



An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service

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Critical Incident Policy





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COURTS SERVICE CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

As the success of the Courts Service in delivering its public remit is dependant on the health and welfare of its employees, it is imperative that adequate structures, procedures and supports are in place to act promptly, effectively and appropriately to ensure the physical and psychological wellbeing of staff in the event of a Critical Incident occurring in or impacting on the workplace.

To this end, this document outlines Courts Service policy, procedures and support mechanisms for managing such an incident.

WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

A Critical or Traumatic Incident within the workplace may be defined as any serious accident, trauma, injury or fatality outside the range of an employee's normal work experience. It may make intense demands on the emotions and coping skills of employees and it also has the potential to cause sudden and/or significant disruption to the operation of the organisation. Such events may cause extreme stress, fear or injury to the person/s experiencing or witnessing the event and may have the potential to have a lasting effect on individuals. While such incidents usually occur within the workplace, they may also occur off-site and outside of normal working hours.

- Critical Incidents may include (but are not limited to) events such as:
- On-site / off-site Death
- Suicide
- Serious accident or injury
- Deprivation of liberty
- Threats/Acts of violence and/or assault
- Fire, Bomb, Explosion
- Natural Disasters such as a flood and "Act of God" events

In the event of such an incident, immediate attention and decisive action is imperative to prevent/minimise any negative impact on the health or welfare of persons involved in or effected by the incident.

COURTS SERVICE STRUCTURE TO MANAGE A CRITICAL INCIDENT

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) shall be established by the Courts Service to oversee the management of Critical Incidents which impact on the Courts Service organisation.

Where such Critical Incidents occur, the response needs to be appropriate, timely and in proportion to the actual event. Where possible, the Office Manager in whose office the incident occurs will manage the event. He/she may seek guidance regarding any aspect of the situation from the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) and will ultimately provide a Report to same regarding such occurrence and the response to same.

Where an incident occurs which effects the organisation at a broader level it will be managed by the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) which shall nominate an Incident Team Leader to co-ordinate the response and report ultimately to the CIMT.

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) should be comprised of the following members:

1. Head of Infrastructure Services (Chairperson)
2. Head of Operational Directorate as appropriate
3. Head of Office/Office Manager/Regional Manager in whose area the incident occurred
4. Personnel Officer
5. Employee Assistance Officer
6. Media Officer
7. Other members as the event may dictate.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CIMT?

The CIMT is responsible for:

- appointing an Incident Team Leader (when appropriate) to manage the incident and its aftermath
- providing guidance, when sought, from either the said Incident Team Leader or in instances where such Incident Team Leader is not appointed the Office Manager who may be managing the Critical Incident on

- (i) the setting of priorities, allocating tasks/responsibilities and co-ordination of appropriate response to the incident including communications (to staff, families of those involved *etc.* and the media) if required and
 - (ii) the organisation of an ongoing response and follow up
- liaising with the Business Continuity Planning Team (if appropriate)
 - consideration of a written Report of the Critical Incident from the Incident Team Leader (where appointed) or Office Manager who managed the said Incident and consequent thereon the provision of a written evaluation of same together with any recommendations deemed necessary for handling future critical incidents
 - maintaining a Register of all Critical Incidents which occur in the Courts Service Organisation

IN THE EVENT OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT, WHAT IS THE RESPONSE PLAN?

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Stage A

As time is of the essence in such situations, staff present should immediately take the following steps:

1. Contact the Emergency Services as appropriate.
2. If applicable, secure the area.
3. Ensure safety of staff, judiciary and members of public
4. Report immediately to appropriate Courts Service Management *i.e.* Office Manager whose function it will be to inform the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) either for information purposes (where event is manageable at a local level) or for the appointment of an Incident Team Leader.

Stage B

The Office Manager or the Incident Team Leader in conjunction with the CIMT shall

1. Liaise with emergency services, hospital and medical services as necessary

2. Identify the persons most closely involved and at risk
3. Contact and inform family members if necessary
4. Manage media and publicity
5. Assess the need for support and counselling for those directly and indirectly involved

SECONDARY RESPONSE

The Office Manager or Incident Team Leader (if appropriate) shall :

1. In conjunction with the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service, assess the need for debriefing, support and counselling for those directly and indirectly involved (ongoing).
2. Provide relevant staff and judges and other relevant persons with factual information. It is important that the information shared is accurate and appropriate, as this helps to prevent rumours which may add to people's distress. Care should also be taken in ensuring that privacy would be maintained where appropriate.
3. Restore the Courts Service to a regular routine and delivery of service as soon as is practicable and with due regard to the Business Continuity Plan
4. Where a Critical Incident involves a fatality, make necessary arrangements for Staff representation at funeral
5. Prepare a Critical Incident Initial Report outlining details such as the nature of incident, the location, the time it happened, how it happened and other relevant facts together with details of any person or persons who might be injured, in distress or potentially at risk and submit same in due course to the Critical Incident Management Team. [[Critical incident report form is contained in Appendix 1.](#)]

ONGOING FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE

The Office Manager or Incident Team Leader where appointed in conjunction with the Manager of Office /Head of Office wherein the Critical Incident occurred should endeavour to

1. Provide ongoing accurate information where appropriate to relevant staff, judiciary and relevant members of the public.

2. Maintain contact with any injured and affected parties to provide support and to monitor progress.
3. Plan a back to work strategy for those immediately effected and those working in the area and consider where appropriate any necessary adjustments/supports within the workplace.
4. Monitor staff for signs of delayed stress and refer to Civil Service Employees Assistance Service if necessary.
5. Be sensitive to anniversaries (where appropriate).
6. Manage any possible longer term supports *e.g.* leave for inquests, legal proceedings etc
7. Draw the attention of relevant staff to the following support resources available:

(A) In Courts Service:

1. Local and Regional Manager
2. Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (www.cseas.per.gov.ie)
3. Safety Monitoring Committee
4. Courts Service Safety Officers

(B) Outside Support:

1. Own GP
2. Accredited Counsellors specialising in trauma recovery
3. Voluntary organisations such as Samaritans, Bereavement Counselling Services, Console: Suicide Bereavement Support
4. Publications referred to under [recommended reading](#) in Appendix 1 .

APPENDIX 1

WHAT IS HELPFUL TO KNOW ABOUT THE IMPACT OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT ON PERSONS INVOLVED?

1. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

It is very common for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have experienced a critical incident. Personal life situation, previous experience and seriousness of the incident all affect how well someone may cope with the particular event in question. It is important to remember that it is normal for people to have a reaction to severe stress. Remember that it is the event, which is abnormal and unusual – not you. Remember that it helps to talk to someone. Your family and friends may be appropriate but there are times when it helps to talk to someone outside this circle.

2. WHAT REACTIONS MAY BE EXPECTED FOLLOWING A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

In the aftermath of a Critical Incident your emotions may be very mixed and powerful. You are likely to experience one or more normal reactions which may include:

Physical reactions

Fatigue Nightmares Insomnia Hyperactivity Under-activity
Exhaustion Health problems Startle reactions

Cognitive reactions

Difficulty concentrating Difficulty making decisions Flashbacks
Memory disturbance Difficulty solving problems Inability to attach importance to anything

Emotional reactions

Fear Anxiety Guilt Depression Emotional numbing Sense of unreality Over sensitivity Amnesia of the event Anger - possibly manifested by scape-goating irritability frustration with bureaucracy violent fantasies *etc.*

These are normal reactions, and although painful are part of the recovery process. There is not much others may do to keep you from experiencing

these uncomfortable feelings, but there are things you can do to feel better, for example:

| | |
|---|---|
| DO express your feelings | DO talk about what happened |
| DO find opportunities to review the experience | DO listen sympathetically if a colleague wants to speak to you, unless it is too distressing |
| DO advise colleagues who need more support where they can get appropriate help | DO try to keep to daily routines and DO drive more carefully |
| DO look to friends and colleagues for support | DO keep your life as normal as possible |
| DO take more care around the house to avoid accidents | DO discuss what happened with colleagues |
| DO seek professional help, if needed | DO something you enjoy and be gentle with yourself |

| | |
|---|--|
| DON'T bottle up your feelings | DON'T be afraid to ask for help |
| DON'T allow anger and irritability to mask your feelings | DON'T think your feelings are signs of weakness |
| DON'T simply stay away from work- seek help and support | DON'T use alcohol and other drugs to hide your feelings |

Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that support or sometimes professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply weakness or inadequacy. These feelings can be very common and simply indicate that the particular event is just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

3. WHEN DO I SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP?

- If you feel you cannot handle intense feelings or body sensations.
- If your stress reactions do not lessen in the weeks following the event.
- If you continue to have nightmares and poor sleep.
- If you have no-one with whom to share your feelings when you want to do so.

- If your relationships seem to be suffering badly, or sexual problems develop.
- If you become clumsy or accident prone.
- If after the event, you smoke, drink or take more medication, or other drugs.
- If your work performance suffers.
- If you are tired all the time.
- If things get on top of you and you feel like giving up. If you take it out on your family
- If your health deteriorates.

4. HOW DO I SUPPORT COLLEAGUES SUFFERING TRAUMA?

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatised person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Offer support and help with work tasks
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse" – those statements do not console traumatised people. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.

5. AS A MANAGER, WHAT APPROACH MIGHT BE HELPFUL IN MANAGING TRAUMA?

There are several stages to traumatic shock – from the initial shock stage to the impact stage to the coping and understanding stages. The aim of managers is to find what supports are required and to avoid adding to the distress. The following approach may help:

- Be proactive, supportive and non-threatening. Look for support within the organisation early on *e.g.* Employee Assistance Officer.

- Make space, offer practical help and listen.
- Be directive and give staff the opportunity to “pitch in” and get involved in overcoming the trauma. The goal is to return to a normal productive life as soon as possible.
- Manage emotional issues and make allowances for staff including yourself.
- Ensure relevant information is available and is accurately given as it avoids rumour/speculation.

Follow up with further information and updates, even when the answer is “I don’t know”. Ensure confidentiality where appropriate and keep your promise.

RECOMMENDED READING

Courts Service, (2010) *Courts Service Bereavement Policy*
Available on COURTS INFORMATION

Irish Hospice Foundation/CONSOLE (2011) *Breaking the Silence: A Guide for Employers on Responding to Suicide in the Workplace*.
Available on www.hospice-foundation.ie www.console.ie

Levine, Peter (1997) *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*.
Publisher: North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California

Rothschild, Babette (2000) *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*
Publisher: W.W. Norton & Co. New York

Rothschild, Babette (2010) *8 Keys to Safe Trauma Therapy: Take-charge Strategies to Empower your Healing*
Publisher: W.W. Norton & Co. New York

SUPPORT SERVICES

CONSOLE – support for those bereaved through suicide
www.console.ie

Samaritans
www.samaritans.ie

Irish Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (IACP)
www.iacp.ie

Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP)
www.iahip.org

Irish Council for Psychotherapy (ICP)
www.psychotherapy-ireland.com

Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)
www.psihq.ie

Request a psychotherapist or psychologist **specialising in trauma therapy/treatment** from any of the above support services



Courts Service
Phoenix House
Smithfield
Dublin 7

CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORT FORM

To be completed by Office Manager or other appropriate manager and transmitted to the Secretary of the Critical Incident Management Team c/o Estates and Buildings 5th Floor Phoenix House, Smithfield, Dublin 7.

Part 1

Name of place / office where incident occurred -----
Reporting Officer (Office Manager's Name) -----
and telephone number -----

Part 2

Give brief summary of incident including following details:

1. Nature of incident:
2. Date it occurred:
3. Time it occurred:
4. Where it occurred:
5. Who was involved (names, addresses and contact numbers where available):
6. Other relevant matters:

Part 3

How was the incident managed: -----

Part 4

What actions need to be taken regarding the aftermath -----

Signed _____

Dated _____

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