

Student Services  
**Student Services**  
Crisis Intervention Manual  
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(*ABRIDGED*)



***“CREATING POWERFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS”***

*Modified from Rocky Mountain School District #6  
For Wild Rose Public Schools  
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## CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE CHECKLIST

### DAY ONE

- \_\_\_\_\_ **Verify** details of the critical incident by contacting appropriate authorities (RCMP, Coroner, family or family spokesperson). Continue to update as details arise.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inform the Director of Student Services.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Student Services will contact and convene Crisis Response Team.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify one person to contact the family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Principal is responsible as key contact for communication with family. Confirm release of information and offer condolences. (Appendix A)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have the identified person contact the family to offer condolences and ask permission to release information about the incident.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Implement school fan out.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inform District and School secretaries to direct media inquiries to the Superintendent or designate. Prepare a statement which can be read in response to inquiries.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make arrangements for sub relief if needed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Prepare memo and staff meeting agenda (Appendix B).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Generate a list of students and staff who may require follow-up. Remind staff to record the names of students they are concerned about. This sheet is turned into designated person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Prepare a written statement of fact which can be read by teachers to students. Also include an explanation of check out procedures; inform parents if students need to leave the school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify and organize a drop in center coordinated by a member of the Crisis Response Team (Appendix C).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hold the a.m. staff meeting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be cognizant of absences at school on the day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When appropriate, prepare communication to be sent to parents (Appendix D). Pick one of the two letters.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ensure basic needs of all staff and students are met – food, drink, space, rest, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ Debrief with staff at end of day.

\_\_\_\_\_ Direct a staff member to remove the deceased student's name from all mailing/class lists, including district's central office.

\_\_\_\_\_ Change lock on student's locker and secure belongings so they can be dealt with at a later time. Remove belongings from locker and/or desk when appropriate. Have the designated contact person consult with the family to determine if they want to be a part of the process.

## DAY TWO

- \_\_\_\_\_ The Principal contacts the family of the deceased person re: funeral, student/staff participation and/or possible memorial.
- \_\_\_\_\_ School based discussion and planning regarding appropriate places for memorials, condolences and observations. Due to the potential contagion response, this should be reviewed with the CRT.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Notify parents of students who may need extra monitoring and support.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have some quality literature photocopied for distribution to parents/teachers/students (See Resources section).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Touch base with staff members to provide support.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Share information **where appropriate** with other school administrators to prevent “copycat” suicide.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plan interim and day-end meetings and assess the need for following day interventions.

**DAY THREE**

\_\_\_\_\_ Continue to monitor school community as needed.

# Student Services Crisis Intervention Manual



***“SCHOOL SPECIFIC  
INFORMATION”***

**CRISIS RESPONE TEAM  
ORDER OF CALLING**

**SCHOOL**

1. R.C.M.P.
2. Superintendent
3. Staff
4. Family (possibly)

**SUPERINTEDEDENT  
DIVISION OFFICE**

**Crisis Response Team**

Family Wellness Worker(s)  
Counsellors  
FNMI Worker  
Behavior Coordinator  
R.C.M.P.

## **CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN ROLE OF THE TEACHER**

Teachers play a vital role in helping students deal with their feelings regarding the death of a student or staff member. See Leading the Class Discussion (Appendix G).

**If teachers are uncomfortable or unable to fulfill this role, please request assistance from the Crisis Response Team.**

1. Teachers should be aware that there are many different responses to grief such as anger, sadness, withdrawal, laughter, black humour. Students should be allowed to openly express their feelings. One way of encouraging this is for teachers to acknowledge his/her own reactions immediately following the announcement of the person's death.
2. If the death was by suicide, acknowledge the tragic event, but do not encourage memorializing the act. When discussing suicide, use caution as the privacy of the family must be respected as this may be information they do not wish to be made public.
3. The names of students considered to be "vulnerable" or in need of counselling support, at present or as the week progresses, should be forwarded to the Counsellor and/or Crisis Response Team.
4. The Principal, Counsellor, and/or Crisis Response Team Members will be available to discuss concerns regarding students or procedures to be followed.

### **ROLE SPECIFIC CHECKLISTS**

School Crisis Response Teams may choose to organize themselves by appointing coordinators to oversee various tasks. The following checklists may be used to help individuals carry out specific duties related to their roles:

Teacher  
Team Coordinator  
Secretary  
Communications  
Coordinator Counselling  
Coordinator School Staff

**CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN  
TEACHER CHECKLIST**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Attend staff meeting and obtain all possible information.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Request a School CRT Member for support in your classroom and/or to lead class discussion if you feel uncomfortable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Share factual information as directed by the principal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lead the class discussion (see Appendix G).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Record/provide names of any students or staff who may be at risk or need additional support to the designate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attend the after school staff meeting(s).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in Critical Incident Stress Debriefing **as necessary**.

**CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN  
SECRETARY**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Maintain a log of phone calls related to the incident
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do not release information until/unless approved by principal
- \_\_\_\_\_ Screen incoming calls
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrange for substitute teachers/paraprofessionals as required
- \_\_\_\_\_ Check with principal to see if additional coverage for a roaming teacher is required
- \_\_\_\_\_ Record on log students and staff who check in/out relating to the incident
- \_\_\_\_\_ Download and photocopy responsibilities lists/log sheets
- \_\_\_\_\_ Record follow-up dates/activities on master calendar i.e. A few days before birthdays/anniversaries, holidays etc.

# Student Services Crisis Intervention Manual



***“APPENDICES”***

## **APPENDIX A**

### **LIAISON WITH FAMILY**

When a death occurs, either accidental or suicidal, it is essential that contact be made with the bereaved family at the earliest possible opportunity. The contact person will, of course, offer condolences and support to the family. However, of utmost importance is clarifying the situation with a view to what can be shared with staff and students. Questions that must be clearly responded to are: a) cause of death; and b) explanation of the situation. If these questions are not clearly outlined to staff and students, school staff may be required to expend excessive energy combating and dealing with the rumours that may develop and the reluctant feelings that go with uncertainty.

If the school community can be helped to understand how their classmate or teacher or other related member of the school community died and receive as much information as possible, the easier it becomes for them to attend to grief issues.

The family of the deceased need to know:

- a. why this information is important;
- b. how the school will help the children deal with their feelings around the death/suicide; and
- c. that parents of the other students will be notified in writing of the death so that grief and bereavement issues can be dealt with in the classroom. (Parents' support is essential in helping children deal with the death).

When family members of the deceased attend more than one school in the district, the administration of the involved school must ensure that the parental message (i.e. Cause of death, explanation of the situation) is clearly communicated to the other schools.

## APPENDIX B

### SUGGESTED AGENDA: EMERGENCY STAFF MEETING

1. Provide accurate information about the nature of the critical incident.
2. Principal informs all staff members that any media personnel or others requesting information, should be immediately directed to the designated spokesperson.
3. Reassure staff members that Crisis Response Team members are available to provide support in classrooms or to individual teachers where needed.
4. Inform faculty of the assigned roles of Crisis Team members so that questions and problems can be directed to the appropriate person. Identify any outside consultants who may be called into the building for assistance. Provide this information on paper and distribute the written statement of fact.
5. Prepare teachers to notify their students. Clarify the role of the teacher in supporting the class. Using the public address system to inform students of a death will not be used. Encourage teachers to allow time for a classroom discussion. Students need the catharsis of talking as a group to come to terms with their shock and grief. The intensity of such discussion will vary according to the needs of the group.
6. Discuss the resource sheet on **Leading the Class Discussion (Appendix G)** and review the salient points with the staff.
7. Inform staff of procedures to be followed should a student want to leave the class during the discussion. Specifically, students who ask to leave because of their grief reaction should be accompanied to the Drop-in Center. If a student wishes to leave the school, he/she should be released to a parent/guardian, or an adult designated by the parent/guardian. The student should know that he/she is expected to return to school the next day. Explain sign out procedures.
8. The principal, counsellor and the CRT may meet with the classes most directly affected by the death to:
  - i. Review the known facts and dispel rumours.
  - ii. Address suicide and its myths if a suicide occurred.
  - iii. Inform them of the Drop-in Center
  - iv. Encourage them to express feelings in whatever way is appropriate for them. All responses are natural. (For more information, see support material.)
  - v. Discuss possible guilt feelings or feelings of responsibility.
  - vi. Ask them to be supportive of one another and to escort any friend who is upset to a teacher or to the Drop-in Center.
  - vii. Reassure them that any adult in the building is available to help.
  - viii. Encourage them to discuss their feelings with their parents.

- ix. Apprise them of the sign and symptoms of normal grief to watch for in the next few days.
9. Announce the date and time of a follow-up meeting where staff members will have a chance to share their experience and concerns.
10. Remind staff they may access additional support from the Employee and Family Assistance Plan or other outside agency.

## APPENDIX C

### ORGANIZING AND RUNNING A DROP-IN CENTER

A room in the school that provides privacy will need to be set aside for one to two days. The Center should be organized by one member of the Crisis Response Team. However, several counsellors and/or teachers will likely be needed to staff the Center during its operation. Staff members involved in the Center activities will need to be relieved of all classroom and supervisory duties during this time so that they will be free to see students and staff members as the need arises. Phone calls to Drop-in Center staff should be kept to a minimum. To lessen interruption of counselling interviews, messages can be taken by the office staff.

Students should be encouraged to resume their normal routines. Individuals needing further support after the first day or two should be seen on an appointment basis and/or referred to outside agencies for ongoing counselling.

#### *Appropriate Tasks for Drop-in Center Staff*

1. Meet individually with all identified students and staff who are at risk as a result of this trauma.
2. Meet with any students referred by staff members, parents, or other students.
3. Meet with any self-referred students or staff members in need of support.
4. Provide initial supportive counselling for the above-mentioned clients.
5. Assess students and staff for risk and, where necessary, refer to outside resources.
6. Identify non-school attendees who may be “at risk” and inform parents of your concerns.
7. Maintain a close liaison with the Community Health Nurse. Students may evidence physical complaints as a result of emotional trauma.
8. Instruct Peer Counsellors, in schools where such programs exist, refer “at risk” students initially to the drop-in Center. After that time, encourage Peer Counsellors to refer any at-risk students to the school counsellor. It is important to remember that the peer counsellors may themselves need support at this time.
9. Hold a debriefing group, if needed, for those students who appear to have been most intimately affected by the death.
10. Provide information about postvention services in the school and resources within the community.

### *Guidelines for Individuals Staffing Drop-in Centers*

The following statements are suggested responses for those who will be doing individual counselling in the Center.

1. Review the known facts of the tragedy (without releasing confidential information) and dispel rumors.
2. Allow students to express their reactions in whatever way is appropriate for them. All responses are acceptable. Strive to achieve a high level of comfort.
3. Talk about losses. Allow students to express their feelings about this loss and other losses they have experienced in life. (e.g. death, divorce, break-ups).
4. Talk with students about what has happened in their lives recently. Allow students to express feelings without being judgmental or denying them the right to these feelings. Say, "That must have been very hard for you. How do you feel about it now?"
5. If you don't understand what the student is feeling, don't pretend that you do. Say, "I'm not sure I know what you mean, but I want to understand you. Perhaps if you tell me again, I might understand."
6. Give reassurance to children regarding their own future and security; this death may prompt anxiety about their own mortality.
7. Allow students to discuss feelings of guilt, anger, denial, frustration, or personal responsibility without making judgments.
8. Encourage the student to seek support from, and to be supportive of, other students and to escort any friend who is upset to the Drop-in Center.
9. Encourage the student to discuss his/her feelings with parents/supportive adult.
10. Help the student to identify his/her strengths and the resources that are available. Reassure the student that concerned adults are available for help. Make sure the student has a Crisis Center card before leaving the Drop-in Center.
11. Discuss other options for dealing with stress and depression. **DO NOT MORALIZE OR PREACH TO THE STUDENT.** This may block communication.
12. If you suspect a student has suicidal tendencies, discuss your concerns with the student. Remember, you will not be placing the thought in the student's head, and if the student admits to self-destructive ideations, ask the student about his/her plan. A well thought-out plan is a significant danger sign.

13. If you suspect that the student is thinking about suicide, consult with other members of the Drop-in Center staff. If the team believes that a referral is necessary, this action should be taken immediately.
14. Be aware of the student's response to you. If he/she seems accepting and there has been an improvement in mood, continue present tactics. If you are feeling overwhelmed, remain calm and seek assistance.
15. Above all, model a calm manner for the student. He/she will pick up on your nervousness or discomfort.

***Be aware of our personal reaction to the event and to the stress of working with clients in the Drop-in Center. If you are feeling uncomfortable, anxious or stressed, take time for yourself and seek assistance. External consultants are available to support you personally and professionally.***

## APPENDIX D

### SAMPLE LETTER #1 TO PARENTS (To be placed on School Letterhead)

(Date)

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We have suffered a tragedy at our school. On (date) , one of our students died suddenly and unexpectedly. In addition to our grief over the loss of this member of our school community, we are sensitive to the fact that such an event has an impact on other students.

In response, the school has implemented a plan which allows students an opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings with trained professional staff. We expect that some will seek out this help, while others may not. Those who do will be provided an opportunity to express their feelings and grief. This is not intended to take the place of outside professional counselling or pastoral care.

Anticipating that your child may have a reaction to this event, we have some information available to you at your request which could be helpful as you respond to your child's concerns. If you should determine that your child needs further professional counselling, please feel free to contact the school for phone numbers of local agencies that are available to assist you.

If it seems advisable, we will offer all concerned parents an opportunity to meet with professionals to discuss this recent crisis. Please do not hesitate to contact the school regarding your requests or concerns at (phone number).

Sincerely,

(name)  
Principal

## APPENDIX D

### SAMPLE LETTER #2 TO PARENTS (To be Placed on School Letterhead)

(Date)

Dear Parent/Guardian:

On \_\_\_\_\_ one of our students died suddenly and unexpectedly. In addition to our grief over the loss of this member of our school community, we are sensitive to the fact that such an event has an impact on other students.

In response, the school has implemented a plan which allows students an opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings with trained professional staff. We expect that some will seek out this help, while others may not. Those who do will be provided an opportunity to express their feelings and grief. This is not intended to take the place of outside professional counselling or pastoral care.

Anticipating that your child may have a reaction to this event, we have some information available to you at your request which could be helpful as you respond to your child's concerns. If you should determine that your child needs further professional counselling, please feel free to contact the school for phone numbers of local agencies that are available to assist you.

If it seems advisable, we will offer all concerned parents an opportunity to meet with professionals to discuss this recent crisis.

Sincerely,

(name)  
Principal

## **APPENDIX E**

### **I. THE FUNERAL**

1. A funeral is a leave-taking ritual which in some cultures is a way of acknowledging our relationship to the deceased. There is general agreement among researchers that going to a funeral can be positive experience, a way of saying good-bye. However, students should not be pressured into attending.
2. It is possible to take any school aged child to a funeral if they are accompanied by a familiar adult, feel secure, and are prepared in advance for what will take place.

For example, “We have funerals so that people can say good-bye. Some people may be crying. Often a religious leader and a few other people talk about special memories and say special prayers”.

3. Young children may not be able to sit for the entire service. The adult in charge should try to maintain a close physical presence to reassure the child and answer questions. Sufficient adults need to be available to accompany any children who may wish to leave early.
4. Adolescents sometimes wish to leave notes or mementos in the casket, or at the grave site. This should be discouraged as it may upset students and/or family members.

### **II. MEMORIAL GUIDELINES**

Sudden death (accident or homicide) occurs to the individual, while suicide is a chosen act. There are cases where the difference between the two are not apparent. The following issues need to be carefully considered before the school handles announcements, memorials and media coverage.

There are three guiding principles for institutional postvention policies and procedures:

1. Nothing should be done to glamorize or dramatize suicide.
2. Doing nothing can be a dangerous as doing too much.
3. The students cannot be helped until the faculty is helped (Dume, 245).

There appears to be some correlation between the death of one student and suicide attempts or completed suicides by others, and an even higher correlation when the death was a suicide.

Probably the single greatest objective of any school administrator after a suicide is to avoid doing anything to make the situation worse. There is concern about possible contagion and about administrative responses that might encourage it (Dyck, 1990; Dunne, McIntosh & Dunne-Maxim, 1987). However, the impact of a student suicide simply cannot be ignored. The suicide puts other students at risk, just as a suicide in a family puts other family members at risk. A major goal of postvention policies, therefore, is to minimize the risk of the contagion effect and to process the tragic loss.

If some kind of school memorial service involving a large number of staff and students is customary or otherwise felt to be appropriate, it is important that the limitations and risk of such a gathering be recognized. This is generally not a place for processing feelings i.e. Working through feelings. The group is too large, too unmanageable, and the feelings too variable for most professionals, even those familiar with postvention principles, to safely manage.

Suggestions:

- Students' responses could be channeled into constructive projects to help the living i.e. contributing or donating funds to concerned agencies, such as teenage support services, hospice society, family resource center.
- Careful consideration should be given to planning permanent memorials i.e. Plaques, dedicating athletic events, planting a tree, dedicating a yearbook or establishing a scholarship fund. This has potential for constant invitation to consider suicide.
- Parents wishing to establish an annual scholarship or other permanent memorial for a student who committed suicide could be encouraged too look at other options such as support services, parent/youth mediation, family resource center, hospice, etc.
- Discourage shrines on school property where flowers and mementos are left in memory of the deceased.
- Ask the family what they want the school to do with items left in the students' memory.

**APPENDIX F**

**CRITICAL INCIDENT CONTACT LIST**

**School Crisis Response Team:**

| Name  | Role/Position | Home Phone | Other Phone |
|-------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |

**School Staff Members:**

| Name  | Role/Position | Home Phone | Other Phone |
|-------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |

**Others to consider:**

| Name  | Role/Position | Home Phone | Other Phone |
|-------|---------------|------------|-------------|
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |
| _____ | _____         | _____      | _____       |

## APPENDIX G

### LEADING THE CLASS DISCUSSION

#### **Rationale**

School is a place where learning takes place, where it is safe to ask questions and obtain factual information. Adults frequently attempt to insulate children from the realities of death. But children have the capacity to cope with stronger feelings of loss than many of us realize. If children sense that parents and teachers are hiding something, their suspicions can lead to fears and fantasies that are more problematic for them than the truth. A teacher's expression of sorrow in class conveys to students that strong emotions are natural, that mourning does not have to be hidden away. In addition, when students are allowed to grieve in a supervised setting with the comfort and reassurance of an adult, they will develop positive coping behaviors which will serve as a foundation for subsequent death related situations. By sharing our feelings and experiences when confronted with death, we feel less helpless and alone.

#### **General Principles to Help Students of All Ages**

This is a classroom discussion, not a therapy session.

1. It is important to acknowledge the reality of the death and your willingness to talk about it.
2. Be simple and straightforward. Discuss death in terms the child can easily understand.
3. Give the minimum facts regarding the death in a concrete, clear and accurate manner. Share only the information that is public knowledge.
4. Express your own feelings in an open, calm way which encourages students to express their grief. Some bereaved students choose not to talk; discussion of the death strikes them as a source of more pain and some have a hard time verbalizing their feelings. These students should not be pressured to talk.
5. Project confidence and calmness. Be encouraging and reassuring.
6. Listen, acknowledge the loss and have a non-judgmental attitude.
7. Be patient. Many times, because of their need for reassurance, young children will repeat the same questions. Older children may repeatedly tell about the relationship and reconstruct the loss. Repetitions of this sort are part of the normal grieving process.
8. Be prepared for any student(s) who may feel the need to discuss unpleasant features of the relationship.

9. Assess the meaning of the loss for each child. Pay close attention to those children who have experienced other recent deaths or losses, or, to those who have emotional problems.
10. Expect regressive behaviors such as fear of dark, sleeping alone, nightmares, or being left alone. Expect physical complaints such as stomachaches and headaches.
11. Sometimes a gesture such as a touch on the arm or hug can be a powerful expression of care and compassion.
12. Avoid imposing your own theology, dogma and personal beliefs.
13. Assess which students are in need of additional support and refer them to the Drop-in Center for individual assessment and counselling. Have someone accompany them there.

### **The Class Discussion**

There is no one right way to talk about death. The following statements are meant only as a guide. Words and phrases may have to be changed to better fit your students' needs.

#### **I. Introductory Phase**

- (a) "Something very sad has happened. (*Name*), a Grade \_\_\_\_ student, has died (*in the hospital, in a car accident, etc. Set at CRT shared at staff meeting.*) This kind of sad news is hard to accept. You will probably have many feelings in the next while. You could be sad, angry, confused, depressed, afraid, or have no feeling at all for some time. When I've felt like this, it has helped me to talk to someone. Sharing my feelings made it easier, although not less painful, to deal with the tragedy. If you'd like to talk about the situation, I'd be glad to take time to do that. I'll try to answer any questions as well as I can."
- (b) Encourage children to share memories of their classmate or teacher: "what are some of the things you want to remember about (*Name*)."

#### **II. Fact Phase**

- (c) Share facts. Be objective. Help young students understand the difference between speculation and fact.

#### **III. Reaction Phase**

- (d) Acknowledge that a wide variety of feelings are normal; there is no one right way to react to death. Feelings will vary from student to student and will change over time.

"It's okay to forget (*Name*) sometimes when you work and play."

“Some of you feel angry that (*Name*) died. What can you do with your angry feelings?”

“It’s okay that some of you are very sad and some only a little sad”

“Because (*Name*) died, you may be reminded of others that you cared for who have died”

“It’s okay to cry -- it’s all right”

- (e) Acknowledge that you don’t possess all the answers. Often there is more comfort from an honest “I don’t know why” than from an attempt at explanations that don’t sound credible.
- (f) Acknowledge the various cultural or religious beliefs that may be expressed.
- (g) Review that possible reactions may include headaches, bad dreams, being scared, anxiety.

#### IV. Teaching Phase

Educate students that these are all normal reactions to a very abnormal event. Reactions may range from feeling nothing to feeling numb, shock, disbelief, anger etc. Reassure students that reactions vary widely. Delayed reactions are also common.

#### V. Closure

- (h) Focus on what the students still have in terms of:
  - the support that comes from sharing grief
  - a support network – have each student think of someone he/she can go to for support
  - their individual strengths
- (i) Talk about the natural healing process. “Over time the pain or missing (*Name*) won’t hurt so much. That’s the way it should be. It doesn’t mean that you love (*Name*) any less.”
- (j) “Class is almost over and it seems there’s more to talk about. Perhaps we can set aside some time tomorrow.”
- (k) Give information about the Drop-in Center (*dependent on family wants*). “A Drop-in Center where you can go to talk about your feelings is available. The Drop-in Center will be located \_\_\_\_\_ for the next \_\_\_ days. You can use the Drop-in Center whenever you like. The people in the Center want to help you accept this loss. They will listen to your feelings and concerns. They want to try to help you accept this loss.”
- (l) It’s helpful to channel the feelings of the class into appropriate expressions of

concern. It's comforting for students to feel a sense of usefulness. Students may want to:

- Send personal sympathy notes
- Make casseroles or do some baking
- Provide baby-sitting or transportation
- Go to the grocery store
- Mow the lawn
- Plant a tree
- Raise money for a memorial scholarship fund or donations to medical research (not recommended in the case of suicide)
- Offer a brief eulogy during the funeral service or at a school assembly
- Discuss what else they can do to remember
- If appropriate, students could be encouraged to select representatives to visit the family's home. These students could be accompanied by the Family Representative.

### **What Not to Do/Say**

1. Falling apart - It is essential that teachers convey empathy and understanding. It is all right to share emotions but it is vital to remain in emotional control.
2. False Promises - do not tell students things you are not sure of or that are not true. Don't say "Everything will be all right" unless you have some way of knowing that for sure.
3. Making judgments - facial expressions, body language, inferences and questions can communicate judgments. Remain objective. Avoid speculation.
4. Role defection - it is important for teachers to maintain control and not relinquish the leadership role.
5. Withdrawal - remain open to further discussions with students. Students will continue to need opportunities to talk about the incident.
6. Avoid euphemisms such as "passed away", "gone", or "sleep" which may confuse or frighten the child.
7. Avoid the general statement, "If you need anything, tell me..." It is better to say, "Would it help if I ..."
8. Avoid saying "I know just how you feel." It is more empathic to say, "You must be having a lot of feelings right now..."

## APPENDIX H

### EVALUATION OF INTERVENTION PLAN

#### 1. School Staff

- Check in at the end of each day for information sharing and defusing regarding students/faculty/community.
- Possible questions to ask:
  - a. What did we do?
  - b. What still needs to be done?
  - c. Modifications for next day?
  - d. What supports are needed from team?
  - e. Are we keeping other school staff informed?  
i.e. custodians, secretaries, bus drivers

#### 2. Follow-up

Schedule follow-ups at least one month, three months and yearly after the event. Be aware that feelings may be affected by other significant dates such as anniversaries, birthdays and school events significant to the deceased student. Schedule and plan for follow-up on these dates.

#### 3. Evaluation

- After the event and once the intervention plan has been implemented i.e. Day One
- One month after the event, maybe 3 months and the anniversary
- Crisis team designate to coordinate this
- Focus evaluation around the following questions:
  - a) What worked?
  - b) What did not work?
  - c) What would we change another time?

See form.

**APPENDIX I**  
**EVALUATION FORM**

What worked?

What did not work?

What would we change another time?

# Student Services Crisis Intervention Manual



## ***“RESOURCE PACKAGE SUICIDE – SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS”***

## **VULNERABLE STUDENTS**

Immediately following a completed suicide, there may be a number of other students and adults in the school and community who become suicidal themselves. We have listed these categories of people below. This may not be an exhaustive list but it does reflect our experience.

### Potentially Vulnerable Students After Suicide

1. Any students who participated in any way with the completed suicide: helped write the suicide note, provided the means, involved in a suicide pact, etc.
2. Any students who knew of the suicide plans and kept it a secret.
3. Siblings or other relatives, best friends.
4. Any students who were self-appointed therapist to the deceased, who had made it their responsibility to keep the person alive.
5. Any students with a history of suicidal threats and attempts themselves.
6. Any students who identified with the victim's situation.
7. Any students who had reason to feel guilty about things they had said or done to the student prior to the student's death.
8. Other students desperate for any reason who now see suicide as a viable alternative.
9. Any students who observed events which they later learned were indicative of the victim's suicidal intent.
10. Any students who have experienced sudden or traumatic losses in their own life, i.e., death, divorce.

## **SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS**

### **Changes in Behavior**

Normally active people may become withdrawn; cautious individuals may start taking unusual risks. Any significant change may be cause for concern.

### **Problems in School**

A dramatic drop in grades, falling asleep in class, emotional outbursts or other behavior that's uncharacteristic of a particular student may be cause for concern.

### **Themes of Death**

A desire to end one's life may show up in the person's artwork, poetry, essays, listening to heavy metal music, or preoccupation with an occult group or activity.

### **A Previous Suicide Attempt**

A significant number of young people who commit suicide have attempted suicide before.

### **Substance Abuse**

Alcohol and other drug abuse appear to be significantly linked to increased risk taking and suicide attempts among young people.

### **Signs of Depression**

These may include changes in eating and sleeping habits, anxiety, restlessness, fatigue, feelings of hopelessness and guilt and loss of interest in usual activities. Alcohol and drug abuse are common ways for people to medicate to escape from depressive feelings.

### **Verbal Statements**

Comments such as: "You'd be better off without me" or "I wish I were dead" should always be taken seriously.

### **Giving Away Possessions**

Someone who has decided to commit suicide may give away personal possessions: records, favourite articles of clothing, etc.

### **Poor Coping Skills**

The inability to see many options for solving problems and lacking confidence in a brighter future make young people vulnerable.

### **Other**

These may include: physical complaints, frequent accidents, hyperactivity, aggressiveness, sexual promiscuity or prolonged grief after a loss.

## **WHAT TO DO**

- Discuss it openly and frankly
- Show interest and support
- Get professional help

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AFTER A LOSS**

- Writing a eulogy
- Designing a yearbook page commemorating the deceased
- Honoring the deceased by collecting memorabilia for the trophy cabinet
- Writing stories about the victim or the incident
- Drawing pictures of the incident
- Debating controversial issues
- Investigating laws governing similar incidents
- Creating a sculpture
- Creating a class banner in memoriam
- Building a fitness course, a sign for school tea, or a bulletin board in memory
- Discussing ways to cope with traumatic situations
- Discussing the stages of grief
- Conducting a mock trial if laws were broken
- Integrating life experience into curriculum
- Encouraging students to keep a journal of events and of their reactions, especially in an ongoing situation
- Placing a collection box in the class for notes to the family
- Urging students to write the things they wish they could have said to the deceased
- Practicing and composing a song in memory of the deceased
- Discussing alternatives for coping with depression, if suicide is involved
- Analyzing why people take drugs and suggesting ways to help abusers, if substance abuse related
- Writing a reaction paper
- Writing a "where I was when it happened" report
- Discussing historical precedents about issues related to crisis
- Reading to the class (bibliography in the appendix)
- Encouraging mutual support
- Discussing and preparing children for funeral (what to expect, people's reactions, what to do, what to say)
- Directing energy to creative pursuits, physical exercise, or verbal expression when anger rises
- Creating a class story relevant to the issue

## LEADING THE CLASS DISCUSSION IN THE EVENT OF SUICIDE

Most students over eight years of age are old enough to understand the suicidal act. Children and teens often have romantic fantasies about death which we do not want to encourage. The key here is to be truthful, but not to dwell on the details of how the student took his or her own life.

This type of sudden loss brings with it a heavy overlay of guilt, shame, self-doubt and self-blame. Bereavement and mourning can be more intense and extreme.

### *Suicide Risk Factors That Warrant Referral*

Following a suicide or a sudden death, students are more vulnerable to suicide attempts. Reactions that might suggest potential suicidal behaviour at this time of crisis are:

- An excessive grief response
- An extreme change in behavior
- Statements that indicate a student wants to join the deceased
- Previous suicide attempts
- Other recent major losses

If it has been agreed with the family that this was a suicide death, it is appropriate to use that term. If not, the class discussion will need to be conducted as for a sudden death.

### *What You Can Say*

- (a) A very sad thing has happened. (*Name*), a Grade \_\_\_\_\_ student has committed suicide. Details of the death will not be released to protect the privacy of his/her family. This kind of news is hard to accept. You will probably experience many feelings within the next while. You may feel sad, angry, confused, numb, depressed or even guilty. There was nothing any of you could have done to prevent the suicide.
- (b) “You are not responsible. Despite any of the things that you may have done, or not done, you didn’t cause this death.”
- (c) “This kind of death does not need to happen. Studies suggest that at the moment of suicide, individuals think death is the only way out. Although it may not seem possible, feelings and circumstances can change. Many people, when they feel unhappy or unloved, think about hurting themselves. But there are many better options. There are people who can help.” You may want to remind students about the drop-in centre that is currently operating in the school, as well as the ongoing support that is available through the school counsellor or the Family Resource Centre.

- (d) “Some people who commit suicide believe that people will care more about them after they are dead, than when they were alive. This is no the case and when time passes, people ultimately go on with their lives.”
- (e) At the end of the discussion, help students understand the importance for talking to someone when they feel despondent. Elicit suggestions from the class as to whom they would talk to, and ask each individual student to privately think of those people to whom they would turn.

### ***Grief Reactions in Children and Youth***

Grief is a process. It is the work we must do to come to terms with loss. Grief is not a single emotion, but rather it is a constellation of feelings, which can be expressed through a variety of behaviours and thoughts. Because there are many ways to express grief, there are many ways to resolve grief. It should be remembered, then, that children who are grieving may be characterized by a variety of physiological symptoms and psychological and behavioral responses. There are a variety of viewpoints about the development of children’s understanding of death, and how children strive to satisfy their need to create order out of confusion and loss. Essentially, how students deal with loss is determined by their development level. Thus, it is important that teachers provide information appropriate to students’ developmental needs. The most often quoted study about how a child conceptualizes death was conducted in 1948 by Maria Nagy. Her study involved children ages three to ten years old. It should be noted that many students will grieve sporadically and some may even re-grieve the loss at each new stage of development. Also, development stages overlap and are affected by each individual’s unique experiences. Because there are varying theories on the child’s concept of death, it may be helpful to ask the student for his/her own interpretation of what happened in order to deal with the issues at the most appropriate level of understanding.

## SUICIDE - MEMORIAL GUIDELINES

Sudden death (accident or homicide) occurs to the individual, while suicide is a chosen act. There are cases where the difference between the two are not apparent. The following issues need to be carefully considered before the school handles announcements, memorials and media coverage.

There are three guiding principles for institutional postvention policies and procedures:

1. Nothing should be done to glamorize or dramatize suicide.
2. Doing nothing can be as dangerous as doing too much.
3. The students cannot be helped until the faculty is helped (Dume, 245).

There appears to be some correlation between the death of one student and suicide attempts or completed suicides by others, and an even higher correlation when the death was a suicide.

Probably the single greatest objective of any school administrator after a suicide is to avoid doing anything to make the situation worse. There is concern about possible contagion and about administrative responses that might encourage it (Dyck, 1990; Dunne, McIntosh & Dunne-Maxim, 1987). However, the impact of a student suicide simply cannot be ignored. The suicide puts other students at risk, just as a suicide in a family puts other family members at risk. A major goal of postvention policies, therefore, is to minimize the risk of the contagion effect and to process the tragic loss.

If some kind of school memorial service involving a large number of staff and students is customary or otherwise felt to be appropriate, it is important that the limitations and risk of such a gathering be recognized. This is generally not a place for processing feelings i.e. Working through feelings. The group is too large, too unmanageable, and the feelings too variable for most professionals, even those familiar with postvention principles, to safely manage.

Suggestions:

- Students' responses could be channeled into constructive projects to help the living i.e. contributing or donating funds to concerned agencies, such as teenage support services, hospice society, family resource center.
- Careful consideration should be given to planning permanent memorials i.e. Plaques, dedicating athletic events, planting a tree, dedicating a yearbook or establishing a scholarship fund. This has potential for constant invitation to consider suicide.
- Parents wishing to establish an annual scholarship or other permanent memorial for a student who committed suicide could be encouraged too look at other options such as support services, parent/youth mediation, family resource center, hospice, etc.
- Discourage shrines on school property where flowers and mementos are left in memory of the deceased.
- Ask the family what they want the school to do with items left in the students' memory.

## **DEALING WITH GRIEF**

### **DO'S**

- Feel comfortable asking for help. This experience need not be handled alone.
- Develop an environment in which students feel perfectly safe to ask any questions, and completely confident of receiving an honest answer.
- Use correct terminology related to death. Avoid euphemisms - "passed away" etc.
- Listen and empathize. Make sure you hear what is said and not what you think ought to have been said.
- Allow students to express as much grief as they are able or willing to share with you. Make the bereaved person aware that you acknowledge life as difficult and painful right now and that you are prepared to let them talk about death, their feelings, their problems and their guilt.
- Share your own feelings and tell about your own memories of the deceased but don't idealize the deceased.
- Say "I don't know" when you don't know.
- Maintain appropriate discipline, a sense of continuity and care giving; however, recognize that classroom routines and management may be disrupted. This is natural - be flexible.
- Maintain a sympathetic attitude toward the student's age-appropriate responses.
- Organize activities that will allow students to express their grief in a tangible way (e.g. memorials, letters, etc.)

### **DON'TS**

- Don't force a child to participate in a discussion about death.
- Don't link suffering and death with guilt and punishment.
- Don't be judgmental; don't lecture; don't moralize.
- Don't force a "regular day" upon grieving students but at the same time don't allow the class to be totally unstructured. Offer choices of activities.
- Don't say "I know how you feel" unless you truly do.

- Don't force others to look for something positive in the situation or feel you have to always cheer up the person. Don't say "Try to get back to normal - time heals - the show must go on" etc.
- Don't expect "adult responses" from children and teenagers. Their grief responses may seem inappropriate to you e.g. giggling.
- Don't say "Try to get back to normal - time heals - the show must go on", etc.
- Don't avoid discussion because you are uncomfortable or unable to cope with your own feelings about death. You are not alone . . . ask for help if you need it.

## **BEREAVEMENT INFORMATION**

### **I. IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION**

#### **A. Reaction to loss.**

We tend not to talk about death in our society and this does not help.

The range of feelings you may be experiencing and what you can expect to feel in the next few days may run the gamut.

Grief is an expression of love.

There is a wide range of "normal" feelings.

If you examine how you feel at this moment, you may feel relieved that someone is talking about emotions and death.

You may be feeling really angry that you have to sit here and listen to this stuff about loss and death. You may feel insulted that we're even talking about this. These are normal feelings.

Everything from being numb to being very angry and acting out is normal.

You may move away from the numbness to some other feelings.

Anger is an interesting emotion that all of us experience with a death, and the anger may be for any number of reasons.

### **II. DEALING WITH LOSS**

#### **A. Dealing with your own feelings.**

1. What are your reactions to death and loss? Are you able to talk freely? With whom? When? It's important you allow yourself to deal with it. It's okay to cry - you may need to cry.
2. How are you going to look after yourself after experiencing a loss?
  - let yourself talk to someone else
  - write a journal
  - acknowledge your feelings
  - you will need time to talk, reminisce, share treasured moments, laugh at experiences shared with the individual

- Verbalize as much as possible. Music, situations, clothing and pictures may trigger feelings - allow yourself to experience them.
- Be willing to be comforted. Parents and friends can help you through their experiences.
- Take one day (one minute) at a time. Don't focus on the lifetime before you, just getting through the next 24 hours.
- Grieving is normal and healthy. When you are through it, reach out to others who need a friend like you.

## **B. Helping each other deal with loss**

Each of us experience a loss from our own perspective. Those who have had a recent loss may react to this situation in a different manner.

You need to recognize how you feel, and you need to look at how others feel also. It's going to be really important for all of you to support one another. How are you going to care for each other in the next little while?

How can you be of help to others?

- being there
- being supportive
- Model good listening skills. It will encourage others to do the same.
- Sit and listen. Give others an opportunity to use your ear.
- Don't judge. Acknowledge their feelings and allow them to live through their own pain.
- Be sincere. Don't pretend or exaggerate your feelings.
- Any feelings are okay. Sometimes we think others are acting/reacting in inappropriate ways. We must keep in mind that everyone deals with loss in the only way they know how.

## **C. Saying Goodbye**

It's important to say goodbye in a manner that you find appropriate.

### **1. Funeral**

- Public recognition of the deceased, heightens reality of death.
- Funerals make it "OK" to show emotions related to death.
- Signals the end of death, after the funeral people try to get back to normal. However, family and friends often need extra support after the funeral when the support systems tend to disappear.
- Funeral can be a source of strength because friends and relatives gather.
- Viewing the body is one of the hardest but can be a healthy thing to do (you may or may not have a chance to do this).

- you can go to the funeral to support your friends if you didn't know the deceased
2. If you can't go to the funeral, other ways to say goodbye.
- 2 minutes of silence
  - send a card
  - write a letter to family/friends of the deceased
  - write a letter to the deceased, say goodbye, let them know how you feel
  - keep a journal

3. Things to say to people who have had a loss.

In an effort to find the right thing to say, we often at times will say nothing at all to a grieving person. The best things to say are simple, honest and straight forward.

- I'm sorry about your \_\_\_\_\_'s death.
- I've heard about your loss and want you to know that I'm concerned and want to help you.
- I hurt for you.
- I don't know what to say.
- You have my deepest sympathy.

Avoid cliches and easy answers. Don't attempt to minimize the loss. Just your presence, your being there, is more important than anything you could say. Avoid saying things like:

- It will be okay.
- Time heals everything.
- God took her home.
- I know just how you feel.

**D. Getting on with normal life.**

Going through the grief process after a death is a growing experience. Encourage the person to focus on life and not death by involving them in day-to-day activities. Loss generates a lot of energy and if all that energy is turned inward, it can be destructive. Be there for the person several weeks and months after the funeral; this is the time you will be needed and appreciated the most. Later, areas of concern for the person may include: anniversary of death, holidays, birthdays, dating a new person, guilt, and fear of death.

Slowly, eventually, the pain eases and the person enters the stage of acceptance. Living begins to again carry small joys. The loss is still deep, but the sharpest pain is gone.