

# WHAT IS A SCHOOL CRISIS?

A situation or event which introduces elements of:

- Sudden personal threat or danger to others
- Complex issues and the burden of responsibility
- Overwhelming anxiety about loss of control
- Uncertainty in response by exceeding problem-solving skills thereby creating feelings of discord and shocked immobility for the professionals, students, and parents of a school community.

# **What do Crises in Schools Produce?**

- Angry, volatile reactions
- Feelings of vulnerability and hopelessness
- Loss of focus and confusion
- Diminished self-esteem
- Demands for an appropriate response concerns about safety
- Openness in communication and rumor control
- Evidence of crisis management protocols

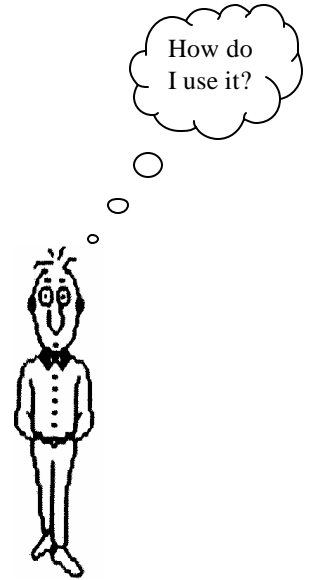
Rowland Savage (2000)

## WHAT FACTORS WORSEN SCHOOL CRISES?

- Lack of **resources** - both local and on a system's level
- Lack of **procedures** and **protocols**
- **Uncertainty** about legal responsibilities
- Absence of a **team of trained responders**
- **Inadequate information** to control rumors
- **Novel crises** demanding new protocols
- **Underfunctioning** at the school leadership level

# What is the Role of School-Based Crisis Management Teams?

- Consultants - Emergency Plans
- Leadership in Schoolwide Crises
- Collaborators in Achieving a Safe and Orderly School Environment
- Staff Development Training
- Back-up for Student Management
- Compliment Services of Archdiocesan Team



# **WHY ARE CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAMS HELPFUL?**

- MINIMIZES CONFUSION
- USES SKILLS WITHIN YOUR SYSTEM
- PROVIDES ROLE CLARIFICATION
- OFFERS EXPERT CONSULTATION
- PROVIDES CONSISTENCY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES
- AUGMENTS SKILLS OF STAFF MEMBERS
- SUPPLEMENTS IN-SCHOOL SERVICES
- RESTORES FUNCTIONING IN A SYSTEMATIC AND EXPEDIENT FASHION WHICH IN TURN REDUCES BARRIERS TO STUDENT LEARNING

# **WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DIOCESE'S RESPONSE TEAM AND A LOCAL SCHOOL'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM?**

## **Diocesan Response Team Consults with Schools In:**

- Defined crises such as natural disasters and very public traumatic losses,
- Crises which threaten to overwhelm the local resources of a school (e.g., sudden death of a well known student/teacher)
- Crises which call for public relations or legal expertise

**WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN THE DIOCESE'S  
RESPONSE TEAM AND A LOCAL  
SCHOOL'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT  
TEAM?**

**Local Crisis Management Team  
Personnel serve as:**

- Triage assessment of students known to them
- Identification of students/teachers in need
- Individual and group support counseling
- Support of teachers in classroom
- Classroom presenters
- Parent consultation

## **Goal of Crisis Intervention:**

Allow people to tell their story and to facilitate a return to a natural routine by encouraging them to recover cognitive analysis skills.

Elements *within* Crisis Intervention:

### **Provisions for safety and security**

- Assurance that there will be no revictimization
- Information about safety provisions
- Ensuring confidentiality
- Accepting a range of grief emotions

### **Provisions for ventilation and validation**

- Allow survivors/victims to tell their story
- Permit expressions of anger
- Effective listening practiced

### **Provision for prediction and preparation**

- Providing information on what will happen next as a result of intervention
- Assisting people to deal with the realities of the aftermath of the crisis
- Helping people recognize the strengths they demonstrate within a crisis.

## **2. The School Crisis Response Team**

The building Crisis Response Team (CRT) capitalizes on the fact that co-workers know each other, have communicated previously in some manner with one another, and can work collaboratively. If a building team is not feasible, then a Diocesan team composed of members throughout the Diocesan schools should be formed. Capitalizing upon the collaborative relationships that exist among members of a school family cannot be underscored enough and will be explored further in this guide. School personnel must be educated and empowered to effectively respond to school based crises. Notwithstanding, today there are often efforts to bring in outside teams of experts in the wake of a tragedy. The well meaning efforts of these "strangers" are often rebuffed and their presence may only serve to exacerbate confusion.

Members of the School Crisis Response Team should include the following:

### **Principal**

The principal maintains a critical position on the Crisis Response Team. He/She holds the most authority in the building and typically has responsibility for actions taken by team members. The principal must obtain all available facts. This process often involves speaking with families as well as outside agencies (e.g., police department and/or local hospital). The principal functions as the liaison between the school building, the superintendent and other district administration. Additionally, he/she may be involved in addressing the media. Ideally, the principal is approachable and supportive, especially during times of crisis.

### **Assistant Principal (Dean)**

The assistant principal helps the principal by serving as a liaison between support personnel, students and the principal. He/She maintains primary authority in the absence of the principal. The assistant principal can prepare and arrange for the distribution of letters to be sent home to parents and guardians. Such letters can inform them of the facts surrounding the crisis and a summary of actions the school is taking to help students (see Practical Document F). The assistant principal can meet with parents/guardians as well as facilitate the referral process for outside support (perhaps in conjunction with the psychologist and/or social worker). Finally, the assistant principal may serve as an alternate spokesperson for the media.

### **School Psychologist/Guidance Counselor/Student Assistance Program (SAP)**

School psychologists are in a position to facilitate the crisis response at several levels. By virtue of their training, they can educate the school staff and students about what to expect-physically, emotionally and behaviorally-as a result of exposure to a traumatic event (e.g., a suicide). School psychologists are trained to identify individuals who may be "at risk" or vulnerable to further psychological deterioration following exposure to a crisis situation. Additionally, they may provide coping strategies, follow-up counseling with individuals, and referrals to outside professionals when appropriate.

**Social Worker**

Social workers can work with school psychologists in maintaining the emotional well-being of individuals exposed to a crisis. They may conduct support groups (if indicated) and help in the identification of individuals in need of further assistance. Social workers may contact and work with parents of students to facilitate further support, perhaps, by a community mental health center, etc.

**School Nurse**

With his/her knowledge of physical problems, the nurse is in an ideal position to help students who are injured. Moreover, the nursing staff is typically trained to handle acute physical reactions to crisis exposure including hyperventilation, fainting, etc. The nurse may serve as a liaison between the local hospital and the school building. Nurses can document the nature of injuries and facilitate in the transport of individuals to the hospital (if necessary).

**Guidance Counselor**

By virtue of their relationships with many students, guidance counselors may aid in identifying those individuals who are in need of intervention. They can coordinate support groups for students and staff, provide counseling as well as notify parents and guardians of students affected by the crisis (if indicated).

**Teachers**

Teachers may have the difficult task of providing a stable and calm model for their students at a time when they, personally, may be experiencing considerable emotional turmoil. A careful selection of teachers should be included on the Crisis Response Team. These teachers can serve as a liaison between the team and the faculty. Moreover, these teachers may be in a position to answer questions that students have regarding the crisis situation (assuming that by doing so, the emotional well-being of the student is prioritized). Teachers can help identify and refer students who appear in need of emotional support. Specific guidelines for teachers are offered in Practical Document 1.

**Building Security**

Some schools have security guards on campus. Security guards maintain an important role in safeguarding individuals in the building in the event of a violent or potentially life-threatening situation. Building security should maintain direct contact and work in concert with local police (if indicated). Security guards can engage in crowd control in the event bystanders gather in the wake of an event. School classrooms, halls, cafeterias and grounds may need special monitoring.

**Ancillary Staff**

Other building staff may serve important roles during a crisis situation. For example, secretaries likely know many parents and students, and may supply the Crisis Response Team with relevant information. They may also be helpful in documentation. In addition, paraprofessionals (e.g., teacher aides) frequently have close relationships with many students within the school environment. These relationships could be invaluable in reaching students during a crisis. Finally, it is important that all staff, including non-teaching staff (e.g., custodians), have basic knowledge of the school's, crisis response plan.

## **If a tragedy occurs . . . What building administrators can do.**

**Actions to take.** Immediately upon learning a student has completed a suicide, the chief school administrator or other appropriate person should meet with the crisis team *to*:

- Confirm the facts of the death. Someone will need to talk directly with the investigating police officer and, possibly, the coroner.
- Make decisions about the school schedule, trying to keep it as normal as possible.
- Decide who will brief staff on the tragedy, and when this will be done. There is always a need to re-explain staffs responsibilities in discussing the student's suicide, to advise them on procedures for referring students for assistance, and provide them with candid information to offset rumors.
- Decide how the student's death will be announced to other students. Do not use the public address system. Have written copies for all teachers to work from in their classrooms.
- Decide who will prepare the office staff to deal with telephone calls. Providing these clerical members with an accurate written statement can reduce the pressure they may feel in an unfamiliar situation.
- Determine when the contents of the victim's locker will be removed and who will remove them. Advise the teachers of ways to resolve the "empty chair" issue.
- Decide when the building administrator should visit the family. . Determine how support for close friends of the victim will be handled. Quite often they should be the first student's directly seen by the school counselors.
- Agree on who will attend the funeral. How will this issue be presented to the student body It is not wise to call off school so that everyone can attend the funeral. This tends to glorify the suicide and could lead to others.
- Determine how to deal with family issues. The school should convey its sympathy for the loss the family has suffered. However, school memorials that glamorize the death, such as planting trees, setting up scholarships in the deceased name, or installing plaques are not appropriate. Suggest to family members that they contribute to programs that promote mental health for students.
- Identify who will communicate with any schools attended by sibling survivors so that their re-entry into the system will be easier.
- Assign an administrator or a crisis team member to monitor the interest the media may take in this death. Preplanning with the media to develop a mentally healthy policy of underplaying any suicide is recommended. Discourage the media from interviewing students on campus.
- Call your faculty together at the end of the day to assess their feelings about the plan, to inquire about any concerns they may still have, and to obtain their input for further adjustment to your plan.

Adapted from Teens in Crisis

Dr. Thomas C. Barrett

American Association of School Administrators (1989)

## **SCHOOL CRISIS MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST**

<b>A. The existence of a comprehensive safety plan:</b>	<b>Fully Implemented</b>	<b>Partially Implemented</b>	<b>Need to Address</b>
1. A crisis management plan has been developed to address the following emergencies.			
a. Accidents			
1. at school	_____	_____	_____
2. to and from school	_____	_____	_____
3. on a school bus	_____	_____	_____
4. after school activity	_____	_____	_____
5. on a field/athletic trip	_____	_____	_____
b. Serious(personal injury) assaults			
1. on a student	_____	_____	_____
2. on a teacher/staff	_____	_____	_____
3. on an administrator	_____	_____	_____
c. Bomb threats	_____	_____	_____
d. Explosive device found	_____	_____	_____
e. Explosive device detonates	_____	_____	_____
f. Suspected child abuse	_____	_____	_____
1. occurred at home	_____	_____	_____
2. occurred at school	_____	_____	_____
g. Child napping	_____	_____	_____
h. Death at school	_____	_____	_____
1. natural causes	_____	_____	_____
2. accidental	_____	_____	_____

**A. (Continued)**

	<b>Fully Implemented</b>	<b>Partially Implemented</b>	<b>Need to Address</b>
3. homicide	_____	_____	_____
4. suicide	_____	_____	_____
I. Ethnic disturbances	_____	_____	_____
j. Gang altercations	_____	_____	_____
k. Student demonstration	_____	_____	_____
1. authorized	_____	_____	_____
2. unauthorized	_____	_____	_____
l. Natural disaster	_____	_____	_____
m. Riots	_____	_____	_____
n. Suicide attempts/threats	_____	_____	_____
o. Possession of a weapon	_____	_____	_____
p. Violation of State laws	_____	_____	_____
q. Violation of school rules	_____	_____	_____
2. Threats that are unique to your school (i.e. nuclear accidents, hazardous chemical release, environmental conditions)			
a. _____	_____	_____	_____
b. _____	_____	_____	_____

**B. Elements of a Crisis Management Plan**

1. A select group of staff have been chosen _____ to serve on the <i>Situation Management Team</i> .	_____	_____	_____
2. The SMT members have been given specific assignments during a crisis.	_____	_____	_____
3. A <i>Chain-of-Command</i> has been established which identifies who is in charge if the principal is not present or is not able to exercise leader- ship role.	_____	_____	_____
4. A <i>word</i> or <i>phrase</i> has been selected to alert staff that an emergency exists and that the Crisis Plan is being activated.	_____	_____	_____

**B. (Continued)**

**Fully Implemented      Partially Implemented      Need to Address**

- |   |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| 5. A <i>word or phrase</i> has been selected to alert staff that the crisis has passed and to return to normal operations.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 6. All staff, not having direct supervision of students, have been instructed to report to a central location.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 7. A floor plan of the school showing the location of all telephones, the shut off valve for water, gas and electricity has been prepared and is part of the Crisis Management Manual.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 8. An alternative evacuation site has been selected.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 9. An alternate <i>Command Center</i> has been selected.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 10. An emergency kit consisting of the following has been assembled:<br>a. portable telephone<br>b. flashlight<br>c. stick-on name tags<br>d. marking pens<br>e. hand-held radio<br>f. first aid supplies<br>g. whistle<br>h. master keys<br>l. emergency telephone numbers<br>j. class list<br>k. bull horn (optional)<br>L rubber gloves<br>m. note book<br>n. list of staff<br>o. camera | _____ | _____ | _____ |

**C. Communication of Discipline Policies and Procedures**

- |   |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Students are made aware of behavioral expectations and school discipline procedures through the <i>Code of Student Conduct</i> . | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Parents are made aware of and acknowledged student behavior expectations and school discipline procedures annually.              | _____ | _____ | _____ |

<b>D. Intra-Agency and Inter-Agency Emergency Planning</b>	<b>Fully Implemented</b>	<b>Partially Implemented</b>	<b>Need to Address</b>
--	--------------------------	------------------------------	------------------------

- |  |       |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. School crisis management/emergency Plans are coordinated with district emergency plan.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2. School Crisis management/emergency plans have been developed in cooperation with law enforcement and other emergency response agencies. | _____ | _____ | _____ |

**E. Recording of Disruptive Incidents**

- |   |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Violations of state and federal laws that occur on school property are reported immediately by school officials to the appropriate law enforcement agency.                         | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2. An incident-reporting procedure has been established for all disruptive incidents that take place on school property.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 3. A process has been developed to report disruptive incidents and to analyze the data in order to identify recurring school safety/ security problems. ( <i>Incident Profiling</i> ) | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. A process has been established for students to report alleged physical, psychological, or sexual abuse.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |

**F. Training of Staff and Students**

- |  |       |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Training session and drills are conducted on a regular basis to test the effectiveness and efficiency of crisis plans and procedures. | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| a. Date of last drill: _____   |       |       |       |
| b. Date of next scheduled drill: _____   |       |       |       |
| 2. Staff training is provided for the following:   |       |       |       |
| a. weapons detection and reporting   | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| b. how to respond to confrontations involving a weapon   | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| c. clarifying expectations for reporting and responding to acts of violence  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| d. intercepting and responding to intruders  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| e. crisis management procedures  | _____ | _____ | _____ |

**F. (Continued)**

**Fully Implemented      Partially Implemented      Need to Address**

f. response to suspected child abuse \_\_\_\_\_

3. Some staff are trained in first aid & CPR. \_\_\_\_\_

**G. Assessment of Buildings and Grounds**

1. School buildings and grounds are properly lighted- for night activities. \_\_\_\_\_

2. A system is in place to monitor all entrances. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Entrance doors have see-through safety glass. \_\_\_\_\_

4. All areas within the building are adequately lighted. \_\_\_\_\_

5. A system is in place to monitor all rest rooms and other unsupervised campus areas. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Student locker areas can be monitored. \_\_\_\_\_

7. Access to electrical panels, in all areas, is restricted and secured by locks. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Mechanical rooms, hazardous material storage, audio visual rooms, and supply rooms are kept locked. \_\_\_\_\_

9. Shrubbery and trees are trimmed to Permit good visual surveillance of all parts of the school campus. \_\_\_\_\_

10. A high visibility area has been designated as the *pickup/drop-off* point for students. \_\_\_\_\_

11. Parking areas are well lighted and are monitored by staff. \_\_\_\_\_

12. Playground supervision is adequate to ensure student safety. \_\_\_\_\_

**H. Procedures for Handling Visitors, Substitute Teachers, and Parent Volunteers**

1. Signs have been posted directing all visitors to report to the main office. \_\_\_\_\_

2. A *separate Sign - In Log* is maintained for Visitors, Substitute Teachers and Parent Volunteers. \_\_\_\_\_

**H. (Continued)**

Fully Implemented	Partially Implemented	Need to Address
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- |   |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| 3. A <i>separate numbered</i> identification badge is issued to each classification of visitor.   | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. A procedure has been developed and implemented that regulates how a student is released to a parent prior to the normal closing of school. | _____ | _____ | _____ |

**I. Transportation Rules and Accident Procedures**

- |  |       |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Procedures have been established for notifying bus drivers to return to a school to transport students and staff during an evacuation proceeding  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2. All students participate in school bus emergency evacuation drills twice yearly.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 3. Passenger lists for all bus routes are maintained at the school site and are updated as changes occur.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Route descriptions for field trips are filed in the school office before trip begins.   | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Passenger lists are developed and filed with the school for each vehicle going on the field trip.   | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 6. All students and staff participating in a field trip carry photo-identification with them.  | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 7. Students, staff, and chaperones with medical problems have identification of these problems on them when participating in a field trip. The supervisor of the event will have a written list of these medical problems. | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 8. The adult in-charge of each bus on a field trip will have a roster of each passenger with an appropriate emergency phone number for each.   | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 9. If available, the field trip supervisor should have a portable telephone.   | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 10. Arrangements have been made to notify an appropriate school official of any delay in the return of a field trip.   | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Date Assessment Completed: \_\_\_\_\_ By Whom: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: NASS wishes to acknowledge that a major portion of this Checklist was taken from a document prepared by the Texas Education Agency, Austin, Texas. We are appreciative of their willingness to share this information.

## ADAPTING THE PLAN TO FIT THE CRISIS

Adapting your previously developed plan to fit the current crisis is a primary task of the crisis committee. To do this better, or to formulate your initial plan, ask the following questions:

### **How Will the Announcement Be Made?**

- Can you tell your faculty first?
- Is this a school-wide crisis?
- Can you announce the event in such a way that it does not become sensationalized?
- Will rumor and speculation result because of the way the announcement is made?
- How do you expect your faculty, your students and parents to react to the news?
- Who should be notified within your school system? (Superintendent, principal, crisis team)

### **Will a Memorial Service Be Held?**

- How widespread is the effect of this tragedy on your students?
- Is *this* an incident that should be memorialized?
- Will the service be open to the public, the press, or parents?
- Set the date, time, and location of the Memorial Service.

### **Does Your School Have Any Legal Responsibilities in This Incident?**

- How will you inform parents?
- What supports, if any, will you provide for parents or the community?
- Are your students or faculty likely to face trials or positions? If so, how will you prepare them?
- Who can you contact from your school board or community for assistance?

### **How Will You Address the Media?**

- Who is your spokesperson?
- Is this incident likely to draw national attention? If so, who is your back-up spokesperson?
- Has a written statement for the press been prepared?
- Have a time and a location been established to address the media?
- Do you need assistance from your Superintendent's office?

### **How Much Faculty Support Is Necessary?**

- Is it necessary to provide counseling for faculty as well?
- Who will provide this faculty support?
- Have a time and location been established to meet with the faculty after the school day?

When the crisis is over, review and update your school's plan to accommodate necessary changes as they occur.

School Crisis Survival Guide  
Suni Peterson and Ron L. Straub  
Center for Applied Research in Education

## Communicating with the Media

### **Be proactive.** with the press:

- If there is a chance that this will be a public crisis, contact them before they contact you.
- Set up geographic and time restrictions for contact between the media and your spokesperson.
- Explain restrictions such as, no photographing on campus or within the school.

### **Be positive and focused** in your communications with the media:

- Be willing to speak to the media through an identified spokesperson.
- Have a set number of points (3) which you wish to get across and work them into your responses to their questions.
- Have a written statement to distribute to media.
- Stress the preparation you have taken:
  - A crisis intervention plan was immediately called
  - A crisis intervention team is already in place assisting students and staff.
  - Students are handling the loss calmly and with understanding.
  - Parents will be informed of the loss and given suggestions on how to be of assistance to their children.

### **Be honest:**

- If you do not have information, merely say, *I have no information about that at this time.*
- Be cautious about statements of cause and effect until your facts are clear.
- Offer to update information when more facts are known.

### **Be candid but confidential:**

- Who (Use "student" and "teacher"), "What, When, Where, How (without prescription for copycats), and "What is being done now.

R. L. Savage, 1996

# GOALS FOR ARCHDIOCESEAN RESPONSE TEAM TRAINING

- A**      **Articulate** the needs of a traumatic loss intervention team plan tailored for archdiocesan schools.
- R**      **Review** the steps required to put a collaborative plan into operation among the archdiocesan schools.
- C**      **Consider** the skills demanded of effective response team members:
- Direct crisis counseling
  - Consultation with parents and staff members,
  - Follow-up strategies such as debriefing and evaluation.
- H**      **Help** spread the awareness of the Diocesan Response Team plan among schools within the archdiocesan system.

## **THE DIOCESAN RESPONSE TEAM CONCEPT FOR SCHOOL SETTINGS**

- There are a number of traumatic losses and human crises which can and do occur in schools each year.
- Effective crisis management demands procedures which everyone knows and understands ahead of time.
- Some crises have the potential of overwhelming the trained resources of a given school's staff. The Archdiocesan Response Team concept identifies additional trained professionals.
- Suicide, the most disruptive of all traumatic losses, calls for special guidelines and intervention strategies.
- The resolution of a crisis requires leadership to coordinate a response which identifies school needs, develops an intervention or postvention plan, and augments in-school services with other trained personnel.

## **THE DIOCESAN RESPONSE TEAM CONCEPT DESIGNED FOR SCHOOLS OF THE DIOCESE OF DAVENPORT**

It is a well-known fact that a death in the school affects everyone in that school to some degree or another. All of our school systems will eventually experience a number of deaths, both unexpected and anticipated, during the course of time. The trauma of death has the potential of negatively affecting the ability of students and staff members to carry on their activities. Students have a need to understand and make sense of a death; staff members, while dealing with their own sense of loss, also look for ways to assist their students who are grieving. It has often been the experience of schools that a traumatic death in the school community affects so many students and staff members that the resources of a given school are overwhelmed by those who are seeking support in their grief. Additionally, parents of students within the school are often in need of information on ways to be supportive to their children during a bereavement or crisis.

As a response to this need, the Diocese of Davenport has provided leadership for the development of three response teams composed of selected volunteer educators to work as a unit to provide crisis intervention services in times of need following a sudden or anticipated death in the school community.

How are crises differentiated in this plan? For the purposes of the archdiocesan response team concept, crises will be considered to be loss experiences which have the potential of affecting a large number of students and staff members in a given school. When the loss-related needs of an individual school's staff and students may far exceed the helping resources within a given school, consideration will be given to involving the support of the archdiocesan response team. Those "crises" typically related personal problems such as family discord, the death of a loved one within a given family, or a public embarrassment of a family member, while personally tragic, do not typically qualify to be considered a traumatic loss. Additionally, school management crises such as a fire, an injury to a student, or a related stressful event have procedures and identified personnel already in place for the effective management of those situations.

The **mission** of the diocesan response team is to be available to **respond to an diocesan school principal's request for assistance following the traumatic or anticipated death of a student or staff member**. These volunteers have sought permission to notify their immediate supervisors of the request for their services in an intervention and to assume that released time to assist another school will be readily given. The Office of Pastoral Services will appoint a person who serve as team coordinator. It will be the coordinator's role to assess each intervention and decide with the principal the type of services needed, the number of team members required, and the length of time the team will remain on site.

The **role** of the diocesan response team is to **provide consultation** to the school administrators on recommended procedures for responding to a death in the school community. Typically team members meet with the school staff in an early morning or late afternoon faculty meeting to explain the procedure for announcing a death to the students, advise teachers on ways to assist students to discuss their concerns about death,

and identify resources available in the school to provide direct counseling for students who are experiencing difficulties. Diocesan Response Team members also are available to **provide direct counseling services as a supplement to the counseling services already in place at a local school.** As a matter of practice, diocesan response team members will turn over to the local school the cases of the students they have worked with during the crisis. As a followup, the coordinator will meet with the principal within a week of the intervention to inquire about additional needs of the school and the impact of the intervention. Also, it will be the responsibility of the coordinator to conduct a debriefing with team members within a month after the intervention.

#### PROCEDURES for NOTIFYING an DIOCESAN RESPONSE TEAM

1. Initially the principal of the school will notify key staff members.
2. The principal and key staff members will discuss the situation and determine the course of action. The scope of the intervention will be governed by nature of the traumatic loss (suddenness, popularity of the deceased, and the violent nature of the death).

Given the differences among crisis situations, at times no team will be called. Some situations can be served by the services in place at a school such as in-school crisis management teams. Other situations, especially those involving a crisis related to traumatic death, might call for a response using both in-school personnel and the services and/or consultation of the archdiocesan response team.

3. If the archdiocesan response team is to be used, the Office of Pastoral Services will select the team's coordinator. It is the role of the coordinator to notify one member of the team who, in turn, will notify other members of the incident, the school affected, the time needed to be on campus, and the respective roles each person will play.

Team members may want to determine ahead of time the roles in which they feel most suited. The team coordinator is to be informed of the number of members who will be responding. Additionally, the coordinator is serving as consultant from the team to the school head in developing a planned response for the crisis.

4. The principal and the team coordinator will devise the steps for an intervention. As a matter of practice, the following elements are involved in an diocesan Response Team postvention procedure at the school level:
  - Through the school telephone tree, teachers are notified of loss and the time of the early morning faculty meeting to discuss intervention plans
  - Administrators of other schools within the archdiocese which may be indirectly affected will be notified of the crisis by individual response team members.

- In preparation for the faculty meeting, the principal will draft a notice which will be read to students by teachers.
  - The principal will determine who will be the contact person between the school and the bereaved family.
5. The coordinator will prepare briefing materials to assist teachers in working with bereaved students. If there are unique circumstances related to this loss (e.g., suicide), coordinator will advise principal of special intervention needs
  6. At the faculty meeting, the principal will advise the faculty of the current situation, distribute the announcement to be read by teachers to their students in lieu of a schoolwide assembly or public announcement, and introduce the team members.

Crisis management experts advise against the use of large assemblies or a public address system to announce a death to students. Research into the aftermath of crises, indicates that such assemblies and announcements generally produce hysterical reactions. The calm, reassuring voice of a respected teacher has a soothing impact on students who are hearing potentially disturbing information. Additionally, the presence of someone familiar to students focuses their attention on that teacher as a source of support and a resource for further direction.

7. The team members will provide faculty members with brief suggestions on ways to help students discuss their concerns. They will also advise the faculty of the location of counseling resources and procedures for referring students in need of individual or group bereavement counseling.

In more complex interventions, suicide and violent death for example, the faculty needs directions on what to say and how to deal with rumors which frequently run through the student body at this time. Rather than deny what may be publicly known, it is advised to agree ahead of time what will be said and what information will be provided later when the facts are fully known. Such candor reduces morbid or sensationalized speculation.

8. The announcement of the death and the principal's commentary should be read by teachers or advisors known to the students. Teachers and advisors are advised to provide some time from their class to lead students in a discussion of their concerns if there seems to be a need. Teachers and advisors also become the first line of communication, assessment, and referral for students who may be in need of direct bereavement counseling.

A fundamental principle of youth crisis intervention is to maintain the structure which supports them. The school schedule should continue. It is never appropriate to stop the school day to assemble students in a large student body to announce a traumatic death. Students should learn of the loss in small groups which are conducive to discussion. Teachers who abruptly announce the death and fail to ask about their students' feelings are perceived by grieving youngsters as cold and uncaring. Their ability to model for young people how to talk about death is a lesson from which can young people can learn about life, death, and the mourning process. Team members are available to assist classroom teachers and help facilitate discussions.

9. Students may either ask for counseling assistance or be referred by their teachers. Students who have been identified as close friends to the deceased student or staff member are generally invited to the counseling office as a precautionary screening measure. There, the counselor(s) can either provide direct individual or group counseling or refer them to other team members who are conducting counseling sessions at other places within the school.

It is seldom in the best interests of students to send them home, especially to an empty home, because of their difficulties in dealing with a death. The school is the best place for them to receive support and professional counseling assistance. It has been the experience of trauma response teams that the great majority of students quickly return to the routine of the day once their loss has been recognized and support has been assured to them.

10. As the students' reaction to the crisis begins to lessen in intensity, generally, there will be time to begin to assess what further steps should be taken. The following are some of the issues which have been addressed by administrators following a traumatic loss in schools:
  - Further information from police or family to quell rumors
  - Announcement of wake and funeral arrangements
  - Coverage of wake by staff members
  - Notification to parents of death in the school community
  - Policy for student attendance at funeral
  - Policy about return to school after funeral
  - Decision about memorializing the deceased
  - Cultural differences related to the mourning process
  - End of the day public announcement which recognizes a death in the school community.

Often it is not possible to provide definitive answers or recommendations for each question arising from a specific crisis. Team members can be of assistance in helping the staff decide on what is in the best interests of the students. The ultimate decision maker is the school head guided by accepted crisis intervention practices.

11. Toward the end of the day, a letter to the parents informing them of the death, the support provided at school, and recommending ways for parents to talk to their children about death should be drafted and distributed to the students.

Parents are grateful for suggestions on how to discuss death with their children. Frequently, a death in the school, even the death of someone unknown to an individual young person, will remind him/her of the death of someone significant to them or may raise fears for the welfare of oneself or others in the family. This event becomes the "teachable moment" for the whole family.

12. Once the students have left for the day, it is beneficial for the staff members to meet with the principal and the team members still at the school to assess the impact of the intervention, to answer any questions which may have arisen during the school day, and to determine follow-up procedures.
13. The coordinator for archdiocesan response teams has four additional responsibilities:
  - Conduct an impact evaluation on the effectiveness of the postvention within a week
  - Provide additional counseling and/or referral services for students in need of more intensive counseling.
  - Lead the critical incident debriefing session with team members
  - Encourage school to maintain contact with the bereaved family.
14. All feedback about archdiocesan response teams will be used to make appropriate adjustments to the archdiocesan response plan.

## **Characteristics of a School That Is Safe and Responsive to All Children**

- Focus on academic achievement.
- Involve families in meaningful ways.
- Develop links to the community.
- Emphasize positive relationships among students and staff.
- Discuss safety issues openly.
- Treat students with equal respect.
- Create ways for students to share their concerns.
- Help children feel safe expressing- their feelings.
- Have in place a system for referring children who are suspected of being abused or neglected.
- Offer extended day programs for children.
- Promote good citizenship and character.
- Identify problems and assess progress toward solutions.
- Support students in making the transition to adult life and the workplace.

A Guide to Safe Schools (1998)  
U.S. Department of Education

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# Physical Environment

Safe location

Free from criminal activity

Places for loitering are limited

- Bathrooms patrolled

- Lockers are visible for supervision

- Appropriate lighting

Prompt repair of vandalism

Well-maintained facilities

Standard incident reporting procedures are used

Coordinate campus security w/law enforcement

Parents & volunteers recruited as monitors

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# Social Environment

- Learn names of students
- Walk the campus/visit classrooms
- Respond personally to student concerns
- Act on rumors
- Be visible to the community
- Involve the superintendent & school board in school safety
- Use cooperative learning
- Instruct students in conflict management
- Work with law enforcement
- Principal provides strong leadership
- Students, parents & staff participate in goal setting & know how decisions are made
- Each school has a crisis plan
- Maximum use of instructional time
- Student, staff & parental ownership

# **Cultural Environment**

Conduct student attitude surveys

Develop a buddy system for new students

Promote "We Are Family" themes

Recognize and value contributions from diverse cultures

Establish clear behavior expectations

Establish clear academic expectations.

Establish support and recognition programs

# **Cultural Environment**

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Establish support and recognition programs

Model our religious values in our interactions with one another.

## Traumatic Loss Teams Guide for Teachers/Parents

### Explaining the Death of a Classmate/Teacher/School Staff Members to Children

Children should be told about the death in a quiet, direct manner.

Use age-appropriate language. (That means concrete explanations, not euphemisms like "sleep" or "went away") Build your explanation on what the children know and move to new information ("Remember how \_\_\_\_\_ came to school after he lost his hair and we explained to you that his body was sick with an illness called cancer." u.. "Remember how \_\_\_\_\_ started to miss more and more school because he needed to stay in the hospital?"... Well, sadly, \_\_\_\_\_ was so sick that neither the doctors and nurses nor the medicine could cure him and he died last night" Then (if very young) Does everyone here understand what it means to be dead?"

Format - Classroom: do not use an assembly or the public address system.

After the announcement, children should be allowed to:

- Ask questions.
- Express their thoughts and feelings.
- Produce a response in art, poetry, cards, etc.
- Collect their memories of the deceased in a memory book to be shared with the family.
- Decide on a school project to appropriately memorize the deceased.

One of the most effective modeling behaviors a teacher/counselor can do in the classroom setting or in a small group setting to further the discussion is to inquire about the children's memories of the deceased person.

Teacher says,

"One of the nicest memories of \_\_\_\_\_ I have is when he \_\_\_\_\_."

Then asks,

- Would some of you like to share with the group some of the memories you have of when \_\_\_\_\_ was in or taught our class?"
- What was *one* of the funniest things you remember about \_\_\_\_\_?"
- What was one of the nicest things \_\_\_\_\_ did for you?

Teachers/counselors may also want to ask open-ended questions to help children express any residual concerns brought to consciousness by the death.

- "Have people said or done anything that worries you about \_\_\_\_\_'s death?"
- "Do you have any worries about \_\_\_\_\_'s death that you'd like to discuss in the group or privately?" [You are looking *for* concerns that they may have "caused" the death (guilt). Also, you may uncover hidden concerns that the death was the child's fault (blame).]

Children may want to attend the wake or funeral service.

- Explain to child what happens in a funeral home.
  - ? physical set up,
  - ? range of adult emotional reactions.
  - ? ideas on what to say to the deceased's family,
- Encourage parents to accompany children to funeral home and service
- Suggest that children return to school after service for continued support.

Adapted from article in American Funeral Director, May, 1999, by Dr. Alyson Lefkowitz School Psychologist, Baltimore County Public Schools

### Considerations

Do not forget the mourning **needs of the school staff**, especially present and previous teachers. They may need time to deal with their own grief reactions before they can be in a position to help the children. Involve the services of EAP

Adults need to understand the self-protective mechanisms children have which allow them to be intensely sad and upset for a short period of time and then become involved in play minutes later. This ability should not be interpreted as "not caring."

Remember, to send a letter home to parents informing them of the loss experienced in your school, what services the school system provided to children, information about funeral arrangements, and how parents can assist their children deal with the *loss* at home.

## THE CHILD'S REACTION TO DEATH

The child's major reactions to death are fear, guilt, anger and confusion. By examining the various layers of feeling, as well as the variety of influential experiences that are a part of the child's world following a death, the caretaker can cope better with the child survivor's needs.

### ***Fear After Loss During Childhood:***

- Fear of losing the other parent
- Fear of going to sleep
- Fear of being separated from a parent or sibling
- Fear of being unprotected
- Fear of sharing his or her *feelings* with others

### ***Guilt After Loss During Childhood:***

- "The death is a punishment to me for misbehaving"
- "I wished the other person dead"
- "I did not love my brother, sister, friend, teacher enough"
- "It is not right for me to live when my sister, friend, mother, father is dead. I should be dead instead"

### ***Anger After Loss During Childhood:***

In addition to anger growing from guilt, It can grow from any of the following beliefs which may be held by the child survivor:

- "I have been abandoned. Now r must cope with life on my own, and with little help"
- "I am unimportant. That *is why my loved* one could leave me"
- "My future has been taken 3W\_1\ from me. I don't have anything to look forward to"
- "I have to fight forces that are bigger than I am; they are very powerful and I am inadequate. A feeling of helplessness prevails; sometimes there is also a loss of trust"

***Confusion Resulting from Loss during Childhood:***

- Confusion about God and religion
- Confusion about others' expectations
- Confusion about perceptions and memories
- Confusion which results from depression

DO:

1. Tell the truth: "I don't know" is an OK answer to "WHY" questions.
2. Maintain structure, rules, limits. It provides security.
3. Touch, hold, hug.
4. Save special items from the deceased child to give the living child later, ( a collection, a Bible, sweatshirt, etc.)
5. Share your faith: "God knows what has happened to us. He loves us and will help us".
6. Be a good role model. Cry in front of the child. "I miss sister."
7. Talk about loss and death before a significant death occurs, if possible. Visit a cemetery, use nature, i.e., a dead bird, for discussion.
8. Give the child a choice about going to the funeral. If under 8 years take an adult who can leave with him anytime.
9. Tell the child he did not cause the death by his angry thoughts.
10. Tell the child who will take care of him if you die.
11. Recognize that children express grief physically. They "flush out the wound" by beating, pounding, running it out.
12. Allow children to select to play activities they need to work through their grief.
13. Let the child "talk" about his feelings through drawings.
14. Give the child something to do. It will combat his helplessness. (Plant a memory tree, write a story, take flowers to the grave).
15. Read children's books that deal with loss so the child knows his feelings are normal.
16. Use third-person language in talking to children. It is less threatening. Say, "Many children feel," instead of "do YOU feel?"
17. Look through photo albums at pictures of the deceased with the child.
18. Talk about the loss whenever the child brings up the subject.
19. Answer only what is asked. Let the child be in charge of what he is ready to hear.
20. Expect children to regress somewhat, i.e., to cling, be afraid. Rocking and nightlights are fine.
21. Tell the child the exact cause of death (brother's heart wouldn't work anymore).

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Heart to Heart, 2115 Se Adams, Milwaukie, OR  
97222-7773, 1991

# HELPING A CHILD THROUGH GRIEF

## DON'T:

1. Don't underestimate the child's grief.
2. Don't try to protect the child from feelings of pain and loss.
3. Don't assume the child will respond to the loss as you have.
4. Don't worry about saying the "right" words. You can't hide feelings from children, no matter what you say.
5. Don't find something "good" about the death, i.e., "Aren't you glad brother doesn't hurt anymore?"
6. Don't associate tears with grief. Some children cry, some don't. Both may be equally affected.
7. Don't push the child to "talk about it." A child will tell us how he feels in the way he is able, which is usually through his behavior.
8. Don't be afraid of losing control or crying in front of the child. Tears give the child permission to be real, too.
9. Don't shut the child out by sending him to the babysitter. Include him in the family sadness.
10. Don't be overly simplistic about death, i.e., put all the focus on heaven and none on the feelings of loss.
11. Don't allow the child to assume the role of emotional caregiver to the parents.
12. Don't worry about the child's poor appetite. Give plenty of drinks.
13. Don't tell the child he will feel better in time. "Time heals all wounds" is a lie. Some wounds get infected.
14. Don't use abstract language to "soften" the death. Children are concrete thinkers. Instead of saying, "Sister passed away," say, "Sister died."
15. Don't promise YOU won't die. You can say, "I think I will live until I'm very, very old, but no one knows for sure."
16. Don't be afraid to initiate talking about the death. Mention the child's name who died, i.e., "I know your brother died and I'm sure you miss him very much."
17. Don't assume a child will always want to talk about the death. Children can only handle "bits and pieces" of grief at a time.
18. In a church or school setting, don't single out a grieving child for special privileges. He needs to feel he is treated as his peers.

## **SIGNS WHEN A CHILD'S GRIEF NEEDS OUTSIDE SUPPORT**

1. If a child persists in pretending that nothing has happened.
2. If the child's school work takes a dramatic decline or school phobia sets in.
3. If information about the death was kept from the child for a long time or the child was told lies about the death.
4. If the child makes suicidal threats.
5. If the child panics frequently.
6. If the child begins to physically assault others or becomes cruel to animals.
7. If the child had a difficult relationship with the deceased or behaves poorly with family members.
8. If the child becomes involved in drugs or alcohol.
9. If the child begins to commit serious delinquent acts.
10. If the child is unwilling or unable to socialize with other children.

## ADOLESCENT GRIEF: Common Counseling Factors

### SHOCK/DENIAL

Death offends their magical beliefs that people for whom they care are not *supposed to die*. If the person who *dies* is young, it upsets their sense of control over life. It may also take the form of apparently remaining "above it all".

### ANGER

The rebel against the "unfairness" of death. They are intensely interested in determining who or what was at fault. They are surprised at the anger they feel for the deceased.



### GUILT/BLAME

Their egocentricity causes them to feel that they may have indirectly caused the death of another. They ruminate about how they should have guessed what was wrong or could have treated another better when he/she was alive.

### DEPRESSION

They may feel *drained* by the loss or *hopeless*.

### LONELINESS

They become saddened by the increasing realization that a person they have known will no longer be an active presence in their lives. This may be their first permanent loss.



### HOPE

They need to be encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings with others. They are old enough to take a leadership role in the mourning process. They must be reminded that this is probably the worst they have ever felt, but that they will survive.

### INTELLECTUALIZING

Adolescents are often fascinated on an intellectual level with the existential questions which death raises for them. Their own mortality may be an issue for them to consider. They also may begin to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of life if it is something which can end so fast.

### MARGINALIZED

They may complain to the counselor that they feel excluded in the family mourning process. They need to assert this need to be included in the mourning rituals.

### OVERCOMPENSATION

They may feel the need to act "grown up" and take on too many responsibilities when a parent is at his/her worst. This may be a mask to avoid their own feelings of helplessness and disorganization.

## **ADOLESCENCE AND GRIEF**

Adolescents are close to an adult understanding of death but may not fully accept that it will happen to them. Since their focus is on living, they can have a great deal of anger about death. They are most comfortable expressing anger because expressing hurt and sadness would show childish behavior, and this is not what our society permits adolescents to express. Adolescents want to be in control. Death belies that fiction of control.

Normally, adolescence is a time of heightened and intense emotion. Death and grief add to their emotionality, and adolescents try on different identities that hide and confuse their emotions. While loss through death brings out the child in all of us, adolescents find it particularly hard to acknowledge these feelings.

Death can also be seen by adolescents as a **THREAT**. They would like to live life without the cloud of possibility that they might lose their future- by a premature death. The death of an age-mate confronts their personal myth of immortality and belies their magical thinking about a life free from unpredictable losses.

Too often adults in a family "marginalize" teenagers when a death occurs. It is not uncommon that if you or your school provides any training on death education or offers group counseling on loss issues, this may be the first opportunity for some teenagers to express how they about a death in their family, as well as a chance to process some of their questions about death in general.

## CLASSROOM ANNOUNCEMENT

(Actual Sample Announcement which was Read and Discussed by Teachers  
at an Elementary School)

Something has happened over the weekend that we need to talk about. Early Sunday morning, one of our students, XXXXXX XXXXXX, died in a fire. We do not have all the details, but this is what we know so far ... a fire started in the middle of the night. Everybody in the house except x:xxxxxxxxxxxx was able to survive the fire. Some others were hurt, but xxxxxxxx was hurt too badly and died at the hospital.

We are all upset and it is important to help our friends deal with this sad death. We need to talk to each other, 'with me, your teacher, to our families, and perhaps with friends like Mrs. xxxxxx, our counselor. Our counselor has invited some of her friends from nearby schools to talk with you if you feel the need to.

"When we get more information from xxxxxxxx's family, we will let you know. Please keep xxx in your prayers and also his/her family in our prayers today.

### ***POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:***

Do some of you have questions you would like to ask me about the fire or about XXXXXX? (*Answer with the facts you have; curb their tendency to speculate on graphic details. Shut down any effort to assign blame.* )

Did any of you see the fire? Did you see it on TV ? How did you react?

Did any of you know XXXXXX? What do you remember about him? (*Attempt to guide conversation into making the deceased real and their memories of him / her personal.* )

Can anyone tell me a happy memory they have of XXXXXXXX from class or the playground or the neighborhood that they would like to share with the class?

**Sample Letter Sent Home Announcing Death of Student**

St. Paul the Apostle Elementary  
1007 E. Rusholme St.  
Davenport, Iowa 52803

Date

Dear Parents,

On Sunday, xxxxxx, one our students, XXXXX xxxxxx, died at his home during an early morning fire. He \vas a fourth grade student at xxxxxxxx School. He had made many friends in his four years here and we are all saddened by his untimely death.

Today we have had the outstanding services of the Archdiocesan Response Team at our school to assist students and faculty members. These team members are helping professionals from several archdiocesan schools. They have been trained to consult in times of crisis, conduct bereavement counseling, and to assess if any student is in need of further counseling support. They, along with the school staff, have nlet \with and provided comfort and counsel to students, staff, and parents. These Response Team members will be available on an "on call" basis to aid the school support staff for as long as necessary.

One of the members of the team reminded me that when elementary school age children experience a trauma such as this, it often reminds them of other loved ones who have died. It is not unusual for them to want to talk about those loved ones or ask about death in general. I include this item for your consideration and am enclosing a handout on talking to children about death.

We have been told that various groups in the community have offered support in many different ways to the family. At this time we are not aware of the funeral arrangements. We will inform you as soon as they are known.

Please join with us in extending our sympathy and prayers for the xxxxxx family.

Sincerely,

Principal of School

## **Sample Letter Home When Child was Injured in a Bus Stop Crossing**

Date

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

We had some upsetting news today. One of our students was struck when crossing the street in front of a bus and was seriously injured. We have checked with the hospital and the student is having x-rays and is talking with his mother. His known injuries at this time are a broken ankle, a bump on the head, and minor scratches.

Members of our Diocesan Response Team were brought in and met with the students on the buses who witnessed the accident and addressed their concerns. The children on the buses handled themselves beautifully and in a mature manner.

Our school counselor has met with the children in the injured student's classroom.

The classroom teachers talked with the children and reminded them of bus safety procedures.

As the days progress, we hope to learn how soon the student will return to school.

I know you join with me in your support of the child and his family. Let us continue to be a support through our prayers and good works.

Sincerely,

Principal of School

## Sample Letter Announcing Death of a Staff Member

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Yesterday afternoon, Mr. xxxxxx., Department Chairman, here at xxxxxx was involved in an automobile accident near xxxxxxxx, Virginia. Mr. xxxxxx sustained fatal injuries as a result of this accident and died at the scene at approximately 3:00 PM. Our school mourns the loss of Mr. xxxxxx who served as a student advisor, chess club sponsor, and a member of our football coaching staff. He has been a part of our school family for the past 25 years. Mr. xxxxxx will be greatly missed by the faculty, staff, and students here at xxxxxxxx.

Members of the Diocesan Response Team will be present at our school to assist students and faculty members. These team members are helping professionals from several diocesan schools. They have been trained to consult in times of crisis, conduct bereavement counseling, and to assess if any student is in need of further counseling support.

We encourage you to discuss Mr. XXXXXXIS death with your children. Such traumatic deaths often remind young people of similar unresolved deaths of loved ones in their lives. I have enclosed a handout prepared by our team to assist you in a discussion of death.

We will have a prayer service \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely in Christ,

Principal of School

## **Sample Announcement to Students about a Traumatic Incident Witnessed by Elementary Aged Children**

Boys and Girls, I have some sad news to share with you this morning.

Some of you may have heard that there was a shooting in this area last night. It was the terrible end to what started out as an argument between two people. The police were called and arrested the person who did the shooting. Unfortunately the man who was shot died.

Some of our students saw the police cars as they came to school this and might be feeling upset or worried. As your teacher, I wanted to stop my regular classwork for a few minutes to find out whether or not some of you have any worries about what happened.

### ***Typical Processing Questions:***

**Did any of you see the police cars in the Big Trees apartments this morning?**

**Did any of you see anything else about which you may have questions?**

**What are some of the thoughts you have about this sad thing?**

**What could we do if we saw two people arguing or someone waving a gun or knife ?**

Note: Process the children's concerns about their own safety. If they have questions about the facts of the case, tell them that we are interested in their feelings and their safety. Explain we do not have information about the police investigation of the shooting. Tell them that there probably will be something on the news tonight.

## **SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Please read the following announcement to students in your first period class/home room. Feel free to make what you say personal and in keeping with your own feelings. Invite students to discuss the loss and the meaning it may have for them with you.

### **Announcing a Teacher Death**

*As some of you may know, one of our teachers, Miss Brown, died yesterday. Although the exact reason for her death is not clear at this time, it was by natural causes. I know that this news may be very upsetting to some of you (as it is to me). If you need to talk now with a counselor, you should let me know. If you need to speak as a class, we can. What are some of the thoughts and feelings you are dealing with right now?*

### **Announcing an Accidental Death**

*A 10th grade student, Maria \_\_\_\_\_ died as the result of an automobile accident that occurred shortly after midnight Friday. Another student, Lori \_\_\_\_\_, was seriously injured and is in Medical Center Hospital. We are all saddened by this news. If anyone needs to talk with a counselor, please let me know.*

*The accident happened on \_\_\_\_\_ Road. Apparently the car in which these girls were riding tried to avoid a car that approached them with its headlights off. Their car veered off the road and struck a large tree. The driver of the car and Lori were thrown from the car and seriously injured. Maria was trapped inside the car, where she died shortly after the crash.*

### **Announcing a Suspected, but Unconfirmed, Suicide Death**

*We are saddened to learn of the death this weekend of one of our students, \_\_\_\_\_ . He died this past Saturday afternoon as a result of a gunshot wound. The complete details of his death are not available at this time. I know that this news may be upsetting to some of you. If you need to talk to someone about your concerns, please let me know. There are several crisis counselors in our school in addition to our regular counseling staff I will give you a pass to go to the counseling office where there are people who are trained to help you.*

If you know that it is common knowledge among the students that it was in fact a suicide and if the family has given permission that this information can be shared, you may want to substitute the following phrase in the announcement *of a self inflicted wound.*

TO: Staff  
FROM:

RE: Weekend Tragedy

By now most of you are aware that a tragic automobile accident claimed the lives of three students over the weekend. xxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxx were members of the senior class in our high school; xxxxxxxx was a sophomore at xxxxxxxx School. We are all deeply saddened by this horrible event.

The weekend's events will still be most disturbing to many of our students. Our neighboring schools are providing us with an diocesan crisis intervention team. This team will be available in the guidance area to assist students in need of immediate assistance. It would not be unusual for staff members who taught these students to also experience difficulty coming to grips with such a tragedy. The team is also available to all staff members. If you need time to visit with a team member, just let me know and I will see that your classes are covered.

While we need to let students know that we are available to them in this difficult time, large assemblies or public announcements are not really the appropriate means to share such feelings. At the conclusion of the regular announcements, I would ask each homeroom teacher or advisor to please read the statement below and offer students an opportunity to discuss their concerns with you.. If you wish to paraphrase the statement, please feel free to do so. Thanks for all of your assistance in helping our students cope with what promises to be a most difficult time.

### ***HOMEROOM ANNOUNCEMENT***

***AS MANY OF YOU ARE ALREADY A WARE, OVER THE WEEKEND A TRAGIC AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT CLAIMED THE LIVES OF THREE YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY. THEY WILL BE GREATLY MISSED BY THEIR FAMILIES AND THEIR MANY FRIENDS. I KNOW THAT MANY OF YOU KNEW XXXXXX, XXXXXX, AND XXXXXX AND ARE ALSO SADDENED BY THEIR LOSS. I WANT TO LET EACH OF YOU KNOW THAT MR. , MR. XXXXXX, AND ALL OF YOUR TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS ARE HERE TO HELP YOU DURING THIS DIFFICULT TIME. THERE WILL ALSO BE SOME ADDITIONAL SPECIAL COUNSELORS WHO WILL BE AT OUR SCHOOL TODAY. IF AT ANY TIME DURING THE DAY YOU NEED TO SEE AN ADMINISTRATOR, TEACHER, COUNSELOR, OR ONE OF THE SPECIAL COUNSELORS, JUST TELL ONE OF YOUR TEACHERS AND THEY WILL SCHEDULE YOU FOR AN APPOINTMENT AS SOON AS THERE IS AN OPENING. I KNOW THAT YOU JOIN ALL OF US IN THE SCHOOL FAMILY IN EXPRESSING OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHY AND PRAYERS TO THE FAMILIES OF ALL THREE YOUNG PEOPLE. LET'S SPEND SOME TIME SHARING HOW WE'RE DEALING WITH THIS.***

## Sample Letter Announcing Death of a Staff Member

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Yesterday afternoon, Mr. xxxxxx, Department Chairman, here at xxxxxxxx was involved in an automobile accident near xxxxxxxx, Virginia. Mr. xxxxxx sustained fatal injuries as a result of this accident and died at the scene at approximately 3:00 PM. Our school mourns the loss of Mr. xxxxxx who served as a student advisor, chess club sponsor, and a member of our football coaching staff. He has been a part of our school family for the past 25 years. Mr. xxxxxx will be greatly missed by the faculty, staff, and students here at xxxxxxxx.

Members of the Diocesan Response Team will be present at our school to assist students and faculty members. These team members are helping professionals from several archdiocesan schools. They have been trained to consult in times of crisis, conduct bereavement counseling, and to assess if any student is in need of further counseling support.

We encourage you to discuss Mr. xxxxxx's death with your child. Such traumatic deaths often remind young people of similar unresolved deaths of loved ones in their lives. I have enclosed a handout prepared by our team to assist you in a discussion of death.

Sincerely in Christ,

Principal of School

## **Helping Students Cope with a National Tragedy**

Some ideas to share with teachers and parents

The following are some emotional responses students may continue to demonstrate , following witnessing the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C,

**Fear:** Fear may be the predominant reaction of many students - fear for the safety of relatives and friends living in the affected cities or fear for their own safety. Their worries may seem unreasonable, but to them, they are quite real. Students may hear many rumors at school and let their imaginations run wild. Help students put their fears into a realistic perspective and gain mastery over the geography of the distance.

**Loss of Control:** Statistically the chance of anyone student being a victim of terrorism is very remote. Feelings of loss of control can be overwhelming. Blame is the most common straw they cling to, In order to feel safe, they want the bad people caught.

**Anger:** Students who are old enough to have some understanding of concepts of national security may be angry at adults who "let" this happen, who were unable to prevent terroristic acts.

**Loss of stability:** National disasters interrupt the natural order of things. Life, as they know it, is disrupted,

**Isolation:** Students who have a family member directly involved in these tragic events may experience feelings of isolation as well as grief and loss.

### **What Can I Do as a Teacher?**

- Help students put their fears in perspective.
- Help students to feel personally safe.
- Help students to feel a sense of control by involving them in coping strategies. Students often have practical and creative ideas for coping.
- Be careful not to stereotype or demean the people or countries or religions thought to be connected to terrorists, Children can easily generalize negative statements and develop prejudice.
- Identify support services for students and families needing assistance beyond what can be provided in school.

### **What Should Parents Do?**

- Try to help them understand what happened based on their developmental level. Be honest. Convey the facts as we know them. Tell them what is necessary.
- Children will take their cues in how to react based upon how adults are reacting.
- Children will have many different types of feelings. Assure them that all feelings are okay.

- Limit the amount of your child's viewing of these events on television, radio and the internet
- Maintain structure and stability within your home.
- Make sure your children get appropriate sleep, exercise and nutrition.
- Spend longer tucking your children in bed tonight.
- Have your children spend time with people they care about.
- Consider praying with your children tonight especially for those who died and for all the victims, survivors and their families.
- Children may exhibit behavioral or emotional changes. This is natural. Be aware that children process anxiety, fear and grief in many different ways.
- It may be a good time to take your children to church, synagogue, or mosque.

Source - National Association of School Psychologists

## **Guidelines for Addressing the National Emergency on September 11, 2001**

1. Listed below is information to assist principals in working with students and staff as schools strive to maintain normalcy in a very difficult time.
2. The first item is a statement approved by the Superintendent that must be read by all teachers to their students. The statement should not be modified. PLEASE DO NOT READ THE STATEMENT OVER THE INTERCOM OR IN AN ASSEMBLY SETTING. Principals may find that because of personal involvement in the nation's tragedy, some staff members will be unable to read the statement and lead classroom discussions. In those situations, please arrange to have another staff member fulfill that responsibility.
3. Talking points are also included to help teachers lead discussions.
4. EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS WILL BE GATHERING INFORMATION FROM SCHOOLS DURING THE MORNING HOURS THAT WILL GIVE DR. HAIRSTON A SENSE OF THE CLIMATE IN SCHOOLS. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT PRINCIPALS OUTLOOK THEIR RESPONSES TO THESE QUESTIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS BY 9:45 A.M. ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12. This information will be used to draft a letter that schools will send to all parents/guardians at the end of the day. The letter will arrive in schools by 11:00 A.M. on Outlook in time for morning kindergarten dismissal.
5. Each principal will share a statement with teachers instructing them to conduct a brief discussion during first period class. Teachers will read a prepared statement, and then conduct the discussion. Talking points are included with this statement. It is very important that teachers read the statement as it is written without embellishment. Once the discussion has been completed, students and teachers should resume a normal school day. Teachers need to be sensitive to the fact that some students may need additional time with a caring adult. Please utilize members of the Pupil Service Team to assist these identified students. Principals also need to be aware that some staff members may be very unsettled by the entire situation. In addition to school counselors and nurses, pupil personnel workers, school psychologists, and social workers will be available to schools, recognizing that many of these individuals are assigned to more than one school

### **Statement to be Read by Teachers to Students**

On September 11, beginning at 8:45 A.M., the United States suffered horrible tragedies. The World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. were hit by terrorist attacks. These attacks resulted in explosions that caused injury and considerable loss of life.

We are all feeling shocked and upset by these terrible events. It is normal when we hear of such events to feel afraid for our own safety and the safety of the people we care about.

We may find it hard to concentrate on our daily activities and to understand why this has happened. The police, military, and others are responding with heightened security measures to protect us. Our administrators, as always, are watching carefully to make sure that our schools are safe.

6. Teachers should consider using the following **TALKING POINTS** in the discussions. Please adjust the discussion to the developmental needs of students.

- Maintain a calm demeanor. Your reaction shapes the children's responses.
- You should be aware of your own feelings (shock, anger, sadness, anxiety) while validating the children's feelings. Our role as teachers is to help students understand the impact that a trauma may have on their thoughts and feelings. **IT IS IMPORTANT FOR TEACHERS TO REMEMBER THAT THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO DISCUSS THESE EVENTS FROM A GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE. IT IS A VERY SENSITIVE TIME; LITTLE IS KNOWN OF THE ACTUAL FACTS SURROUNDING THESE EVENTS.**
- Expect questions that have no answers. (Why?, Will we go to war?, Who did it?) Answer questions as honestly as you can. Be careful that you do not allow blame on any race, culture, or religion. Don't be afraid to say that, "We don't know yet." As we stated above, please resist the temptation to engage in speculation as to the ramifications of these events.
- Move the children through this discussion and return them to school work in order to have children focus on something other than this tragedy. Returning to actual school work will give students a sense of normalcy and control.
- Students need to be assured that their safety is a primary concern of everyone in the Baltimore County Public Schools. You can reassure students that the Superintendent has been working closely with the County Executive and Governor to respond appropriately to this troubling situation.

Parent Letter  
School Letterhead

Dear Parents/ Guardians:

As you are already aware, our nation experienced a national emergency caused by a series of terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania.

During the school day, teachers discussed the tragedy with their students. School counselors, school nurses, and other Pupil Services personnel were available to help students who were having difficulty dealing with this loss. They will continue to be available to our children. Our school staff also addressed students' concerns about safety as they discussed their fears and anxieties. Teachers stressed the safety measures being taken in all Baltimore County Public Schools. At the end of the classroom discussions, we made every effort to return to a normal school day.

We are aware that you as parents and guardians are trying to make sense of these events and looking for guidance about what you can say to help your children. Your children are looking to you for some answers. We may not have answers to all of your questions, but we do have a few suggestions:

- Expect the following reactions from your children - shock, fear, anxiety, sadness, and, yes, anger.
- It is important to validate their feelings by saying to your children. "These are normal feelings when faced with such abnormal situations."
- Share your own feelings, but be cautious about assigning blame prematurely.
- Monitor your children's reactions to what might be a traumatic event for them.
- Typical trauma reactions may range from distractibility and confusion to a loss of energy, feeling "stuck," and unwilling to return to normal interests. At times, traumatized people feel as if "things don't matter anymore." Encourage your children to become interested again in those things that fulfill their lives.
- Don't be surprised if you or your child may have trouble sleeping. Reassure your child and sit with them to calm them.
- We are aware that students may become frightened again as they relive these experiences. Reassure them that these fears will eventually become less intrusive in their lives. Help them continue their normal activities.

Our school stands ready to help you and your family as we adjust as a nation and a local community to this national loss. Please feel invited to contact our school counselor or other Pupil Service personnel if you feel that your family needs assistance in coping with this situation. As always, thank you for your support as we come together as a school community during a most difficult time.

Sincerely,