

# **Sample Crisis Management Protocol**

## **Purpose of the protocol**

The purpose of the Crisis Management protocol is to meet the needs of students, families, school personnel and the community in the event of a crisis or tragedy. Cases of crisis or tragedy should be further defined by the Crisis team, but at its minimum, this protocol is designed to address trauma caused by the death of a student.

## **Goal of the protocol**

This protocol strives to provide a systematic format to address concerns caused by tragedies which may impact normal functions in the community.

### **Objectives of the protocol**

- 1) To maintain a safe environment for the community
- 2) To meet the special needs of individuals affected by the crisis.
- 3) To accurately communicate with staff, students, parents and the general public by using effective and practical methods. Dissemination of information to the community as soon as possible.
- 4) To present a coherent, unified and predictable plan of action.
- 5) To evaluate effectiveness of protocol.

## **Response team**

Appoint members to the Crisis Management Team. This team shall be composed of community resource people, local clergy people, school personnel and interested qualified parties from the community. This team will routinely evaluate the overall management plan and coordinate the response to a crisis. The Crisis Management Team will also help school personnel deal with a crisis in the schools

## **Crisis Team Members**

Crisis Team members shall include 1) Superintendent or designee, 2) Principals and other staff 3) counselors, 4) school nurse(s), 5) representatives of local clergy, 6) law enforcement, 7) additional medical people as necessary, 8) community resource people.

## **Responsibilities of Team Members**

1. Superintendent: Coordinate the response of the Principals and act as the only communicator for official news releases to the public. Initiate the calling tree to selected team members.
2. Principals: Implement the protocol at each location when a crisis occurs. The Principals are also responsible for providing annual in-service updates on the protocol. Staff will be under the instruction of the Principals.
3. Counselors: Work with team to develop and initiate crisis management strategies.
4. All other team members: Work as part of the team in initiating procedures under direction of the Superintendent and Principals. Support staff are to be called as each crisis dictates.

## **Sequential Crisis Response**

1. When a member of the team is notified of a crisis or tragedy, that member will notify the team leader. The team leader will verify accuracy of information, contain the information and convene the Crisis Response Team to determine the necessity of initiating any or all of the following procedures. Responsibilities will be delegated to individual team members at this time. Appropriate team members will be chosen to make family contacts. Appropriate team members will be invited to schools to help with counseling as necessary.
2. Members of the Crisis Response Team will meet with the staff before announcing the crisis or tragedy to give teachers facts and answers to their questions, to dispel rumors, to initiate strategies to deal with student reactions and to identify high risk students who may be strongly affected, to assign other duties and to give secretaries the telephone response.
3. Principals will meet with their staffs to answer questions, announce funeral arrangements, discuss staff attendance, school policy regarding student dismissal, share new information and present the plans for the individual classroom meetings.
4. Immediate friends will be identified and provided counseling immediately. Staff will be made aware of who those students are and will be directed to heighten their sensitivity to them.
5. Principal and/or counselor will make an announcement to the students in their classrooms. Teachers will be in their classrooms during the announcement and will openly acknowledge student feelings, explain the circumstances of the death/tragedy, dispel rumors and let students know that counseling is available.
6. The principal, counselor, nurse and appropriate team members will meet with individual classes to help students better deal with their feelings, dispel rumors, offer reassurance and encourage students to be supportive of their fellow classmates and friends.
7. Parents of students identified as high risk will be contacted and offered support from the school. No student will be allowed to leave school unless parents/guardians/pertinent persons have been contacted and have given permission for the student to leave.
8. All building staff are to be assembled after school to allow for expression of feelings and support, review and evaluate the day's events, compile a list of high-risk students and assess their individual and classroom needs.
9. The team will meet to evaluate the day's events. The team will discuss the appropriateness of meetings to support students and parents, review and plan classroom meetings for the next day, identify and assess the needs of high-risk students and discuss school dismissal policy.
10. Continued crisis counseling will be offered to students, parents and staff as needed.
11. Principal and/or counselor will be responsible for returning the personal effects and records to the student's family.

## **Ten Step Plan to Deal with Crisis**

Following are ten steps each building principal should follow in dealing with the sudden death of a student or staff member. These steps may be modified for other crises.

### **Step One:**

Prior to meeting with the entire faculty, meet with the Crisis Management Team for the purpose of identifying the agenda to be followed for the day. Staff members may be notified if appropriate.

### **Step Two:**

Identify a team leader who will orchestrate the activities of all the helping persons (and students) over the next several days. This person will be the hub of information and, in many instances, may be a counselor.

### **Step Three:**

Direct staff member and police to immediately go to the deceased student's locker, remove the contents and bring the belongings to the principal. This needs to be completed prior to the students coming to school to avoid unnecessary rumors and because some students may remove the deceased's property which rightfully belongs to the parents.

### **Step Four:**

Direct a staff member to pull the deceased student's cumulative folder to determine what other schools the deceased attended. The principal should call the other school(s) and inform them that the event has occurred.

### **Step Five:**

Identify a Support Center Area in the building where the students may come for support and counseling. Usually this area should be close to the guidance office and/or the main office to facilitate communications between guidance and administrative staff

### **Step Six:**

Decide with the Crisis Management Team what will be reviewed at the mandatory all-staff meeting.

### **Step Seven:**

Prepare an announcement to be read over the P.A. system to the students or to be presented by the classroom teacher. It is important to have a central spokesperson for all announcements to students. By the time students reach school following a sudden death or suicide, many will have heard differing versions about what happened. The presence of a strong, caring and supportive authority figure sharing information during this stressful time is important.

### **Step Eight:**

Direct a staff member to collect funeral arrangement information and to prepare details for student/faculty attendance at the visitation and funeral. When details are final, an announcement should be made to staff and students.

### **Step Nine:**

Call and/or visit the parents as early as possible to express the school's and your condolence. Visiting the parents is encouraged, and principal should take along a staff member who has been well-acquainted with the student.

### **Step Ten:**

Following the deceased student's funeral, begin to bring closure by encouraging teachers to resume regular classroom activities as quickly as appropriate. On the day following the funeral,

the principal should make the following closure statement to all students and faculty. This is done the day following because many of the deceased student's closest friends will not have returned to school the day of the funeral. Following is a suggested statement:

"May I have your attention please. I wish to thank each of you, students and faculty, for the support you have shown each other during the past few days. The example you have shown is a positive and healthy one and provides us the opportunity to work towards strengthening our relationships with each other. Guidance staff remain available if you should wish to talk with a counselor. (Any additional comments from the family that have been passed on to the principal might be shared at this point) Thank you for your attention."

### **Appendix A: Media Management**

Designated Media Spokesperson.

1. All media correspondence, news releases, interviews, etc., will be directed to the Superintendent's office.
2. No students shall be interviewed within the school or on school premises.
3. No faculty shall be interviewed except those who have been designated by the school administration in charge.
4. No cameras will be allowed within the school building.
5. All questions are to be directed to the designated representative in the Superintendent's office.
6. All official school district communication will come from the central office.
7. All members of the media are asked to show consideration for the emotional welfare and educational interests of the students by cooperating with the above listed procedures.

### **Appendix B: Announcements (Example)**

We have just been informed that (Name) , a student in this school, has died. The funeral arrangements have not been completed. We all feel saddened by this death. On behalf of the entire faculty, staff and student body, I wish to express our school's deepest sympathy to relatives and friends who knew and loved (Name) As soon as we learn the funeral arrangement details, we will let you know. Those of you who want to discuss your feelings about (Name's) death may meet in room, where you will receive further instructions. Teachers express appropriate feelings then soon return the classroom to normal activities.

### **Appendix C: Teachers' Response (Example)**

"I know it may be difficult for some of us to continue our work today, but our counselors have set aside a special time and place for discussion for those who are troubled by the loss. Students who are feeling troubled by the death of (Name) are encouraged to meet with the counseling staff at (Time and Place) "

After the Teacher's Response...Refer individual students who are obviously in need of immediate removal from class to the counselor's office (crying, obviously upset). The teacher then continues to proceed with the usual routine for the day.

### **Appendix D: Staff Response to Visitors (Example)**

We feel saddened by the sudden death of one of our students. We are concerned for our students and staff. Further questions should be directed to the Superintendent's office.

### **Appendix E: Secretary's Announcement for Curious Callers**

"Hello." (Make sure you know to whom you are speaking) "How may I help?" Questions concerning (Name) are being taken by the Superintendent's office at 773-7300."

### **Appendix F: Special Lesson**

This lesson is to be used to relieve student stress resulting from accidental death or suicide.

#### **Main Idea**

Many students can cope with the accidental death or suicide of a classmate and adjust without serious distress. Others have difficulty expressing their feelings. School personnel can provide support during this painful time by letting students know that verbalizing their feelings is an acceptable and effective way of coping.

#### **Lesson Objectives**

- To allow students to express their feelings concerning the death or suicide.
- To help the teacher/advisor to identify those students who may need referral to the counselor for additional help.
- To offer students some clues to the recognition of the suicide-prone students (if that is the nature of the current crisis) and some information on where to seek help.

#### **Teacher Preparation**

Teachers will attend the session provided by the Location Team before approaching this sensitive subject with students. The leader of the faculty session will (i) present the facts of the particular situation as they are known, (ii) stress that this is not an ordinary teaching experience, but one which requires greater compassion, empathy and listening skills and (iii) discuss adolescent suicide, some of the causes, the symptoms, and the effects on friends and schoolmates. It is important to note that very few adolescent students have developed adult coping skills. They may react to high stress situations in one of the following ways:

- Through the "flight or fight" response, i.e., by acting totally unconcerned and suppressing their feelings or by becoming extremely hostile and promoting conflict situations.
- By avoiding the situation because of fear of not being able to cope. Absence from school may be the result.
- By suffering from guilt feelings. It is sometimes difficult to accept that one cannot control others.

#### **Activities**

In order to dispel unfounded fears and bring an end to rumors, begin the lesson by giving students the information about the particular accidental death or suicide as it was given to you in the faculty meeting.

**Encourage student discussion by asking questions similar to the following:**

1. How did you react when you heard about the death?
2. What are your feelings now?
3. What do you think causes a person to turn to suicide as a solution to problems?

REMEMBER: The advisor should strive to be the listener. the objective is to allow the students opportunities to discuss their concerns in an accepting environment.

You may find that the students are not inclined to open up in the large group. If this happens, allow them to move into smaller groups for discussion. Move from group to group as a source of support and information.

Ask students, "How would you respond to someone who says he feels guilty about not recognizing that a friend was behaving in a suicidal manner?"

**Bring three ideas out in your discussion:**

1. It is normal to feel guilt when someone we know dies or chooses self-destruction as the solution to their problem.
2. We know that we cannot assume responsibility for the actions and choices of another
3. We can learn to recognize the symptoms of personal distress in those around us and we can learn where we can go for help.

**Help the group to identify ways to identify a deeply distressed person.**

**Emphasize that there is no foolproof test. A person must always be cautious in making judgments and should never spread rumors.**

**Mental health professionals often point to these symptoms as signs of possible trouble**

- a. a previous suicide attempt
- b. a threat to commit suicide
- c. uncharacteristic problems in school
- d. expressions of low self-esteem
- e. drug abuse or alcohol problems
- f. lasting depression (loss of interest in friends, hobbies or an inability to cope with trivial problems).
- g. giving away cherished possessions

**Help students identify where a suicide-prone person can seek help other than from family and friends.**

- a. in school, from a caring teacher, counselor, nurse or an administrator
- b. from community helpers, such as a Crisis Hotline, Suicide Intervention Hotline or outside counseling services
- c. from the family physician
- d. from a religious counselor

Through the advisor's understanding of adolescents' reactions to suicide in their midst--feelings of guilt, fear, hostility, helplessness--students have had the opportunity to verbalize their feelings and learn to appreciate group discussion as a means of coping with this and other stress situations.

## **Grief Processing Support Structure**

### Some Ideas and Suggestions

1. "Drop-in Center" all day the first day that news of a sudden death is disseminated.
2. More than one counselor/facilitator is needed in the group at one time. It's also a good idea to have others available for relief purposes
3. Focus
  - a. memories, positive experience with person who died
  - b. feeling about the loss
  - c. stages of grieving--students may bring up spirituality
  - d. funeral and services--appropriate behaviors/concerns about experience
  - e. future--what next?
  - f. guild work if needed/some need to focus on causation
  - g. family and friend's response (kids often wonder "What can I do? How can I help?")
  - h. identifying others that the students are concerned about (provides them with an opportunity to help, gives them a purpose in crisis, allows them to be part of a larger supportive community response.
4. Avoid focusing on:
  - a. narcissistic focus on suicidal thoughts, feelings, experiences, if the death was by suicide.
  - b. constant talk about the actual death (morbid focusing)
  - c. blame
5. Bring group to some closure the second day. Avoid adding new members (may need to meet others on a one-to-one). Probably will focus more on funeral and services.
6. may need to reconvene after funeral for an hour to refocus on grief/loss. Bring group to some closure again and offer various resources for on-going support
7. Remember throughout the course of group process, facilitators need to identify students with chronic problems around the issue of suicide/self-destructive behavior (regardless of the cause of death) and to assess whether or not these youngsters need to be "pulled" from the group. If the students in question are identified as "chronic manipulative attempters" they must be removed from the group.
8. The counseling staff may want to consider the possibility for a "neighborhood group" in the evening to reach youngsters at all age levels (checking in with parent(s) to see if there is a need).
9. Finally, we suggest viewing group work as a possibility for the whole system, K-12. Death impacts the entire educational community. not just one branch.