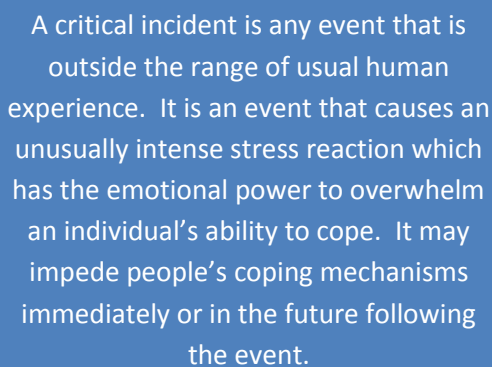


Guidance on Responding to a Critical Incident in an Athletic Club

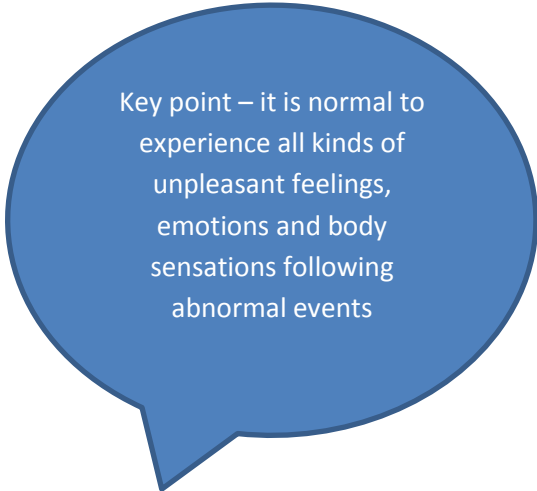
Introduction

Athletics Ireland, its clubs, counties and provinces provide great support during and after all manner of incidents that may have traumatic or tragic consequences for members and their communities. This natural response by clubs usually requires no external expertise or input. A basic critical incident plan is acknowledged as an invaluable support to those involved when situations can overwhelm even the most experienced and well prepared AAI leaders and clubs.

This critical incident plan is designed to offer some assurance about what steps to take in such situations, while also highlighting that other support services – both within Athletics Ireland and external to it. All it takes is a phone call. That reassurance can be invaluable in times of stress. Clubs are encouraged to complete the Critical Incident Management team section of this document and keep the document at hand. Templates and further information on developing a critical incident plans are available from the Athletics Ireland National Children’s Officer (contacts appendix 5). This outline plan has been developed from the GAA Critical Incident Plan model and adapted for Athletics Ireland with consent.



A critical incident is any event that is outside the range of usual human experience. It is an event that causes an unusually intense stress reaction which has the emotional power to overwhelm an individual’s ability to cope. It may impede people’s coping mechanisms immediately or in the future following the event.



Key point – it is normal to experience all kinds of unpleasant feelings, emotions and body sensations following abnormal events

Critical Incident Management Team (to be completed by the club):

List Name and Mobile Phone Number

Leadership Role: _____

HSE support officer: _____

Communication Role: _____

Club Member Liaison Role: _____

Family Liaison Role: _____

Parents Representative: _____

County / Provincial Rep: _____

National Representative: Athletics Ireland National Children's Officer

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined. The second-named person assists and only assumes responsibility on the absence of the first-named.

Roles and Responsibilities of the team:

Leadership Role

Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (children, parents, leaders)

Postvention

- Signpost support to club members
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review plan

Communication Role:**Intervention**

- With Team prepare a public statement
- Organise designated room to address media promptly (if required)
- Liaison with relevant outside support agencies.

Postvention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response.

Club Member Liaison Role**Intervention**

- Outline specific services available to the club
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of members
- Signpost information and support

Postvention

- Ongoing support to vulnerable persons
- Monitor groups most affected
- Refer on, as appropriate
- Review and evaluate plan

Family Liaison Role:**Intervention**

- Coordinate contact with families (following first contact of leader)
- Consult with family around involvement of club in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any member affected by critical incident

Postvention

- Provide ongoing support to bereaved family
- Involve as appropriate family in club memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan.

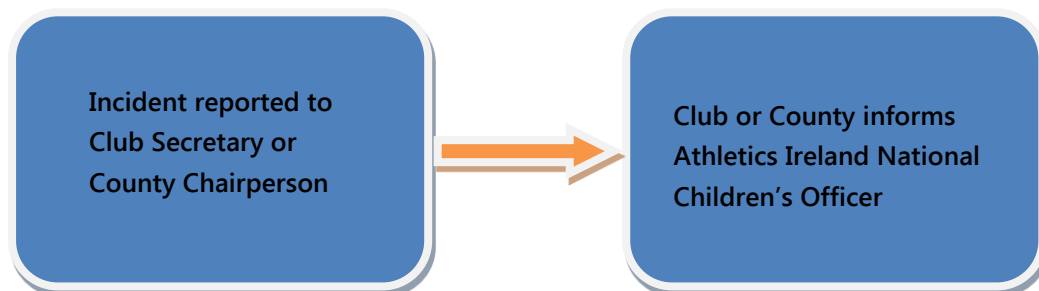
What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is any event that is outside the range of usual human experience. It is an event that causes an unusually intense stress reaction which has the emotional power to overwhelm an individual's ability to cope. It may impede people's coping mechanisms immediately or in the future following the event.

Examples of Critical incidents may include:

- Death or serious injury on or off the track
- Exposure to the aftermath of a road traffic collision eg; the accident scene, the victim(s)
- 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. Guidelines developed by professional services highlighting the most appropriate responses are available (see appendix 4).
- A situation with excessive media interest
- A natural disaster or act of God
- Other incidents not covered above but which are associated with unusually strong emotional reactions.

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

5 Key Principles of Crisis Management

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**



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

Supports are out there

It's important to remember that the club will usually be just one entity playing a part in any response to a critical incident. Figure 2 outlines some of the other entities that may be involved in a community response. It also highlights the importance of having the affected family or families at the centre of any plan while being consulted on all actions. Other at risk persons will be to the forefront of considerations too.

Where to find support.

During a critical incident it is important to source help and support as quickly as possible for you or for anyone the club or individual might be concerned about. If you are seriously concerned about someone, please contact the Gardai on 999 and/or the local Doctor out of hours. If you feel you need further help and support as a consequence of being involved in a critical incident, you are advised to contact:

- 1) **Samaritans** is a free helpline available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for anyone struggling to cope.

Phone: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org Web: www.samaritans.ie

- 2) **Tusla, the Child and Family Agency** is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children.

Phone: 01 7718500

Email: info@tusla.ie Web: www.tusla.ie

- 3) **Your mental health** www.YourMentalHealth.ie is a place to learn about mental health in Ireland, and how to support yourself and the people you love. You can find support services near you, and learn about the #littlethings that can make a big difference to how we all feel. Your Mental Health is brought to you by the [HSE](http://www.hse.ie), the [National Office for Suicide Prevention](http://www.nosip.ie) and partner organisations across the country.

Who Requires Support

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:

- Directly witnessed death/injury/violence as part of the incident
- are uninjured, but were at greatest risk
- are siblings of those immediately affected
- 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

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.
- A General Practitioner (GP) should be recommended as the first point of contact if an individual needs help.
- Ensure the response is consistent throughout the process.
- Keep a log of events with times and details of actions and decisions taken. This could be important for any subsequent inquiry which could range from an internal county/local authority review to a formal inquiry/legal inquiry.
- 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. Go to www.yourmentalhealth.ie or www.mindingyourhead.info for a one stop directory of recognised national & local services.
- Ask the questions regarding support services – what can they deliver? And when can they deliver? Do they respond at weekends?
- Only keep open clear lines of communications which will cut out any rumours or miscommunications.
- To ensure consistency of message, only one person should deal with any media inquiries.
- Be mindful of social media and ensure that all information put on social media is accurate and approved by those affected.
- If there is a club or county event scheduled always check in with those involved to see how they would like the Club/County to manage fulfilling the event.
- Be careful about using the term counselling in the aftermath. People understand it to mean different things so it can be misleading.
- Cases of suicide bring with them a particular set of challenges and very specific recommendations as to how to respond appropriately. Fortunately there are also skilled services available – both statutory and voluntary – to guide clubs through such tragic situations. (see appendix 1)

Key Point - Remember that the role of the club is primarily to act as a sign-posting service to the supports that are available. Boundaries should be appreciated and getting the balance between what a voluntary entity can offer as opposed to what professionals can is important. Do not take on too much. Always refer to statutory authorities or support services.

Appendix 1

Sample support letter for members

Support Service for _____ Club/County members

We are all in shock from the untimely death of _____.

To lose a loved one like, a dear friend and team mate, is one of the most difficult life experiences you will have to face. When the death is sudden and tragic, family and friends must cope with the sadness of their loss plus all their additional heightened feelings like confusion, questioning of self, anger and coming to terms with his death.

Should you wish to speak to someone in confidence about how you feel or if you need help or guidance to come to terms with death, please call: **Samaritans, available 24-7, on their free-phone number 116 123 in Republic of Ireland. If you or someone you know is in danger, distress or despair, call the emergency services on 999.**

The above is a confidential service available to you and we encourage you to avail of it and call, if you need to talk to someone. Equally, should you know of any of your friends or colleagues, who are struggling to come to terms with _____ death please encourage them to call also, or talk to a loved one about their feelings.

We also ask you to keep an eye out for each other, not to be shy or embarrassed about asking for help and to talk to and support each other during what is a very difficult time for us all. If there is anything we can do to help and support you please let us know. We will get through this tragic time together.

_____,

Chairperson, on behalf of the _____ Club Committee.

Phone: (insert your number here if you feel it is appropriate for any additional enquiries)

Appendix 2

Guidelines for dealing with the media following a critical incident

Following a critical incident in which people have died, press interest in survivors and bereaved families can be intense. There are rules and standards the press should follow. All members of the press have a duty to maintain the highest professional standards. The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) is charged with enforcing the 'Editors' Code of Practice'.

Individuals are under **no obligation** to speak to the media. If someone doesn't want to speak to them - tell them.

When speaking with the media the following are some helpful tips;

- always make a note of the journalist's name and contact phone number at the outset
- consider appointing somebody as a spokesperson for family - this might be a relative or friend, or your solicitor - some support groups have appointed media liaison people who will field questions on behalf of the support group
- don't do anything in a hurry, whatever the journalist says about deadlines
- ask what they want to talk to you about in advance
- ask them to write down the questions they want to ask you in advance
- give yourself time to think about what you want to say
- write down your answers
- ask the journalist to ring you back at a specified time
- ask if you can see what they wish to quote from you before it goes to press - they may not do this, but it will alert them to your concerns about what they are going to publish
- never say anything 'off the record' unless both you and the journalist have a shared understanding of what this means
- remember that a journalist is entitled to report anything you say, so don't mistake them for counsellors or friends
- bring the conversation to a close if you are uncomfortable

Sometimes journalists will ask for photographs of you, your loved one, and your family. You may wish to provide these, but remember that you are under **no obligation** to do so. If you do, ensure that you have a copy and ask for the photographs and any other personal items that you pass on to be returned.

Appendix 3

Sample announcement to the media

This can be used as a template by clubs to be emailed, faxed or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the club. In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals.

This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the affected family and the nature of the incident.

Template:

My name is (Name) and I am the (Role within the club) of (Name) club. We learned this morning of the death of (Name). This is a terrible tragedy for _____ family, our club and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (Name) family and friends.

(Name of person) was a member of (Name) club and will be greatly missed by all who knew him/her. We have been in contact with his/her parents/family and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our club have implemented our Critical Incident Response Plan. The club has been open to members, to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.

We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you.
Chairperson

Appendix 4

Good Practice guidelines following the death by suicide of a club member

The death by suicide of a member of a club can have a deep impact on club members, in particular on teammates and coaches. How a club responds to a death by suicide depends on a number of factors including:

- How well known the person who died was to club members;
- How the club has dealt with past tragedies;
- The leadership shown by key club members; and
- Media coverage of the event.

What to do after a suicide:

Do's

Do acknowledge the death

Acknowledge that a club member has died. Respect that some families may choose not to describe the death as a suicide.

Do acknowledge a wide range of feelings

Acknowledge that individuals will experience a wide range of feelings and emotions as a result of the death.

- Be gentle with each other – we all grieve in different ways
- The grieving process takes months and years not days and weeks
- Don't blame yourself or anyone else for the death

Do try to get the balance right

Try to get the balance right between continuing to do normal activities (for example, following the funeral, go ahead with scheduled matches), but also make allowances that motivation and morale may be low among the team.

Try not to underestimate young people's natural ability to cope with difficult situations.

Do keep an eye out for vulnerable people

Watch out for those who are not doing well or may be at greatest risk, for example:

- Brother and sisters of the deceased person who are also club members;
- Close friends;
- Teammates; and others who may be experiencing difficult life situations at the time.

Anyone who may be particularly vulnerable at this particular time may need extra support. Having access to local support services contact details is important. You can usually call on these organisations for advice. For more information on local support available contact the local Mental and Emotional Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention contacts (see appendix 5).

Do anticipate sensitive dates on the calendar

Anticipate birthdays, holidays, anniversary dates and other celebratory events where the person's absence from the team will be most felt. Accept there will be times, such as these, when members of the club may benefit from extra support.

Don'ts

Don't focus only on the positive

Do not remember the person who died by only talking about the positive things about them. While it is important to celebrate their sporting achievements and other personal qualities, it is also crucial to talk about the loss. Openly acknowledge and discuss the pain, and heartache, as well as any difficulties the person might have been experiencing, for example mental health issues, but with any discussions also encourage individuals to seek help if they feel the need to talk to someone.

Be careful how you pay respects

Do not do things in memory of the person like:

- Commemorative matches;
- Number on shirts; or
- Naming a trophy.

A Guard of Honour may be organised for other deaths. However, remember that a death by suicide differs from other deaths. Avoid any activities that glamorise or glorify suicide. The challenge is to grieve, remember and honour the deceased without unintentionally glorifying their death.

Do not over-indulge

Around the time of the funeral and immediately afterwards it is important to ask members and friends to try not to overindulge in alcohol, caffeine or other substances. They may make people more vulnerable at this time.

Helpful short and medium to long-term responses

After a death by suicide, clubs have found the following short-term and medium to long-term responses helpful.

Short-term

Right after a suicide those affected often look for the following:

Information

Clubs have found it helpful to identify what supports are available locally to provide advice, support and care at this time. As a result, many communities have developed local supports signposting services available in the area providing.

Support

The first gathering of the team after the funeral, for example, the first night back at training, may be a difficult time for everyone. Coaches have found it helpful to break the team up into small groups and allow some time to talk about their deceased team member.

Coaches or team leaders may wish to prepare for this by thinking through the types of issues that they think will be raised and how best to create a safe place to discuss these matters. Coaches or team leaders should seek the help of local support services if they feel necessary and/or the county health and wellbeing chair. Some coaches may not feel comfortable in preparing for such a gathering. The following topics are usually addressed:

- How to support people who are grieving at this time;
- Looking after yourself during this traumatic time; and
- What to look out for, also what to say and do if you are worried about someone else.

Medium to long-term

The medium to long-term develop policies and procedures on suicide prevention as well as other broader areas such as self-harm, drug and alcohol use.

Policies

Clubs should develop policies and procedures on suicide prevention as well as other broader areas such as drug and alcohol use.

Training

Clubs find it helpful to offer training and skills development to coaches and team leaders. It is maybe useful to initially look at some form of resilience programmes/training that will help coaches/ members. There is also the opportunity to look at putting in place suicide awareness training in the longer term.

Appendix 5

Local & National Support Groups

Athletics Ireland Child Safeguarding

Athletics Ireland is committed to the safeguarding of all children and young people in athletics. If you have a child welfare or safeguarding query or concern please contact Kieron Stout, Child Welfare & Safeguarding Manager, for support and advice. If you have a concern about the safety or wellbeing of a child please contact your local Gardai or HSE Duty Social Worker.

- Email: kieronstout@athleticsireland.ie / childwelfare@athleticsireland.ie
- Phone: 01 886 9933 / 087 245 0134

Aware

Aware was founded in 1985. The organisation developed in response to the clear need for information, understanding and support, both for individuals who had a diagnosis of depression or bipolar as well as family members supporting a loved one.

- Website: <http://www.aware.ie>
- Phone: 1890 303 302
- Email: info@aware.ie

Barnardos

Barnardos is a children's charity that works with vulnerable children and their families in Ireland and campaigns for the rights of all children.

- Website: www.barnardos.ie
- Phone: 01 4530355
- Email: info@barnardos.ie

CARI

CARI is the leading voluntary organisation with a proven track record in providing child centred specialised therapy and support to children, families and groups affected by child sexual abuse, regardless of means.

- Website: www.cari.ie
- Phone: 1890 924567 / 01 830 8529
- Email: info@cari.ie

Connect

Connect is a free telephone counselling and support service for any adult who has experienced abuse, trauma or neglect in childhood. You can talk in confidence with a trained counsellor who can listen or help with questions you have.

- Website: www.connectcounselling.ie
- Phone: 1800 477 477 / 01 8657444
- Email: admin@connectcounselling.ie

Childline

All conversations with Childline are private, which means that you can talk to Childline about anything and they won't tell anyone unless you tell them who you are or where you are. Childline is for young people up to the age of 18. Contact services are available from 10am to 4am every day.

- Live webchat: <http://www.childline.ie>
- Phone: 1800 66 66 66
- Text "talk or bully" to 50101

Drugs & alcohol abuse

Drugs.ie provides general information on drugs and alcohol abuse and details on more specific services in your area to help you get started and point you in the right direction. Support services include helpline, harm reduction services, help with drug and alcohol related problems, and support groups for drug and alcohol users and their families and friends.

- Website: <http://www.drugs.ie/>
- Live webchat: http://www.drugs.ie/live_chat/
- Phone: 1800 459 459

Garda Síochána

An Garda Síochána is the national police service of Ireland. The Mission of An Garda Síochána is 'Working with Communities to Protect and Serve'.

- Website: <http://www.garda.ie/>
- Emergency services: 999/112
- Phone: 1800 666 111
- Text: "help" to 51444

Health Service Executive (HSE)

The HSE provides all of Ireland's public health services, in hospitals and communities nationwide.

- Website: www.hse.ie
- Phone: 1850 24 1850
- Email: infoline1@hse.ie

HSE National Counselling Service

If you are looking for face to face counselling for issues surrounding childhood abuse, please get in contact with the HSE National Counselling Service, which has counselling centres all over Ireland.

- Website: http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/National_Counselling_Service/
- Phone: 1850 24 1850
- ISPCC Stand Up To Bullying

ISPCC

The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) is Ireland's oldest and most well-known children's charity. The ISPCC has a long, proud history of service delivery and advocacy on behalf of children.

- Website: www.ispcc.ie
- Phone: 01 676 7960

Athletics Ireland has implemented the ISPCC Stand Up to Bullying reporting tool on the Athletics Ireland Child Welfare page. This is a confidential service for any child or young person to use if they are affected by bullying. Please share with children and young people in your club. This is a monitored secure service where children and young people can voice any concerns they may have about bullying. Athletics Ireland is the first sport in Ireland to adopt this service. Stand Up to Bullying: <http://www.athleticsireland.ie/juvenile/child-welfare>

Jigsaw & Headstrong

Jigsaw is a network of centres across Ireland to make sure every young person has somewhere to turn to and someone to talk to when in need. Headstrong, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health is a charitable organisation supporting young people's mental health in Ireland. Its goals include that every young person will have at least "one good adult" in their life, and that when they need support, they will be able to seek and obtain it.

- Website: <https://www.headstrong.ie/jigsaw/>
- Jigsaw centres: <https://www.headstrong.ie/contact/>
- Phone: 01 472 7010

Mental Health Ireland

Mental Health Ireland is a national voluntary organisation which aims to promote positive mental health and to actively support persons with a mental illness, their families and carers by identifying their needs and advocating their rights.

- Website: www.mentalhealthireland.ie
- Phone: 01 284 1166

One in Four

One in Four is a national charity which provides psychotherapy and advocacy services for people who have experienced sexual violence.

- Website: www.oneinfour.ie
- Phone: 01 6624070
- Email: info@oneinfour.ie

Pieta House

Pieta House, the centre for the prevention of self-harm or suicide opened over nine years ago with Lucan in County Dublin the centre of operations, now with nine centres nationwide helping people in suicidal distress or engaging in self-harm.

- Website: www.pieta.ie
- Phone: 01 628 2111 01 601 0000
- Email: mary@pieta.ie

Rape Crisis Centres

For a directory of Rape Crisis Centres around the country. Rape Crisis Centres across the country offers a wide range of services to women and men who are affected by rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment or childhood sexual abuse.

- Website: <http://www.drcc.ie/get-help-and-information/centres-around-ireland/>
- Phone: 1800 77 88 88

Reachout

ReachOut.com is an online youth mental health service. Put simply, it helps young people through tough times in their lives.

- Website: ie.reachout.com
- Phone: 01 764 5666
- Email: general@reachout.com

Samaritans

Samaritans provide 24-hour emotional support to anyone experiencing distress, despair or suicidal thought.

- Website: www.samaritans.org
- Phone: 116 123
- Email: jo@samaritans.org

Spunout.ie

SpunOut.ie is Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people. SpunOut.ie provides young people with a space to have their questions answered, receive advice from other readers with lived experiences and to share their views with the SpunOut.ie community.

- Website: <https://spunout.ie>
- Phone: 087 773 0000
- Email: info@spunout.ie
- Text: 087 773 0000

Teen Between

Teen Between is a specialised counselling service which supports teenagers with separated or divorced parents.

- Website: www.teenbetween.ie
- Phone: 1800 303 191
- Email: teenbetween@relationshipsireland.com

Tusla

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is now the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It represents the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services ever undertaken in Ireland. The Child and Family Agency's services include a range of universal and targeted services for children and families.

- Website: www.tusla.ie
- Phone: 01 7718500
- Email: info@tusla.ie

Women's Aid

Women's Aid is a national organisation that has been working in Ireland to stop domestic violence against women and children since 1974. The Women's Aid Helpline is the only free, national, domestic violence helpline with specialised trained staff.

- Website: www.womensaid.ie
- Phone: 1800 341 900
- Email: info@womensaid.ie