



Initial Incidence Response Planning Form

1. Verify the facts:

Name _____ (call police, family,....)

2. Draft written informational statement for staff and students.

Name _____

3. Primary contact with the family

Name _____

4. Read informational statement to the staff

Name _____

****Remember that you may need to hold students in class until all students and staff have been informed.**

5. Who will read the informational statement to students:

_____ Classroom Teachers _____ Special Teams

If Special Teams, how many, who?

6. Person to liaison with emergency personnel, law enforcement, etc:

Name _____

7. Personnel to keep staff and students updated with facts (i.e., funeral arrangements).

Name(s) _____

8. Persons to go to hospital or scene of off campus accident:

Names _____



Diagram of Incident
Complete applicable areas

School and District Name _____ Date _____

Principal _____

Counselor _____

Student(s) or staff involved _____

Gender _____ Grade _____ Grade/Subject taught _____

Describe student academically _____

Socially _____

Clubs, Sports, Bands _____

Family _____

Close friends _____

Acquaintances _____

Details of Incident _____

List any significant events in the history of the school, which might affect student or staff reaction to this Incident? _____

Type of support needed? _____



School Emergency: Principal's Check-Off List

1. Immediate Response

- Facts of incident verified (Who, What, When, Where, How).
- Occurred on Campus
- 911 called
- Family members notified.
- Superintendent/Executive Secretary notified.
- District assistance with News Media requested.
- Building Counselor contacted.
- Other possibly affected schools' administrators notified.

- Bus accident:* Arrived at scene. (cell phone)
- Identified and comforted students
- Verified location where injured students transported to.
- Secretaries contacted with information for notifying students' parents.

2. Secondary Response

- Informational meeting for staff arranged (time and place).
- School out of session: Phone tree used to inform staff.
- Staff informational statement drafted.
- Student informational statement (script) drafted. (see *Student Informational Statement check off form and Sample Student Informational Statements*)
- Phone script for secretaries drafted.
- Parent notification statement drafted. (See *Parent Letter Check Off Form*)
- Parent/Community meeting letter drafted. (See *Parent Letter Check Off Form*)
- Regional Crisis Response Team contacted
(Lori Stolee work cell: 360-770-1234)
- Substitutes arranged for classroom coverage as needed.
- Meeting with Building and District Crisis Teams held.
- Plan for day developed.
- Staff informed at staff meeting.
- Students informed in classrooms.
- Identified the students and staff most affected.
- Areas for counseling services designated.

3. End of First Day

- Parent notification statement sent home with students.
- Parent/Community meeting letter sent home with students.
- Teachers asked to personally contact, by phone, parents of at-risk students and invite them to the Parent/Community meeting.
- Plan for next day developed.
- Second staff meeting (staff debriefing) held.
- Crisis Team debriefed.



Morning Staff Meeting

- _____ Informed staff of incident details.
- _____ Staff received copies of statement to be read verbatim to students
- _____ Plan for day.
- _____ Substitute availability
- _____ Student referral process. (see Referring Students At-Risk form *pg.*)
- _____ Stages of Grief Handout (*pg.*)
- _____ Notified staff of available Counseling resources and locations.

End of Day Staff Meeting

- _____ Status update
- _____ Review of day
- _____ Time provided for expression of feelings and mutual support
- _____ Evaluated need for further student counseling support
- _____ Plan for next day



Student Informational Statement

Consider the following:

- _____ When to inform the students: Inform all at the same time.
- _____ How to make the announcement.
 - The classroom is the most effective location.
 - Have the teacher read a prepared statement.
- _____ What will reactions be?
 - Teachers need to allow enough time for students to begin to discuss their feelings.
- _____ What the statement will say:
 - What happened?
 - Who was involved?
 - What is happening now?
 - Resources available.
 - Who to go to for information concerning address, phone numbers, visiting hours, etc.
 - What will happen next?



Meeting with the Victim's Family

- _____ If informing the family of student death, Principal should accompany police to family home.
- _____ If not informing of death, principal and counselor visit family at their home.
 - Review "stages of grief".
- _____ Express sympathy and support.
- _____ On a follow-up visit, return student's belongings.
- _____ If appropriate, provide guidance on
 - relating to their child's close friends who call or come over.
 - working with the media.
- _____ Gain an understanding of the family's wishes and communicate them to staff and students.
- _____ Consider the family's cultural characteristics when planning the visit (e.g., who should be at home when you visit).



Parent Letters

Consider the following guidelines:

_____ **1. Respect people's privacy.**

You may want to consult an attorney before you release information about someone, especially a victim or an alleged perpetrator. Don't assume that information is public just because you're aware of it.

_____ **2. Give out only the facts.**

Don't speculate, don't fuel rumors, and don't make assumptions.

_____ **3. Emphasize control.**

Foster the attitude that you've taken steps to contain the Incident and to protect the students and other members of the school community.

_____ **4. Be sensitive.**

Put yourself in the place of the parents receiving the letter. Some of them may be upset, others may be distrustful, and still others may be resentful. Try to tailor the letter to meet the needs of the parents who read it. Also make the appropriate translations available to non-English-speaking parents.

_____ **5. Prepare for a response.**

Just because you set up a parent/community meeting for a certain date doesn't mean that parents who receive your letter won't call or come down to the school before that date. Think about who will respond to parents and what they will say.



Parent/Community Meeting

- _____ Send home with students, on first day, letter to parent's notifying date and time of meeting.
- _____ Have teachers personally contact, by phone, parents of at-risk students and invite them to the Parent/Community meeting.
- _____ Environment suggestions:
 - Hold meeting at a site not associated with the incident.
 - Use a horseshoe or circle format with caregivers placed around the room.
 - Provide refreshments.
 - Have Kleenex tissues available.
- _____ Agenda suggestions:
 - Purpose statement
 - Opportunity to share feelings and information, but not criticize people or institutions.
 - Set Ground Rules:
 - A pledge of confidentiality.
 - All feelings, except violence, acceptable.
 - People may leave the group as needed, with a caregiver if possible.
 - Present information related to the incident.
 - Principal discusses his/her feelings concerning the incident.
 - Present information about school's response to the incident.
 - If suicide: What school plan is to minimize the risk of more suicides.
 - Present parents information on warning signs of suicide.
 - Provide Stages of Grief handout
 - Provide information on how to respond to at-risk students.
 - Provide information about additional resources for assistance.
- _____ Have designated space and counselors available to meet with parents individually about their children.
- _____ Consider need for interpreter.



When a Staff Meeting is not Possible

- _____ Identify any available staff to assist in notifying the rest of the staff and students.
- _____ Provide them with the appropriate information.
- _____ Keep the students in their classrooms.
- _____ With the help of available staff, meet with the teachers at their classrooms, but away from students.
- _____ Assisting staff may inform students if classroom teacher cannot.
- _____ Assisting staff member needs to remain in classroom through student discussion of the situation and classroom teacher is in control of their classroom.
- _____ All information must be provided during one class period.



Multi-day Incident Response Check List

Day 1—First school day following Incident

- _____ 1. Morning staff meeting: deliver informational statement, review plan for the day.
- _____ 2. All staff monitor reactions of students. Refer agitated or despondent students to counselors.
- _____ 3. Allow students an opportunity to talk about their reactions to the incident at the beginning of each class period. Teachers should resume normal routine as soon as appropriate.
- _____ 4. End of day staff meeting
- _____ 5. Prepare to review all absentee reports for several days following the Incident to determine if any “high risk” students are absent. If so, contact their parents and offer assistance.

Day 2—Second full day following Incident

- _____ 1. Staff meeting: review plan for day, allow time for reflection of reactions.
- _____ 2. Keep Counseling “*crisis*” center open. Contact parents of identified high risk students; offer assessment and information on resources for extended counseling.
- _____ 3. Resume normal class schedule and procedure. Continue to monitor student reactions, i.e., agitation, depression.
- _____ 4. Update students on status of possible injured students/staff and funeral/memorial plans, etc.
- _____ 5. Avoid glorifying or romanticizing the incident.



Day 3—Third School Day Following the Incident

- _____ 1. Keep Counseling “*crisis*” center open. Continue to monitor student reactions, i.e., agitation, depression.
- _____ 2. Contact parents of any high risk students continuing to show signs of stress and conference.
- _____ 3. As follow-up: be available for class presentations on grief stages, depression, suicide warning signs and the permanency of suicide.

Day 4—Fourth School Day Following the Incident

- _____ 1. Keep Counseling “*crisis*” center open.
- _____ 2. Counseling “*crisis*” center to be closed after the fourth day. Inform students. Students with special concerns contact building counselor.
- _____ 3. Encourage staff and students to focus on the future with a positive outlook.
- _____ 4. Continue to watch for changes in student attitudes and behavior.



HOST COUNSELOR(S) RESPONSIBILITIES

- _____ 1. Assess level of impact
- _____ 2. Call for Visiting Counselors/ Regional Crisis Team/ ministers

Name	Phone
<u>Lori Stolee</u>	<u>360-299-4000 or 360-770-1234</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
- Provide Visiting Counselors with:
 - _____ a. Name Tags
 - _____ b. Referral Roster,
 - _____ c. Referral and Intervention Form,
 - _____ d. Suicide Assessment Form
 - _____ e. Note Pads and Pens/Pencils
 - _____ f. Refreshments
 - _____ g. An appointed building/district/ contact person
- _____ 3. Assist with the classroom announcement process
- _____ 4. Provide teachers with “special helps” materials (e.g., writing, drawing supplies, envelopes etc.)
- _____ 5. Designate counseling location(s) for Visiting Counselors
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
- _____ 6. Direct Visiting Counselors to counseling locations
- _____ 7. Direct students to Visiting Counselors
- _____ 8. Provide counseling support to staff-- Consider possibly contacting EAP
- _____ 9. Attend to family members of victim / go to site of Incident / go to hospital
- _____ 10. Collect reports for Visiting Counselors
 - _____ Referral Roster
 - _____ Referral and Intervention Form
 - _____ Suicide Assessment Form
- _____ 11. Follow up on referrals
- _____ 12. Plan and assist with staff debriefing



Incident Response Summary Data Sheet

Date of Incident _____

School _____

District _____

Principal _____

Host Counselor _____

Summary of Incident _____

Number of RCRT Counselors present _____

Names:

Number of Days

Number of Students Referred _____

Number self-referred _____

Referred by others _____

Number of Males _____

Number of Females _____

Number of Students referring multiple times _____

Person submitting this report _____

Title _____

Send one copy to ESD 189 c/o Lori Stolee & Maintain one copy for Building Records

Adapted from ESD 105, Learning Support



Psychological First Aid: The Classroom

Purposes of the classroom meeting:

- Provide facts and dispel rumors
- Share stories; allow grief to occur
- Normalize grief symptoms
- Regain a sense of control
- Screen for referral
- Meeting the counseling needs of some
- Closure—shifting the focus to the future



Suicide Assessment

Mark the Student's responses by placing an X on each continuum.

1. How will you commit suicide?
Vague plan (lower risk).....Specific Plan (higher risk)
2. Where will you commit suicide?
Vague plan (lower risk).....Specific Plan (higher risk)
3. When will you commit suicide?
Vague plan (lower risk).....Specific Plan (higher risk)
4. How much do you want to die?
Little desire (lower risk).....Great Desire (higher risk)
5. How much do you want to live?
Great Desire (lower risk).....Little Desire (higher risk)
6. How often do you think about suicide?
Rarely (lower risk).....Constantly (higher risk)
7. When thinking about suicide, how long do the thoughts stay with you?
Not long (lower risk).....Always (higher risk)
8. Is there anyone or anything to stop you?
Strong Support (lower risk).....Weak Support (higher risk)
9. Have you attempted suicide before?
No attempts (lower risk).....Previous attempts (higher risk)
10. What do you think is the probability you will kill yourself?
Low assessment (lower risk).....High assessment (higher risk)

Student Name _____
 Sex: M F Age _____ Grade _____
 School _____
 Interviewer _____

Date _____
 School Number _____
 Teacher _____

Significant Others in the Student's Life

_____	Relationship _____
_____	Relationship _____
_____	Relationship _____



The Initial Classroom Meeting: Guidelines

The initial meeting to inform students about an Incident should occur in a classroom. The classroom teacher needs to be sensitive to and expect a wide range of student reactions. Refer students to counselors should the need arise.

Suggested Meeting Format:

1. The Announcement

- Based on facts
- Free of judgments
- Told in students' language
- Direct yet discreet to protect people's privacy

2. Presentation of the school's response to the event.

3. Discussion and acceptance of feelings.

4. Sharing of information about the "Stages of Grief" (see handout), if appropriate.

5. Sharing of memories of victim, if appropriate.

6. Sharing of information about helping resources, including counselors.

7. Encouragement of students to continue to discuss feelings, e.g., with parents.

8. In case of suicide:

- Discouragement of suicide being considered glamorous, heroic, or a viable option to solve problems (without a direct attack on the character of the person who committed suicide)
- Discussion of the pain suffered by surviving family members and friends
- Sharing of the warning signs of suicide

9. Discouragement of blame while facts are not yet known.

10. Reassurance that students are safe.



General Guidelines for Communicating with Students

1. Be open and honest; request help from counselor if you're uncomfortable and reluctant to participate in discussions.
2. Show students that you take everyone's feeling seriously and wish to help them.
3. Listen to students; avoid challenging their feelings or analyzing motives.
4. Use phrases like "I'm sorry this happened," "It's sad," or "I feel lots of different emotions right now,". Avoid phrases like "I understand" or "I know how you feel," which may not be perceived as genuine.
5. Have translators available for students, as appropriate.

Specific Guidelines for Communicating with Students

1. **Reach out to students; give them an opportunity to talk.**
 - Questions that truly ask for information, seek clarification or reach out for feelings are the most effective.
 - a. Asking "What's wrong?" may be met with a shrug and a muttered "Nothing". Do not give up—Teenagers have to be convinced that someone is really concerned before they'll talk about their feelings.
 - b. Interested questions are helpful, but statements that begin "Why didn't you.....?" are not helpful because they steer the conversation toward blame and shut down communication.
2. **Help students identify their feelings.**
 - Honesty applies particularly to feelings. You risk loss of student trust if your actions do not match your stated feelings.
 - Communication is a two-way street. Self-disclosure builds trust with students if it is not overdone. Students are reluctant to discuss failures and feelings with adults that seem to have never experienced them.
 - It is often difficult to open up and discuss your feelings, e.g.:
 - a. "I feel anxious when I see that you're unhappy and I don't know why."
 - b. "Talking about suicide makes me feel uncomfortable."
 - c. "I remember when I thought my whole world had collapsed and I believed that if I told my father, he'd get angry with me."

Adapted from Quick Response: A Step-by-Step Guide to Crisis Management for Principals and Counselors



3. Find out students' intentions.

- Be alert for words and phrases that suggest suicidal intent, e.g.,
 “I'd rather die than go back to school.”
 “I can't take it anymore!”
 “Everybody would be better off if I wasn't around.”
- The way to find out if a student is suicidal is to ask directly. Asking will not put the idea in anyone's head. In fact not talking about suicidal feelings robs a young person of the chance to reach out and get help.
- If the answer to “Are you thinking about suicide?” is even a tentative “yes” staff members should get the student to a counselor.

4. Avoid labeling, judging, criticizing, or giving unsolicited advice.

- Once a student starts talking, listen without judging or giving advice
- Listen carefully for words and the feelings behind the words. In doing so you communicate two critical messages:
 - a. You take the students problems seriously
 - b. You care enough to help

5. Identify your resources in advance so you can act quickly if needed.

- If the situation is volatile, bring other people into the situation as fast as possible: the school counselor, members of the family, clergy, or the police.



Referral Guidelines for Students At-Risk

Teachers:

- Refer to counselors any students close the victim.
- Refer to counselors any students who demonstrate signs of depression or suicide.

Be alert for words and phrases that suggest suicidal intent, e.g.,

“I’d rather die than go back to school.”

“I can’t take it anymore!”

“Everybody would be better off if I wasn’t around.”

The way to find out if a student is suicidal is to ask directly. Asking will not put the idea in anyone’s head. In fact, not talking about suicidal feelings robs a young person of the chance to reach out and get help. *If the answer is even a tentative “yes”, refer the student.*

- Send to counselors the names of students who are under significant stress but who indicate they don’t want help.
- Maintain a list of students who at-risk and turn a copy in to the counselors.
- Maintain a list of students who leave class for counseling.
- Let counselors or administrators know about any relevant conversations you overhear.



Crisis Referral and Intervention Form

Date of Referral _____ Time: from _____ to _____

Person Recording Information _____

Occupation/Position _____

Person Being Seen _____

Sex: M F Age _____ Grade _____ School Number _____

School _____ Teacher _____

Referred by _____ Relationship _____

Specific Reason(s) for Referral _____

Significant Others in the Person's Life:

_____ Relationship _____

_____ Relationship _____

_____ Relationship _____

Summary and Concerns:

Follow-up? _____

Referred to _____ On date _____



HALL PASS

Date _____

Student Name _____

Teacher or Room _____

Time to Counselor _____

Teacher's Signature _____

Time Returned to Class _____

Counselor Signature _____

HALL PASS

Date _____

Student Name _____

Teacher or Room _____

Time to Counselor _____

Teacher's Signature _____

Time Returned to Class _____

Counselor Signature _____

HALL PASS

Date _____

Student Name _____

Teacher or Room _____

Time to Counselor _____

Teacher's Signature _____

Time Returned to Class _____

Counselor Signature _____

HALL PASS

Date _____

Student Name _____

Teacher or Room _____

Time to Counselor _____

Teacher's Signature _____

Time Returned to Class _____

Counselor Signature _____



NO HARM CONTRACT

I, _____, agree to the following conditions:

I will not harm myself.

I will ask for help.

Call the Care Crisis Line: 1-800-584-3578

This contract begins _____ and ends _____.

Student Signature

Counselor Signature



Sample: Life Contract

I, _____, will not make **any** attempt to hurt myself during the next ____ days. Further, I agree to do the following, should I desire to break this contract:

1. If I'm at school, I'll contact _____ at _____ or call _____ at _____ to talk about my intentions.

2. If I'm not at school, I'll contact _____ at _____ or call _____ at _____ to talk about my intentions.

3. Whomever I decide to talk to, under no circumstances will I make any final decision until I have discussed my intentions face-to-face with my counselor or an adult who will attempt to help.

I, _____, agree to the following:

1. Whenever _____ comes to see me in my office to discuss suicide, I will make every effort to make the situation my top priority.

2. I will do everything I can to prevent _____
From following through with any plan to commit suicide.

This contract is valid beginning immediately and is effective until _____

Student's Signature

Date

Counselor's Signature

Date



Sample Student Informational Statement: Elementary

I want to share with you information that has affected our entire school. Last night about 7:30 p.m., Larry Johnson, one of our 4th grade students and one of your classmates, was found dead in his bedroom. His parents confirmed that Larry chose to take his own life. Some of you may have already heard that something happened to Larry. I want you to know the facts of what happened.

I am shocked and feeling very sad just like you may be feeling. These feelings are normal. Today we have school counselors in our building that will talk to you alone if you would like. Be sure to ask you teacher if you want to talk to a counselor alone. Ms. Jones, our school counselor, will join our class in about 10 minutes and we will have a chance to talk about what happened.

At anytime during the day, after our classroom talk, if you want to talk about this with classmates, I would like you to ask either the school counselor or a teacher to be with you and your friends.



Sample Student Informational Statement: Secondary

I want to share with you information that has affected our school. Last night about 7:30 p.m., Larry Johnson, one of our 10th grade students and one of your classmates, was found dead in his bedroom. His parents confirmed that Larry chose to take his own life **by self-inflicted gunshot wound**. Some of you may have already heard that something happened to Larry. I want you to know the facts of what happened.

The entire school community is shocked and saddened about what happened. Right now some of you are feeling very sad and confused and angry. This is normal. All of us will have a chance to talk about our thoughts and feelings in a few minutes when our school counselor joins our classroom. There will be a team of visiting counselors available throughout the school day if you would like to talk with someone alone or with a small group of classmates.

We will continue to hold classes throughout the day in a normal fashion. Teachers will be able to suspend normal instruction if the class feels a need to talk about the situation.

Right now I do not know about any funeral or memorial services that has been arranged by the family. When that information becomes available we will share that with you. You will be allowed to attend any off campus services with your parent's permission.

Larry's family wishes not to have any contact from people outside the family for the time being. If you want to express your condolences to Larry's family, you can do so by forwarding a card or letter to our principal, Mr. Smith, who has contact with the family.



Issues You May Encounter In The Classroom When Someone's Impacted By Trauma Or Death

AGES 3-6

- Student may think he/she caused death by thinking bad thought
- Experience grief in brief heavy outburst
- Youth may think the dead person will awaken and return
- May fear loss and abandonment by close friends / family members

AGES 6-9

- May resort to superstitions
- Begin to realize others close to them will die
- May anticipate grief by associating death to someone close that has a non-threatening illness
- May become fascinated by death & destruction
- Some aspects of death may seem funny

AGES 9-12

- Develop a more realistic sense of death and become unrealistically fearful
- Feel death is sudden and unpredictable
- Fear of what happens after death
- Fear that others close to them may die

ADOLESCENCE

- Begins to develop philosophical view of death
- May idealize the deceased—close friend, parent, famous rock star
- May regress developmentally—suspend the process of “breaking away” from parents and cling to them for support. Causes a great deal of angst.
- Fear that others close to them may die



Stages of Grief

The psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, in her book *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1969), developed a set of five stages commonly seen in dying patients. The same five stages conceivably characterize students trying to come to grips with a loss, e.g., the death of a friend. Although adolescents don't necessarily manifest the characteristics of each of these stages, and they don't necessarily progress from one stage to the next in the following sequence, some of their behaviors might be more understandable seen in this context.

Stage 1: Denial

("This can't be happening.")

Denial acts as a buffer. It gives the person time to regroup, take stock, and eventually mobilize other defenses.

Stage 2: Anger

("I hate her for doing that.")

Anger allows the full force of emotions to be felt by the person. It may be directed, e.g., by railing at the person who died, or diffused, e.g., by acting belligerent with everyone.

Stage 3: Bargaining

("If I become a better person, maybe he'll get better.")

Bargaining is an attempt to postpone something that will inevitably happen or even to negate something that already happened.

Stage 4: Depression

("What's the use of even trying anymore?")

Depression is the preparation for acceptance. It is the initial realization of what will happen or already has happened, and it brings with it the full sadness of reality.

Stage 5: Acceptance

("What's done is done. I have to get on with my life now.")

Acceptance is the beginning of the end of the struggle with a death or other loss. It is a demarcation point for reconciling with the past and progressing into the future.



The Grieving Elementary School Student

Common Behaviors to Expect

- Regression to earlier behaviors
- Fighting, anger
- Difficulty in paying attention and concentrating
- Daydreaming
- Not completing homework or assignments
- Sleepiness
- Withdrawal

How to Help

- Answer questions as clearly and accurately as possible
- Provide art, journal, music, and dance activities
- Make time for physical outlets, sports, games, walks, etc.
- Help the student identify and use support systems
- Work with the student around academic workload
- Encourage the student to take a break and have some alone time
- Allow for expression of feelings and emotions
- Maintain routines and structure but allow for flexibility
- Give the student choices whenever possible
- Let the student know you care and are thinking about her
- Assign the student a buddy who can work with her
- Create a “safe space” that a student can go to when needed

Common Mistakes: Words and Action to Avoid

The following words and actions can be harmful to children and teens

- **DO NOT** suggest that the student has grieved long enough.
- **DO NOT** indicate that the student should get over it and move on.
- **DO NOT** expect the student to complete all assignments on a timely basis.
- **DO NOT** act as if nothing has happened.
- **DO NOT** say things like:
 - “It could be worse, you still have one brother.”
 - ”I know how you feel”
 - You’ll be stronger because of this.”



The Grieving Middle School Student

Common Behaviors to Expect

- Argumentative
- Withdrawal, sullenness
- Anger, fighting
- Sleepiness
- Lack of concentration and attentiveness
- Risk-taking behaviors [drugs, sexual acting out, stealing]
- Unpredictable ups and downs or moodiness
- Erratic, inconsistent reactions

How to Help

- Expect and accept mood swings
- Provide a supportive environment where the student can share, when needed
- Anticipate increased physical concerns including illness and body aches and pains
- Allow the student to choose with whom and how she gets support
- Encourage participation in a support group
- Allow flexibility in completing school work

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- **DO NOT** act as if nothing has happened.
- **DO NOT** say things like:
 - “It could be worse, you still have one brother.”
 - ”I know how you feel”
 - You’ll be stronger because of this.”



The Grieving High School Student

Common Behaviors to Expect

- Withdrawal from parents and other adults
- Angry outbursts
- Increased risk-taking behaviors [substances, reckless driving, sexual behaviors]
- Pushing the limits of rules
- Lack of concentration; inability to focus
- Hanging out with a small group of friends
- Sad face, evidence of crying
- Sleepiness, exhaustion

How to Help

- Allow for regression and dependency
- Encourage expression of feeling such as sorrow, anger, guilt, regret
- Understand and allow for variation in maturity level
- Answer questions honestly and provide factual information
- Model appropriate responses, showing the students your own grief
- Avoid power struggles and allow choices
- Help students understand and resolve feelings of helplessness
- Assist students with plans for completion of assignments
- Allow for some flexibility in assignments, e.g., be willing to adapt assignments to topics relevant to the student's current experience

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- **DO NOT** say things like:
 - “It could be worse, you still have one brother.”
 - ”I know how you feel”
 - You’ll be stronger because of this.”

Taken from “Helping the Grieving Student: A guide for Teachers” The Dougy Center for Grieving Children



Fact Sheet: Helping Children Cope with Trauma

After any disaster, children are most afraid that the event will recur, that they or someone they love will be hurt or killed, that they may be separated from those they love and be left alone.

Here are ways that you can help children cope with trauma:

- Allow children to express their feelings about what has happened and share your feelings with them.
- Reassure children that they are safe and that they are loved.
- Be honest with children about what has occurred and provide facts about what happened. Children usually know when something is being sugar-coated.
- Help children return to as normal a routine as possible.
- Spend extra time with you child, especially doing something fun or relaxing for both of you.
- Remember the importance of touch. A hug can reassure children that they are loved.
- Review family safety procedures so children will feel prepared the next time an emergency situation occurs.
- Talk with teachers, baby-sitters, daycare providers and others who may be with children so they understand how the child has been affected.
- Watch for signs of repetitive play in which children re-enact all or part of the disaster.
- Praise and recognize responsible behavior and reassure children that their feelings are normal in response to an abnormal situation.



Age-Specific Interventions for Children in Disasters

Elementary School-Aged Children

Draw a picture

Tell a story
or loss

Books on disaster or loss

Create a game about a disaster

Create a play about a disaster

School study projects

Discuss disaster safety for self and

Preadolescents and Adolescents

Books on disaster and loss

Write stories, essays on the disaster

Write letters to the family

Create a play about the loss

Plan a memorial

Create a school health project

Participate in a community service

Family project

Discuss strategies for making the
school and community safer



Activities for Students

Participating in Classroom or Panel Discussions

Discussions can allow students to express their emotions about a traumatic event if the environment is safe. A safe environment means acceptance, respect, and no put-downs.

Panelists might include people who were directly involved in the Incident, authorities who participated in the response to the Incident, and other helping resources.

Possible Discussion Questions:

1. What happened?
 - Who was involved?
 - When did it happen?
 - Where did it happen?
2. Why do you think it happened?
3. How did you find out?
 - Where were you?
 - Who were you with?
 - When was it?
 - How did you feel?
 - What did you say?
 - What did you do?

In situations of building destruction:

4. *How did you feel when you saw the school after it happened?*
5. *What did you lose?*
6. *What if it happens again?*
7. What are you worried about now?
8. What can be done to help you?



One of the many benefits of such discussions is that students may find that the thoughts and feelings they assumed were theirs alone are actually shared by others. The critical thing to remember in a discussion is to control it so that students can express themselves but at the same time don't aggravate the situation. Having a counselor on hand is a good idea during a discussion that has the potential to bring out deep emotions.

Keeping Journals

For those students who can't express their feelings orally, or who don't want to share their feelings, keeping a journal is ideal. Not only does it give students an opportunity to articulate their emotions, but it also allows them to work through their emotions and, over time see how their emotions have evolved.

Compiling Scrapbooks

A scrapbook is a good way to preserve memories and as such might be a good strategy if the Incident was significant but not necessarily personally devastating. For example, if over a weekend, part of the school was damaged in a hurricane, students might be tremendously inconvenienced yet not traumatized. They might like to collect newspaper articles, photographs, and even videotapes of news reports so they can look back on the Incident year from when it took place.

Helping other Students

Getting students to help other students is one of the best ways to distract them and thus let time blunt the acuity of their emotions. By concentrating on others' situations, students can feel useful, see themselves as valuable, and avoid becoming depressed. This strategy also bonds the school community more tightly and helps to develop empathy among all students. Usually, the more specific tasks you can assign, the more useful students will feel, because they'll have something before them with a beginning and an end—a measure of their accomplishments.



Creating and Performing Skits

Skits are useful in several ways:

- They may clarify what happened in an Incident
- They may romanticize someone's gallant efforts
- They may bring forth something sad or fearful so that students can confront it
- They may lighten the mood by portraying as humorous something previously seen as serious.

As with any "springboard" strategy, you need to be prepared for the release of feelings such skits may engender.

Drawing

Students may want to reproduce an event within the Incident, e.g., the perpetrator of a crime handcuffed and bowed. They might want to symbolize the anger they felt when they heard that a classmate was raped. Or they might want to draw something totally unrelated to the Incident—a springtime idyll—as a way of taking their minds off the heaviness of the Incident. Remember not to judge the quality of the artwork; it is the expression that's important, not the execution.



Here is a Picture of What This is Like



When Someone Dies.....



Use these ideas for cards you could have in classrooms or in the SafeRoom. After messages are screened (to be sure it is appropriate), they could be compiled onto a bulletin board or made into a big banner that could be given later to the family. Fun these on cardstock if you can.

What I Appreciated Most About Jenny Was...

My Favorite Memory of Joey.....



If I Could Make a Mask of Death, Here's How It would Look:



Write a Eulogy

Goal: Express feelings and positive thoughts about deceased.

Objectives: To start students talking so that grief response can begin in a healthy way.

Materials: Paper, pens markers

1. Have students break into teams of four.
2. Invite each team to write a eulogy regarding he deceased. Instruct them to write it in a way that reflects the person in a positive light.
3. Ask each group to appoint a recorder to write the eulogy and someone that would be willing to share it with the rest of the class.
4. Be sure to let students know that reading/sharing the eulogy is optional. If the Group would like to have it read, yet team members are not comfortable reading it, offer to read it for them.
5. Invite discussion



Stress Reducers

Goal: Increase coping skills

Objective: Create positive ways to reduce stress given circumstances of the crisis and increase coping skills

Materials: Pens, pencils, tablets, flipcharts, markers

- Conduct general discussion concerning stress and how crisis can increase stress levels.
- Recognize that too much stress can cause people to behave abnormally.
 1. Have students break into teams of 4-6. Distribute materials.
 2. Have students use flipchart paper, instruct them to draw a line down the middle of the paper. In the left hand column list ways stress has impacted them during the crisis.
 3. In the right hand column, brainstorm ways to reduce or manage stress and increase way to cope with the crisis.
 4. Supervise the students by making sure that stress activities they list are healthy and appropriate.
 5. After all of the ideas have been listed have the groups share them with the remainder of the class.
 6. Have each group choose one activity listed on the flip chart paper to conduct during class throughout the next week. Have students talk about positive coping skills.
 7. Allow time during class for students to conduct and participate in activities they have designed.



Notes to the Family

Goal: Express thoughts and good wishes

Objective: Convey message to the family of the deceased

Materials: General art supplies, markers, pens, tablets

- the
1. Invite students that want to write letters, poetry, or draw pictures to send to the family of the deceased, to do so.
 2. Remind students this is a voluntary exercise.
 3. Inform students this is a time to express thoughts and feelings to the family members of the deceased.
 4. Encourage students to recall positive events with the deceased.
 5. Inform students you will screen each paper or picture for appropriateness, prior to forwarding them to the family.



Drawing Pictures

Goal: Express feelings

Objectives: to have students that are not comfortable talking about the incident begin to express themselves.

Materials: General art supplies

1. Instruct students to draw their recollection of the incident, situation and People involved.
2. Invite each student to share their drawing.



The Paper Bag

Goal: Normalize feelings

Objective: To have students be able to articulate and express feelings

Materials: 3 x 5 cards or small pieces of paper
Pens/markers
Paper bags

Activity:

1. Have students write one feeling down on the card/paper
 2. Teacher will walk around the room; students will put the card/paper the bag
 2. After all cards/paper have been collected, the teacher can pull one card at a time from the bag and share the feeling with the class
- Students will be able to share feelings and not have to be personally identified. Students will realize that others have the same or similar feelings.
 - Invite discussion



Warning Signs of Suicide: Descriptive

Although a single, traumatic event can trigger a sudden suicide without warning, suicide is most often the final response to a slow erosion of self-value and positive connections to life.

Young people who are contemplating suicide almost always give advance signals.

Students' expressions of suicide should always be taken very seriously; it is better to overreact than to under-react.

The Key: Recognizing and responding to the following warning signs by referring the student to a counselor.

A Recent Suicide in the Family

A recent suicide in the family, school, or community increases the suicide risk of survivors enormously for several reasons: unbearable depression or guilt over the loss of a loved one, a fear of mental illness, or a notion that suicide presents as option—a way out of an unwelcome and painfully unhappy situation.

Suicide Threats

Most teenagers give clues to their suicidal thoughts, such as making direct statements about their intentions or less direct comments such as “I might as well be dead” or “My family and friends would be better off without me.” Sometimes warnings take the form of a preoccupation with death, such as when a friend writes death poems or fills sheets of paper with sad drawings. Suicide threats or hints should always be taken seriously; they are a very real sign of danger.

Recent Losses

Significant losses, major disappointments, and humiliation are misfortunes that can be devastating to some young people. Examples of such losses are death or divorce of parents, breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend, losing a close friend or friendship, being cut from an athletic team, receiving bad grades, or failing to achieve a goal.

Traumatic Events

In some instances, a crisis occurs that can plunge a friend into instant despair and a suicidal act with no warning other than the event itself. These crises usually involve a sudden loss of self-esteem and a feeling that it is impossible to face the next day.



Sudden Changes in School Behavior

Other warning signs occur in or just outside the classroom:

- Abrupt changes in attendance
- Dwindling academic performance
- Sudden failure to complete assignments
- Lack of interest and withdrawal
- Changed relationships with classmates
- Increased irritability or aggressiveness
- Despair
- Uncontrolled emotional outbursts

Sudden Changes in Personality or Attitude

The shy student who suddenly becomes a thrill-seeker or the outgoing person who becomes withdrawn, unfriendly, or uninterested may be giving signals that something is seriously wrong. Other changes include the classic signs of depression: sleep disturbances, lack of interest in romance or sex, loss of appetite, loss of weight, neglect of schoolwork, and long periods of solitude.

Sudden Changes in Appearance

Students who suddenly no longer care about their appearance and cleanliness may be signaling that they have given up caring about life. Increased appetite and weight gain are additional signals.

Heavy Use of Alcohol or Other Drugs

Heavy users of alcohol and/or other drugs are likely to be depressed student who are seeking relief from their pain. At first, these chemicals may help relieve the depression and suicidal thinking. Eventually, however, they stop working and contribute to a greater depression and added feelings of worthlessness. In addition, heavy drinking or use of other drugs can lead to reckless, impulsive behaviors such as careless driving at high speeds.

Making Final Arrangements

Giving away prized personal belongings such as a music collection can be particularly serious sign. Since almost all teenagers occasionally engage in rapid mood swings, it's sometimes difficult to tell the difference between normal teenage behaviors and those that indicate that something is seriously wrong. If you notice a pattern of several warning signs and if they last longer than usual, you should take action. **If you're in any doubt at all, refer the situation to a professional counselor.**



Warning Signs for Potential Suicide

- previous attempts (single biggest indicator of a completed suicide to come)
- giving clues (90% of kids who suicide give many clues)
- make poor choices about safety (no seat belts, no condoms)
- hospitalized (especially for consequence of living dangerously, for depression or other mental health issues)
- long-term depression
- pre-occupation with death
- listening to depressive or violent music
- writes of these themes
- frequent crying spells
- withdrawn behaviors
- change in peer group
- rebellious
- increase in acting out behaviors
- loss of interest in usual activities
- talk about death
- may have experienced many losses within a short time
- hopeless/powerless/out of control language
- recent suicide of another
- increased physical symptoms
- giving away belongings
- no hope for future, no plans
- previous attempts (single biggest indicator of a completed suicide to come)
- giving clues (90% of kids who suicide give many clues)
- make poor choices about safety (no seat belts, no condoms)
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Adapted from the CRISIS MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE 2003



Often these kids feel both exceptional and isolated.

Messages they may give to others:

"I can't go on."

"I hate my life."

"I'm tired."

"I'm bored."

"You'll regret it when I'm gone."

"I have to do this on my own."

"You won't be seeing me around anymore."

"I'm going to kill myself."

"I wish I could just go to sleep and never wake up."

"I feel like I could just kill myself."

MYTHS and TRUTHS

Myth -People who talk about suicide want attention and won't do it.

Truth -*Most people who commit suicide have made comments or gestures that are indicators of their plan/thoughts.*

Myth - Most suicides occur late at night.

Truth -*They occur at all times, but are more frequent in late afternoon and early evening, more in fall and winter.*

Myth -Once their mind is made up, they can't be stopped.

Truth -*Usually they want a way out of their pain. Interventions (professional) can most often prevent an adolescent suicide.*

Myth -After an attempt, adolescents won't try again.

Truth -*Highest single predictor of a suicide is a past attempt.*

Truth -*Highest time of repeat is at one-year anniversary or within two years, triggered by additional pressures/specific event.*

Truth -*Time of greatest risk is two weeks after a successful intervention.*

Myth -Talking about suicide will put the idea into their minds.

Truth -*Bringing up the topic indicates your willingness to talk and creates a sense of safety.*

Truth -*Often it brings relief that someone has noticed their plight.*

Myth -Suicide is an inherited problem.

Truth -*No, but modeling that behavior increases risk (a parent suicide increases risk that children will).*



SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT SUICIDE

- No one person or event can cause a suicide, and no one person can prevent one.
- The tendency to blame is related to an incredible need to understand **why**. Although understandable, blame is not helpful to yourself or others.
- Suicide is more about thinking errors than emotions. Remember that traditional counseling and parenting techniques won't work. Get trained, expert help.
- Being direct in confronting/talking about suicide is effective. Hinting, probing, advising, ignoring and judging aren't.
- Suicide is brought on by multi-dimensional problems over time. The recovery process is lengthy and involves whole families and outside support systems.
- Anger, guilt and feeling terribly hurt are common reactions to suicide. Recovery is often helped by joining with others who have also experienced a suicide.
- Children in families with suicides need extra special support and are often "forgotten grievers". Outside support is helpful -- families can rarely grieve and support their children enough at the same time.
- Listen to people in grief/pain. Don't advise, don't say you understand, don't give platitudes. Just be willing to listen.
- Bring up the subject with family members. Helpful phrases might be, "I'm feeling so badly for you I just don't know what to say." "I'm so sorry this happened to you." "What is the most painful part?" "What could I do for you right now?"

If you are concerned that someone is at immediate risk of suicide, call mental health, your local hospital or 911 to get support. Don't try to handle it alone!

High risk groups:

- anyone with multiple losses (divorce, death, accident, other)
- Native Americans
- gays/lesbians, youth in sexual identity crisis
- history of suicide in the family
- past suicide attempt (***this is the biggest single indicator***)



Debriefing the Debriefers

School _____ Date _____ And/Or Name _____

1. What worked/what went well:

2. Lessons Learned (what didn't go so well that we want to change) and Ah-Ha(s)?

3. Given that you cannot change what has happened, what is the most difficult thing for your personnel? Or what is the most difficult thing about this Incident?

4. Share one thing you are going to do to take care of yourself.
