**Crisis Response Manual**

 

**2017**

**Your Educational Organization Name Here**

YOUR LOGO HERE

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Crisis Response Team Members

With assistance from Keith Drieberg, Ph.D – Crisis Response Team Coordinator

World Wide Web resources as noted in the bibliography

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**Forward**

**“There are two types of school administrators:**

**Those who have faced a crisis and those who are about to!”**

A Crisis Response Manual and related training are an unfortunate but essential part of public education today. Schools must be prepared to manage many kinds of critical incidents that can occur at anytime, anywhere, and to anyone. Education, planning and established protocols to address a wide range of crisis response situations allow schools to quickly and adequately restore the school climate to optimal learning conditions. This manual is a resource intended to support staff in accomplishing this goal.

This Crisis Response Manual is NOT designed to be an all-inclusive document for every crisis situation. Every critical incident is unique and every response, just as unique.

School Crisis Response planning serves two major purposes:

1) A guide for creating a comprehensive Crisis Response Plan, and

2) As a framework for addressing a range of other school issues such as violence prevention, that require a coordinated school response.

<Your organization name here> has been relatively well prepared for emergency situations such as earthquakes and fires. We understand the need to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is heard. We know procedures for calling 911 to report a fire or when someone requires medical help.

Unfortunately, the recent wave of school trauma and other forms of interpersonal violence across the country has stunned the country and uncovered a need for preparedness for a much broader range of critical incidents. National attention has focused on school violence in communities across the country. Further, although schools may have established procedures for dealing with many emergency situations, most do not have these protocols collected in a coordinated, concise manner. More so than ever before, schools are faced with ongoing challenges to be prepared for a wide range of emergency situations from medical emergencies to threats of violence, from severe environmental emergencies to community problems invading our schools.

Any School District

Crisis Response Team Site Liaisons/Peer Counselors

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**Overview**

The purpose of this manual is to provide a quick reference guide for use in a crisis. It is <Organization’s name> philosophy that a pre-planned and organized approach is more effective in reducing psychological and social difficulties following a crisis in a school.

This Crisis Response Guide includes procedures that were designed to deal with a number of crises that could occur in the district. These procedures do not cover every condition that might develop, and it may not always be possible to follow every procedural step. This manual can be used in conjunction with your building emergency plans. The crisis team members collaborate with the <Organization name> Departments as needed. Contact the District Crisis Response Team at <Phone number>, at <Phone number>.

**Most common critical incidents that involve the school community or multiple students/staff requiring immediate informed effective response**:

* Accidents with injuries
* Acts of violence
* Terminal Illness
* Actual Deaths

**Utilizing the District Crisis Response Team**

As information becomes available, the principal should:

1. Verify facts. Determine if this is a crisis that will impact the school community or multiple students/staff.
2. Consult with the site Crisis Response team members (p5).
3. Establish a calm organized atmosphere

(See appendix for tips, strategies and samples of letters/language to use)

Decide if the District Crisis Team be notified for additional support.

<Name> at < Phone number>.

The District Crisis Response Team provides a supportive service that can help schools assess, plan and intervene in crises affecting staff and students. A pre-planned, organized approach has been shown to be effective in reducing the emotional and social impact of a crisis. The Crisis Response Team has had specialized training to assist building administrators and site liaisons in directing crisis resolution activities.

**The School Site Crisis Response Team**

**Suggested Steps in Team Formation**

1. Principal identifies 2 individuals to serve as the Site Liaison/Peer Counselors.
2. Site team members receive training from the District CRT, and meet 2-3 times a year for training.
3. Site CRT provides a staff training during a staff meeting at the beginning of each school year.
4. Site CRT is called on to assist in critical incidents, as determined by the principal.

The site Crisis Response Team reflects the diversity of the school

**Crisis Event**- any event which produces a *temporary state of psychological disequilibrium* and a subsequent state of emotional turmoil.

Community and capitalizes on the unique training and expertise

Offered by staff in various positions in the school.

Members typically include:

* Principal
* Assistant Principals
* School Psychologist
* Counselor
* Nurse
* School security
* Teachers
* Personnel with relevant expertise (i.e., CPR, first aid, etc.)

Staff located in strategic positions in the building (i.e., near exits or fire extinguishers, on different floors, etc.)

Students (if middle or high school)

These individuals can assist the team based on their level of training.

**The purpose of the Site Crisis Response Team (Peer Counselors) is to:**

* Be available for a critical incident response, when called out by the Principal.
* Initiate communication with students, parents and the community during and after every critical incident as called to by the principal.
* Conduct or coordinate awareness programs for students.
* Conduct or coordinate orientation training for staff and recommend additional site training.
* Perform an operational critique after every critical incident where they are called out, to determine areas for improvement regarding the school's crisis response.

**PLANNING PROCEDURES PRIOR**

**TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT**

The following procedures are required to be completed or implemented by our site. The principal should ensure that each of these requirements is fulfilled.

* Train the Crisis Response Team members on your site on all aspects of the Crisis Response protocol, as they will be the first persons called upon to assist in a crisis situation. They will help you in determining if the district CRT team needs to be called on.
* Be certain that all staff is familiar with emergency procedures.
* Ensure that front office personnel are trained and are familiar with emergency procedures and communications.
* Any staff that are first responders, who are directly involved in a critical incident will debrief with the Crisis Response team, to provide closure on the social –emotional impact related to their involvement.

**District Crisis Response Team Services Available (As Needed/Requested) **

\_ Meet with building administrators and key staff to formulate an action plan.

\_ Facilitate a staff meeting to provide information related to the crisis.

\_ Support school staff.

\_ Help teacher’s process information with students.

\_ Work with students individually or in groups.

\_ be available for contact with parents.

\_ Provide helpful, factual information for the school community.

**GUIDELINES FOR THE EVACUATION OF THE SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATION**

1. School officials in consultation with the local fire marshal should designate and post fire safe areas of refuge for the severely physically handicapped on each floor level when necessary.
2. School staff and fire personnel should be properly trained in how to evacuate special needs occupants from a facility.
3. Each special needs person should be evacuated by his/her teacher/paraprofessional to an appropriate location per the evacuation plan, so that he/she will not inhibit egress of other occupants from the building or endanger himself/herself during evacuation from the structure.
4. Where possible, the special needs person should be educated to communicate what his/her special needs are in order to assist in the evacuation.
5. A list of special needs students and faculty who have problems which would interfere with normal locomotion should be kept by the site health personnel, who will disseminate this information to the appropriate teachers.
6. If the student uses adaptive devices for locomotion or has a loss of normal gait, the school nurse should discuss with each of the student's teachers how to assist in the exit procedure.
7. The classroom teacher should know the whereabouts of a special needs student at all times.
8. If a teacher should have more than one special needs student in a class who needs assistance for evacuation, the administration should assign one or more responsible adults to aid in the evacuation.
9. Information about special needs students and their exit plan should be available to substitute teacher and aides.

  

**Sharing Information with Staff**

**Substitute Teachers**

Make sure substitute teachers have basic information about the school's emergency plan. When a substitute teacher arrives at the school, it may be helpful to provide a brief orientation to the school's emergency plan, including where to find written information about emergency response procedures, evacuation routes, and the school's emergency alert codes.

**The Telephone Tree**

A telephone tree is a simple, widely used system for notifying staff of an emergency event when they are not at school. Set up a telephone tree by listing the first in Building Chain of Command (Principal). Then link him/her to several on the School Crisis 'Response Team; then link to different staff groupings (teachers, support staff, etc.). In practice, the first person on the list calls several people, who in turn call others, etc., until everyone on the list has been notified of the situation. A carefully crafted statement, specifying what is and is not yet known, and what steps may need to be taken, should be drafted before the telephone tree is activated.

**During/After an Emergency**

The principal will need to notify staff of an event or emergency and keep them informed as additional information becomes available and as plans for management of the situation evolve.

**The Morning Faculty Meeting**

An early, brief faculty meeting provides the opportunity to give accurate, updated information about an emergency situation itself and to review with staff procedures for the day, including the availability of intervention resources.

**The End-of-Day-One Faculty Meeting**

A brief end-of-day-one meeting provides the opportunity to review day one of an emergency, to update information, and plan for day two. Misinformation or rumors can be addressed before staff members go home or into the community where they are likely to be asked about the situation.

**Dealing with Rumors**

Establishing reliable communication networks is critical for dealing effectively with a potentially detrimental phenomenon often present in emergencies: rumors. People are going to talk about an emergency, and when accurate information is not available, rumors begin. Without facts, people speculate. Rumors create a negative perception of the school's ability to manage an emergency. The most effective strategy for combating rumors is to provide facts as soon as possible.

1. Identify and notify internal groups including administrators, teachers, students, custodians, secretaries, teaching assistants, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, etc. These are primary sources of information and are likely to be contacted in their neighborhoods, at grocery stores, etc. It is critical that they have accurate information because what they know (or are speculating about) will be passed on. A faculty/staff meeting should be held before staff members go home so that what is (and is not) known can be clearly communicated.
2. Clerical staff who answers the telephone at the school and at the Central Office must know which information can be shared and which information cannot be shared with the public. They must be kept informed of inaccurate information that is circulating so they can help correct misinformation. They must all receive consistent and updated information as it becomes available. Designating a few persons to answer calls helps control the circulation of misinformation. Additional office staff may be required in an emergency event.
3. Use of key communicators in the community will also combat rumors. A telephone tree or a briefing held especially for identified community representatives directly associated with the school will help convey accurate information.
4. The media can also help control rumors. The media will need to be directed to a district appointed spokesperson.

**Sharing Information with Parents**

In the event of an emergency, parents have very specific information needs.

First, parents want to know their children are safe; then, parents want to know the details of the emergency situation, to know how it is being handled, and to know that the children will be safe in the future. The first reactions are likely to involve *fear.* Upon learning of an incident at the school, parents are likely to descend upon the school in search of their child or to telephone, frantically seeking information. Establishing a system for responding quickly to parent needs for information is an important part of pre-planning. For example, assign a school official to be responsible for traffic flow and parking for parents in the event of an emergency, as well as establishing private areas to talk with parents individually if necessary. *Anger* is another common reaction of parents, particularly in the case of senseless acts of violence.

In the event of an emergency or disaster:

1. Tell parents exactly what is known to have happened. Do not embellish or speculate.
2. Implement the plan to manage phone calls and meet with parents who arrive at school.
3. Schedule and attend a Crisis Management Briefing (CMB) for parents as soon after the incident as possible. The CMB is an open question-and-answer meeting that will provide an opportunity for school officials to listen and respond to parent concerns (which are helpful in combating rumors and other misinformation) and to work on restoring parental trust in the school.
4. In the event of an incident that involves damage or destruction, an open house for parents and other members of the community to see the school restored to its "normal" state helps everyone get beyond the emergency.
5. Parents or other community members may wish to view the scene of a disaster. Those affected may also need to view the scene. Plans for the physical safety as well as mental health needs of those visiting the scene should be considered.

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**Backpack Letters**

**What are Backpack letters and when should they be sent home?**

Regular, clear communication between schools and families is essential. Letters to parents and guardians, often sent home in students' backpacks, are a key communications tool between principals and parents.

Especially when a critical incident has occurred at school or has involved one or more students or staff members in a school, letters, written in conjunction with public safety officials, can be an effective way of relaying important and helpful information. Unlike verbal messages, letters can be reread and used as a reference tool. Reporters often use backpack letters to verify facts and, even more importantly, to demonstrate to the community that a school is taking care of its students and staff members. The information in backpack letters can form the outline for media interviews.

**What Should a Backpack Letter Say?**

All well-constructed backpack letters share of number of characteristics:

* They are clear and simply written.
* They avoid words or phrases that are inflammatory.
* They contain only accurate information without speculation.
* They involve parents in the solutions.

Often a backpack letter can be limited to three paragraphs:

1. The first paragraph outlines the situation.
2. The second paragraph details the steps the school has taken-along with other division staff and public safety and/or public health officials-to remedy the problem.
3. The third paragraph lists ways that families can help and how families can get more information.

**How is a Backpack Letter Prepared?**

A draft of a backpack letter is prepared by the principal and then reviewed by other key school/district personnel. In all situations that involve police or fire and rescue investigations, public safety officials must also review the letter before it is sent home.

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< Your Logo> **Sample Letter to Parents**

Dear Parents,

As you may know, our school has recently experienced (specify event, whether death, fire, etc.) which has deeply affected us. Let me briefly review the facts (give brief description of incident and known facts).

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

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

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

Sincerely,

(Principal Name) (Phone)

< Your Logo> < School Name>

**Crisis Response Team**

**Sample Letter to Parents after a Death**

Dear Parents:

I regret to inform you of the death of a child who attended our school. When we learned of this student’s death, we decided to share this information with you.

It is important for all the children to have the same information to avoid rumors, which start so quickly. The facts were written down for each teacher to read to the class. Counselors and the district Crisis Response Team were on hand to visit each class, offering the children a time to talk and to share feelings. Children who were most upset were taken aside for individual or small group discussion.

(Optional) The funeral arrangements are as follows:

 Cards and letters may be sent to her family at:

**Your child may experience grief, and you may see some of the following emotions.**

• Tearfulness

• Bad Dreams

• Irritability

• Clinging to you

• Whiney moods

• Physical Complaints - stomachaches, headaches, etc.

• Inability to concentrate

• A temporary dip in grades

• More pronounced fears of dying, of the dark, of you dying, of walking home alone, etc.

• Regressive behaviors such as reverting to thumb sucking, bed-wetting, etc.

**Listed below are some ideas that can help your child with grieving:**

• Read a book on grief together.

• Let your child talk about the death or draw pictures of what he or she felt happened.

• Let them express their feelings.

• Offer them loving, touching support.

• Allow them to be sad and to cry.

• Let your child ask questions and answer them as simply as you can. If you need to, it's okay to say; "I don't know how to answer that. Perhaps we can find someone who can help us.

• Reassure your child you are healthy, you are careful when you drive, and you will be around for a long time.

• Explain the ritual of funerals and allow their participation.

• Offer support and structure in completing homework.

If there are any questions or concerns about your child’s behavior, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Principal

**Recommendations for Administrators regarding Student/Staff Death**

***Immediate actions to be taken by administrator(s):***

􀀹 Obtain verification of the death(s).

􀀹 Notify superintendent’s office

􀀹 Notify the site crisisliaison. Determine if Crisis Response Team is needed. See Flowchart.

􀀹 Decide on time/place for a staff meeting.

􀀹 Notify all school staff members.

􀀹 Alert all staff that they do not talk to the media. The official district representative talks to the media.

􀀹 Ensure that students aren’t exposed to media inquiries.

***Follow through actions to be taken by administrator(s) possibly in conjunction with the crisis team:***

􀀹 Update information concerning the death(s).

􀀹 Develop a plan for the day.

􀀹 Meet with **all** staff.

􀀹 Inform students.

􀀹 Plan for subs if needed.

􀀹 Notify other schools affected.

􀀹 Identify students/staff most affected.

􀀹 Prepare a letter to be sent home to parents.

**Trauma and It’s Effects**

The impact of tragedies on individual children and adults is not simple to predict. The range of human responses can include physical, cognitive, behavioral, spiritual and emotional symptoms including, nausea, sleep disturbance, slowed thinking, bad memories, regressed behavior, anxiety, guilt, depression, anger and a host of other responses.

Potential experiences or feelings after a trauma include:

* Sense of fear, worry
* Disruption of home, routine
* Feeling that one's life was or is threatened
* Feeling trapped and isolated
* Feeling out of control of life's basics: food, shelter, clothing, people, comfort ...even life itself
* Having flashbacks to other catastrophes
* Feeling cut-off from services
* Being separated from loved ones
* Having a sense of mortality
* Feeling "survivor guilt"
* Children who are forced to become "parents" to adults who are scared or worried
* Problems sleeping (too much or too little)
* Loss of weight
* Poor hygiene

**Symptoms of Distress in Children**

As a result of traumatic experiences some children will show a variety of symptoms of distress. Adults must first know a child's baseline ("usual") behavior and cultural/ethnic responses before he/she can identify "unusual" or problem behavior in a child. In addition to teachers and school administrators, it is important to train bus drivers, foodservice workers and any other staff and/or community members to be alert for students who show signs of emotional distress.

Symptoms of distress in children include:

* Unusual complaints of illness
* Keeping isolated from the rest of the group
* Child seems pressured, anxious that he/she somehow dominates, has to distract others, or is otherwise "needy"
* Changed behavior/appearance
* Resistant to opening up (however, child might just be shy, may have language or cultural barrier)
* No eye contact (Note: In some cultures, making eye contact with adults is "defiant behavior")
* Difficulty concentrating, can't focus
* "Feisty" or hyperactive/silly, giddy
* Any emotional display; crying, "regressed" behavior (less than age-appropriate)
* Lack of emotional expression
* Poor performance
* Can't tolerate change; can't move to next task
* Lethargic, apathetic
* Easily startled, jumpy

**Recovery & Aftermath Planning**

Recovery is the process of assisting people with the physical, psychological and emotional trauma associated with experiencing tragic events.

Recovery is a long-term process of supporting people who have experienced abnormal stressors. Initially, individuals may be in shock and may require support to meet basic physical and social support needs. In the months and years that follow a critical incident, individuals may enter a grief phase and need continued support. Children and their parents, faculty, staff and administrators, public safety personnel and the larger community are all impacted by tragic events and will benefit from immediate and ongoing support.

**Short Term vs. Long Term Recovery**

It is essential to understand recovery at two levels: immediate and ongoing.

Immediate support is needed from the first moments of a traumatic event through the first few days following it. Frequently, recent victims of major trauma are in a state of shock, and at this time basic human needs of food, shelter and clothing are often a primary focus.

Long-term recovery needs may not be readily apparent, and for many, ongoing support will be needed. Ongoing recovery refers to support provided to some individuals for weeks, months, or years following a tragic event.

**General Strategies for Follow-Up**

**Short-Term Follow-Up:**

1. Convene Crisis Response Team and faculty/staff members to update them on any additional information/procedures.
2. In case of death, provide funeral/visitation information.
3. Identify students and staff in need of follow-up support and assign staff members to monitor vulnerable students:

a) Coordinate stress management/crisis intervention strategies for students

b) Announce what the school is doing for students, including ongoing support for students with place, time, and staff facilitator

c) Provide parents with a list of community resources available to students and their families

4. Designate a comfort room for counseling.

5. Convene district-wide support team to assist with crisis management.

a) Assess district-wide support needs, and develop planned intervention strategies

b) Schedule and provide student, family and staff stress management support

c) Discuss successes and problems

d) Discuss things to do differently next time

5. Allow staff opportunities to discuss feelings and reactions and provide list of suggested readings to teachers, parents and students.

**Long-Term Follow-Up and Evaluation:**

1. Amend Emergency Management Protocols if needed.
2. Write thank-you notes to people who provided support during the emergency.
3. Be alert to anniversaries and holidays. Often students and staff will experience an "anniversary" trigger reaction the following month(s) or year(s) on the date of the emergency, or when similar crises occur.

**Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)**

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM, Everly and Mitchell, 1999) is a comprehensive, integrated multi-component crisis intervention system. CISM services in the schools provides a framework for education and crisis intervention immediately following a critical incident. These services complement the delivery of traditional mental health services and include:

1. Pre-crisis preparation: Set expectations for what to do when a critical incident occurs.
2. Individual consultation: A structured one-to-one technique used by a trained peer counselor or professional after a critical incident.
3. Crisis Management Briefing: A presentation to groups following a crisis or critical incident to share information, reduce and dispel rumors, and provide details of action plans.
4. Defusing: A group crisis intervention technique conducted by a trained facilitator.
5. Debriefing (a.k.a., Critical Incident Stress Debriefing or CISD). A structured small group process targeted toward mitigating or resolving the psychological distress associated with a critical incident or traumatic event.
6. Parent/family/organization consultation: A group process conducted to provide ongoing education and support to families, parent groups or organizations following a critical incident.
7. Referral/follow-up: A process to assure that individuals experiencing intense symptoms and who need ongoing support will be referred for appropriate mental health services.

One common way to organize the above interventions is to set up a "Drop in Room." A Drop in Room is a safe, welcoming place for students or staff to gather during the school day for group or individual support from trained team members.



**APPENDIX**

< Your logo> < Name of School>

**Crisis Response Team**

**For School Administrators:**

**Sample Scripts for Classroom Announcements**

** Accident or general death**

I have some very sad news to share today. Jane Doe, a student in Ms. Smith's class, was hit by a

car while waiting for the bus in front of her house yesterday morning. She died at the hospital

last night. I am feeling pretty sad and would like to take some time to talk about how you are and answer any questions you might have.

**Suicide**

I would like to share some very sad news with you. Mr. Smith died yesterday at his home. I know there will be lots of questions about his death. His death is hard to understand, and there are all kinds of questions, the most frequent is "Why?" We can all talk about it and answer some of the questions.

**Violent Death**

I have something sad to share with you. Jane Doe, a student in grade 6 has been missing for 2

days. The police found her body last night. The police are considering her death a homicide. When someone is killed it is very scary for all of us. We will be providing an opportunity for you to talk about the death and share your concerns, fears and questions.



< Your logo> < Your name of school>

**Crisis Response Team**

**For Teachers: Dealing with Grieving Students in Your Class**

The following steps help support the grieving students as well as prepare your class for making the grieving student feel comfortable and supported:

1. Talk with the bereaved student before she returns. Ask her what she wants the class to know

about the death, funeral arrangements, etc. If possible, call the family prior to the student's return to school so that you can let her know you are thinking of her and want to help make her return to school as supportive as possible.

2. Talk to your class about how grief affects people and encourage them to share how they feel. One way to do this is to discuss what other types of losses or deaths the students in your class have experienced, and what helped them cope.

3. Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to return to school, and how they may be of help. You can ask your class for ideas about how they would like others to treat them if they were returning to school after a death, pointing out differences in preferences. Some students might like to be left alone; others want the circumstances discussed freely. Most grieving students say that they want everyone to treat them the same way that they treated them before. As a rule, they don't like people being "extra nice." While students usually say they don't want to be in the spotlight, they also don't want people acting like nothing happened.

4. Provide a way for your class to reach out to the grieving classmate and his or her family. One of the ways students can reach out is by sending cards or pictures to the child/family, letting them know the class is thinking of them. If students knew the person who died, they could share memories of that person.

5. Provide flexibility and support to your grieving student upon his or her return to class. Recognize that your student will have difficulty concentrating and focusing on school work. Allow the bereaved student to leave the class when she needs some quiet or alone time. Make sure that the student has a person available to talk with, such as a school counselor.

**DOs and DON'Ts with Grieving Students**

• DO listen. Grieving students need a safe, trusted adult who will listen to them

• DO follow routines. Routines provide a sense of safety which is comforting to grieving students.

• DO set limits. Just because students are grieving, doesn't mean rules do not apply. When

grieving, students may experience lapses in concentration or exhibit risk taking behavior. Setting clear limits provides a more secure and safe environment for everyone under these circumstances.

• DO NOT suggest that the student has grieved long enough.

• DO NOT indicate that the student should get over it and move on.

• DO NOT act as if nothing has happened.

• DO NOT say things like:

• "It could be worse. You still have one brother."

• "I know how you feel."

• "You'll be stronger because of this"

• DO NOT expect the student to complete all assignments on a timely basis.

As a teacher, you have the opportunity to touch children's lives in a very special way. Your actions have a lifelong impact. When a death influences the lives of your students, you and your school, can make a lifelong difference by creating an environment for healing and support.

These lessons have been excerpted from the book Helping the Grieving Student: a Guide for Teachers.

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< Your logo> < Your school name>

**Crisis Response Team**

**For School Administrators:**

**Dealing with Grieving Students**

**The School Day**

After a school community has received news of a death, what happens on that day and the next

day? How are schedules affected? Here's a general outline and some things to be aware of in the hours and early days after a death.

**1. The staff briefing meeting**

After the Crisis Response team has drafted their action plan, a briefing meeting with the staff

should occur. It is important to have that meeting before the students return to school. All staff

who are impacted by the crisis should be included in this meeting. Come to the meeting prepared to accomplish the following:

• Share a written statement and presentation of the circumstances of the death.

• Prepare teachers to share the information in their home room or first period. (It is often

helpful for a team of two people to present the information.)

• Present information about how students grieve and what behaviors might be expected.

Review the plan for the school day/week.

• Stress the need for as routine a day as possible, allowing flexibility: times to talk about

the death and its impact when students need such a discussion.

• Allow discussion of plan

• Address questions and concerns about high risk students with teachers/staff.

• Discuss the need for substitute teachers for those teachers who need to be away from

students for a time because of their own reactions.

• Identify location and use of a safe room for students who need additional support

throughout the day.

• Allow time for teachers to talk about their own feelings related to the death/incident.

• If applicable, inform teachers of the designated media spokesperson. Advise teachers not

to speak with the media or allow them on the school grounds.

Continued on next page

**2. Student Issues**

As principal, you will have many opportunities to impact your students after a death occurs.

Along with the Crisis Response Team, you will set out guidelines for teachers to facilitate

classroom discussion, and inform students of resources available to them. You will also have

opportunities to connect with students during the days and weeks following the death. It may be speaking in an assembly, in your office or in passing in the hall. One of the best things you can do is be a model for grieving, by acknowledging your own feelings around the loss. This helps create a safe and open atmosphere for grief. You can also allow students to play a role in

memorializing the person who died. Planning a memorial service or remembrance can be a good activity for those who want to participate. Your school should have a procedure around memorial services or other commemorations so that you are prepared in advance. The procedure should include the answers to these questions:

• Will our school provide the opportunity for our community to acknowledge the death of a

student or staff member through some kind of memorialization? (We recommend that

you do provide this opportunity, both to acknowledge the life of the person who died and

also to illustrate the school's educational mission in action.)

• What kind of memorialization activities will we sponsor or support? (Some options

include sponsoring a community open forum on an evening where parents, students and

staff members are invited; holding a school assembly; allowing students to do something

commemorative like plant a tree on school grounds; etc.)

• Under what circumstances will we consider memorialization activities? The death of a

staff member or student? What if the death is a suicide or violent death? *(We* believe very

strongly that whatever policy or precedent the school sets should apply to all deaths. For

example, if you decide that if a student dies, there will be an opportunity to acknowledge

that student's death publicly and collectively as a school community, you should do the

same thing for a student who suicides as you would for a basketball player who dies on

the court, or a student who is killed in a car accident. It is not accurate that having a

memorial for a student who suicides will encourage other students to suicide. Not having

the same activity you would provide in a different kind of death gives the message that

the student's life was not valued, or that we should sweep suicidal deaths under the rug.

This is an excellent opportunity to educate your students, staff and school community

about preventing suicide.)

These lessons have been adopted from the books:

Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers

When Death Impacts Your School: A Guide for School Administrators

< Your logo> < Your school name>

**Crisis Response Team**

**NIMH (2001) Recommendations for Helping Children Cope With Crises**

1. Give yourself a bit of time to come to terms with the event before attempting to reassure children.

2. Take care of yourself so that you can take care of children.

3. Explain the episode of violence/disaster. Replace crisis rumors with crisis facts. At the same time, do not volunteer details that might increase children's threat perceptions.

4. Encourage children to express their feelings and listen without passing judgment.

5. Let children know that it is normal to feel upset.

6. Allow time for children to experience and talk about their feelings.

7. Don't try to rush back to ordinary routines too soon. However, a gradual return to

routine can be reassuring.

8. If children are fearful, reassure them that you will take care of them.

9. Stay together as much as possible.

10. Ifbehavior at bedtime is a problem, give children extra time and reassurance. Let him or her sleep with a light on or in your room for a limited time if necessary.

11 . Reassure children that the traumatic event was not their fault.

12. Do not criticize regressive behavior or shame children with words like "babyish."

13. Do your best to let children know that you understand their perception of the crisis event.

Try to put yourself in their shoes.

14. While it is important to understand children's crisis event perceptions, it is also important to correct misperceptions.

15. Allow children to cry or be sad.

16. Encourage children to feel in control. Let them make some decisions about meals, what to wear, etc.

17. Encourage children to develop coping and problem-solving skills and age appropriate methods for managing anxiety.

**Potential Suicide Checklist**

Suicide threats must always be taken seriously and intervention should be immediate. If a situation is potentially life threatening, students and staff need to recognize that the issue of confidentiality does not apply.

***What to do***

\_\_\_\_\_ Do not leave the individual alone.

\_\_\_\_\_ Refer the individual to appropriate staff (administrator, counselor) who will do the following:

***Assess the degree of risk***

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask student directly if he/she is thinking of suicide.

\_\_\_\_\_ Is there a plan and how specific is it?

\_\_\_\_\_ How lethal is the method?

\_\_\_\_\_ How available is the means?

\_\_\_\_\_ Has there been a previous attempt?

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask about feelings of anger and depression (crying, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, hopelessness.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask about losses (deaths, family changes, peer relationships.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask about history of chemical use.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask whether the student has made final arrangements (giving away possessions, saying goodbye.

***Intervention Plan***

\_\_\_\_\_ Contact student’s parent(s) or guardian(s) and plan with them how to help the student.

\_\_\_\_\_ Police and/or Child Protective Services may need to be involved if parents are unable or unwilling to help.

\_\_\_\_\_ Refer parent(s) or guardian(s) to appropriate services from physicians, mental health professionals and/or community agencies.

\_\_\_\_\_ Police involvement may be required in situations where the student is assessed to be in immediate danger and parents cannot be located or are unable to help. The Children’s Crisis Response Team < Local Phone number> from the County Department of Behavioral Health can assist in evaluating on site and seeing that the student gets to an appropriate mental health facility for as needed. (School personnel should avoid transporting student in private vehicles.)

***Follow up***

\_\_\_\_\_ Complete the suicide checklist form when available.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check to be sure that the student has received (is receiving) appropriate services.

\_\_\_\_\_ Plan for student’s transition back to school.

\_\_\_\_\_ Student should have ongoing contact with a counselor.

\_\_\_\_\_ Brief appropriate staff on student’s status.

**Understanding Age-Appropriate Stress Management Interventions**

When providing Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM, Everly & Mitchell, 1999) interventions, it is essential to tailor your approach to the developmental level of the students involved. The following chart illustrates a range of minutes suitable for discussion for different age levels, and from "teacher led" to "counselor led" interventions. In general, younger students need more teacher led interventions using activities (as opposed to discussion), while older students benefit from counselor led discussions. 120 min. 90 min. 80 min. 30 min.

Preschool-K - Minutes able to engage in session - 30 min Teacher led/Counselor observes

Elementary – Minutes able to engage in session - 60 min Teacher led/ Counselor observes

Middle School – Minutes able to engage in session - 90 min Counselor leads while teacher observes

High School – Minutes able to engage in session - 120 min Counselor leads while teacher observes

|  |
| --- |
|  (Adapted from Johnson, 1998)  |
|  |
|  |

**Age-Associated Reactions of Children Exposed to Traumatic or Stressful Events**

0-5 years:

Crying, excessive clinging, regressive behaviors (e.g., thumb sucking, bedwetting,

loss of bladder/bowel control, fear of darkness or animals, fear of being left alone,

fear of crowds or strangers, inability to dress or eat without assistance), sleep

terrors, nightmares, irritability, confusion, sadness, eating problems, reenactment

via play.

6–11 years:

Regressive behaviors (bedwetting, excessive clinging, irrational fears), sleep

terrors, nightmares, sleep problems, irritability, aggressiveness, disobedience,

depression, somatic complaints, visual or hearing problems, school problems

(e.g., school refusal, behavior problems, poor school performance, fighting,

concentration problems, distractibility), withdrawal, lack of interest, peer

problems, increased conflict with siblings.

12-17 years:

Withdrawal, isolation, somatic complaints (e.g., nausea, headaches, chills),

depression/sadness, agitation or decreased energy level, antisocial behavior, poor

school performance, sleep and/or eating disturbance, irresponsibility, risky

behavior, alcohol and other drug use, diminished bids for autonomy, decreased

interest in social activities, conflict with parents, concentration problems.

**Educational Resources for Parents and Teachers**

American National Red Cross. (2001). *American Red Cross materials dealing with terrorism and*

*unexpected events*. Retrieved from http://www.redcross.org/pubs/dspubs/terrormat.html

- *Helping Young Children Cope with Trauma:* on-line brochure designed for parents

and care givers.

- *When Bad Things Happen:* on-line brochure designed for junior high school students

- *Why Do I Feel Like This?:* on-line brochure designed for high school students

- *Facing Fear: Lesson Plans Book & Activities Book:* Curriculum Materials for K-12

covering feelings, facts, perspectives about events, and preparing for the future.

American Psychological Association. *Reactions and guidelines for children following*

*trauma/disaster.* Retrieved from http://www.helping.apa.org/daily/ptguidelines.html

Federal Emergency Management Agency. (1989). *After the disaster: A children’s mental health*

*checklist*. Retrieved from http://www.fema.gov/kids/tch-mntl.htm

Federal Emergency Management Agency, & American Red Cross. (2001). *Helping children*

*cope with disaster*. Retrieved from http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/forchildren.html

Hamblen, J. (2002). PTSD *in children and adolescents: A National Center for PTSD fact sheet*.

Retrieved from http://www.ncptsd.org/facts/specific/fs\_children.html.

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS). (2000). *Children and Trauma*.

Center for School Mental Health Assistance Crisis Intervention: A Guide for School-Based Clinicians 5. Retrieved from http://www.istss.org/children.htm

National Association of School Psychologists. (2001). *Children and fear of war and terrorism:*

*Tips for parents and teachers*. Retrieved from

http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/children\_war.html

Monahan, C. (1993). *Children and trauma: A parents’ guide to helping children heal.* New

York: Lexington Books.

Myers-Walls, J. (1999). *Talking to children when the talking gets tough*. Retrieved from

http://ces.purdue.edu/Living\_on\_Less/Pubs/FF-35.html

Purdue Extension. *Strategies for parents and teachers*. Retrieved from

http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/humandev/disas3.html

Rhode Island School Safety Steering Committee. School Emergency Planning: Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. (March 2008). Supplied by Anne Balboni, Psy.D. RI CISM TEAM member 12/28/2011

Samarzija, J., & Myers-Walls, J. A. (n.d.). *Helping children cope with stress*. Retrieved from

http://ces.purdue.edu/terrorism/children/helpingchildren.html

Sidran Traumatic Stress Foundation. (1999). *Helping a child manage fears after a traumatic*

*event*. Retrieved from http://www.sidran.org/sept11fears.html

Sidran Traumatic Stress Foundation. (2001). *When a terrorist act occurs*. Retrieved from

http://www.sidran.org/sept11terror.html

Waddell, D., & Thomas, A. (1999, Spring). Disaster: Helping children cope. *Communique, 28,*6-7.

**Resources**

< Local Responses and agencies>



(KLD ver0112)

**If Student has Med-ical Insurance**

**< Mental Health Agency>**

**Contact: < Name>**

**< Phone number>**

**They provide site based counseling services at some of our district schools.**

**Any type of Insurance/No Insurance**

**Children’s Crisis Response Team – < Local Phone number>**  This Department of Behavioral Health team functions as a hospital diversion program and goes out in the community to assess children and develop a plan for services with the family(i.e., 5150, hospitalization, case management services, therapy, etc).

‘s Crisis

**< Mental Health agency name> Relationships**

**Contact: < Name>**

**< Phone number>**

< Email address>

**They already provide site based counseling services at district schools that have Family Resource Centers through ‘Building a Generation’**

Providing Services in Spanish, English, Japanese and Korean

* Autistic Spectrum
* Behavior Management
* Domestic Violence
* Drug & Alcohol Recovery
* EMDR
* Parent-Child Support
* PCIT
* Trauma Resiliency