



# PREPARING A CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN

A guide for all  
units and members

2023



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Since the publication of the GAA's inaugural Critical Incident Response resource in 2015, the Community & Health Department in Croke Park has assisted units across the family of Gaelic Games in responding to approximately 400 incidents. These represent a fraction of the incidents handled by clubs and counties locally.

While these varied greatly in their nature (ranging from high profiles incidents that grabbed the attention of the country to local experiences that greatly impacted individuals, families, clubs, and communities) a universal trait was the desire of Gaelic Games volunteers to support those in need to the best of their ability.

Important learnings have been amassed since 2015 which we have tried to incorporate into this updated resource and the suite of resources that supplements it. We want to thank all the volunteers who shared their knowledge and experiences with us in helping make that happen.

Throughout this review process we have been reassured by the support and guidance of a Steering Group that bring with them a wealth of professional and lived experience in supporting people and communities through critical incidents. The Community & Health department would like to sincerely thank:

- Dr. Aedamar Bergin, HSE Principal Clinical Psychologist Cavan/Monaghan Psychology Services
- Dr. Eddie Murphy, HSE Principal Psychology Manager Laois/Offaly
- Ollie Barbour, Former Director Personnel Support Service at Defence Forces of Ireland
- Michael Collins, HSE Resource Officer for Suicide Prevention
- Sarah Woods, HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention, Lead for Strategy Implementation, Stakeholder Engagement and Education
- Fiona Teague, PHA Head of Health & Social Wellbeing Improvement (West)
- Tony Ryan, Chair Cavan GAA Health & Wellbeing Committee
- Shauna Houston, Health & Social Wellbeing Improvement Manager

## INTRODUCTION

The GAA reaches into every community in Ireland and continues to extend its presence overseas with over 400 units now established internationally. Throughout its existence, the Association has provided phenomenal support to its members and communities through good times and bad. It is often during unexpected crisis situations or tragedies that the Association comes into its own by rallying around those affected to provide an appropriate community-based support and response system.

Certain situations, due to their severity or complexity, can overwhelm a club or county’s natural capacity to respond. These are often referred to as critical incidents. Since its formation in 2012, the GAA’s Community & Health section has received approximately 50-60 requests annually from GAA units seeking support in the aftermath of a critical incident. The circumstances vary enormously.

Irrespective, it is important to remember that the GAA club or unit is usually just one entity within a community affected by a critical incident. No GAA unit is expected to take on the burden of responding alone. Of the utmost importance is ensuring that any families and other at risk persons involved remain at the centre of any response.

### GAA’S POSITION - ONE PIECE IN THE JIGSAW



### DEFINING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

A critical incident is any event that is outside the range of usual human experiences. 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.

(GAA/GPA Guidelines, 2014)

**KEY POINT:**

**IT IS NORMAL TO EXPERIENCE ALL KINDS OF UNPLEASANT FEELINGS, EMOTIONS AND BODY SENSATIONS FOLLOWING A CRITICAL INCIDENT.**

**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 or other traumatic incident
- Close encounter with death
- Death by suspected suicide of a club member
- Personal loss or injury

**CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND WHY TO PLAN FOR THEM**

Preparing a Critical Incident Response Plan (CIRP) in advance will better prepare units for the challenges such situations may present.

**This resource is intended to:**

- Reassure clubs of the importance of the natural support system they provide as a community organisation (in fact, in most situations, nothing more is required).
- Offer a toolkit from which units can develop their own critical incident response plan highlighting key roles and responsibilities.
- Help identify appropriate local and national agencies/entities that units can turn to during crisis situations.
- Highlight the supports that are available through the GAA’s own structures.

Hopefully your club, county or members will never need to turn to their critical incident response plan once it has been developed. However, having a plan in place during unexpected critical incidents can make highly stressful and painful situations less so.

No template can account for every possible scenario; however, this resource aims to highlight some key principles, roles, duties, and support systems that will better enable your unit to respond.

**Factors impacting on a club’s own ability to respond may include:**

- Levels of appropriate knowledge or experience in the club – officers/members may deal with such situations as part of their daily or professional lives, e.g. nurses, Gardai/PSNI members, counsellors, doctors, suicide resources officers or trained responders
- Previous experience of handling similar situations
- Links with local support services
- Having a Critical Incident Response Plan in place

**OUR ROLE IN RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS:**

When responding to a critical incident, where appropriate try to promote the 5 Key Principles listed below:



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

**KEY POINT:** KEEP THOSE DIRECTLY IMPACTED INFORMED AND AT THE CENTRE OF ALL DECISIONS

## KEY OBJECTIVES IN RESPONDING TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT



When a club is involved in a critical incident, it is recommended the following communication pathway is followed. As a model of best practice, any critical incident should be recorded and reported even if the club have the capacity and/or capability to manage the situation

### RECOMMENDED LINES OF COMMUNICATION



**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS ONE OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES WHEN RESPONDING TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT**

## DEVELOPING YOUR CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN

The **five steps** below offer a guide for clubs when developing their own critical incident response plan. At the time of a crisis there can be a number of tasks a unit may need to carry out. By identifying **key roles and duties** in advance of an incident, it ensures important elements in the response are not forgotten.

### HOW TO ADOPT YOUR CIRP - 5 STEP APPROACH



#### 1. NOMINATE A LEAD LIAISON PERSON AND SUPPORT TEAM TO OVERSEE THE PLAN

- The lead person should be suited to the role. They should have an interest in this type of work and some particular skills (e.g. communication skills, calm approach, good coordinator)
- Nominate an alternative lead person in case the lead person is unavailable.
- Responsibilities attached to the various roles should be clearly outlined.

#### 2. OUTLINE THE KEY ROLES INVOLVED

**These may include:**

- Lead CIR plan person as identified
- Other duties of CIR team – Family Liaison
- Garda / PSNI contact
- Media relation person (PRO) (**Media queries may be directed to County Executive**)
- Community/Support agency contact

**KEY POINT:**

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.



### 3. HIGHLIGHT POTENTIAL DUTIES WHEN RESPONDING TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

**These may include:**

- Liaison with those directly affected and, if required, outside agencies or services
- Obtain information and record actions taken
- If necessary, manage any media relations/enquiries
- Monitor the club's response throughout the process
- If necessary, organise a gathering for club members or specific groups

### 4. IDENTIFY RELEVANT RESOURCES AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THE CLUB

- Each community/county will have various agencies/support groups that may be called on during or after specific incidents. These should be identified and contact details recorded in your plan.
- To facilitate this 'mapping process' two online resources are available that list all recognised services in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland:
  - ROI visit <http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie>
  - NI visit <http://www.mindingyourhead.info>

### 5. REVIEW THE PLAN ANNUALLY OR FOLLOWING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

After managing a critical incident, it is good practice to review the procedures and amend the plan in the light of experience and lessons learned. This should also be carried out annually regardless of the occurrence of an incident.

Checklist for reviewing the critical incident response plan:

- ✓ Have key roles been clearly identified and tasks clearly outlined? Are personnel suitable?
- ✓ Is the contact list for external agencies appropriate and complete?
- ✓ Are materials such as press releases, letters readily available for adaption to suit the 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?

**WHEN A CLUB IS COMPLETING THEIR CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN, THERE ARE A RANGE OF DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT CLUBS IN THE AFTERMATH OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT:**

**FIND  
THEM  
HERE**

[HTTPS://WWW.GAA.IE/MY-GAA/COMMUNITY-AND-HEALTH/  
COMMUNITY-PERSONAL-DEVELOPMENT/CIRP-TRAINING](https://www.gaa.ie/my-gaa/community-and-health/community-personal-development/cirp-training)



# APPENDIX 1

## SAMPLE CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN TEMPLATE:

**Club Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Lead liaison person:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Contact No:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Alternative Lead Person:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Contact No:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Support team:**

_____	Contact No: _____

**Social Media/Media Liaison:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name/Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**OTHER ROLES MAY BE IDENTIFIED ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS. SOME EXAMPLES BELOW:**

- Family liaison person (someone known to family):
- Garda / PSNI Liaison:
- HSE / PHA Support Agency Liaison:

**KEY POINT:**

**KEEP THE FAMILY AND THOSE DIRECTLY IMPACTED INFORMED AND AT THE CENTRE OF ALL DECISIONS**

Useful GAA Contacts (Sample GAA Contacts):

Contact	Contact Name	Contact Details
County Health & Wellbeing Chair		
County Chairperson		
County PRO		
Community & Health Department Croke Park		01- 865 8600 Email: community.health@gaa.ie

**WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT (SAMPLE SUPPORTS):**

**REPUBLIC OF IRELAND:**

Accident & Emergency \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gardai/PSNI \_\_\_\_\_  
 Out of Hours Doctor \_\_\_\_\_  
 Samaritans: 116 123

[www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/nosp/resourceofficers/>

**NORTHERN IRELAND:**

Accident & Emergency \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gardai/PSNI \_\_\_\_\_  
 Out of Hours Doctor \_\_\_\_\_  
 Samaritans: 116 123  
 Lifeline: 0808 808 8000

<https://www.mindingyourhead.info/>

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.



## Sample Critical Incident Response Plan Template Continued

<b>Date of Issue</b>		<b>Date of Revie</b>	
<b>Person Responsible for Review</b>		Named Person /People	

### IMPORTANT ACTION POINTS

- Review the plan and its content at least twice a year or after an incident
- Keep the plan up-to-date regarding personnel
- 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.

## APPENDIX 2

### Guidelines for dealing with the media following a Critical Incident

A high-profile critical incident, especially one involving the loss of life, can bring intense media interest on any family and club involved. Club officers and members are under no obligation to speak to the media. Never feel pressured to do so. If you feel it is appropriate here are some helpful tips:

- Get approval from the club executive if speaking on behalf of the club and not in a personal capacity
- Don't do anything in a hurry regardless of any deadline the journalist is working to – set a time and date that works for you/the club, not them
- If conducting a live interview, ask journalists what questions they want to ask you in advance so you can prepare. Make sure they stick to those questions
- A prepared response is helpful as this avoids someone saying something they wished they hadn't
- Remember that a journalist is entitled to report anything you say, so don't mistake them for counsellors or friends
- Journalists may ask for photographs of the bereaved. You may wish to provide these, but remember that you are under no obligation to do so. If you do, ensure that you have the family's permission to do so

Dealing with the media can bring additional, unwanted stress during an already difficult time. Feel free to reach out to either your county PRO or Croke Park's Communications department for support and assistance (all media queries can be directed to these if you wish).



**WHERE WE ALL BELONG**