

Crisis Management Workbook

Rev 8/2011



INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Student Services Department offers this Crisis Management Workbook as a tool for counselors and administrators to use during school crises and tragedies. The workbook is in response to feedback from administrators who said that the previous manuals were too large and dense to be of practical help during intense and fast-moving events. The majority of this guide amplifies the “Following the Guidelines for Responding to a Tragedy/Checklist” which can be found on pages one through three of this packet.

Administrators are advised to have written building level crisis management plans, identified school level crisis teams, and annual reviews of plans with all staff. The names of the school level crisis team members and an annually updated telephone tree can be added to this workbook for ready reference. Further information about crisis management, responding to specific kinds of tragedies (e.g. murder, abduction, suicide), and understanding grief in children and adolescents is available by calling 503-916-5460 or on the Student Services website: <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/departments/student-services/3433.htm>.

The Student Services department is grateful for the work of Izetta Smith, who wrote the original workbook. We would also like to thank Cheri Lovre of the Crisis Management Institute in Salem, Oregon, who generously provided additional materials from her Crisis Resource Manual. Izetta’s full length manual, the “blue book,” and Cheri’s “red book” are excellent in-depth resources and available from the PPS Professional Library.

We provide these workbooks with the fervent hope that you will not have to use the information, handouts and resources but stand ready to help in the event that you do.

Student Services
Portland Public Schools
503-916-5460
Revised August 2011

Portland Public Schools recognizes the diversity and worth of all individuals and groups and their roles in society. All individuals and groups shall be treated with fairness in all activities, programs and operations, without regard to age, color, creed, disability, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.

Building Level Plan

(Create a plan and attach here.)

**School Level Crisis
Team Member List with
Phone Numbers**

(Create a list and attach here)

**School Level Phone
Tree**

Other Important Numbers:

- District Emergency Counseling Support Team: 503-347-1438
- PPS Communications: 503-916-3304
- Employee Assistance Program (for PPS staff): 866-750-1327

(Create a phone tree and attach here)

Crisis Management Workbook
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GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO A TRAGEDY

CHECKLIST TO USE DURING A SCHOOL CRISIS

#1: CONFIRMATION OF A CRISIS

Confirming Incident Details:

- The person receiving the information about a school crisis contacts the school principal
- Principal confirms the information with law enforcement, PPS Communications or the impacted family
- Principal contacts Regional Administrator
- Principal informs PPS Communications of the facts of the incident
- Principal contacts School Level Crisis Team liaison
- Principal contacts District Emergency Counseling Support Team Coordinator for consultation and/or to mobilize the team

Family Communication:

1. Possible script for the family contact: "We have received distressing news. We are calling to find out how we can best help you, and to decide what information we can give to the student body, parents and staff."
2. Families generally appreciate the concern and do not consider such a call intrusive.
3. An effort should be made to honor the family's wishes about the information delivered to the school community. It is important to discuss the advantages of sharing truthful and factual information with the family.
4. A family member or a family friend needs to be identified as the ongoing family spokesperson.
5. A request is made for information about the viewing, memorial, etc (if and when it is available and appropriate).

#2: PREPARATION FOR THE SCHOOL DAY

School Level Crisis Team Response:

- School Level Crisis Team members decide whether to call an all-staff meeting before school the next day. A phone tree is set up to tell staff about the time and location of the all-staff meeting.
- School Level Crisis Team members meet before the next day of school to:
 - o Share facts
 - o Define initial actions
 - o Inform staff? who? when?
 - o Inform students? who? when?
 - o Plan the school day and create a script for teachers
 - o Call the District Emergency Counseling Support Team Coordinator for additional helpers (if needed)
 - o Call PPS Communications at 503-916-3304 to work with the press (if needed)
 - o Send a letter home to parents (if appropriate)
 - o Choose an ongoing contact person in the impacted family
 - o Designate team members to specific jobs during the day

#3: DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

- Share reactions and feelings

Staff Notification:

- The staff is informed via a written notice or in a before-school staff meeting facilitated by the principal:
 - Identify School Level Crisis Team members
 - Share the facts
 - Identify District Emergency Counseling Support Team members (if called upon)
 - Share reactions and feelings
 - Pass out a prepared script of information for staff to share with students
 - Give plans for the day: e.g., tell students in first period, open the Safe Room for students to meet with counselors
 - Give out “Guidelines on How to Lead a Discussion with Grieving Students”
 - Offer teachers assistance from the School Level Crisis Team or District Emergency Counseling Support Team
 - Discuss how students may react and how to help at-risk students who may need additional assistance
 - Respond to questions, reactions
 - Refer all media contacts to PPS Communications at 503-916-3304
 - Remind the staff of their own vulnerability
 - Provide information about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), available to all PPS staff (if needed) by calling 866-750-1327.

Student and Community Notification:

- Students are informed by school staff:
 - Gather in small groups, not bigger than class-size as soon as possible in the school day (first period, if possible)
 - Sit in a circle, read the script, answer questions truthfully
 - Listen, allow for reactions, speculation, feelings, silence
 - Share your own feelings if you wish and take ample time
 - Inform students about the Safe Room (if one is available)
 - Encourage students to share concerns about themselves or friends with counselors
 - Offer a time for a release: e.g., a brief recess on the playground, a time to draw, or time to write in a journal after the sharing time
 - Return to normally scheduled activities but put aside curriculum when needed to enable students to express feelings and discuss events
 - Give students letters to take to parents

Parents

- Send a letter home with students
- Invite a community meeting for education and support (if

- appropriate)
- Invite parents to utilize the Safe Room (if appropriate)
- Offer referrals to community providers (if needed)

The Media

- All media contacts should go through PPS Communications
- Press should not come onto school grounds

Miscellaneous School Partners (alert partners about the incident if it is appropriate and if it will impact their service provision)

- Multnomah County Crisis Line
- School Based Health Center staff
- Mental health providers
- SUN Community School staff
- Social service agencies or culturally-specific service providers, etc.

#4: DEBRIEFING AND FOLLOW-UP

Staff Debriefing and Follow-Up Tasks:

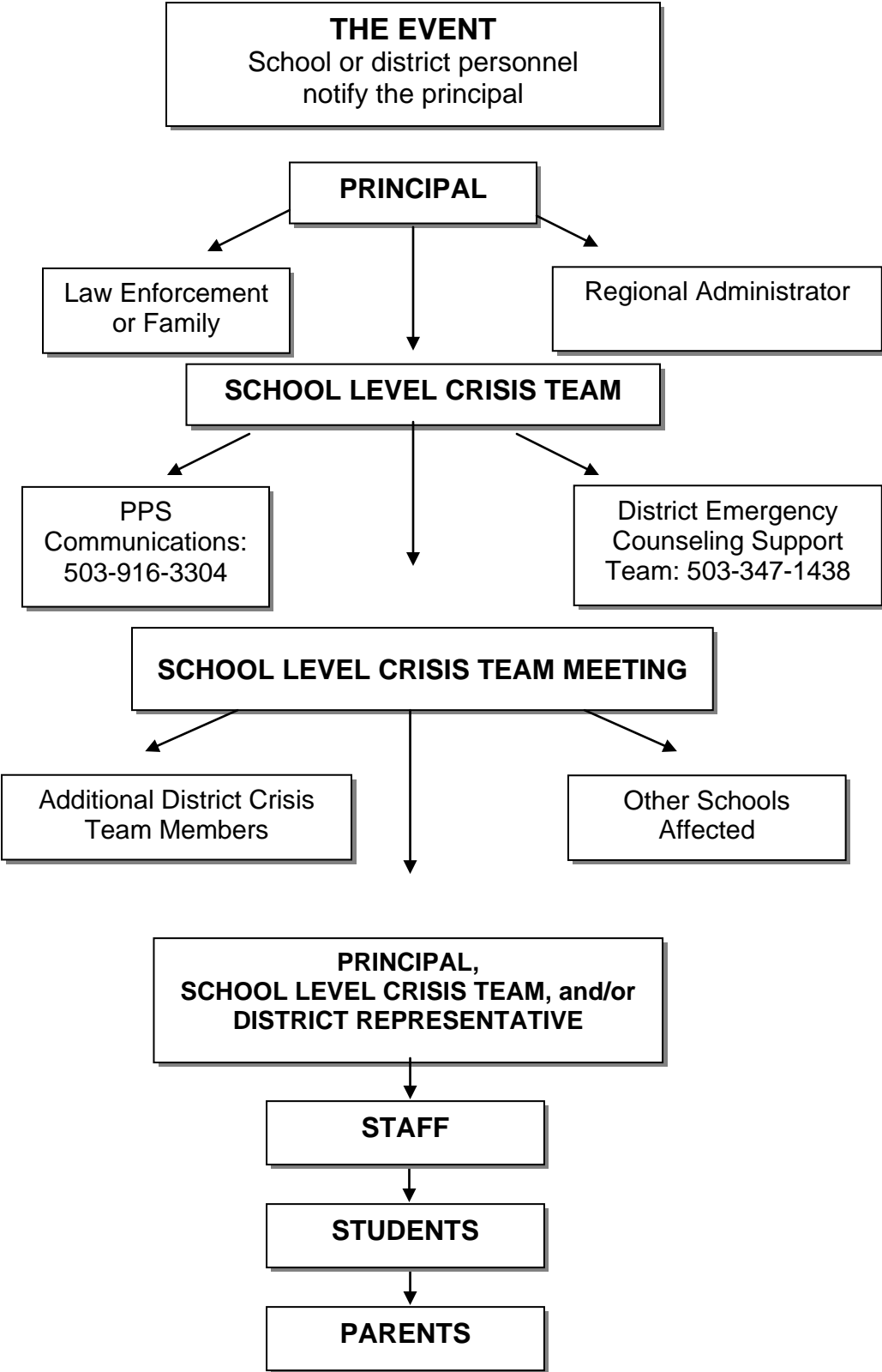
Staff debriefing meeting

- Gather at the end of the first day or soon after to share feelings and reactions
- Share new information about the crisis (if available)
- Identify and plan for at-risk students
- Share ideas that worked and suggest flexible classroom approach
- Remind staff about the Employee Assistance Program available to all PPS staff

Ongoing follow-up

- Determine the need for ongoing Safe Room support, support groups or a parent night
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the crisis response
- Disseminate community resources
- Inform students and staff of the date and time of a Memorial Service (if appropriate)
- Monitor staff and students for delayed reactions

**Crisis
Information
Flow Chart**



SUMMER GUIDELINES

Guidelines When Responding to a School Tragedy That Occurs During the Summer

There are years when you return to school after the summer to learn that someone in your school community (student, teacher, or other staff member) has died. In the great commotion of the first days of school, you may also be faced with how to commemorate the lives of these special friends.

The District Emergency Counseling Support Team would like to offer some ideas to consider when there is a death or trauma over the summer that affects your school community. Our hope is to strengthen the lines of support that already exist among your staff and students, encouraging your school to be a truly interdependent community.

Supporting the school community in case of a summer crisis:

1. If news of a death reaches you before the start of the school year, call a meeting of your School Level Crisis Team or an ad-hoc crisis team consisting of yourself, the counselor, and a few other appropriate staff members. If news comes to you once school has begun, call the meeting as soon as possible.
2. Share the information about the incident with your team. Decide who in the school community will be affected by this incident and how to disseminate the information. Remember, there are always more people than we think affected by a school crisis. Other schools may have family members affected by the crisis, for example.
3. Develop a plan for how to support the emotional needs of those who are grieving. This plan may consist of any of the following activities either during the summer or at the beginning of the school year:
 - Group sharing time in the classrooms
 - A "Safe Room," or designated sharing room in the building, staffed by counselors and/or District Emergency Counseling Support Team Members
 - Staff support meetings
 - Parent support meetings
 - School commemoration or remembrance
 - Consultations about at-risk students
 - Accessing the Employee Assistance Program for staff support
 - Calling the District Emergency Counseling Support Team for further assistance with the plan
4. Use the internal team that you have developed to keep you in touch with the needs of the larger school community and for your own support.

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL LEVEL CRISIS TEAM

DETERMINING LEVEL OF CRISIS RESPONSE

When does the school level crisis team meet?

The School Level Crisis Team should meet before the start of the next day of school after an event. This is to occur early enough to allow time to plan, and to meet with the staff prior to the start of that school day, if necessary.

What constitutes a crisis?

- AN EVENT THAT AFFECTS THE WHOLE SCHOOL like the death of a student or a staff member, or a traumatic incident in or near the school.
- AN EVENT THAT AFFECTS A STAFF MEMBER like a death in a staff member's family.
 - Specific wishes of the staff member may be on file from a questionnaire such as needing child care, food, to be left alone, help getting substitutes, etc.
- AN EVENT THAT AFFECTS A STUDENT like a death in a student's family.
 - A personal discussion should be arranged with the student and a teacher she/he trusts to discuss the information shared with the classroom and how it is to be shared. Refer to the "Things a Teacher Can Say or Do" Handout.

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Which staff is information shared with?

- The School Level Crisis Team decides what information is to be shared with which staff members:
 - The entire staff
 - The staff involved with a particular student
 - The staff involved with a particular staff member
- The School Level Crisis Team also decides how the information is to be shared:
 - A handout in the staff box
 - A phone tree
 - An email message
 - A staff meeting

Which students is information shared with?

- The School Level Crisis Team decides what information is to be shared and with which students:
 - The entire student body
 - A specific class
 - The students involved with a particular student
 - The students involved with a particular staff member
- The School Level Crisis Team also decides how the information is to be shared:
 - A personal discussion with individuals
 - An announcement in the first period class

Assisting teachers with a script

The School Level Crisis Team decides whether to write a script to help teachers in giving the information to the students. Refer to “A Script To Help Teachers Announce a Death to Their Classroom” Handout.

Getting information to parents

The School Level Crisis Team decides if a letter should go home to the parents that day, explaining what has happened and what the school has done to process the event with the children. A parent information night may be scheduled. Refer to the “Sample Letter to Parents” Handout.

Family contact person

A team member is designated to be the ongoing family contact person who keeps in touch with the family spokesperson.

ACCESSING DISTRICT RESOURCES

District Emergency Counseling Support Team

The School Level Crisis Team decides whether to call in members of the District Emergency Counseling Support Team. The team provides support for student-related incidents that significantly impact more than an individual child or family. For smaller scale tragedies or those that impact individual students or families, Student Services staff is available to provide the administrator with consultation on appropriate community resources.

Media contacts

- The School Level Crisis Team decides whether to ask personnel from PPS Communications to be onsite during the school day to address the media.
- PPS Communications will serve as the source of official information about the death or crisis.
- The press should be courteously and firmly discouraged from coming onto school grounds.

PLANNING AND OVERSEEING THE SCHOOL DAY

The School Level Crisis Team makes a plan for the day. They designate, if necessary, a safe room for students and staff to go if they need emotional support. They also identify which of their staff will stay in the safe room and establish a schedule for coverage. The School Level Crisis Team members share their own reactions and feelings with each other, taking time for mutual support.

THREE PART STRATEGY

1. The Staff Pre-Meeting
2. The School Day
3. The Debriefing Meeting

THE STAFF PRE-MEETING

Planning the staff pre-meeting

- Invite the staff who is impacted by the crisis, which may be the whole school. Part-time teachers, substitutes, bus drivers, cooks,

custodians, and/or secretaries should also be considered.

- Announce the facts of the situation as known or as appropriate within the bounds of confidentiality. A handout should be prepared for the staff not in attendance and distributed by a School Level Crisis Team Member prior to the start of school.
- Share reactions and feelings with each other, taking time for mutual support. The School Level Crisis Team offers information on grief and answers questions and concerns from the staff.
- Give a plan for the day that is endorsed by the team.
- Designate a safe room for students and staff to go to if needed, where counselors and support people will be there to assist.
- Schedule a debriefing meeting for the end of the day or within the next few days.

Preparing staff to tell the students

- Decide which students need to be told.
- Confirm what information they will be told.
- Decide who will tell the students.
- Outline procedures for how they will be told.
- Discuss how they may react and what to do.
- Explore how to tell an “at-risk” student.

Activities to discourage

- Delivering important information at large assemblies and/or in public address announcements. These do not provide opportunities for supporting students on a more individual basis.
- Staff and student contact with the media while at school. Media contacts can be disruptive and sometimes insensitive. Direct all media to the PPS Communications Department representative.
- Removing belongings of the deceased. This is best done as a gradual process that can include family members and friends. Having concrete reminders remain in the classroom for a while can help the children and teachers remember the one who died and let go gradually.
- Staying rigid in regards to curriculum. Students may need flexibility or they may need structure. Decisions must be made on an individual basis.

THE SCHOOL DAY

School Level Crisis Team Duties

- Assist teachers who have asked for help in processing the information about the crisis with the students.
- Determine whether School Level Crisis Team members or District Emergency Counseling Support Team members may be called on to help lead classroom discussion.
- Staff a safe room for students and staff to go to if needed.
- Roam the halls, playground, lunchroom, and lockers – be visible and ready to assist where needed.
- Discuss at-risk students/staff and possible interventions.
- Write the letter to the parents if needed. Refer to “Sample Letter to Parents” handout.
- Decide if any athletic or other events should be canceled.

- Disseminate information from the family contact person regarding the viewing/funeral/memorial service if available.
- Mobilize peer help programs, Parent Teacher Association or other school support systems.
- Plan support groups for at-risk students if necessary.
- Plan for the debriefing meeting for the staff.

First period

- Information can be provided to the students according to the script written by the School Level Crisis Team and shared with the staff. Refer to “A Script to Help Teachers Announce a Death to their Students” Handout.
- Efforts are made to accomplish telling the designated students in classroom size groups or smaller, and in informal, comfortable settings.
- Processing time may last 10 minutes to a whole period and beyond. This depends on the comfort level of the facilitator and the needs of the students.
- Teachers should refer to handout, “Teacher’s Guidelines on How to Lead a Discussion with Grieving Students.”

Activities for the remainder of the school day

- After processing time, the students may need a break; a recess, playground time or an unstructured art time to help with the relaxation of their bodies and the expression of their feelings.
- The students may welcome structured curriculum. Structure is comforting, but be flexible if students are unable to concentrate.
- Intersperse time for drawing and journal writing in the curriculum during the day and in the weeks to come, so the processing of feelings can continue. Allow the student to decide what the subject matter is to be for these projects.
- Students may want to make something as a gift to the people most affected by the death. Letters, pictures and/or writings can be collected and developed into such a gift. A memory book or a memory box can be created.
- Make the students aware that there is a safe room with support people where they can go if they need to talk about the death at any point during the school day. Develop a system to keep track of their whereabouts.
- If appropriate, letters will be sent home with students describing the crisis and the way the school has responded.

It is suggested that staff be required to attend a debriefing meeting, either at the end of the first day after the crisis or within a few days. The staff members affected may include more than the obvious ones. Remember, some staff may be in shock and may not be aware of their reactions.

The importance of staff debriefing

- Support
The most critical element in a successful crisis intervention is the flexibility of the school community. The staff must have an ability

THE STAFF DEBRIEFING MEETING

to turn to each other for support so they do not isolate and carry their burdens alone. A staff that is interdependent does not become rigid in the face of a crisis.

- **Education**

A debriefing of the critical day by all those affected by the crisis is an excellent opportunity to share resources and ideas about how to proceed in the crisis.

Staff may need to go over what happened with their students during the day in order to:

1. Find out if they did a good job and get reassurance.
2. Find out what other teachers have done to get new ideas for their classrooms.
3. Express feelings of their own that have been touched by the students or the crisis.
4. Discuss at-risk students.

The staff debriefing: Plans for the following days

- **Family Memorial:** Ceremonies can aid in the healthy reconciliation of grief. Information regarding the viewing/funeral/memorial service is shared with the staff. Decisions regarding school closure and/or substitute coverage for attendance to the memorial is discussed. Staff is encouraged to educate and support students who want to attend ceremonies. Staff can play a role in the ceremonies either by memorializing the deceased or by working with students who want to participate. A designated School Level Crisis Team member can attend to provide support and identify at-risk students.
- **Support Groups:** The School Level Crisis Team can organize support groups for at-risk students. Teachers are alerted as to how to refer students to the groups.
- **Classroom:** Suggest that teachers introduce the crisis information with the students occasionally by an opening remark such as "I'm thinking about Sam right now and missing him at his desk. I wonder what you are thinking about him?" Be open for conversation or go on with instruction. Suggest that teachers plan a time for open ended drawings and/or journal writing in the curriculum of the next days/weeks so feelings can be expressed by students privately. Teachers can look at these materials for assessment of at-risk students.
- The Parent Informational Evening is discussed (if appropriate)
- Community Resources for the students and families are discussed.
- Employee Assistance Program benefits for staff can be mentioned and encouraged.

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION IN THE AFTERMATH OF A CRISIS

The aftermath of a crisis is an illusive thing. It may last for months even though it appears to be resolved.

It is useful to assume that grieving is being felt by those affected by the crisis whether they behave as we would expect them to or not.

Certain days may be more difficult than others:

- Birthdays of the deceased and of the grievers
- Holidays
- The anniversary of the death day, day of the week, day of the month, day of the year
- Dates that mark events significant to the deceased or family of deceased such as graduation

ACTIVITIES OF THE SCHOOL LEVEL CRISIS TEAM: THREE WEEKS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT

Establish regular and ongoing meeting times of the School Level Crisis Team

Communicate with the family

- The family contact person calls the family spokesperson. Families can be informed about the crisis plan response in the school and be invited to be involved.
- Information is gathered about the services for the deceased and staff assistance can be offered.
- Information about community resources is offered to the family (support groups, professional counselors, etc.).
- Ongoing support for surviving student family members can be discussed.

Be available to parents

- For phone consultation.
- For a Parent Informational Evening
- To provide information about community resources and professional services.

Watch for and discuss at-risk students and staff

Counselors or designated School Level Crisis Team members can:

- Create ongoing support groups for students who come on a volunteer basis or are referred by staff or other students.
- Follow up with individuals after group sessions.
- Conduct assessment interviews of referred at-risk students, staff or parents.
- Consult with specialists in the community.
- Contact parent(s)/guardian(s) of at-risk students and refer to professional counselors and community resources.

Use of volunteers

- Screen volunteers carefully. Some volunteers may be unrealistic about their own capacity to assist, or may come forward to work out problems of their own.

Planning a school memorial

- School teams should decide which activities are appropriate on school grounds to memorialize the deceased. Special care

should be taken to develop a school memorial model that would serve to memorialize all potential types of deaths consistently, including deaths by long-term illness, accident, trauma, suicide and homicide.

- Working with students/staff in a creative process for a ceremony often strengthens the students'/teachers' ability to adjust to the loss.

Issues in the classroom

- Encourage classroom flexibility.
- Help teachers find a balance between curriculum goals and time out to express feelings.

Support for the staff

- The School Level Crisis Team should be available to the staff. Encourage your members and staff to:
 1. Eat regularly.
 2. Take breaks during the day.
 3. Make plans that allow for some fun or some ease.
 4. Come to organized debriefing sessions.
 5. Acknowledge each other frequently for the hard work done.
 6. Trust yourselves and your intuitions.
 7. Utilize Employee Assistance Program for further counseling.

ACTIVITIES OF THE SCHOOL LEVEL CRISIS TEAM: ONGOING

The School Level Crisis Team's ongoing tasks

- School Level Crisis Team meetings may continue on an ongoing or occasional basis.
- Continue to be watchful of at-risk students/staff.
- The grief response can be delayed. Offer necessary services or referrals.

A review of the effectiveness of the process used during the crisis should be made by the School Level Crisis Team with input from the staff.

DISTRICT EMERGENCY COUNSELING SUPPORT TEAM

TEAM PURPOSE	The District Emergency Counseling Support Team provides support for student-related incidents that significantly impact more than an individual child or family. For smaller scale tragedies or those that impact individual students or families, Student Services staff is available to provide the administrator with consultation on appropriate community resources.
TEAM ACTIVITIES	<p>The Team will provide back-up support in the event of a school tragedy. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting in the set up of safe rooms for students • Supporting existing building resources in providing individual and/or group counseling for students • Assisting teachers in facilitating classroom conversations with students • Assisting principal in facilitating parent and community presentations
WHEN TO CALL	In the event of a crisis or tragedy, activate your building crisis plan. Consider calling any time the nature of the tragedy is so great that your school resources (counselor and other staff) may not be able to effectively respond to the need. Student Services staff is available for consultation and is responsible for coordinating the Emergency Counseling Support Team. Please call 503-347-1438, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to reach Student Services personnel.
COORDINATION	<p>The District Emergency Counseling Support Team Coordinator can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as the general consultant to all schools and departments in the district for issues pertaining to tragedy, death, and grief, • Coordinate the District Emergency Counseling Team's activities with the Principal and Regional Administrator, • Provide direction and guidance to the principal onsite during crisis response and via phone or email as follow-up. • Provide information about community resources for staff or parent meetings, • Maintain a file of letters, memos, etc., developed to communicate information about the tragedy and share with principals and Regional Administrators, • Provide resource materials on grief and loss for students and staff.
TEAM MEMBERSHIP	The team primarily consists of school counselors who have offered to leave their buildings in the event of a crisis. Team members are also drawn from Student Services, ESL, SPED, and other departments as appropriate. Ad-hoc team members may be added to the team in order to most appropriately respond to the school's need. Call 503-347-1438, 24/7, to access the team coordinator.

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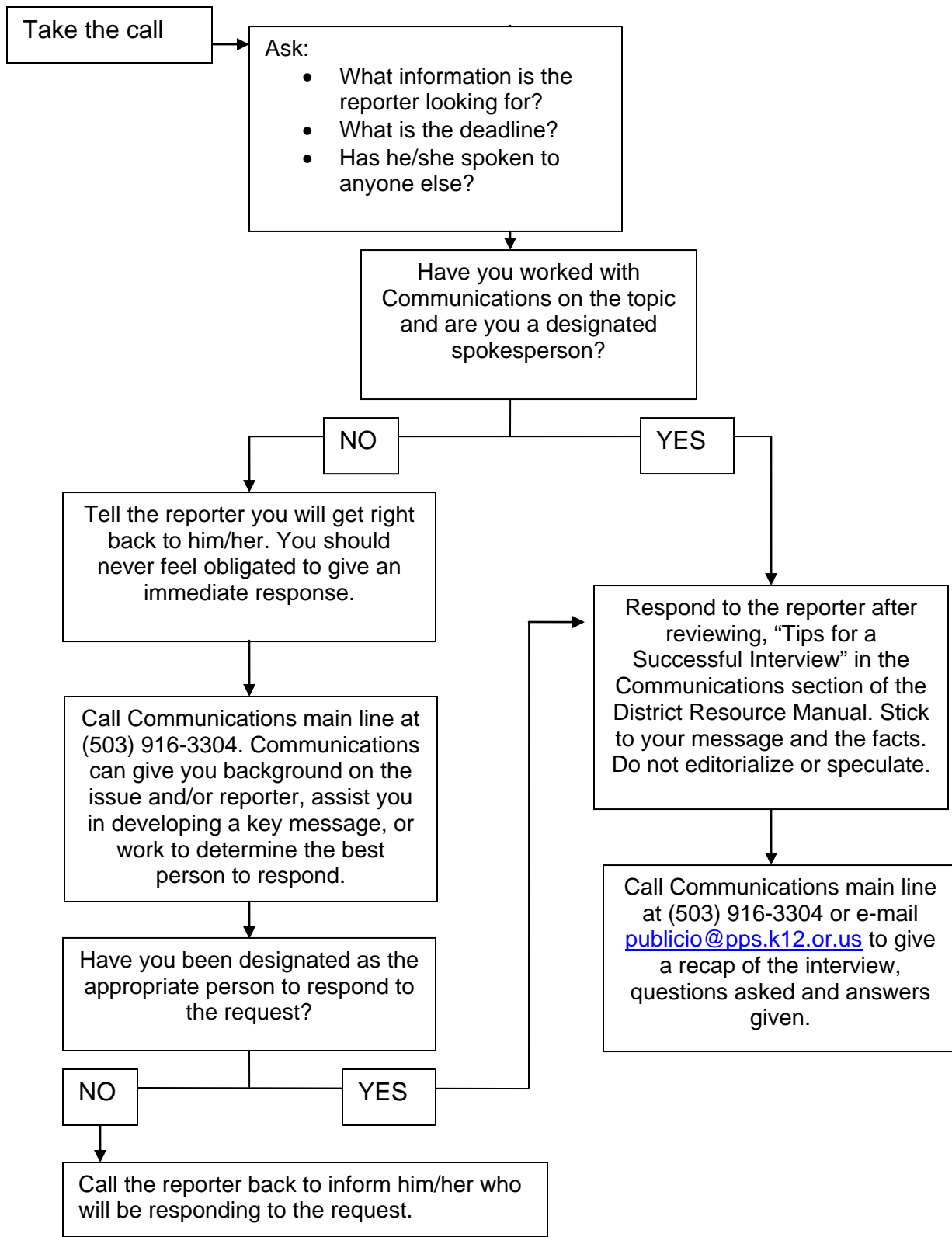
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What to Do When a Reporter Calls



What to Do When the Media Calls

In a crisis:

Follow official emergency procedures:

- Call 911
- Call PPS Communications main line at 503-916-3304

The most important action is to do your job and handle the crisis. If there are students involved, they are your first priority. Handling the media is not your primary responsibility, but you should make an effort to be cooperative—and not antagonistic—to media inquiries.

If a reporter tries to interview you while you are dealing with students in a crisis situation, suggest politely that you cannot talk with him/her at that time because you need to help the students.

“I can’t talk to you at this time because I need to help the students. I have a limited view of the incident and I need to talk to others about the situation. Someone will get back to you as soon as possible. May I get your name and telephone number?”

Talk to your principal, supervisor or your Regional Administrator about the incident before making any public comments. Have the media contact the PPS Communications Office (503-916-3304). A representative from the Communications Department will get there as soon as possible. (That is how the police and fire departments deal with issues.)

You are not obligated to speak to any reporter, even though you may be pressured to comment. Getting defensive or abusive, however, will reflect negatively on the issue. Do not reinforce the image of the “defensive public employee” denying the public’s “right to know.” Also, do not say “No comment.” That remark sends up a red flag to any good reporter. Instead say, “I cannot talk with you right now, but someone will get back to you as soon as possible.” Remember, reporters are only trying to do their job. Treat them with respect, help them do their job, but let them know that your job has top priority for you, especially when a crisis involves students.

In a non-crisis situation:

When you receive calls from the media requesting background information, remember that your response is an opportunity to “get the word out” about our excellent schools and programs. These inquiries are not “crisis” calls and you should not view them with suspicion. Media requests for information are the perfect opportunity for us to provide the best information possible, from the broadest perspective.

Try responding by saying, “Thanks for calling. Could I please get back to you as soon as I can gather all the information you might need about the issue/situation/program/etc? What is your deadline? Would you mind if I have someone else also call you about this?”

Use the time you have available to get as much information as possible. Give PPS Communications a call to advise them of the question, and to ask for assistance, if necessary. If you are not comfortable calling the reporter back, a PPS Communications staff member can make the call for you. In that case, however, you should make a courtesy call back to the reporter after PPS Communications has spoken to them. For any assistance with media – in both crisis and non-crisis situations – please call the PPS Communications Department at 503-916-3304 to assist you.

A Script to Help Teachers Announce a Death to Their Students

Dear Staff:

This is a hard task - to tell your students about the death that has occurred.

FIRST AND FOREMOST: If you do not feel that you want to be the one to tell your students, then don't. The School Level Crisis Team will make someone available to you who can lead the discussion for you, or take over your class while you seek the support you need. Please take advantage of this resource! We care about your needs in this sad time and want you to feel our support.

If you do want to lead the discussion, then here are the facts and some suggestions for procedures:

"I have something very sad I want to share with you." Write here the factual information (agreed upon by the School Level Crisis Team) e.g.; "Joe Smith, a student who attends our school, who was missing, is dead. Yesterday, the police found the little boy's body and he had been murdered. The police are investigating the crime and will give us the information they can as they make progress in finding the killer."

Then offer some information about feelings:

"When things like this happen, people have all kinds of reactions: shock, sadness, fear, anger, or no feeling at all. These reactions can come and go in an hour, a day, or for days to come. Some of us will want to be private about our feelings; some of us will want to talk to people."

Say a little about your feelings, for example:

"I am feeling very sad about what's happened and a little scared, too. I would like to spend some time together now to share with each other. Maybe we could help each other in expressing how we feel about (name of the one who died) and how she/he died."

Take some time for discussion. Refer to "Teacher's Guidelines on How to Lead a Discussion with Grieving Students".

After your discussion, tell the students that there are counselors in the building if they need to talk further and arrange with them a procedure for going to see the counselor or to the safe room.

After your discussion you may want to:

- Take time for recess, playground play or standing and stretching in the classroom.
- Do some drawing, art project or other projects – leave the subject matter up to the student.
- Do some journal writing – write down thoughts about whatever is on the child's mind.
- Go back to curriculum.

It may be useful to continue these activities at intervals during the day and to intersperse them throughout your curriculum in the coming days.

If you need some support, please call the front office. Do not hesitate to ask.

TEACHER GUIDELINES ON HOW TO LEAD A DISCUSSION WITH GRIEVING STUDENTS

1. **FACILITATE A DISCUSSION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**
Hold the talking circle as soon as possible after a crisis to avoid times of confusion and misinformation.
2. **ASK FOR HELP (IF NEEDED)**
You must be comfortable enough with the issues being discussed in order to lead the discussion. If you are not comfortable, ask for help from a counselor/School Level Crisis Team member.
3. **FORM A CIRCLE**
Forming a circle will include all members in a discussion. Move the desks, sit on a rug, etc.
4. **CREATE A STRUCTURED OR UNSTRUCTURED CONVERSATION**
A talking circle can be structured so that each student has an opportunity to speak in turn around the circle or the leader can facilitate an open, unstructured discussion. Younger students and students facing greater trauma are relieved by the more structured format.
5. **OBSERVE THE "I PASS" RULE**
In a structured talking circle, a child can choose not to share by saying "I pass." This rule keeps the discussion safe for a student by honoring his/her own pace.
6. **USE A "TALKING STICK"**
In a structured talking circle, use a special object as your "talking stick" (a stuffed animal, a special rock, a wand). The one holding the object is the only one to speak.
7. **TELL THE TRUTH**
Use accurate information and appropriate words (i.e., died, murdered, suicide). If you don't know the answers to the student's questions, say so. Offer to find out answers and report back, if possible.
8. **SHARE YOUR OWN FEELINGS**
It is good modeling and greatly cherished by students if their teachers share honestly about their own feelings (tears are OK). Do not look to your students as your source of support, but show your students that you rely appropriately on your adult peers for emotional support.
9. **SHARE FEELINGS AND MEMORIES IN THE GROUP**
10. **OFFER TIME FOR REFLECTION**
Listen carefully when a student shares an experience and be willing to simply reflect their statements. This often gives the students a sense of what they are feeling and inspires them to proceed along their own direction at their own pace.
11. **AVOID ASKING TOO MANY QUESTIONS**
Questions can often generate a conversation in a more unstructured discussion but too many questions can lead the conversation in the direction of the facilitator's wants and needs rather than the student's wants and needs.

12. AVOID INTERPRETATIONS

If a student is indirect or is using symbols in order to express him/herself, it is because direct communication is too painful. Communicate with a student through the information and the symbols that are offered.

13. AVOID JUDGEMENT

Referring to a student's sharing as either "good" or "bad" can encourage a student to seek adult approval while discouraging the student to trust his/her own way of expressing grief. You can say "thank you" for their sharing.

14. META COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER STAFF IN THE CIRCLE

Meta-communication is communication that takes place between the facilitators in a talking circle. This meta-level conversation is one that is meant to be "overheard" by the students and allows the facilitators a time of reflection with each other. Possible uses: highlighting important information shared, slowing down and processing a difficult interaction, giving emotional support to the process as a whole, or acknowledging our own feelings.

15. ALLOW FOR SILENCE AND TEARS

Often a little silence expresses the care that is needed and allows the one who is crying time to understand the meaning of the tears.

16. ALLOW FOR "MORBID CURIOSITY"

Curiosity about the explicit details of a death is healthy because students need to create a specific picture of what has happened before they can begin to feel what the death means to them. Encourage students in their exploration and answer their questions when you can.

17. ALLOW FOR SPECULATION

When students do not have the information they need to make the explicit pictures of what has happened, they will make up the missing pieces in their minds. Honor their speculations as their attempts to understand.

18. ALLOW FOR JOKING AND LAUGHTER

Sometimes students laugh when they are nervous and uncomfortable. We all do. Normalize this process for the students and find ways for the healthy release of laughter.

19. ENCOURAGE OTHER SUPPORT

As the group sharing is coming to a close, discuss with the students other ways they may get the support they need as they continue to grieve, i.e., a safe room or other adults in the school building, adults at home, friends, or resources in the community.

20. RECOGNIZE FEELINGS MAY CONTINUE

As the group sharing is coming to a close, inform students that they may continue to experience a wide range of feelings in the coming days/weeks/months. Feelings (anger, fear, numbness, happiness, guilt, regret, relief, etc.) are normal.

21. ESTABLISH CLOSURE

Express your appreciation for what has been shared and have a moment of acknowledgement for what the group may be going through.

Things a Teacher Can Say or Do to Help a Grieving Student Returning to School

"I remember when I went back to school how terrified I was. My heart began to beat faster as I reached for the doorknob." 12-year-old

1. Visit with the student and family before the student returns to class. If possible talk to the student about what she/he may want the class to know about the death, who should tell them, and whether the student wants to be present. Offer, if the student chooses, to lead a sharing time when the student returns.
2. Make a plan with the student so she/he may leave the room if she/he is feeling vulnerable. Find a safe place where the student can go during the school day, at recess, at lunch or during class if she/he wants some time alone.
3. Find a safe person that the student can go to during the day if she/he is feeling vulnerable; i.e., counselor, principal, nurse.
4. Encourage the student to answer friends' questions only when she/he feels like it. If the student does not want to answer, suggest that the student say, "I'd rather not talk about that right now."
5. Offer to support the student in telling the class during a sharing time. Whether she/he wants people to bring up talking about the death or whether she/he would like to make school a time out from grief. Remember, there are nonverbal ways you can show you care.
6. Offer the student a journal as a gift. Encourage the student to write about feelings, thoughts and/or memories in the journal during the school day when needed, especially during times the student is not able to concentrate on school work. Offer crayons and a blank drawing book to a younger child.
7. Negotiate, on an ongoing basis, homework and classroom assignment expectations. Grief takes tremendous physical and emotional energy. The student may experience temporary cognitive changes, including short-term memory loss, reduced concentration and impaired sequential thinking.
8. Offer yourself as a listener or friend to the student if you want to do so. Designate times when you are available, i.e.; lunch, recess, after school.
9. Encourage a mini support group of the student's friends and allow for special arrangements so that the group can spend time together during the school day.

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What to Say to Grieving Students

Both students and teachers can send a note before the student returns to school. “I’m sorry to hear that your mom died. I’m thinking about you and wanting to make your time at school the best it can be . . .”

Being a good listener is the best you can offer. Allow what you say to be an opener for the student to talk if she/he wants to. If she/he doesn’t want to talk, then remain available.

1. “I’m sorry that your mom died. I’m thinking about you.”
2. “I’m available at lunch time (be specific) if you want to talk or shoot some baskets.”
3. “When is your basketball game? Maybe I can stop by and watch you play.”
4. “I’d like to do something with you on Saturday. We can either talk about your mom if you’d like, or we can go roller-skating at the mall—both are ok with me” (as appropriate).
5. “I care about you.”
6. “I want to help in any way I can.” (Offer specific ideas: help with homework . . .)
7. “I am aware that today is your birthday/your mother’s birthday/Mothers’ Day/ the anniversary of the day your mother died. I’m thinking about you.”
8. “I can’t know how you feel, but I want to.”
9. Share your own losses briefly, and then listen: “I can’t know how you feel, but I did have my grandfather die . . . (share). What was it like for you?”
10. “If you want to talk, I want to listen. If you don’t want to talk, I’ll hang out with you.”
11. “If you don’t want to talk to other students, I’ll tell them about what happened to your mother.”
12. “Do you want a hug?”
13. “Do you have any pictures of your mom?”
14. “Don’t forget to continue to joke and crack-up. Laughter is food to help us endure.”
15. Teachers: Let’s talk about things we can do to make you feel more comfortable in class/school. Some ideas are included on the handout, “Things A Teacher Can Say or Do to Help a Grieving Student Returning to School.”

For the most part, it is important to say something to a grieving friend, even if it feels awkward. The reaching out is what is important.

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Sample Letter to Parents

Dear Parents:

A very sad thing happened today that I want to share with you. (Share the information honestly, i.e. This morning one of our kindergarten students, (Name), was hit by a car outside of his home in Southwest Portland. According to his family, he ran out into the street and was seriously injured. He died at the hospital. We are all profoundly saddened by his death.)

We have shared this information and had discussions with all of our students (in the classroom/school) so that they know what has happened. Counselors, teachers and other support personnel have been, and will continue to be, available to students, teachers and parents on an ongoing basis. Please call the school, (number), if you want assistance.

As parents, you may want to talk to your children too. The death of a (student/teacher) may affect a child in a variety of ways depending on the age of a child, how well the child knew (the one who died) and the child's prior experience with grief.

When reacting to a death, a child may:

- Appear not to be affected.
- Ask a lot of questions.
- Be agitated and angry.
- Try extra hard to be good.
- Be thinking about it privately.
- Be frightened.
- Be sad and withdrawn.

We suggest you listen to your children. If they seem to need to talk, answer their questions simply, honestly and possibly over and over again.

(optional) A Parent Informational Night is planned for (date, time, place). At that time, we can talk further about how to help children in grief.

Our thoughts are with (family name).

Sincerely,

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Sample Letter to Parents (2)

Dear Parents/Guardians,

INSERT SCHOOL-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Today at school, we shared this information with our staff, who in turn shared it with students. Counselors, teachers and district support personnel have been and will continue to be available to students, teachers and parents on an ongoing basis.

When circumstances of this magnitude occur, people have all kinds of reactions: shock, sadness, fear, anger or no feelings at all. These reactions can come and go in an hour or a day or for days to come. All of these feelings are normal responses to the death of someone we know or who was a part of our school community.

It is helpful for students to be able to talk about how they feel and are impacted by this event. The death of a student may affect a young person in a variety of ways, depending on their age, how well the student knew the individual who died, and the student's prior experience with grief, death, and loss.

When reacting to a death a student may:

- Appear not to be affected
- Ask a lot of questions
- Be agitated and angry
- Try extra hard to be good
- Be thinking about it privately
- Be frightened
- Be sad and withdrawn

We suggest that you encourage your student to talk about the events of the day. If they seem to need information, answer their questions simply and honestly. We encourage you to call the school at 503-916- _____ should you need any assistance.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter to Parents: Follow-up Letter

Dear Parents:

Our school has been profoundly affected by the death of (name of student/teacher). We would like to offer you, at this time, some additional material that might help you respond to your children at home as they are struggling to understand and recover from this loss in their lives.

Enclosed are some handouts and a list of books that you can read yourself, read with your children or get for them to read.

Please call the school counselor (name and phone number), for further assistance. We will be most interested to talk with you regarding any questions or concerns.

We recognize that this is a difficult time for our school families. We want to be available to support you.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter to Parents and School When Death is a Suicide

To the School Community:

A very sad thing happened today that I want to share with you. (Give accurate information, using the word 'suicide' for cause of death, i.e., Josephine Smith, our librarian, died by suicide from poisoning herself, on March 2nd).

Any person's death is tragic; however, when that person's death is a suicide, it is a different and greater tragedy. There can be many factors which would lead an individual to this course of action. We can never know exactly why she killed herself.

We do know that we often ask ourselves if there was something we could have done or said. It appears that many individuals did care about her and reached out to her in their own way. Depression is a curious and confusing state. Sometimes we can break through its shell and at other times no one can.

We will all miss (name) – family, friends, students, and teachers. If nothing else, I hope we all realize that we must reach out to one another, to be friends, to listen, to help each other to understand that each one of us is important. As difficult as times may get, our lives have value and meaning. If any of us have thoughts of wanting to kill ourselves, tell someone. If we can do this, we can get help. There are people who know how to help and who care.

Counselors, teachers and other support personnel have been, and will continue to be, available for students, teachers and parents on an ongoing basis. Please contact the counselor, (name), or call the school office, (number), for assistance.

A Community Support Night is planned for (date, time and place) for staff and parents.

At that time, we can talk further about how to help ourselves and our children with grief and suicide prevention.

Our thoughts are with (family name) and with each of you.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter to Parents When a Violent Death Has Occurred

Dear Parents:

A very sad thing happened today that I want to share with you. (Give accurate information about the murder, using the word "murder", e.g.; a neighborhood child who is the brother of a student here at school was murdered earlier this week. We are all profoundly saddened by his death).

We have shared this information and had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened. Counselors, staff and other support personnel have been, and will continue to be, available for students, staff and parents on an ongoing basis. Please call the school (number) if you would like to talk to someone.

You may want to talk to your child as well. The violent death of a student/staff member may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Most children will experience being afraid for their own lives and for the lives of those they love.

We will be planning follow-up activities to help cope with children's fears, with lessons on safety and security. You may want to talk to your children about safety at home and on the way to and from school.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!! PLEASE send your child who walks to school at the appropriate time only. School begins at 8:40! Please do not send your child early to play on the playground. We would recommend children walk with other friends to and from school. Children must go home directly after dismissal. Let's work together to provide the safest and most secure environment for our children.

There are news reporters around the school. You need not respond to reporter's questions if you are approached. Naturally, we will not allow reporters to interview your child at school.

The death of a young person is tragic. However, a violent death is a different and greater tragedy. It is a sad thing to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it. This is a loss for us all. We can offer our children our love and our intention to make a safe and kinder world. This is something we can do together. Please, let us know if there is any way we can support you during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

THE THREE TASKS FACING CHILDREN IN GRIEF

WHEN SOMEONE IN A CHILD'S LIFE DIES, A CHILD GRIEVES. A CHILD'S GRIEVING IS, IN ACTUALITY, A CHILD'S TACKLING AND MASTERING THREE SIGNIFICANT TASKS. EACH CHILD HAS AN INNER DRIVE TO MASTER THESE TASKS IN ORDER TO REGAIN A SENSE OF WELL-BEING AFTER A DEATH HAS OCCURRED.

the 1st task

A child wants *to understand* what has happened when a death has occurred.

This is a thinking task.

- How to help:
- Tell the truth.
 - Use the words "death" and "dead."
 - Answer a child's questions, maybe over and over again.
 - Admit when you don't know the answer by saying so.
 - Allow a child to make speculations about information that is not known, and label them as so.
 - Give a child choices about his/her involvement in the dying process, the viewing, the service and in other events during which they can learn about what has happened.
 - Know that children may grieve over and over again as they grow older developmentally, and are able to understand more.

the 2nd task

A child wants *to express feelings* about the death. This is a feeling task.

When 1) the "goneness" of someone who has died is felt, and 2) the children experience the grief of the adults in their lives—then children have an emotional and physical response.

- How to help:
- Listen, accept and care.
 - Keep a child safe. Maintain standards of discipline.
 - Do not let children hurt themselves or others. If they do so continually, seek professional help.
 - Make available outlets for the big energy of feelings: sports, active play, loud voices, hitting pillows.
 - Lower expectations of children at school and at home, because grief takes tremendous physical and emotional energy.
 - Understand that children may feel and act younger when they are grieving.
 - Understand that children may be physically vulnerable—i.e. illness- and accident-prone—while they are grieving.

the 3rd task

A child wants *to continue to live fully in the present and open up to the future.*

This is a practical task.

- How to help:
- Allow children to play hard, laugh hard, and have fun even as they mourn, for this is not disloyal. In fact, it is through this play that children can be restored.
 - Hold the vision of a child's healing. Have faith, even when they do not, that they will regain a sense of well-being.

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***Coping Strategies for Children Following Trauma
(For Families in the Aftermath of Trauma)***

Rebuild and reaffirm attachments and relationships. Love and care in the family is a primary need. It is important to spend extra time with children to let them know that someone will take care of them and, if parents are survivors, that their parents have reassumed their former role as protector and nurturer. Physical closeness is needed.

It is important to talk to children about the tragedy — to address the irrationality and suddenness of disaster. Children need to be allowed to ventilate their feelings, as do adults, and they have a similar need to have those feelings validated. Reenactments and play about the catastrophe should be encouraged. It may be useful to provide them with special time to paint, draw, or write about the event. Adults or older children may help pre-school children reenact the event since pre-school children may not be able to imagine alternative “endings” to the disaster and hence may feel particularly helpless.

Parents should be prepared to tolerate regressive behaviors and accept the manifestation of aggression and anger, especially in the early phases after the tragedy.

Parents should be prepared for children to talk sporadically about the event – spending small segments of time concentrating on particular aspects of the tragedy.

Children want as much factual information as possible and should be allowed to discuss their own theories about what happened in order for them to begin to master the trauma or to reassert control over their environment.

Since children are often reluctant to initiate conversations about trauma, it may be helpful to ask them what they think other children felt or thought about the event.

Reaffirming the future and talking in hopeful terms about future events can help a child rebuild trust and faith in her own future and the world. Often parental despair interferes with a child’s ability to recover.

Student Servicesues of death should be addressed concretely. The child is not to blame for others’ deaths. The death is not a rejection of the child. Death is permanent and sad. The grieving process should be acknowledged and shared.

***This information is from the National Organization for Victim Assistance
Washington, D.C., October 1987.***

Ways to Take Care of Yourself at Times of Loss

- Talk to family or friends about how you are feeling/doing.
- Write your thoughts and feelings in a journal.
- Write poetry.
- Write letters of appreciations about anything in life.
- Draw pictures.
- Get into art.
- Play a game or sport.
- Get lots of exercise.
- Listen to soothing music or listen to loud music and dance!
- Snack on healthy foods.
- Take vitamins.
- Go for a walk.
- Care for your pets and houseplants.
- Take a favorite stuffed animal to bed with you.
- Read a favorite story or ask someone in your family to read a story to you.
- Let yourself cry.
- Ask for a hug. Ask for another hug.
- Get lots of sleep.
- Spend time in prayer or meditation.
- Talk to a counselor.
- Treat yourself to a massage.
- Light a candle.
- Watch your favorite movie.
- Sing loud.
- Laugh.

Recommendations for Youth

(Use this as a guideline – school staff may amend and add to it as needed)

We thought this might be a good time for all of us to think about how to get through the next day or two. Here are a few suggestions on how we can support each other.

- Put a little extra energy into friendships.
- Call each other more often for the next few days.
- If you had a good talk with someone today and don't know his or her phone number, get it before you leave school.
- Eat decent food and try to get plenty of sleep.
- Let your family know what today has been like. Tell them what you need from them. Let them know how they can support you.
- Look for ways to support each other: Check in with each other or spend more time together.
- Do some fun things, too. Take breaks from the grief.
- Let the school counselor or another adult know if there is someone you're concerned about.
- Talk to a trusted adult if you're having a tough time – especially if you're having nightmares, fears or thoughts that you just can't get to go away.
- There is a crisis hotline in Multnomah County available to anyone who wants to talk about anything, 24 hours a day. The number is 503-988-4888.

For those of you who go to the funeral:

It will be a (church/graveside/whatever) service. Dress for the weather. (Where will it be held? Will there be a viewing? Other information regarding this.)

If you want to take flowers or cards, it is fine to do so. Even though it may feel awkward, when you are there, it is helpful to go ahead and talk to the family. Saying that you feel bad about this, that you are sad, that you wish there were something you could do to make it better, any honest expression of how you are feeling is a fine thing to say. It is also fine to tell the family what one thing you admired or liked most about the person you've lost. Share your favorite memory with them.

If you know other family members, it is better to talk to them than avoid them. We don't want them to feel further isolated. It is OK that you may feel awkward.

If you are going to attend the service tomorrow, remember your permission slip. Remember that you are to check in to your first period class/attendance office and be excused from there. All students are expected to return to school after the service. If students feel the need to talk to someone tomorrow, supportive adults will be available.