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Responding to a Critical Incident



**Cumann Pheadair Naofa
GAA Club Warrenpoint**





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Critical Incident Response Plan Cumann Pheadair Naofa GAA Club

Joint Liaison Person: **Club Chairperson**

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Joint Liaison Person: **Club Secretary**

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Name	Key Role
Paul McKibben Club Chairman	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joint liaison persons to liaise with Club Incident Response Team.
Donal McCormack Club Secretary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To be key contact with family.• Delegate key responsibilities as related to incident.• Review situation as it develops.• Coordinate special Senior Committee Meeting.• Liaise with GAA County Provincial and National Organisations if appropriate.• Liaise with Club chaplain
Katrina Kernan Health and Wellbeing Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To liaise with GAA County, Provincial and National health and Wellbeing Officers.• To signpost persons involved to relevant agencies.• Community/support agency contact.• To assist with debriefing meeting for club members.
Gerry O'Neill Senior Committee Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To provide advice and guidance on responding to a critical incident.• Logistics of response to incident.
Shane Carr Vice Chairman	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To liaise with managers, mentors and coaches.• To communicate update to managers, mentors and coaches.• To be proactive in the organisation of response events i.e. clubrooms available for club members to meet.• To prepare practical arrangements i.e. clubrooms set out with seating if required.
Noreen Kelly Deputy Children's & Vulnerable Adults Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To liaise with parents.• To organise clubrooms for refreshments if required and to create appropriate environment in clubrooms.
Anne McCormack Children's Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To contact relevant agencies to provide support and guidance.
Aisling McGivern PRO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To coordinate response to media.• To ensure that the club response is accurate and consistent.
Feargal McCormack Club Trustees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To oversee communication to club members.• To prepare press release.• To respond to media presence at club.• To monitor social media.



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The GAA, its clubs and counties provide great support during and after all manner of incidents that may have traumatic or tragic consequences for members and their communities. This natural response by clubs usually requires no external expertise or input. Nonetheless, it has been identified as an invaluable support to those involved. However some situations can overwhelm even the most experienced and well prepared GAA officers and units.

This critical incident plan is designed to offer some assurance about what steps to take in such situations, while also highlighting that other support services – both within the GAA and external to it – are available should they be needed. All it takes is a phone call. That reassurance can be invaluable in times of stress. This document has been developed by Cumann Pheadair Naofa GAA Club. Cumann Pheadair Naofa GAA Club has implemented the recommended ‘five step plan’ and has developed key roles and duties for identified individuals.

A critical incident is any event that is outside the range of usual human experience. It is an event that causes an unusually intense stress reaction which has the emotional power to overwhelm an individual’s ability to cope. It may impede people’s coping mechanisms immediately or in the future following the event.

(GPA/GAA guidelines 2014)

Key point – it is normal to experience all kinds of unpleasant feelings, emotions and body sensations following abnormal events



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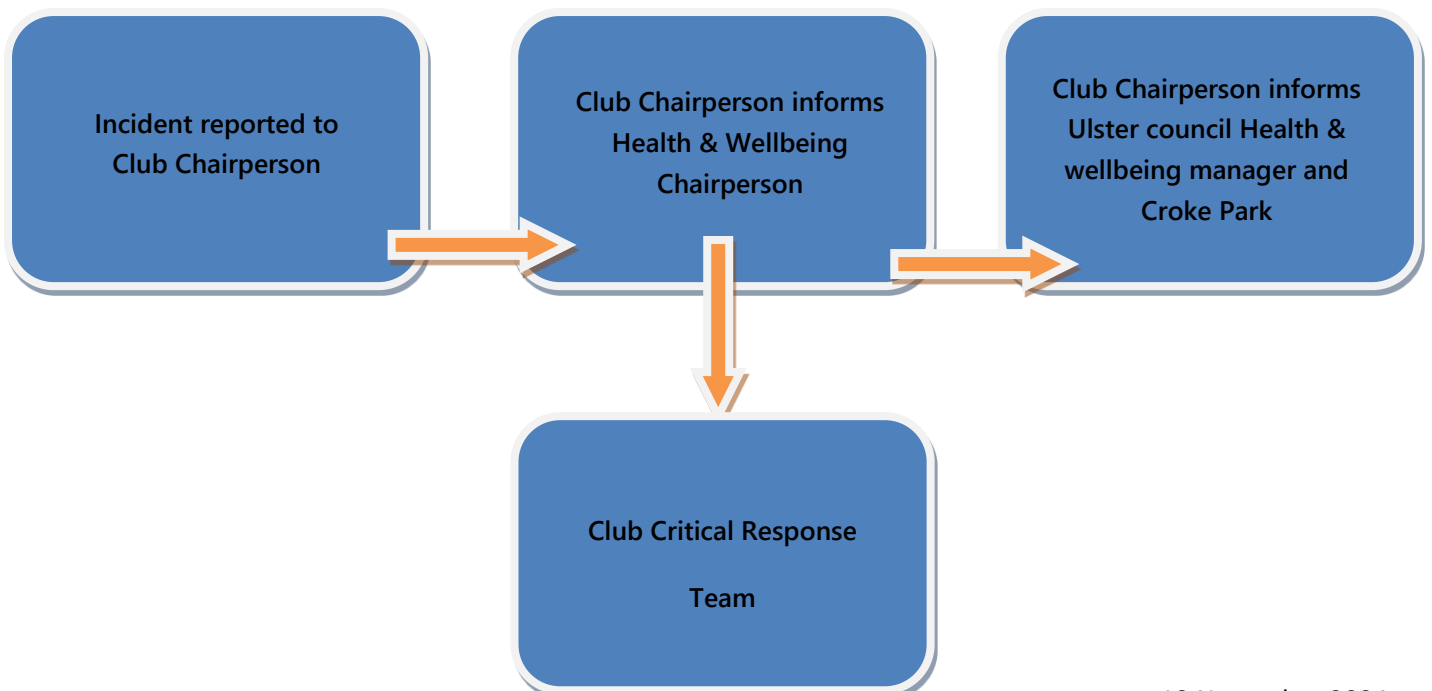
What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is any event that is outside the range of usual human experience. It is an event that causes an unusually intense stress reaction which has the emotional power to overwhelm an individual's ability to cope. It may impede people's coping mechanisms immediately or in the future following the event (GPA/GAA guidelines 2014).

Examples of Critical incidents may include:

- Death or serious injury on or off the playing field
- Exposure to the aftermath of a road traffic collision eg; 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 are available (see appendix 4).
- 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.

Figure 1: Recommended avenues for communicating a critical incident.



Our role in responding to critical incidents

Experts have encouraged following these **5 Key Principles** during any crisis situation or critical incident. These simple yet effective steps help support personal and collective responses to any critical incident. Abnormal events trigger normal responses that may seem alien to those experiencing them. It is important to normalise these responses. (HSE, A Guidance Document, Psychosocial & Mental Health Needs Following Major Emergencies.)

5 Key Principles of Crisis Management

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

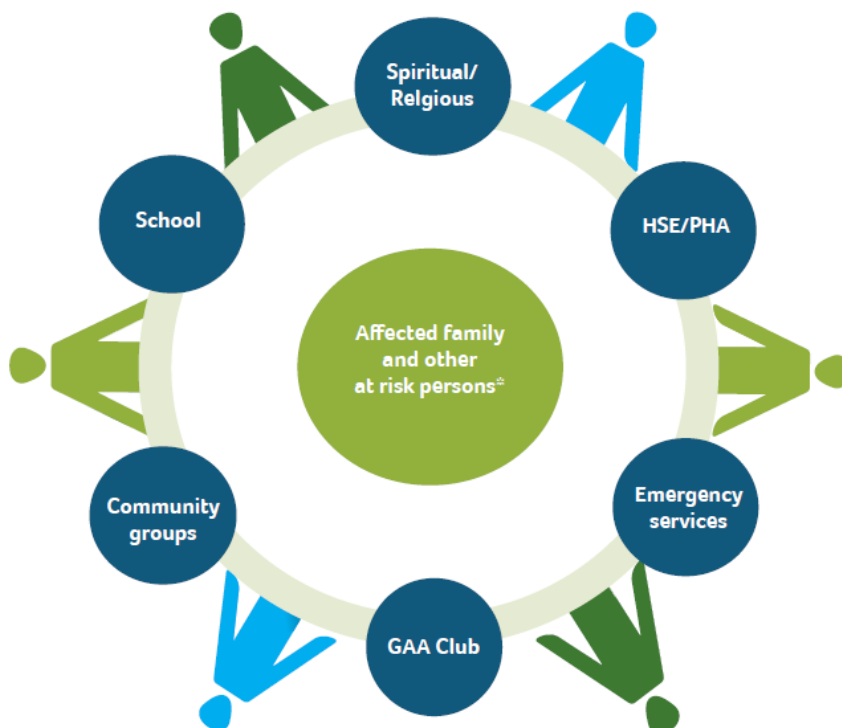


Figure 2: Some potential participants involved in a community based response to a critical incident.



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Supports are out there

It's important to remember that the GAA will usually be just one entity playing a part in any response to a critical incident. Figure 2 outlines some of the other entities that may be involved in a community response. It also highlights the importance of having the affected family or families at the centre of any plan while being consulted on all actions. Other at risk persons will be to the forefront of considerations too.

Where to find support.

During a critical incident it is important to source help and support as quickly as possible for yourself or for anyone the club or individual might be concerned about. If you are seriously concerned about someone, please contact 999 or the GP out of hours. If you feel you need further help and support as a consequence of being involved in a critical incident, you are advised to contact: <http://mindingyourhead.info> for a 'one stop' online resource.

LIFELINE is a Northern Ireland crisis response helpline service operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you're in distress or despair, you can call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000 and talk to an experienced counsellor in confidence. For more information visit www.lifelinehelpline.info

Samaritans (Official mental health partner & support helpline of the GAA) Free helpline: Samaritans is a free helpline available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for anyone struggling to cope.

Telephone: 08457 90 90 90 in Northern Ireland, or

Email jo@samaritans.org

Visit www.samaritans.ie for details of the nearest branch.

Who Requires Support

In addition to the individuals directly affected, other 'at risk' persons are amongst those most likely to suffer distress as a consequence of an incident. Evidence would suggest that these may include those who:

- Directly witnessed death/injury/violence as part of the incident
- are uninjured, but were at greatest risk
- are siblings of those immediately affected
- may blame themselves and/or those who may be blamed by others
- are experiencing instability at home
- have learning difficulties
- have pre-existing emotional and behavioural/mental health difficulties
- are vulnerable due to cultural and/or language difficulties
- have previously suffered bereavement or loss

(GAA/GPA Critical Incident Response Information and Guidelines, 2014)



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Good practice tips

The following is a summary of some good practice tips to follow:

- **Always** consult with those affected to see what level of support they want from the Club, if any.
- A General Practitioner (GP) should be recommended as the first point of contact if an individual needs help.
- Ensure the response is consistent throughout the process.
- Keep a log of events with times and details of actions and decisions taken. This could be important for any subsequent inquiry which could range from an internal county/local authority review to a formal inquiry/legal inquiry.
- Be familiar with all the appropriate local services and agencies that are available and ensure that the contact numbers are checked and updated every year. This is really an invaluable exercise. Go to www.yourmentalhealth.ie or www.mindingyourhead.info for a one stop directory of recognised national & local services.
- Ask the questions regarding support services – what can they deliver? And when can they deliver? Do they respond at weekends?
- Only keep open clear lines of communications which will cut out any rumours or miscommunications.
- Be mindful of any relevant procedures in both jurisdictions (ROI/NI).
- To ensure consistency of message, designated persons should deal with any media inquiries.
- Be mindful of social media and ensure that all information put on social media is accurate and approved by those affected.
- If there is a club match scheduled always check in with those involved to see how they would like the club to manage fulfilling the fixture.
- Be careful about using the term counselling in the aftermath. People understand it to mean different things so it can be misleading.
- Cases of suicide bring with them a particular set of challenges and very specific recommendations as to how to respond appropriately. Fortunately there are also skilled services available – both statutory and voluntary – to guide units through such tragic situations. (see appendix 1)

Key Point - Remember that the role of the Club is primarily to act as a sign-posting service to the supports that are available. Boundaries should be appreciated and getting the balance between what a voluntary entity can offer as opposed to what professionals can is important.



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Appendix 1

Sample Support Letter For Members

Support Service for _____ Club/County members

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

To lose a loved one like, a dear friend and team mate, 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 116 123 in Republic of Ireland or 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 counsellors 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.



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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/family 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 have 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. 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 to 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.



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Having access to local support services contact details is important. You can usually call on these organisations for advice.

For more information on local support available contact the local Mental and Emotional Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention contacts (see appendix 5).

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:



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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. '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 and/or the county health and wellbeing chair. 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, also what to say and do if you are worried about someone else.

Medium to long-term

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.

Training

Clubs find it helpful to offer training and skills development to coaches and team leaders. It is maybe 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.



Appendix 5

Local & National Support Groups

GP out of hours services – Tel: 028 38399201

Samaritans – Tel 08457 90 90 90 official helpline of the GAA and available 24-7 in Northern Ireland.

Childline Tel: 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC Helpline (24 Hour) Tel: 0800 800 5000

PIPS Newry and Mourne Tel: 028 30266195

Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH) Tel: 028 6632 2995

Local support, including housing schemes.

Website www.niamhwellbeing.org

Women's Aid, Newry Tel: 028 30250765

WAVE Trauma Centre Tel: 028 37511599

Offers care and support to anyone bereaved or traumatised through violence, irrespective of religious, cultural or political beliefs.

Website: www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care Tel: 028 30252322

- National Cruse day-by-day helpline 0844 477 9400
- Cruse young person's helpline 0808 808 1677

National charity that exists to promote the wellbeing of bereaved people – for adults, children and young people.

Websites: www.cruse.org.uk Young people: www.rd4u.org.uk

Youthlife Tel: 028 7137 7227

Helping children and young people who have experienced bereavement and loss.

Website www.youthlife.org



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Southern Health Trust – Key Contact Details

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