

# Critical Incident Response Plan



Galway 2022

## **Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

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### **County H&W Committee**

Iggy Clarke	Chairperson	0872609607
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Ruth Mulkerrins	Secretary	087 9745396
Ciaran Lynch	Treasurer	087 9572807
Marie Skelly	Pro	086 3651949
Ciaran Coyne		
Bernard Haddigan		
Gerry Fahy		
Lena Cummins		
Una Fallon		

## **Base for Critical Incident Management Team:**

Galway GAA, Centre of Excellence, Loughgeorge, Claregalway Co Galway

**Key Role:** Consult with the club officials from the club concerned to establish if any support is required from the county officials.

**Key Duties:** Ensure club has information on any local appropriate support services available.

**Critical Incident Team** Justin Campbell Iggy Clarke

**Suicide Resource officer** Mary o Sullivan, [mary.osullivan@hse.ie](mailto:mary.osullivan@hse.ie)

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### **Introduction**

*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 usual ability to cope. It may impede people's coping mechanisms immediately or in the future following the event. (GPA/GAA guidelines, 2014)*

Sometimes a critical incident - one that overwhelms one's natural capacity to respond - will arise leaving individuals or communities struggling to cope. GAA clubs and counties have proven themselves invaluable in supporting their members' and communities in responding to an array of tragic and seemingly insurmountable situations. This plan will allow Galway GAA structure to respond to critical incidents. On receiving the initial

alert regarding the incident, ask for, and record, as much information as appropriate.

Please see full [national guidelines](#) for further details at:

<http://read.digitaleditions.ie/i/532758-responding-to-a-critical-incident>

Clubs are encouraged to develop their own critical incident plans. Templates and further information on developing a critical incident plan are available from the county health and wellbeing committee.

*Examples of critical incidents may include:*

- 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
- 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. Some of this information has been included in a special section on suicide in the Appendix section of this resource.*)
- A situation with excessive media interest; a natural disaster or act of God.

### What clubs can do

Figure 1: Recommended avenues for communicating a critical incident.



## Our role in responding to critical incidents

The role of the CIMT is to provide information and support to clubs who experience an event. The County H&W response team will be available to give assistance. 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 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. It is important try to follow these **5 Key Principles** during any crisis situation or critical incident.

**Key point - Always consult with those affected to see what level of support they want / need.**

1. Promote a sense of safety
2. Promote a sense of calm
3. Promote a sense of self-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.**

### **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
- 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*)

It is important that these individuals should be considered in relation to specific needs.

### **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 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://www.yourmentalhealth.ie> for a 'one stop' online resource.

**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: **116 123** Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**We as a county have a primary role 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.**

**Do not take on too much.**

### **Appendix 1.**

#### **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 under estimate 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.

For more information on local support available contact the local Mental Health and Suicide Prevention contacts.

### **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**

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.

### **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.

#### **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, 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. 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. 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 2**

### **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 friend's must cope with the sadness of their loss plus all their additional heightened feelings like confusion, anger, questioning of self, guilt, and coming to terms with his/her 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 ..... the County health and wellness critical incident response team.

If you wish call the Samaritans who are the official helpline of the GAA  
Phone 116123

Equally if you know of any of your friends or colleagues, who are  
struggling to come to terms with the death of----- please  
encourage them to call or talk to a loved one about their feelings.

We 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 this difficult time for all of us.

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

----- Chairman

On behalf of the club committee.

Phone-----

### Appendix 3

Guidelines for dealing with the media following a critical  
incident

When speaking to the media

1. Appoint one spokesperson for the club and family
2. Get the journalist's name and number
3. Do not be rushed by possible deadlines
4. Ask for the questions in advance
5. Give yourself time to think,
6. Write down your answers
7. Ask them to ring you back

8. Ask to see what they quote

10 Do not speak off the record, they are entitled to report anything you say

11 They may ask for a photograph

12 If uncomfortable finish the conversation

## Appendix 4

Sample Announcement to the Media.

My name is ----- and I am the chairman of -----club. We learned today of the death of ----- . This is a terrible tragedy for the -----family, our club and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with the -----family and friends.

-----was a member of -----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 have implemented our critical incident response plan.

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

Thank you

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Chairperson

## Appendix 6

If a debriefing session is required or a first squad session for trainers and coaches post critical incident, then you can contact the critical incident team in Galway, Justin and Iggy.

<b>Date of issue</b>	January 2022	<b>Date of next review</b>	January 2023
<b>Person responsible for updating this plan</b>		Chairperson H&W Committee	

### Important Action Points

- Review the plan and its content at least once per Quarter
- Keep the plan up-to-date regarding personnel
- Ensure staff know their roles
- Keep the contact list on your phone in case it becomes necessary to activate the plan
- Send a copy of the plan to stakeholders after each major amendment.