

Sonoma County
School Crisis Response & Recovery

Go-To Guide

Crisis Intervention Checklist,
Forms, Handouts & Activities
for an immediate crisis

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The Sonoma County School Crisis Response & Recovery Go-To Guide, Resource Guide and other resources are available at www.scoe.org/SOS

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The Go To Guide

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Crisis Intervention Checklist

(Please refer to the Resource Guide and to this Go To Guide for detailed information)

1. Gather the Facts

- Notify the principal/designee
- Principal contacts family or police/fire to verify information
- Clarify information to be shared with school site

2. Determine Level of Response

- Principal meets with Crisis Intervention Team Leader
- Evaluate problem/event and determine degree of impact on school
- Assemble the Crisis Intervention Team
- Determine if additional support is needed
- Request assistance from District, Regional and/or County Crisis Teams
- Use Sonoma County Crisis Response System of Support if needed
- Request support from State and National resources as needed
- Inform district officials of crisis and level of response
- Update level of response as needed

3. Manage the Flow of Information

- Review facts and determine what information is to be shared with:
 - Faculty
 - Students
 - Parents/Community
 - Media
- Determine how the information is to be shared with staff/students in order to control rumors and provide factual information
 - Initiate phone tree to staff
 - Schedule faculty meeting ASAP
 - Written memo/fact sheet delivered to classrooms
 - In-person memo/fact sheet delivered to classrooms by admin/counseling staff
 - Loudspeaker/intercom during class time not recommended (except in lock down situations)
 - Assemblies are not recommended
 - Use automated phone calling system as a secondary method

4. Manage the Logistics

Identify the Location of Services

Large Scale Disaster

- Assemble crisis intervention operations near the first aid station
- Mental Health Response
- Determine a central location for counseling services (library, multi-use room)
- Select rooms for individual interviews
- Obtain supplies (letter and poster/butcher paper, markers, paint, food, water, tissues)
- Establish a sign-in and message center for support service personnel on campus
- Prepare sign-in sheets and documents to record students needing additional support services

5. Create a Referral Process

- Provide a referral process including procedures for self-referral
- Clarify procedures for student passes (discourage any wandering/loitering outside of classrooms and counseling locations)

6. Provide Interventions

During the crisis

- Follow the “immediate assessment” guidelines
- Refer for first aid and/or psychological first aid as needed

Following the crisis

- Conduct psychological triage to identify high-risk students/staff
- Initiate appropriate interventions
 - Individual interviews (highest risk)
 - Psychological First Aid - *Small Group Counseling* (medium risk)
 - Psychological Education Groups - *Classroom Discussions* (all, as willing)
 - Classroom activities, presentations
 - Support groups (as needed)
 - Parent meetings (as needed)
 - Staff meetings (encourage participation by all)
 - Support to staff (as needed)
 - Referrals to community agencies (as needed)
- Encourage crisis responders to take breaks and maintain self-care

7. Document

- Maintain a log of
 - All students receiving support services
 - All students needing additional services
 - Crisis responders

8. Releasing and Debriefing Team

- Review process, status of referred students
- Prioritize needs
- Plan follow-up actions
- Provide support to team members
- Provide support to staff
- Revise the plan as needed

9. Consider the Recovery

- Care for the caregiver
- Attend to trigger events/anniversaries
- Revise the plan as needed

Student Sign-in

PLEASE PRINT

	Date	Name	Grade
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			
22			
23			
24			
25			

Crisis Screening Interview

Interviewer _____ Date _____

Note identified problem:

Is the student seeking help? Yes No

If not, what were the circumstances that brought the student to the interview?

Student's Name _____ Age _____ Birth date _____

Sex: M F Grade _____ Current class/Period _____

Ethnicity _____ Primary Language _____

We are concerned about how things are going for you. Our talk today will help us to discuss what's going O.K. and what's not going so well. If you want me to keep what we talk about confidential, I will do so -- except for those things that I need to discuss with others in order to help you.

In answering, please provide as much details as you can. At times, I will ask you to tell me a bit more about your thoughts and feelings.

1. Where were you when the event occurred? (Directly at the site? nearby? out of the area?)
2. What did you see or hear about what happened?
3. How are you feeling now?
4. How well do you know those who were involved?
5. Has anything like this happened to you or any of your family before?
6. How do you think this will affect you in the days to come? (How will your life be different now?)
7. How do you think this will affect your family in the days to come?
8. What bothers you the most about what happened?
9. Do you think anyone could have done something to prevent it? Yes No
Who?

10. Thinking back on what happened,				
	not at all	a little	more than a little	very
How angry do you feel about it?	1	2	3	4
How sad do you feel about it?	1	2	3	4
How guilty do you feel about it?	1	2	3	4
How scared do you feel?	1	2	3	4

11. What changes have there been in your life or routine because of what happened?

12. What new problems have you experienced since the event?

13. What is your most pressing problem currently?

14. Do you think someone should be punished for what happened? Yes No
Who?

15. Is this a matter of getting even or seeking revenge? Yes No
Who should do the punishing?

16. What other information do you want regarding what happened?

17. Do you think it would help you to talk to someone about how you
feel about what happened? Yes No
Who? How soon?

Is this something we should talk about now? Yes No
What is it?

18. What do you usually do when you need help with a personal problem?

19. Which friends and who at home can you talk to about this?

20. What are you going to do when you leave school today?

If you are uncertain, let's talk about what you should do.

Center for Mental Health in the Schools at UCLA. (2004). A resource aid packet on responding to a crisis at a school. Los Angeles, CA: Author.
Revised May 2004. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

Suicide Assessment and Intervention Form
(Confidential Information)

Referral Date: _____ Time _____

Name: _____ DOB: _____ Gender: M F

School _____ Grade: _____ Teacher _____

Student referred by: _____ Relationship to Student _____

Crisis Team Designated Reporter: _____

Additional Crisis Intervention Team Member _____

Description of Suicidal Threat (verbal--direct or indirect, drawings, writing) – Be specific:

Assessment (Determine Level of Risk):

Question 1-Have you thought about suicide before?

Question 2-Have you ever tried to hurt yourself before?

Question 3- Do you have a plan to hurt yourself today? Have you thought of how you might do it?

Evaluate Risk:

Low Risk: Ideation (prior thoughts of suicide) _____

Moderate Risk: Previous suicidal behaviors (previous attempts, hospitalizations) _____

High Risk: Current plan/method/access (student identifies that s/he plans on hurting her/himself now and has a defined plan and access to weapon, pills, bridge etc.) _____

If the student is deemed to be either a moderate or high risk, under no circumstances should they be allowed to take the bus home. Students judged either moderate or high risk should be released only to parents (see exceptions), law enforcement, or psychological emergency team members.

Immediate Action Plan (please initial by each activity)

- 1) Notify School Administrator _____ (time)
- 2) Contact Parents: _____ (time/team member)

Question 1-Is the parent available? _____

Question 2-Is the parent cooperative? _____

Question 3-Does the parent have information that will help the team to assess the risk?

Question 4-What mental health/health insurance does the family have?

- 3) Determine if the student is safe to go home:
Low risk? If student is moderate or high risk, no buses!

High risk/parent available and cooperative

- a) Appropriate community referral provided (e.g. Kaiser, PES) _____
- b) With parental approval, agency contacted prior to arrival ___yes ___no
- c) Student safe to transport via parent ___yes ___no
- d) Law enforcement contacted for transport if student unsafe ___yes ___no
- e) Team member follows student to agency ___yes ___no
- f) Release of information signed by parents? ___yes ___no

Follow-up actions:

- g) Hospital contacted? ___yes ___no
- h) School team has supports established for student return? ___yes ___no

High risk/parent unavailable

- a) Police or SRO contacted for transport to agency ___yes ___no
- b) Contact social services to notify parents ___yes ___no

Follow-up actions:

- c) School team contacts parent ___yes ___no
- d) Release of information signed by parents? ___yes ___no
- e) Hospital contacted? ___yes ___no
- f) Supports established for student return? ___yes ___no

High risk/parent uncooperative

- a) If reluctance is based on negligence, contact CPS ___yes ___no
- b) Contact law enforcement for transport ___yes ___no

Follow-up actions:

- c) Supports established for student return? ___yes ___no

Low risk/parent uncooperative

- a) Parent has signed form indicating that they were notified about suicidal threat ___yes ___no

Low risk/parent cooperative

- b) Student has signed a no-harm contract? ___yes ___no
- c) Parent/student have been provided with hotline numbers ___yes ___no
- d) Parent has signed form indicating that they were notified about threat ___yes ___no

Suicide Risk Factors and Warning Signs

Risk Factors

- Psychological Disorders
 - Affective disorder/Depression
 - Conduct disorder
 - Anxiety disorder
 - Co-morbidity (e.g. conduct disorder and depression)
- Biological Factors
 - Reduced Serotonin
- Impulse Disorders
 - Alcohol/substance abuse
 - Previous suicidal behavior
 - Self-injurious behavior
- Familial Factors
 - Economic status
 - Family discord or loss
 - Child abuse
 - Domestic violence
 - Parenting style
- Environmental Factors
 - Presence of a firearm
 - Access to other means of suicide (pills, ropes, etc.)
- Situational Crises
 - Loss (death, divorce, broken romance, relocation)
 - Victimization/exposure to violence
 - School crisis (disciplinary, academic)
 - Suicide in school or community

Warning Signs

- Suicide note - Serious attention needs to be paid to these notes, they are real signs of danger.
- Threats - These can be direct threats, “I want to die” or indirect, “who would miss me anyway?” References may also be detected in artwork, creative writing projects, and joking.
- Previous attempts - This is the best predictor. An individual who has attempted previously should be monitored closely and be provided with therapeutic support.
- Depression - An individual is at higher risk for suicide if they have consistent and pervasive thoughts of hopelessness and despair.
- Masked Depression - Risk-taking behaviors including gun play, alcohol/drug abuse, aggression
- Giving away prized possessions
- Efforts to hurt oneself - Running into traffic, jumping off of high places, scratching/cutting/markings the body
- Cognitive Issues - Inability to think clearly or to concentrate. This might be noted in child’s classroom behavior.
- Death and suicidal themes - These might appear in drawings, work samples, creative writing, journals, homework.

- Changes in physical appearance or habits - Include difficulty sleeping or excessive sleep, weight gain or loss, lack of personal hygiene.
- Sudden changes in personality, friends, behavior - Withdrawal from normal relationships, lack of interest in typical interests
- Plan/method/access - There may be an increase in focus on guns and other weapons. There may be a discussion about methods and some mention of a potential plan. The more planning, the greater the risk.

No-Harm Agreement

I, _____, agree not to hurt myself when I get home today.

I agree to meet with the counselor on: (date)_____.

If I have the urge to harm myself, I agree to call the following emergency crisis numbers:

PES _____

Suicide Hotline _____

911 _____

Kaiser _____

Other _____

Some of the activities I can do that make me feel better are: _____

Some of the people that I can talk to when I feel the urge to hurt myself are:

Signature of Student _____

Signature of Designated Reporter/Crisis Team Leader _____

Date _____

**Suicide Intervention
Parent Acknowledgment of Notification**

School Name

I (parent name) _____ have been notified that my child
(student name) _____ has verbalized, or through other
activities, has manifested a suicidal threat. My child has been assessed, and the team has
determined that s/he is low risk. They have asked me to monitor my child carefully and to take
her/him in for immediate psychological assistance if s/he is in immediate danger. I have been
provided with the following numbers to provide me with support if needed:

PES _____
Kaiser _____
Other Hospital _____
Suicide Hotline _____

Parent Signature

Date

Threat-Maker Interview Protocol

Interview with Threat-Maker:

When interviewing an individual about safety concerns, one approach is to ask questions which move from general introduction, to fact finding, to recognition of concerns, to assessing support networks, to developing an outline of “next steps.” The following questions are intended to provide a sample structure for the kinds of questions that may need to be asked. Individuals using this outline are encouraged to use their professional judgment and experience, and consult with legal counsel when tailoring questions to each unique circumstance.

1. “Seems like you’ve been having a hard time lately. What’s going on?” *(To establish rapport and trust and open dialogue in a non-threatening way)*
2. “What is your understanding of why you have been asked to come to the office?” *(To review factual events)*
3. We are concerned about (behavior of concern). What’s your side of it?” *(To give the person opportunity to be heard, and understand the situation better)*
4. “What is your understanding of why school staff are concerned?” *(To determine if student is aware of effect behavior has upon others)*
5. “What has been going on recently with you at school?” *(To look into possible precipitating events such as peer conflict, student/teacher interactions, failing grades, etc.; follow appropriate leads)*
6. “How are things going with your family?” *(To look into events such as conflict, divorce, deaths and losses)*
7. “What else is going on with you?” *(To look into events outside of school such as police involvement, medical issues, threats)*
8. “Who do you have to talk to or assist you with this situation?” *(To determine what supports or stabilizing factors may be available or in place such as mental health professionals, peer groups, family support, church groups, etc.)*
9. “Given (whatever is going on), what are you planning to do?” or, “What are you thinking about doing?” *(Follow up on appropriate leads, including level of detail to stated plans, ability to carry out plans, violence intent, weapons access, etc. NOTE: If there is imminent risk, take immediate action to maintain safety by contacting law enforcement.)*
10. Close with a statement that describes short-term next steps *(i.e., “I’ll need to contact your parents to talk about...” or, “You will be suspended for two days, then we’ll...”)*

Completed by: _____
Title: _____
Date: _____

Threat Assessment Incident Report

Threat-Maker's Name _____
Student ___ Parent ___ Staff ___ Other ___
If a student: School _____ DOB _____ Grade _____
Person/s or site threatened: _____

Name of reporting party _____
Relationship to student _____
School official notified _____ Title _____
Other students involved as witnesses or participants:

Date of incident _____
And/or date school official notified of concern _____
Content of Threat: _____

Incident

Describe the facts of the incident. Include the language of the threat and the sequence of events.

When and where did this take place? _____

Who was there? Include any witnesses. _____

What happened immediately prior to the incident? _____

What was the teacher/admin/staff/student response? _____

Describe the immediate impact/result of what happened: _____

What is the current status of the person making the threat? _____

Action Taken:

Threat-Maker interviewed by: Name: _____ Title: _____ Date: _____

Parent Notified: Name _____ Date: _____ Time: _____ By whom: _____

Threatened Parties Notified:

1. Name _____ Date _____ Time _____ By Whom _____

2. Name _____ Date _____ Time _____ By Whom _____

3. Name _____ Date _____ Time _____ By Whom _____

4. Name _____ Date _____ Time _____ By Whom _____

School Resource Officer Notified: Date _____ Time _____ By Whom _____

Safe Schools Counselor Notified: Date _____ Time _____ By Whom _____

Consultation – Children’s Crisis Team (County Mental Health) Date _____ Time _____

Consultation - Site Threat Assessment Team (always consult at least one person):

Name _____ Title _____ Date _____

Name _____ Title _____ Date _____

Name _____ Title _____ Date _____

Consultation – District Threat Assessment Team (when appropriate):

Name _____ Title _____ Date _____

Name _____ Title _____ Date _____

Name _____ Title _____ Date _____

Disposition of Case - School

Discipline Code 48900.3 _____ 48900.4 _____ 48900.7 _____ Days of Suspension _____

Search completed:

_____ student clothing/belongings _____ vehicle _____ computer/web _____ classroom

Found: _____

Discipline Meeting: Date _____

Threat Assessment Team Intervention/Support Meeting: Date _____

Disposition of Case – (city name) _____ Police Department _____

Officer Responding _____ Case number _____

Student Cited ___yes ___no Penal Code _____

Student taken to mental health facility for evaluation _____ Held _____ Released _____

Search completed: _____ student clothing/belongings _____ vehicle _____ computer/web _____ home

Found: _____

Attach: written evidence, drawings, incident reports, student statements, grades and discipline file

Copy to: ___ Site Threat Assessment File ___ District Threat Assessment File

___ Safe Schools Counselor ___ School Resource Officer

___ If RSP, notify Director of Special Services

Signature of person completing form

Date

Threat Assessment Initial Review

This form may assist you in defining the category of risk and determining necessary follow-up. The threat should be assessed within the same school day that the administrator is made aware of it. Only school staff trained in threat assessment may complete the threat assessment interview. Any written evidence should be attached to this form. Any verbal evidence should be quoted as closely as possible.

Anyone threatened by the student should be notified immediately.

The student's parent should be notified of the threat and the outcome of the interview as soon as possible.

Risk Factors

1. Does the student intend to harm anyone?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

2. Does the student have access to weapons/explosives?

- Does the student have any weapons/explosives currently in his/her possession?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

- Does the student have access to weapons in his/her own home or someone else's home?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

- If guns/weapons/explosives are in the home, are they locked up?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

- If yes, where are the keys? _____

• Evidence _____

• Discussion _____

3. Does the student have the ability to use the weapons?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

4. Has the student been moving towards violence in his/her thoughts, actions, areas of interest, knowledge of weapons and/or anger towards victims?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

5. Is the student able to appropriately verbalize his/her anger and explain the reasons for the threat?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

6. Does the student understand or take responsibility for the effect of his/her statements/actions on other people?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

7. Is the student currently under the influence of controlled substances including prescription and non-prescription drugs?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

8. Does the student have a history of emotional disturbance or appear to be emotionally disturbed at the present time?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

9. Does the student have a history of violent behavior/discipline/truancy problems?

(Review SASI file)

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

10. Does the student have a history of poor achievement or declining school performance?

(Review SASI file)

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

Precipitating Events (Recent events which may trigger violent behavior)

11. Might intervention (interviews, being found out, etc.) become a precipitating event to violent behavior?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

12. Has the student recently experienced a loss or emotional trauma?

____ Death of family member, friend or pet

____ Girlfriend/boyfriend relationship problems

____ Rejection, humiliation or victimization by peers

____ Recent school failure

____ Other

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

Stabilizing Factors

13. Does the student have any stabilizing factors in his/her life that might help to minimize or mitigate the likelihood of violent behavior? Consider:

- Close alliance with a supportive adult
- Effective parental involvement
- Mental health counselor
- Positive peer relationships
- Positive involvement in school or outside activities
- Personal strengths

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

Evidence _____

Discussion _____

Category of Risk Assigned

Please summarize your findings by selecting the most appropriate category of risk. **Be aware that Category 1 and 2 risks may require immediate containment and removal of the threat-maker.** Plans for monitoring the safety of the threat-maker and possible victims may require removal of either party from the school setting as a short-term or long-term solution.

_____ Category 1: High violence potential. Qualifies for Immediate Arrest or Hospitalization

_____ Category 2: High Violence Potential, Does not qualify for arrest or hospitalization

_____ Category 3: Insufficient evidence for violence potential, sufficient evidence for repetitive and/or intentional infliction of emotional distress upon students, co-workers, supervisors or others.

_____ Category 4: Insufficient evidence for violence potential, sufficient evidence for unintentional infliction of emotional distress upon students, co-workers, supervisors or others.

_____ Category 5: Insufficient evidence for violence potential, insufficient evidence for infliction of emotional distress upon students, co-workers, supervisors or others.

Additional Notes

Threat Assessment Intervention Plan

Student Name _____ DOB _____ Grade _____

Plan Development Date _____ Scheduled Review Date _____

Counseling Intervention

- Meeting with counselor, scheduled (Date) _____
 Grade-level counselor Safe schools counselor Psychologist Private
- Conflict Resolution Meeting, scheduled _____
- Private Counseling Referral, scheduled _____
- Community Agency Referral, scheduled _____

Behavioral Intervention - Scheduling and Supervision

- No harm/harassment contract (Please attach)
- Modification of daily schedule

- Late arrival/Early dismissal times
- Inspection or searches as follows

- School will provide increased supervision in the following settings

- Off-limit areas

- Parents will provide the following supervision/intervention

- Other

Participant's signatures of participation and agreement with plan provisions. Attach any pertinent documents.

Position	Signature	Agreement	
		Yes	No
Case Manager		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counselor		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Principal/Asst Principal		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent/Guardian		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Handouts and Activities:

Possible Reactions To A Crisis Event Staff Handout

(Monhandie, 1999)

Critical Incident: Any event outside of the range of normal human experience

Events That Can Cause Stress Reactions:

- Death – child victim, rescue victim, emergency worker victim – especially school violence death – or traumatic loss of co-worker, multiple deaths, suicide
- Threatening event – being physically or emotionally attacked, exposure to hazardous material, perceived safety threat, robbery, assault
- Extraordinary media coverage – death or threatening event with extreme publicity

Some Normal Signs and Symptoms of Acute Distress:

Physical

- Nausea, upset stomach, tremors, feeling uncoordinated
- Profuse sweating, chills, diarrhea, rapid heart rate
- Muscle aches, sleep disturbance, dry mouth
- Shakes, vision problems, fatigue

Cognitive

- Confusion, lowered attention span
- Memory problems, calculation difficulties
- Poor concentration, flashbacks, distressing dreams
- Disruption in logical thinking, blaming others
- Difficulties with decision-making
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings
- Preoccupation with vulnerability or death

Emotional

- Anticipatory anxiety, denial, fear, survivor guilt
- Uncertainty of feelings, depression, grief
- Feeling hopeless, overwhelmed, lost, vulnerable, helpless
- Feeling abandoned, worried, angry, wanting to hide
- Feeling numb, identifying with the victim
- Feeling alienated, disenchanting
- Panic, generalized anxiety
- Intensified or reduced emotional reactions

Behavioral

- Change in activity, withdrawal
- Less or more communicative, increased smoking
- Change in interactions with others, excessive humor
- Increased or decreased food intake
- Overly vigilant to environment, unusual behavior
- Increased alcohol intake
- Avoidance behavior
- Acting out, antisocial acts, angry outbursts
- Suspiciousness
- Intensified fatigue, sleep increase or decrease
- More frequent visits to the physician for nonspecific complaints

Grief and Bereavement Process:

- Denial – “This can’t be happening!”
- Anger – “How could something like this happen!”
- Bargaining – “If only. . . !”
- Depression – “This is sad”
- Acceptance - “Sometimes bad things happen to good people”

(Not everyone goes through all the stages in order)

Coping After the Incident:

- Eat well – AVOID CAFFIENE, ALCOHOL, SALT, SUGAR AND FAT – drink more fluids (water and fruit juices), eat complex carbohydrates, low-fat and nonfat foods, whole grain bread
- Get rest, but avoid boredom
- Physical exertion or exercise as soon as possible after incident is over-moderate intensity to work out potentially damaging stress chemicals
- Attend and participate in a debriefing
- View your reactions as normal reactions to an abnormal situation – anyone who experienced what you did may feel the same way
- Allow yourself the freedom to talk about your reactions to what happened
- Seek peer, clergy, or professional assistance as necessary
- Allow yourself time to heal
- Work on accepting that anyone in your situation would have responded similarly
- Talk with your family, check in with your peers
- Be gentle with yourself, move away from beating yourself up
- Use crisis as opportunity for growth and positive change

Helping Students/Co-Workers Cope With the Aftermath:

- Offer listening and discussion opportunities regarding the incident
- For group discussions set parameters: tolerance/respect for feelings of others, confidentiality (except for safety issues) and trust, one person at a time
- Discussions should be age-appropriate in method and content
- Normalize and validate reactions
- Share and model healthy emotional and coping responses to incident (tears, anger, and the like are okay, as long as it is modulated and in control)
- Don’t put child or student in position of having to care for the adult

When To Seek/Recommend Additional Assistance:

- Intense feelings of discomfort
- Significant symptoms that persist longer than six weeks
- Suicidal thoughts or planning
- Other self-destructive acting-out (sexual, aggressive, or substance)
- Intense family conflict
- Feel like your losing control of your impulses
- Just want to check in to see if you’re “normal”

Where To Seek Additional Assistance:

Sonoma County Psychiatric Emergency 1-800-746-8181

Supporting Youth In Grief - Staff Handout

Keep in mind that students need or may benefit from any of the following:

- **Continued structure in the schedule for the day.** It is usually better to continue to have students stay at school where they can grieve with others. They can benefit from walking through the usual class schedule and showing up for all or many of their usual classes because there is a sense of routine. Suspend the academic expectations long enough to process the meaning and impact of the event. In some cases, that may last the whole class period; in others, all day.
- **Consistency in discipline,** with flexibility. Often at these times, students feel that life is out of control. They feel even more unsafe if the behavior of peers is not within the usual realm of the classroom. Exceptions may be made with expectations of how much academic work gets done for a day or two, or other aspects of school life which do not put others at risk or leave them feeling a loss of structure. Students do **not** need for you to become an instant counselor. They **do** need for you to "be there for them" by letting them talk about their fears, concerns and feelings. They need to feel safe and not judged. If your school is going through a tragedy or trauma, the first day or two may be a bit of an emotional roller coaster ride.
- **The truth** about what has happened. If there are aspects of the death or event which are simply too gory or for some other reason too difficult to talk about, it is better to be honest about that than to whitewash the event with a cover story. This shows respect for the students' integrity and is essential to your credibility.
- **The opportunity to talk about the event** as well as other similar events in their lives. This helps "normalize" the event as they hear that others, too, have had similar experiences. Also, talking eases the pressure we feel inside.
- **Understanding that this event might be a "trigger"** which is causing them to re-experience feelings they had in the past at times of danger, threat or fear. It helps for them to know that this reaction is not unusual for people with something frightening in their histories.
- **Staff and other adults in their lives understanding that,** if they come from a dysfunctional home, their ability to cope with grief is likely diminished.
- **Being allowed to use the Safe Room** even if they didn't know the deceased. Many students will have been triggered by this event and will not be able to focus on schoolwork until they've had the opportunity to process some of the newly reactivated grief. Suspend judgment about who needs to go to the Safe Room, and let the staff there send back students who are not using the grieving process.
- **To find meaning in the event.**
- **Help understanding what to expect at the funeral or memorial service.** As the details of the service are known, take time to talk with students about whether they've ever been to a funeral, what it was like, and what to expect with this one.

Encourage students to:

- **Support each other** for the next while and help each other get through the day.
- **Put extra energy into friendships.** Exchange phone numbers with each other.
- **Take good care of themselves** by eating well and getting lots of rest.

Classroom Activities List

In addition to discussion, teachers can help students deal with their reactions to a crisis through a variety of classroom activities. Classroom activities enable students to express and discuss feelings about crises. The following are simply examples to stimulate teachers' planning.

PRE-SCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN ACTIVITIES

Play Reenactment

Toys that encourage play reenactment of students' experiences and observations during a traumatic experience can help integrate the experiences. Useful toys include fire trucks, rescue trucks, dump trucks, ambulances, building blocks and dolls.

Physical Contact

Children need lots of physical contact during times of stress to regain a sense of security. Games involving structured physical touching help to meet this need.

Nourishment

Extra amounts of finger foods and fluids help provide the emotional and physical nourishment children need in times of stress. Oral satisfaction is especially necessary, because children tend to revert to more regressive or primitive behavior in response to feelings that their survival or security is threatened.

Puppets

Playing with puppets can be effective in reducing inhibitions and encouraging children to discuss their feelings.

Art

Have the children do a mural on butcher paper with topics such as what happened when the traumatic event occurred. This is recommended for small groups with discussion afterward, directed by an adult. Have the children draw individual pictures about the event and then discuss or act out elements of their pictures. This activity allows for discussing experiences, and helps children discover that others share their fears.

Stories

Read stories to the children that tell about other children's (or animals') experiences in a disastrous event. This can be a non-threatening way to convey common reactions to frightening experiences, and to stimulate discussion. It helps to emphasize how people resolve feelings of fear.

Large Muscle Activity

When children are restless or anxious, any activities that involve large muscle movements are helpful. You might try your own simple version of doing exercises to music, like skipping and jumping.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Play Reenactment

For younger children, using toys that encourage play reenactment of their experience and

observations during the traumatic event can help integrate the traumatic experience. Toys might include ambulances, dump trucks, fire trucks, building blocks and dolls.

Puppets

Play with puppets can be effective in reducing inhibitions and encouraging children to talk about their feelings and thoughts. Children often will respond more freely to a puppet asking about what happened than to an adult asking the questions directly. Help or encourage students to develop skits or puppet shows about what happened in the event. Encourage them to include anything positive about the experience as well as those aspects that were frightening or disconcerting.

Art and Discussion Groups

Do a group mural on butcher paper with topics such as "What happened in your (*neighborhood, school name or home*) when the traumatic event occurred?" This is recommended for small groups with discussion afterward, facilitated by an adult. This type of activity can help students feel less isolated with their fears and provide the opportunity to vent feelings. Have the children draw individual pictures and then talk about them in small groups. It is important in the group discussion to end on a positive note (such as a feeling of mastery or preparedness, noting that the community or family pulled together to deal with the crisis:), in addition to providing the opportunity to talk about their feelings about what took place.

Share Your Own Experience

Stimulate group discussion about disaster experiences by sharing your own feelings, fears or experiences. It is important to legitimize feelings to help students feel less isolated.

Disaster Plans

Have the children brainstorm their own classroom or family disaster plan. What would they do if they had to evacuate? How would they contact parents? How should the family be prepared? How could they help the family?

Reading

Read aloud, or have the children read, stories or books that talk about children or families dealing with stressful situations, pulling together during times of hardship, and similar themes.

Creative Writing or Discussion Topics

In a discussion or writing assignment, have the children describe in detail a very scary intense moment in time and a very happy moment. Create a group story, recorded by the teacher, about a dog or cat that was in an earthquake, flood or other disaster. What happened to him? What did he do? How did he feel? You can help the students by providing connective elements. Emphasize creative problem-solving and positive resolution.

Playacting

In small groups, play the game, "If you were an animal, what would you be?" You might adapt discussion questions such as "If you were that animal, what would you do when some traumatic event occurred?" Have the children take turns acting out an emotion in front of the class, without talking, and have the rest of the class guess what the feeling is and why the student might have that feeling. Do this for good as well as bad feelings.

Other Disasters

Have the children bring in newspaper clippings on disasters that have happened in other parts of the world. Ask the students how they imagine the survivors might have felt or what they might have experienced.

Tension Breakers

A good tension breaker when students are restless is the co-listening exercise. Have the children quickly pair up with a partner. Child #1 takes a turn at talking about anything he or she wants to, while Child #2 simply listens. After three minutes, they switch roles and Child #2 talks while Child #1 listens.

Also, when the children are anxious and restless, any activities that involve large muscle movements are helpful. You might try doing your own version of exercises to music, like skipping or jumping.

JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL

Activities

Classroom activities that relate the traumatic event to course study can be a good way to help students integrate their experiences and observations, while providing specific learning experiences. In implementing the following suggestions, or ideas of your own, it is important to allow time for the students to discuss feelings stimulated by the projects or issues being covered.

Home Room Class

Group discussion of their experiences of the event is particularly important among adolescents. They need the opportunity to express feelings, as well as to normalize the extreme emotions they may have experienced. A good way to stimulate such a discussion is for the teacher to share his or her own reactions to the event. The students may need considerable reassurance that even extreme emotions and crazy thoughts are normal in a traumatic event. It is important to end such discussions on a positive note, such as talking about what heroic acts were observed.

Break the class into small groups and have them develop a disaster plan for their home, school or community. This can help students regain a sense of mastery and security, as well as having practical merit. The small groups can then share their plans in a discussion with the entire class. Conduct a class discussion and/or support a class project on how the students might help the community recovery effort. It is important to help them develop concrete and realistic ways they might be of assistance. Community involvement can help overcome feelings of helplessness and frustration, and deal with survivor's guilt and other common reactions in disaster situations.

Have a home safety or preparedness quiz. What would you do under certain circumstances (such as finding a hurt child, being without water or electricity, or having an earthquake hit the area).

Talk about what is necessary to survive in the wilderness. How does this knowledge apply to a community following a disaster? Encourage students who have had first aid training to demonstrate basic techniques to the class.

Science

Conduct projects on stress, physiological response to stress, and how to deal with it.

Creative Writing

Ask the students to write about an intense moment they remember very clearly, not a day or an hour, but a short period of time lasting no more than three minutes.

Make up a funny disaster.

Write a story about a person who is in a disaster and give it a happy ending.

Literature or Reading

Have the students read a story or novel about young people or families who have experienced hardship or disaster. Have a follow-up discussion on how they might react if they were the character in the story.

Psychology Class

Initiate a discussion on how course content might apply to the stress reactions students observed during and following a traumatic event. Discuss post-traumatic stress syndrome. Have a guest speaker from Mental Health Services or a therapist involved in counseling victims speak to the class.

Peer Listening

Provide information on common responses to traumatic events. Use structured exercises using skills students are learning in class to help them integrate their experiences. Point out that victims need to repeat their stories many times. Students can help family and friends affected by the event by using good listening skills.

Health Class

Discuss emotional reactions to the event and the importance of taking care of one's own emotional well being. Discuss health hazards in a disaster, such as water contamination or food that may have gone bad due to lack of refrigeration. Discuss health precautions and safety measure. Guest speakers from public health and/or mental health and from the fire department might talk to the class.

Art Class

Have the students portray their experiences or observations of the event in various art media. Have the students do a group project, such as a mural, showing the community recovery efforts following a disaster.

Speech/Drama

Have the students portray the catastrophic emotions that come up in response to a traumatic event. Have the students develop a skit about some aspect of the event.

Math Class

Have the class solve mathematical problems related to the impact of the event.

Social Studies/Government

Study governmental agencies responsible for aid to victims. How do they work? How effective are they? Write letters or petitions to agencies responsible for handling disasters. Discuss the political implications of the event within a community.

History Class

Discuss historical events and disasters. Discuss how the victims and survivors of those events might have felt. Have the students bring in newspaper clippings on current events in other parts of the world. What kinds of experiences might the victims have had? Have you experienced anything similar?

Facilitating Classroom Discussion - Guidelines

In general, informing and discussing a traumatic event with students is best done in small-groups where questions can be answered, rumors clarified, and concerns addressed. Some students may choose not to enter into discussion, and some may even express a desire to be excused. Don't force the situation; honor the student's wishes.

Students often start off by saying such things as:

I feel terrible.

S/he was my friend.

Why did it have to happen?

I'm really mad that it happened.

We knew he was upset; we should have done something.

Things like this don't make sense.

It could happen to me.

It's just one of those things.

I can't believe it.

If it weren't for (name of someone), it wouldn't have happened.

You can often help keep students more fully express their thoughts and feelings by paraphrasing what they have just said. Try not to make intrusive comments. At the same time, move the discussion away from any attempts to glamorize or romanticize the event.

After they have been able to express themselves, you need to let them know that what they are thinking and feeling is very natural under the circumstances and that, for some of them, it may take a while before such thoughts and feelings are worked through.

Be sure to tell them that who is available to students if they or a friend are very upset. Watch for any student who appears very upset and follow predetermined procedures for connecting that student with someone who is ready to provide psychological first aid.

Psychological Education Groups - Outline

Psychological Education groups help dispel incorrect perceptions about the crisis event, help to promote a sense of control in the recovery process, emphasize strengths and self-efficacy, and provide connections to mental health resources. Psychological education groups can be facilitated by trained teachers or mental health professionals and offered to small groups, classroom groups, staff meetings or larger community meetings.

Outline

1. Introduce the discussion
 - Introduce facilitators
 - Describe the purpose, process and outline of discussion
 - Establish group rules
2. Answer questions and dispel rumors
 - Provide necessary information; follow the lead of and respond to student questions.
 - Don't give excessive details that could be further traumatizing.
 - Prepare students for how difficult it is to not have all the answers and not know "why" it happened. Caution them that in the absence of answers there may be a tendency to blame or spread rumors.
3. Prepare students for the reactions that may follow crisis exposure.
 - Describe common crisis reactions (See "Possible Reactions to a Crisis Event", page 26 in Quick Reference Guide)
 - Normalize: "These are normal reactions of normal people to an abnormal situation."
4. Teach students how to manage crisis reactions
 - Discuss coping strategies, i.e., maintaining regular eating and sleeping routines, avoiding drugs/alcohol, spending time with supportive friends/family, etc.
 - Develop personal care plans.
5. Inform students of resources for support.
 - Counseling services available on campus
 - Community resources (See page 5 in Quick Reference Guide)

Referrals

If the group leader notices students who may need further evaluation and support, refer them to appropriate services on campus as soon as possible.

Psychological First Aid Intervention - Outline

Psychological first aid is an intervention for individuals or groups who are significantly impacted by a crisis. The intervention is offered by a mental health professional in a confidential setting, typically within 24-72 hours of the crisis event, and is designed to help individuals understand the crisis event and their reactions to it. They are given an opportunity to share their stories fully and to develop coping strategies and identify supports that will help them return to their normal activities.

- Groups should be homogenous (based on naturally occurring groupings or level of exposure). It is important to not pair individuals who have close physical or emotional proximity to the event with those who had minimal exposure.
- Participation in these sessions should be voluntary.
- Individuals should be given ample time to share their stories without time constraints. This process should not be rushed.
- This may be the first step in working with traumatized individuals, however it should never be used as a stand-alone intervention and further referrals may be necessary.

Outline

- 1) Introduce the Session
 - Introduce the facilitators
 - Describe the purpose, process, and steps of the session.
 - Establish group rules
- 2) Answer questions and dispel rumors
 - Provide necessary information, but not details that could be further traumatizing.
 - View carefully selected/screened media presentations.
- 3) Share Stories
 - Ask for volunteers.
 - Give each student a chance to share.
 - Engage students in developmentally appropriate art activities.
 - Do not rush the process
- 4) Share Reactions
 - Teach common crisis reactions
 - Give each student a chance to share.
 - Mention self-referral procedures.
- 5) Empower the individuals
 - Teach stress management.
 - Identify accessible supports.
 - Reinforce adaptive coping (e.g. exercise, journal writing) and offer alternatives for maladaptive strategies.
- 6) Close the Session
 - Prepare students for funeral attendance.
 - Supervise memorial development.
 - Create cards and write letters.
 - Summarize what has been learned.
 - Reiterate self-referral procedures

How To Help Children Cope With Trauma/Grief

1. **Listen** – Provide opportunities for children to talk and express whatever they are feeling and thinking.
2. **Be supportive and non-judgmental** – Let children have their own reactions. Don't tell children what they should or should not feel.
3. **Support children in expressing feelings, verbally and non-verbally** – Talking, crying, drawing, writing and playing are all helpful ways to process reactions. Children will often work through their feelings through play and may re-enact the death, trauma, funeral, etc. with playmates, dolls and other toys. This is a normal and healthy way for children to heal.
4. **Be honest and provide accurate information appropriate to the child's ability to understand and wish to know** – In order to cope, children need to trust that we will be honest with them. The unknown and the imagined can be much more terrifying than the truth.
5. **Be patient** – Realize that this will take time. Children may take longer than adults to resolve trauma and grief. Their processing of it may be intermittent. They may need to ask the same questions over and over.
6. **Share your feelings** – It is okay for children to know that you are human and have feelings, too, but don't overburden your children with your anxieties. Make sure you take care of yourself and have good support from other adults.
7. **Provide affection and reassurance regarding safety issues** – Let your children know that they are loved and that the adults in their lives will do their best to keep them safe. Children may temporarily need extra safety measures: i.e., sleeping in your room, leaving lights on, etc. You may want to say, "We will do this for a while and then get back to normal."
8. **Maintain order, security and stability in your children's lives** – Children need regular routines and structure to continue as much as possible.
9. **Give choices so that children have a sense of control and participation** – Ask: What would help you feel safe? Do you want to go to the memorial service?
10. **Memorialize** – Light candles. Create a scrapbook or memory book. Write letters to the person who has died. Ritual helps us heal.

Como Ayudar A Los Niños Lidiar Con El Duelo/Trauma

1. **Escuche** – Brinde oportunidades para que los niños hablen y expresen todo lo que están sintiendo y pensando.
2. **Brinde apoyo y no juzgue** – Permita que los niños tengan sus propias reacciones. No les diga lo que debían o no deberían sentir.
3. **Ayude a los niños a expresar sus sentimientos verbal y físicamente** – Hablando, llorando, dibujando, escribiendo y jugando son formas de procesar sus reacciones. Los niños usualmente trabajan en sus sentimientos por medio del juego y podrían actuar la muerte, trauma, funeral, etc. con compañeros, muñecas o juguetes. Esta es una forma normal y saludable de recuperarse.
4. **Sea honesto y brinde información correcta y apropiada conforme al nivel de entendimiento del niño y do lo que el/ella quiera saber** – Para poder sobre llevar las costs, los niños necesitan confiar en qu seremos honestos con ellos. Lo desconocido y lo que se imaginan puede ser más aterrador que la verdad.
5. **Sea paciente** – Reconozca que esto tomara tiempo. Los niños podrían tomar más tiempo que los adultos toman para sobre pasar el trauma y pena. Su procesamiento puede ser intermitente. Podrían necesitar preguntar las mismas preguntas una y otra vez.
6. **Comparta sus sentimientos** – Está bien que los ninos sepan que usted es humano y de que tambien tiene sentimientos, pero no los agobie con su ansiedad. Asegúrese de cuidarse a sí mismo y obtenga apoyo do otros adultos.
7. **Brinde afecto y tranquilidad con relación a asuntos de seguridad** – Deje saber a sus hijos que son amados y de que los adultos en sus vidas harán lo posible para mantener los seguros. Podría necesitar decirle a los niños temporalmento que “haremos esto por un tiempo y después regresaremos a la normalidad.”
8. **Mantenga orden, seguridad y estabilidad en la vida de sus hijos** – Los niños necesitan rutinas regulares y estructura continua lo mas posible.
9. **Brinde opciones para que los niños se sientan en control y participen** – Pregunteles: ¿Qué les ayudaria a sentirse seguros? ¿Les gustaria ir a los servicios memoriales?
10. **Memoriales** – Encienda velas. Haga un libro de recuerdos. Esbriba cartas a la person que falleció. Los rituales nos ayudan a recuperarnos.

Guidelines for Good Listening in Crisis Situations

(Diane Myers, R.N., M.S.N.)

1. Prepare to Listen: make sure you have the time and place.
2. Show Interest: face the person, relax, and encourage communication.
3. Be Aware of Cultural Preferences: distance, touch, eye contact.
4. Respect the Individual's Situation: Don't probe when person is in shock.
5. Don't argue with feelings. If in doubt, ask what the person would like.
6. Be Aware of Non-verbal Communication.
7. Provide Comfort.
8. Focus Attention.
9. Listen Carefully.
10. Avoid Interrupting.
11. Respect Silences.
12. Allow Expression of Emotion.
13. Tolerate Repetition.
14. Ask Simple, Clear Questions.
15. Be Sure You Understand: periodically check for understanding by,
 - a. Restating or reflexive questioning
 - b. Paraphrasing
 - c. Reflection of feelings
 - d. Asking for clarification
 - e. Summarizing
16. Wait – Think – Respond.
17. Share Yourself: a little bit of yourself or your emotions can let the person know you empathize. However, be careful not to take over the conversation.
18. Be careful about giving advice; instead help the person problem-solve.

Sample Letters and Memos:

Sample Memo to All Staff – Suicide Aftermath Guidelines

This is an example of information that can be distributed to staff only. It is not to be sent to parents, given to the students or the media.

To: All Staff

From:

Date:

Re: Guidelines in the Aftermath of a Suicide - Memorials/Counseling

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Guidelines for Memorials:

The suicide of _____ has profoundly affected many of our students. It is important to offer students as much support as possible during this difficult time. However we need to help students to refrain from romanticizing and glorifying the event. We are particularly concerned about the possibility of imitation attempts.

It is not appropriate to:

1. Distribute pictures of _____
2. Create or organize any dedications or memorials.

Should students wish to do something, appropriate activities at school could be donations to the family, charity, suicide prevention efforts or establishing support programs at school.

Counseling Services:

If you feel that a student in your class needs assistance, continue to send them to the crisis room located in the _____ where trained personnel can help them.

Also any faculty or staff member who would like counseling in the aftermath of this tragic event, please feel free to contact the main office. If needed, class coverage can be provided. A member of the Crisis Team will be available in the _____ office to assist adults. After school assistance will also be available.

There will be a brief faculty meeting after school today at _____ in the _____. _____

If you have any questions concerning the above information, please consult your local crisis team or the District Suicide Prevention Unit.

Sample Faculty/Student Memo – Student Death

(Date)

To: All Teachers,

Please read the following announcement at the beginning of your 2nd period class.

If any of your students would like to talk with counselors in the Library, please give them a pass completed with both your name and their name. Students who spend 1st period in the Library will be asked leave during tutorial and go to their 2nd period class to check-in with their teachers. If they ask to return to the Library, they may do so, again with a pass. The same will be true during 3rd period.

“We are saddened to inform you that (*student name*), a Junior, died of natural causes in his sleep Saturday night. He was a good friend and excellent student who was active in the Drama Club and center on the JV basketball team.

“Counselors will be available in the Library throughout the day. We will also have supplies for those who would like to make a card or write a message to the family. We will be delivering your messages to the family. Please do not contact the family directly. Information regarding services will be announced when it becomes available.”

Sample Faculty/Staff Memo – Gravely Ill Student

Memorandum

Date:

To: All Teachers and Staff

From: Principal

cc: District Administrators

Re: Gravely Ill Student

It is with great sadness that we inform you that we have a (*school name*) student who is gravely ill. It is the last wish of this student that she be treated as any other student and it is in keeping with her wish that this information has been kept confidential. As her medical status has worsened, it has become important to inform her teachers and establish a plan in the event of a medical crisis. In addition, we wish to provide emotional support for both staff and students.

As we are uncertain how students and staff may be impacted, we are providing some information on dealing with illness and loss that you may wish to read. There are also some suggestions on how to discuss the issues with students, should you be in the position to do so. We understand that this information will affect each of you in an individual way, depending on your own life experiences, recent losses and stress level. Please know that we are available to talk with you and support you in any way that we can.

We understand that this has been a difficult and stressful year for many and that this is another difficult issue to deal with. Should you become aware of any student or staff member who may need support, please notify administration and/or counseling. We will also schedule a group support meeting, if that is requested.

Sample Memo to Staff and Students – Teacher Injury
(Use interoffice correspondence)

TO: All Staff and Students

FROM: _____, Principal

RE: ACCIDENT ON CAMPUS

One of our teachers, _____, was accidentally injured this morning by
(*name*), someone from outside of the school campus.

(*Teacher's name*) is at _____ hospital. We will keep you informed as
information about (him/her) becomes available from the hospital. No students were injured.

Please keep your students in class until further notice. We will update you as soon as possible as
to any schedule changes and support services available. We appreciate your assistance at this
difficult time.

(The follow-up letter to this memo should include information regarding a faculty meeting)

Sample letter to Parents/Guardians – Tragic Incident

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As you may or may not be aware, our school (*or district*) has recently experienced (*specify event, whether death, fire, etc.*) which has deeply affected us. Let me briefly review the facts (*give brief description of incident and known facts*).

We have implemented our school's Emergency Management Plan to respond to the situation and to help our students and their families. Students and staff will react in different ways to emergencies of this nature, so it will be important to have support available to assist students in need. Counselors are available at school to assist students as they express their feelings related to (*the specific event*). We have included a reference sheet to help you recognize possible reactions you may observe in your child. If you feel your child is in need of special assistance or is having a great deal of difficulty coping with (*the loss, disaster, etc.*), please do not hesitate to call.

While it is important to deal with grief, loss, anger and fear reactions, we believe it is essential to resume as normal a routine as possible regarding school activities. The following modifications in our school's regular schedule will be in effect during (*specify dates*), and after that time all regular schedules and routines will resume. (*Specify needed information such as memorial services, possible changes in classroom locations, alterations school operating hours, etc.*).

Thank you for your support of our school system as we work together to cope with (*specify event*). Please observe your child closely over the next several days and weeks to watch for signs of distress that may indicate a need for additional support and guidance. Please feel free to call if you have any concerns or questions regarding your child, or steps being taken by the school to address this (*loss, tragedy, etc.*).

Sincerely,

(Principal Name)

(Phone)

Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians – Tragic Event

(Date)

Dear Family Members:

We regret to inform about an unfortunate event affecting our school. Yesterday, (*brief factual statement about event*). An investigation is underway, and until it is complete we will not have all the details about this tragedy.

The school's crisis team has begun meeting with students and staff. We anticipate that some students and staff may need continuing support for a while to help them deal with the emotional upset that such an event produces. In this regard, enclosed are some materials that you may find helpful in talking about this matter at home.

If you have any questions or concerns you think we can help address, please feel free to call the school (*number*) and ask for any of the following staff: _____

_____.

The following community agencies also are ready to help anyone who would like assistance in dealing with their reaction to this event.

(*local*) Community Mental Health Center (*phone*)
Family Services (*phone*)
etc.

We know that events such as this are stressful. We are taking every step we can to be responsive to the needs of our students and their families.

Sincerely,

Principal

Sample Letter to all Parents – Student Death

(Use letterhead stationery)

Date

Dear Parents:

At approximately 7:30 a.m. this morning, one of our students, an eleven-year-old fifth grader, suffered an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound to his head in front of the school. It has not been determined whether the gunshot was accidental or deliberate in nature. The information that we have received at this time is that the youngster has not expired, but is in critical condition.

The school's certificated and classified staff are handling the situation in a calm and compassionate manner. The *(District Name)* Crisis Intervention Team is on campus now. Team members will provide support and counseling for students, parents, teachers, staff and community members for as long as is needed.

We request that you continue to send your child to school. Remember that our school is the safest place for your child in any emergency. Please be assured that your child's welfare and safety is our top priority.

If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to contact the school at *(school phone number)*.

Sincerely,

Principal *(phone number)*

Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians – Student Death

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We are saddened to inform you that _____, a Junior, died of natural causes in his sleep Saturday night. He was a good friend and excellent student who active in our Drama Club on the JV basketball team.

Counselors provided support to students in the Library throughout the day. Cards and messages from students will be delivered to the family. When information regarding a memorial service becomes available, we will let students know.

Your family and your student may contribute to the “_____” fund that will be used for a floral arrangement and to set up a scholarship in _____’s name or provide a donation to the family. You are also invited to attend the school play on Thursday, March 7th at 7:00 P.M. The play will be dedicated to _____, and proceeds from the concert will be donated to the family.

Below are some suggestions. If you have any concerns about your child’s reaction to _____’s death, you may contact your child’s school counselor (_____), Hospice of _____ (*phone*), _____ Counseling Center (*phone*) or a counselor of your choice.

How to Help Your Child Cope With Grief

1. **Be honest and give accurate information** appropriate to your student’s ability to understand and wish to know.
2. **Provide extra affection and reassurance** regarding safety issues as needed. A death may bring up fears about their own health and safety or that of a loved one.
3. **Give choices**, i.e., “would you like to go to the funeral service?”
4. **Listen!** When we show we are interested in their thoughts, youth have a lot to say about death and grief.
5. **Encourage open expression** of emotion through art, poetry and conversation.
6. **Share your own grief** without overburdening your children. It is OK for children to know that you are experiencing and surviving your own grief.
7. **Continue daily routines** for your children as much as possible during this time of change.
8. **Memorialize**, i.e., light candles, create a memory book. Ritual helps us heal.
9. **Be patient.** Children may take longer than adults to resolve grief. Their processing of it may happen in stages. They often need to ask the same questions over and over.

Dealing with the Media

Media reports can make responding to crises more difficult. Thus, it is essential to have a media coordinator/liaison and to meet with media in a designated area. (Usually, the media should not be given access to students without parent consent.) Everyone should keep the following in mind when dealing with the media.

Prepare

Write down what you want to communicate.

- State appropriate concern for victims and their families.
- Provide appropriate factual information (e.g., students involved, ages), including information about the steps taken to deal with the crisis (as well as any preventive measures previously taken). At the same time, safeguard privacy and confidentiality and details that police should handle related to criminal acts and suicide.
- Ask media to communicate resources for assistance available at the school and in the community.

You will find it useful to have prepared and kept on file the outline of a formal news release so that you can simply fill in the details prior to meeting with the media.

Give Straightforward Information

No matter what you are told, assume that everything you say will be quoted (and perhaps misquoted). Thus, respond to questions by reiterating points from your prepared statement. However, when you don't have information on a matter, simply state this in a straightforward manner. Keep a positive demeanor.

Avoid Common Mistakes

- Don't restate any question you are asked (especially negatively phrased questions) because, through editing and selective quoting, it can be made to appear part of your statement.
- Don't interpret events or motives or predict what will happen.
- Don't speculate, ad lib, blame anyone, or try to be deceptive.
- Don't let anyone bait you into an argument because you are almost certain to look defensive (perhaps trying to hide something), and you probably will say something in a way that reflects badly on you and the school.

Correct the Record

As you become aware of errors in media coverage, take the opportunity at future media inquiries to include corrective information in your statement.

Sample Media Statements

Example 1: Bus accident

“Our third grade students were on a field trip when their school bus was involved in an accident on Interstate-5. Emergency medical teams have arrived and are transporting students to (NAME) community hospital. Our assistant principal is at the scene and our superintendent is at the hospital. We have established a hotline for parents (or, staff members are calling parents of students involved in the accident.) The hotline number is (NUMBER). Our Emergency Management Team is implementing our emergency protocol for bus accidents, including providing support to students and staff.”

Note: Important points made are: preparedness of the school; coordination of efforts with community agencies, access to information for parents; responsible immediate action taken by school representatives (including those in positions of authority); and support provided for students at the school.

Example 2: Fight/Death of Student (off campus, after hours)

“A fight involving two eleventh-grade students occurred a block from campus at 7:00 PM last night. The incident resulted in the fatal shooting of one of our students. Police are investigating, and no more is known at this time; but police are conducting an ongoing investigation.

“Our school's Emergency Management Team went into action immediately following the incident, and the following actions have been taken:

- Our Emergency Team met last night and planned a staff meeting before the school day.
- We notified staff of the meeting using our Telephone Tree.
- Crisis intervention services are being provided by our Crisis Intervention Team with assistance from our District crisis team and community resources.
- A review of our school weapons policy is underway and school security is on alert for potential related violence.”

Note: Important points are: Even though the incident occurred off campus, after hours, the school still has a responsibility to act; the incident is coupled with a re-statement of the district weapons policy; the school demonstrates it is able to handle emergencies by convening an Emergency Management Team meeting, by drawing on community resources, and by providing (or accessing) crisis intervention services to the students.