

Nemo Rangers



Responding to a Critical Incident



A Guide for Club Members

Introduction

A critical incident is any 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)

Critical Incidents and why to plan for them

People have remarkable coping skills and mechanisms however at times we can all use a helping hand in overcoming the challenging events life occasionally presents us with.

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.

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 remains at the centre of any response.

It is important to remember that individuals and families are central and must be heard first.

Examples of critical incidents may include the following but the below list is not exhaustive:

- Death, death by suicide or serious injury, on or off the playing field
- Witnessing or Exposure to a serious accident or incident e.g. a road traffic accident scene,
- Personal loss or injury, real or threatened to a child or adult
- Being violently threatened or assaulted
- A situation with excessive media interest
- A natural disaster

Lines of effective communication

If club officers/members/coaches feel excessively challenged or inadequately prepared to deal with a situation it is always better to err 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 contact Croke Park directly for support and guidance.

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.

1. Promote a sense of safety
2. Promote a sense of calm
3. Promote a sense of ability/capacity to deal with the situation
4. Promote a sense of connectedness
5. Promote a sense of hope

These simple yet effective steps help support personal and collective responses to any critical incident.

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.

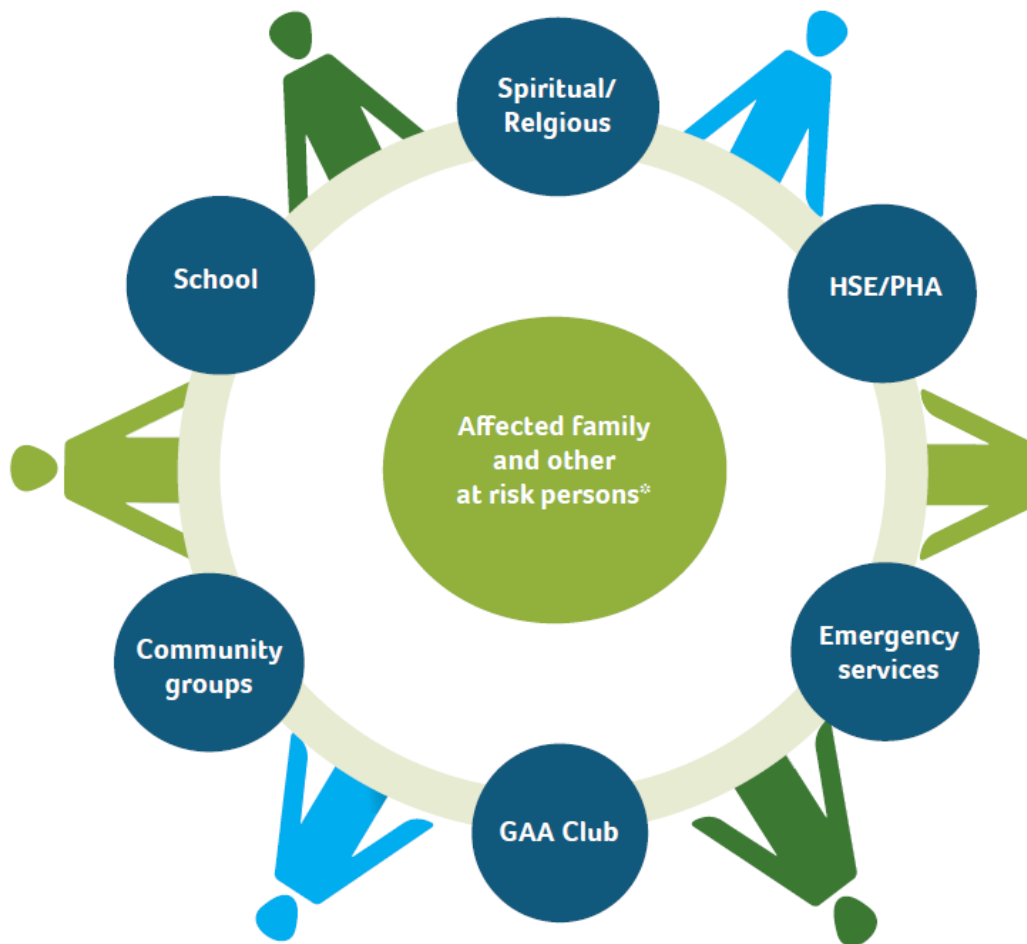


Figure 2: Some potential participants involved in a community based response to a critical incident

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:

- are family members or friends of those immediately affected
- directly witnessed death/injury/violence as part of the incident
- are uninjured, but were at greatest risk
- 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)

By identifying **key roles and duties** in advance of an incident there will be a clear statement of who will do **what, when and how**. A good plan also ensures that no individual is overburdened and that important elements in the response are not forgotten.

Always ensure those leading out on a response have all the support they need. It can be a stressful role and those coordinating the care of others may neglect their own care.
Watch out for each member of the response team.

Checklist for reviewing the critical incident response plan

- ✓ Have key roles been clearly identified and tasks clearly outlined?
- ✓ Are personnel suitable?
- ✓ Has contact been made to external agencies?
- ✓ Is the contact list appropriate and complete?
- ✓ Are materials such as press releases, letters readily available, for adaption to suit the particular circumstances?
- ✓ Are telephone numbers on contact lists up-to-date?
- ✓ Has a date been set for a review of the plan?
- ✓ Where will the plan be kept and are people aware of this?

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.
- **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.

For a one stop directory of recognised national & local services go to www.yourmentalhealth.ie or Information Line: 1800 111 888 or [Resource Officers for Suicide Prevention Nationwide - HSE.ie](http://ResourceOfficersforSuicidePreventionNationwide-HSE.ie)

To ensure consistency of message, only one person should deal with any media inquiries.

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 advise someone seeking support to contact their GP.

Date of issue: April 2025

Date of review: April 2026

Person responsible for review:

Healthy Club Team

Key point:
Keep the family and those directly impacted informed and at the centre of all decisions.