



Friday 6th December 2019

Dear Parent/Guardian,

It is with great sadness that I write to you as the Principal of Coláiste na Mí. We learned yesterday, Thursday December 5th 2019, of the death of Evan Fitzgerald, one of our 5th Year pupils.

This is a terrible tragedy for his family, our school and our local community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathies and thoughts are with the Fitzgerald family and friends at this time.

All our actions over the past couple of days have been taken with the best interests of our students at heart and have been guided by the strong advice and experience of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) and the Department of Education.

The school remaining open was to ensure that all students can continue to experience support in a safe caring environment and avail of the supports and counselling services that have been made available to students over the past 36 hours.

We are heart broken by the passing of Evan, one of our well regarded students. We will continue to offer support and comfort to the family, students and staff both now and in to the future.

We have spoken appropriately on a number of occasions with all the student groupings and would advise you that if your child need future support we would recommend that you contact the school.

Guidelines provided by the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) for parents are included with this letter.

Patrick Carr
Principal



6th December 2019

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am writing to advise you of the arrangements for the funeral of Evan Fitzgerald, 5th Year student who died tragically yesterday.

The funeral will take place on Monday 9th December at 10am in St. Mary's Church, Navan.

In school, all students will be given the opportunity to express their sympathies to Evan's family by signing a book of condolences which was opened today.

1st, 2nd & 3rd Year Students

All students are expected in school at the normal time of 8.45am on Monday. All students in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year will be given the opportunity to show their respects on Monday as we will be providing a guard of honour as the funeral cortege passes down Sion Road. If you do not wish for your daughter/son to participate in the guard of honour, then please inform the class teacher through a note in their Dialann to this effect and alternative arrangements will be made for them in school.

If you wish for your son/daughter to attend the funeral with you, you are welcome to sign them out and collect them from school and bring them to the funeral directly.

There will be refreshments provided for students on their return to school.

Transition Year, 5th & 6th Year Students

If you wish for your son/daughter to attend the funeral with you, you are welcome to sign them out and collect them from school and bring them to the funeral directly.

If you would like your son/daughter to attend the funeral from school, please inform them that the normal start time of 8.45am applies. Students will be accompanied on a bus to the funeral by teachers and will be accompanied back to school after the funeral. They will have the opportunity to participate in the guard of honour for Evan at the Church as per the family's wishes. If they do not wish to participate in the guard of honour and/or attend the funeral, then they should inform their teacher of this and alternative arrangements in school will be made.

Any student who is travelling to the funeral with the school should wear full school uniform (inclusive of jacket). On return to the school refreshments will be provided to students.

Should your son or daughter wish to visit the family home on Saturday or Sunday (2pm-8pm), it is advised that they are accompanied by a parent/guardian. For further details of the funeral arrangements, click here - <https://rip.ie/death-notice/evan-fitzgerald-navan-meath/406219>

Supports remain available to students and our teachers will continue to provide those supports to students over the coming days and weeks.

Patrick Carr
Principal

Patrick Carr
Acting Principal

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (PARENTS)

The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents after a critical incident.

Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?

A. This will depend on the particular situation. The school will usually put a plan in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion or individual support for students who need it. If there is particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.

Q. How can I help my child?

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. Advise on and monitor safe use of social media.

Q. How long will the grief last?

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories of other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.

Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?

A. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check-up.

Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?

A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP/HSE Services.

Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?

A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

- Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal
- Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting
- Reassure them that they are safe
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally. Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, taking exercise, or talking
- When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back
- If you are out for a long time, telephone and reassure them
- Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them. Help them to understand that defiance, aggression and risk behaviour is a way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and or fear they are feeling
- Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light
- Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
- If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen
- Work with the school support services and other available services
- As well as advising your child about appropriate use of social media, monitor their use, particularly during this vulnerable time. Useful website: www.webwise.ie

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND REACTION TO DEATH ACCORDING TO AGE

(This may be used with various groups and individuals)

Children's understanding and reaction to death will depend on their age and their developmental stage. The following are guides only as children will differ in their reactions and grasp of events for a range of reasons other than age alone.

AGES 9 – 12 YEARS

- Understand the finality and universality of death
- Awareness of their own mortality and may worry about their own death
- May display psychosomatic symptoms i.e. physical complaints like tummy aches
- May wish to stay at home close to parents
- May display anger.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Dispel fears about their own health or the health of other loved ones by offering reassurance
- Encourage them to go to school
- Allow them to express their anger, offering appropriate ways to do so.

ADOLESCENTS

- Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults
- May have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
- Death adds to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents
- May appear to not care about the death
- May seek support outside of the family.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Offer them time to listen
- Allow them to express their grief in their own way
- Be prepared for mood swings
- Don't feel left out if they seem to value their friends more than their parents
- Children's use of social media should be monitored and supported by parents.

If parents are grieving themselves, they may be emotionally unable to support their other children. In this instance, another supportive adult in the child's life, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours may need to offer emotional support.

It should be remembered that for children with special educational needs, their understanding of what has happened will be in line with their developmental age.

REACTIONS TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

FEELINGS	BEHAVIOURAL
Fear Guilt Shame Regret Anger Tearfulness Loneliness Anxiety Insecurity Mood swings Shock Yearning Numbness Confusion Isolation	Nightmares Social withdrawal Over reliance on use of social media Irritability Loss of concentration/forgetfulness Physical/Verbal aggression Missue of drugs, including alcohol
PHYSICAL	THOUGHTS
Tiredness Sleeplessness Headaches Stomach problems - Bowel/Bladder problems Loss or increase in appetite	Disbelief Denial Sense of unreality Preoccupation with images of the event/person