

CRITICAL INCIDENT

This document is designed to be a helpful guide to assist clubs in the event of a 'critical incident'. It outlines how best to support club members who may have been affected by the incident and sign posts to the many professional support services available across the 4 Provinces.

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident is any event that is outside the range of usual human experience that causes an intense stress reaction. It can have the emotional power to affect a person's ability to cope - immediately or sometime after the event.

It is normal to experience all kinds of unpleasant feelings, emotions and body sensations following abnormal events.

Examples of critical incidents may include:

- Death or serious injury on or off the pitch
- Witnessing a road traffic collision or scene of an accident.
- 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. A list of helpful organisations can be found [here](#). Support guidelines developed by professional services are available [here](#) and for Northern Ireland are available [here](#).
- A situation with excessive media interest
- A natural disaster or act of God

Our role in responding to critical incidents

Experts say to follow **5 Key Principles** during a critical incident. These simple yet effective steps help support individual and collective responses to any crisis situation.

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.)

The key principles are:

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

Supports are out there

It's important to note that the club may not be the only group involved in responding to a critical incident. Other groups involved in a community response could include; local schools, community groups, Health Service Executive (Ireland) and Public Health Agency (NI).

It is extremely important that the affected family or families are consulted prior to any planned actions by the club.

Where to find support

During a critical incident, getting help and support is really important. If you are seriously concerned, please contact the Garda on 999, PSNI on 112 and/or the local Doctor.

If you feel you need further support due to a critical incident, there are many professional support services available across the country. See our [contact sheet](#) for a list of services.

It is normal to feel anxious about how people might respond to a critical incident and to want to offer assistance. You might think professional help should be sought immediately after the incident, especially when young people are involved.

However, we all respond differently and have our own ways of coping. Intervening too early may disrupt normal coping skills.

There are times when specialised help is needed, so advise clubmates and parents to be vigilant, especially 4-6 weeks after the incident. If you have concerns about someone during that time use the [contact sheet](#) to find local professional services.

As well as those directly affected, others may suffer distress as a result of a critical incident such as 'at risk' persons who:

• Directly witnessed death/injury/violence as part of the incident	• Teammates, club mates, club members	• Have learning difficulties and/or pre-existing emotional and behavioural/mental health difficulties	• May be vulnerable due to cultural and/or language difficulties
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Who should respond to an incident?

Ideally a small group should be assigned to assist in the event of an incident.

This might include the Honorary Secretary or Club Chair acting as co-ordinator; PRO in a communication role; Club Welfare Officer if age-grade players or vulnerable adults are involved and Branch Welfare Officer to act as liaison to Province/ National reps. Some roles and responsibilities are outlined below:

Role	First hearing of event	Next Steps
Coordinator	• Confirm the event. (Be mindful of inaccuracies that arise in social media) • Activate the Critical Incident response team • Make contact with other relevant agencies • Consult with family around involvement of club in e.g. funeral service	• Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (children, parents, leaders) • Signpost support to club members
PRO	• IRFU are here to offer guidance and support, please get in touch with the team at info@irishrugby.ie • Express sympathy to family • Liaison with relevant outside support agencies	• Organise designated room to house media (if required) • Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any member affected by critical incident
CWO	• Outline specific services available to the club • Address immediate needs of members • Signpost information and support • Monitor groups most affected	• Put in place clear referral process / IRFU CMG • Monitoring if further support to vulnerable persons is necessary

If you or a club member are dealing with an incident, it's important to remember your own self-care. Further information can be found [here](#).

Considerations when dealing with an incident



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.



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. A one stop directory of recognised national and local services can be found [here](#).



Cases of suicide are particularly challenging and have very specific recommendations on how to respond appropriately. Local specialised services are listed in the directory noted above.



To ensure consistency of message, only one person should deal with media inquiries. Keep lines of communication open and clear to avoid rumours and misinformation. IRFU are here to offer the guidance and support you need when managing a critical incident. Please get in touch with the team at info@irishrugby.ie



Be mindful of social media and ensure all information posted on social media is accurate and approved by those affected.



The primary role of the club is offer support and direct people to the appropriate professional services when needed. Boundaries should be appreciated. Do not take on too much. Always refer to statutory authorities and support services.

For help and support managing a critical incident contact info@irishrugby.ie