTADOWN COLLEGE

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Frequently Asked Questions – PARENTS

The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents about a critical incident.

Q. What is a Critical Incident?

A. A Critical Incident can be defined as **“an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school”** (*A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools – Department of Education N.I.*). Critical Incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of our local community.

Q. Who will manage a Critical Incident involving Portadown College?

A. The Critical Incident Management Team is composed of Senior staff (Principal, Vice Principals and Senior Teacher) and the Senior Administrator. Other members of staff may be co-opted as required.

College staff will also be supported in managing the incident by personnel from the Education Authority’s Critical Incident Response Team.

Roles and responsibilities are detailed in the College Critical Incident Management Policy. This policy is available on application to School Office.

Q. How will the College communicate with parents?

A. All parents will be made aware of the incident through text alerts, Parent Mail and the school website.

Students who are in College but not directly affected by the incident will be allowed to use their mobile phone to make one call to reassure their family that they have not been involved.

The Principal will be in contact with the families directly affected once the facts have been confirmed with the relevant agency.

Q. This incident has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?

A. The school will inform students and parents of the core details of the incident insofar as they are known. It sometimes takes some time for the true facts to emerge. In the meantime, it is important to stick to the facts as known. Discourage rumour or gossip as it is often incorrect and can be distressing for the families and friends of those involved. Information on social media is not reliable and always needs to be checked.

Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?

A. The College Critical Incident Management Policy has a range of strategies in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion, individual support from Year Heads and counselling. If there is particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.

Q. How can I help my daughter/son?

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. Advise on and monitor safe use of social media.

Q. When a bereavement has occurred how long will the grief last?

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories of other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.

Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?

A. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult with a GP for a check-up.

Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?

A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP.

Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?

A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.

Should you have any further questions not addressed on this Information sheet please contact a member of the Senior Leadership Team at the College.