

<Sample Memo to All Staff - Suicide Aftermath Guidelines>

This is an example of information that can be distributed to staff only.

It is not to be sent to parents, given to the students or the media.

To: All Staff

From:

Date:

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

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Guidelines for Memorials:

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

It is not appropriate to:

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

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

Counseling Services:

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

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

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

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

<Sample Faculty/Student Memo - Student Death>

(Date)

To: All Teachers,

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

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

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

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

<Sample Faculty/Staff Memo – Gravely Ill Student>

Memorandum

Date:

To: All Teachers and Staff

From: Principal

cc: District Administrators

Re: Gravely Ill Student

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

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

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

<Sample Memo to Staff and Students – Teacher Injury>

(Use interoffice correspondence)

TO: All Staff and Students

FROM: _____, Principal

RE: ACCIDENT ON CAMPUS

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

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

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

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

<Sample letter to Parents/Guardians – Tragic Incident>

Dear Parents/Guardians,

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

(Principal Name)

(Phone)

<Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians - Tragic Event>

(Date)

Dear Family Members:

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

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

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

_____.

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

☞ _____
☞ _____
☞ _____.

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

Sincerely,

Principal

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

<Sample Letter to all Parents – Student Death>

(Use letterhead stationery)

Date

Dear Parents:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Principal *(phone number)*

<Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians-Student Death>

Dear Parents/Guardians,

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

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

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

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

How to Help Your Child Cope with Grief

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

Dealing with the Media

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

Prepare

Write down what you want to communicate.

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

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

Give Straightforward Information

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

Avoid Common Mistakes

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

Correct the Record

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

Sample Media Statements

Example 1: Bus accident

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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