



LIBERTY-PERRY COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION

Liberty-Perry Community Schools

Postvention Standards Manual: Procedures Following a Sudden Death

Postvention Standards Manual

5 Goals of Postvention After a Sudden Death

1. To support those grieving the loss of a classmate, teacher or colleague
2. To return the school to its normal routines
3. To identify and assist those at risk for unhealthy behaviors and reactions
4. To refer those who may be at risk for psychiatric disorders
5. To reduce the risk of contagion for those at risk for suicidal behavior

The superintendent shall establish a postvention coordinator based on the following criteria:

- School employee who is familiar with school services, community mental health agencies, and other community resources.
- This person must be a calm and quick-thinking leader in crisis, who can organize simultaneous efforts to meet the needs of diverse populations.

In the event of a tragedy, the postvention coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the following tasks are completed:

- Call the corporations postvention team, composed of school support staff and administrators.
- Contact mental health professionals or other community agencies for on-site support and/or consultation.
- Locate and put into safekeeping the personal belongings of the victim (i.e. any photographs of the person, locker and desk contents, completed paper and projects, team jersey and books). The coordinator might put aside the student's textbooks, in the event that the school chooses to give them to the family or the family wants to purchase them.
- Remove the victim's name from individual class rosters, school mailing lists, automated attendance call lists. If the victim was a high school student, the coordinator or counselor may also wish to reach college or military recruiters who may inadvertently contact the victim's family.
- Compile a list of at-risk students including, but not limited to, the following:
 - Students with a history of mental health problems, suicide attempts, or substance abuse problems, and students who are currently in treatment.
 - Students who are not in treatment but have been a concern for parents, teachers, etc.
 - Relatives of the deceased
 - Siblings, cousins, and other family members of the deceased who are in the district.
 - Boy/girlfriend of the deceased.
 - Close friends of the deceased.
 - Students who have experienced a recent loss or the anniversary of a loss.
 - Students who identify themselves as needing support.

- Students who have gone to the funeral home or cemetery for visitation and/or attended funeral services.
- Members of organizations or teams in which the deceased participated.
- Any other specific groups of students and/or adults on whom the death might have a direct or indirect impact.

If deemed fit for the given situation, additional responsibilities of the postvention coordinator may include:

- Contact the family of the victim.
- Contact the funeral home.
- Contact other schools where the death may have an impact.
- Conduct school staff meetings and alert school security.
- Inform community mental health agencies about possible referrals.
- Inform students about the tragedy and implement postvention services.
- Inform parents and provide referral services as necessary.
- Respond to inquiries from the media or refer questions to District's media spokesperson.
- Evaluate the postvention.
- Plan for anniversary dates and special events (e.g. graduation)

Basic Guidelines for Supporting a School Through a Tragedy

1. Respect the unique needs of each individual
2. Identify and support those most at risk

Planning the School Environment

1. Space- plan appropriate spaces for support staff to meet with students and faculty that are private
2. Escorts- keep a confidential list of students and have one person coordinate the movement of students the designated spaces.
3. Security-escort upset and angry students to the guidance office for proper support, monitor students congregating in large groups during regularly scheduled activities, approach representatives from the media and refer them to the school's media representative, remove media representatives who attempt to interview students or teachers on the school grounds without permission, and monitor hallways, stairwells, bathrooms, locker rooms, entrances/exits and other areas where students may congregate or attempt to leave.

Re-arranging the Classroom of the Victim

In some circumstances schools can:

- Allow students to make decisions about the location of the desk of a deceased classmate and rearrange the desks in the classroom. Allowing the desk to remain in its usual place for a long period can be an unnecessary stressor, and could lead to problem behaviors (such as writing derogatory comments on the desk or turning it into a shrine to the deceased).

- The postvention coordinator, principal, and others close to the students will make a judgment call about involving students in planning how to handle the deceased's desk.
- Whether adults take on the responsibility alone or share it with students, the aim is to return the classroom to a normal learning environment, while minimizing additional stress and re-exposure to students close to the tragedy.

Informing School Staff

An emergency meeting of all school faculty and staff should take place as soon as possible after the school learns of a sudden death. If there is an existing "phone tree," use it to notify staff of the tragedy and inform them of the meeting. A death should never be referred to as a suicide unless the coroner has ruled the death a suicide. (Postvention Coordinator Checklist for Informing Staff- Attachment 1)

The school will make a decision to acknowledge the death as a suicide or to refer to it as a sudden death, based on a number of factors. These factors include:

- (a) The wishes of the victim's immediate family
- (b) The advice of mental health professionals regarding the risk of suicide contagion
- (c) Whether the suicide is already well-known in the community
- (d) The school district's Board policy regarding such communications
- (e) A clinical judgment as to whether those at risk for contagion will be better protected and served if they are made aware of the suicide and its accompanying risks.

Explain the faculty's responsibility to announce the death. If any faculty member does not feel comfortable announcing the death in the classroom or answering students' questions, have that person inform the principal. Postvention team members can then step in to make the announcement or otherwise support the faculty member. (Attachment 2 provides commonly asked questions by students and offers some possible responses for faculty.)

Distribute the announcement. The announcement should be typed in advance, so that each teacher is giving the same information. (Attachment 3 for an example.)

Emphasize confidentiality. Remind school staff that much of the information shared during a postvention is confidential. Alert staff that community members will undoubtedly question them for details of the tragedy. Review school district guidelines about sharing of confidential student (or faculty) information.

Announce follow-up meetings. A follow-up staff meeting should be planned at the end of the day. Intermittent staff meetings may occur depending upon the need to share new information or get advice from the faculty.

Questions or concerns regarding the general climate of the school, the postvention services, and the school-based activities should be referred to the postvention coordinator.

A letter home to parents informing them of the death is the ideal way to proceed. The letter can also inform parents about the support services at the school and, if needed, any other resources within the community. (Attachments 4a and 4b)

Allow as much time as possible for faculty to review the information you are sharing.

Address any questions or concerns as completely as possible; and acknowledge the difficult task the staff members are facing. Finally, thank them for their cooperation and patience with the disruptions to their normal routines. Stress reactions that students and adults may experience. (Attachment 5)

ANNOUNCING THE DEATH TO STUDENTS

Students and their parents need accurate information about the tragedy. Because it is important that each student hear the same information about the death, it is recommended that:

- Classroom teachers use a prepared announcement to read to students. (Attachment 3)
- A letter to be mailed to parents about the tragedy, describing the postvention services available. (Attachments 4a and 4b)

The announcement of a death should never be broadcast over an in-school announcement system, or solely in a school bulletin. Also, avoid announcements in a large group assembly. These approaches do not allow the school faculty to assess the reactions of students and provide them with personal support.

ANNOUNCING A SUICIDE

Care must be taken when sharing information about any death, especially a suicide. The purpose of providing information (beyond acknowledging the tragedy) is to educate the community about concerns that exist in the aftermath of a suicide: the impact of exposure and the potential for contagion.

If a postvention team knows that a suicide has taken place, that team should take the precautions and additional steps outlined in the section, "Special Circumstances Following a Suicide". (Attachment 6- Common Symptoms After a Critical Incident)

FOLLOWING THE SCHEDULE OF THE DECEASED

A school counselor or other member of the school's postvention team can follow the deceased student or staff member's schedule to provide support to teachers and classmates, give everyone a chance to express their feelings, and to answer sensitive questions. In the event that the deceased is a faculty member, the postvention coordinator and principal should decide how to modify the schedule to support that individual's students.

For example, a familiar teacher could cover the deceased's schedule if you have someone take over his or her classes. The classroom teacher or postvention team member will introduce the grief/psychoeducational group discussion: "We learned this morning about the tragic loss of your classmate (teacher). Since you were in classes with _____, we wanted to give you some extra help in handling this very sad event."

Following this introduction, the teacher or leader can:

- Respond to students' questions about the death. (Attachment 7)
- Respond to questions about memorials.
- Explain how, when, and where counselors are available to students.
- Advise students about handling media representatives.
- (If suicide is the cause of death), discuss risk factors for suicide including depression, alcohol and other drug use, and access to firearms as risk factors.

Greif Presentation for Classroom and Other Select Groups

Grieving students can benefit from a classroom presentation on coping with the trauma of a sudden loss. This presentation helps students to understand, label, and talk about their feelings. (Attachment 8- Objectives of the Grief Lecture.) This presentation, facilitated by a counselor, principal or postvention coordinator, may follow the announcement of the student's death. The presenter/facilitator can:

- Ask how each student learned about the death.
- Explore each student's reaction to the death and determine whether the student's reaction was shared with a parent. There is usually a common set of responses including shock, sadness, anger and disbelief. Some students might respond by saying the death was "foolish," or "stupid." Other responses are possible and the presenter must be prepared for students crying or expressing feelings of anger or guilt.
- Review aspects of grief using examples shared earlier in the group.
- Encourage student discussion and questions.
- Distribute student "help card" with a space for students to fill in the name and telephone number of two adults they can contact in a crisis.
- Review the help card resources. (Attachment 9)
- Ask if any student knows of resources not listed on the help card. If so, write appropriate resources on the chalkboard for students to copy onto their help card.
- Urge students to self-refer or refer a friend any time they have cause for concern.

In addition, if a suicide has occurred and the school has made the decision to discuss the death as a suicide:

- Discuss ways to deal with suicide.
- Emphasize the need to contact an adult if students have concerns about suicidality for themselves or a friend.
- Ask for and respond to students' questions.

Students who ask unusual questions or make provocative statements in support of suicidal behavior should be referred promptly to the postvention team for an individual screening.

Individual Referral and Screening General Guidelines

Before beginning postvention activities the postvention coordinator should ensure that the school is in compliance with applicable state regulations (e.g., those governing the privacy of student or employee records) and District's policy. This safeguard is especially important for activities that involve non-school personnel who gather personal information from students. If you believe that a student is at risk for suicide or other dangerous behaviors, immediately contact the student's parents or guardians, and follow up with a written statement of your concerns.

Referrals

Referrals may come from teachers, staff, students who have been interviewed, or from a student who contacted an adult helper out of concern for a fellow student. Any referred student should have an opportunity to meet with a member of the postvention team.

Recordkeeping

It is important to keep accurate records of those students referred and screened. The postvention coordinator or designated support staff member should keep a roster of all students referred and screened. (Attachment 10) Each individual screening should be documented on a special postvention screening form. (Attachment 11) Both the roster and the screening forms are confidential. Only staff directly involved in the postvention should have access to them.

Parent Permission and Follow-up

Every effort to contact the parents or guardians of each student referred for individual screening should be made. Ideally, someone from the school who knows the family should make this contact. Prior to the screening, it should be made clear to the student that the interview is voluntary, that they do not have to answer any questions they choose not to, and the counselor should explain that information shared by the student is confidential unless there is a risk of the student hurting him/herself or someone else, any suspicion of abuse to them or other at-risk behavior. In this case, the student's parents must be informed of the student's risk, and an appropriate level of support should be provided in the form of referral to an appropriate place for care.

The parents of all students who are screened individually should be contacted by telephone, and if possible by the person who conducted the screening interview. Try to have the student present when the parent is called, so that they can talk with one another as well. If there is no need for follow-up, you can tell the parent, "Your son/daughter is understandably devastated by the death of his/her friend. At this point s/he appears to be experiencing a normal grief reaction." Then review child/adolescent reactions that would be of concern and whom they can contact if they observe those behaviors. Send a letter

containing the same information provided during the telephone call. At the end of each day, the postvention team should meet to review individual screening results and determine individual follow-up.

Approximately one to two months after the postvention is completed, school staff should review the status of each student screened and determine the need for further intervention. In the unfortunate situation that another tragedy occurs, the postvention team should revisit those students who were previously referred, as well as attend to the students involved in the current tragedy.

Individual Screening After a Suicide

Certain students may be at higher risk for suicide and/or depression and they should be individually screened by a qualified school counselor. (Attachment 11)

The following issues may comprise an individual screening:

- The student's exposure to the suicide, relationship with the deceased, and participation in the funeral.
- The student's current and past mental health care including anytime they were in counseling.
- Whether the suicide/tragic loss caused any exacerbation of any mental health symptoms. Any current or past history of suicide for themselves or any family members.
- Any symptoms of depression experienced by the student and whether the suicide caused an exacerbation of those symptoms.
- Any past or present involvement with the legal or juvenile court system.
- Any history of alcohol and/or drug abuse.
- Access to firearms (even if in a locked cabinet)
- Access to alcohol and other drugs.
- Stressors in the student's life.
- Any communication about the suicide between the student and the deceased.
- The majority of students screened during a postvention will not require mental health treatment.

However, those students whose severe grief impairs their daily functioning, or those whose histories include the risk factors mentioned earlier [a) current or past history of depression, or b) close relationship with the victim and discovered the body or witnessed the suicide] are particularly at risk for developing depression or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. These students should be monitored for school attendance, changes in academic performance, and any shifts in behavior. At risk students and their parents or guardians should be referred to a mental health professional according to the procedure established by the school.

A screening may reveal that the student is at risk for suicide, depression, or another mental health disorder. (Attachment 11)

If so, the counselor should:

- Negotiate and document a safety plan with the student. A safety plan is an agreement that is negotiated between the student and the person doing the screening.
 - The student agrees:
 - Not to act on suicidal ideation or urges
 - To contact his parent or guardian, or other responsible adult if experiencing suicidal ideation
 - To identify previous stressors that have led to suicidality and to structure activities to prevent recurrence of such stressors.
- If conflict within the family has led to past suicidality, it is important to negotiate a “truce” around hot topics or issues both with the adolescent and the family member.
- To go to an emergency room if the person cannot keep self-safe and other mental health professionals or support persons are not available.
- Have ‘key’ phone numbers (Attachment 9) in order to access appropriate adult support. (Attachment 12 for steps one might take in using a “safety plan”)
- Contact the parents or guardians and facilitate a referral. If the student is already receiving mental health care, encourage the parent to contact the student’s therapist or counselor.
- Advise the parents or guardians to remove firearms, alcohol, and other drugs from the student’s access.

Follow-Up

Follow up on all the students screened should occur on a regular basis by counselors at the school. This should occur in a formal way for those students identified as at-risk because of their current concerns or past psychiatric histories. Other students identified as needing “school monitor” (Attachment 11) could be contacted on a less formal basis for an occasional “check-in,” often referred to as touching base. Regardless of their initial status, students screened should always know where they could get help should they have any problems, questions, or concerns about the tragic loss that they experienced.

Funeral Plans

After speaking with the parents of the deceased, the postvention coordinator should contact the funeral home:

- To review specific funeral arrangements (such as visitation hours, dates, times, interment, etc.).
- To inform the funeral director that large numbers of students might visit the funeral home. We recommend that the funeral director follow the family’s wishes concerning visitation.
- To inform the funeral home director of the mental health services available for students and the victim’s family members as well as a contact person at the school should there be any questions or concerns.

- To suggest that the funeral director consider the route of the funeral procession (i.e., avoid going by the school, if possible).

Faculty and staff members should make their own decisions about attending the funeral. Those who attend the funeral service may provide helpful feedback about the response of the students. A member of the postvention team should make him or herself available to students at the funeral service. Accommodations (i.e., class coverage or release time) for faculty and staff wishing to attend the funeral service may also need to be addressed.

Contacting Leaders of Faith-Based Organizations

Contact with leaders of faith-based organizations is often helpful, especially if they are providing support to students outside of school. These leaders, including heads of youth groups, often act as natural supports for students and can be integral school and community resources. If there is a need to communicate with spiritual/religious leaders involved with the family, then the postvention coordinator can initiate contact. Before doing so however, the postvention coordinator will need to check the District's policy on confidentiality before revealing specific details about the death or about any individual student. At times faith-based leaders will contact the school in an attempt to get a better understanding as to how students are responding, what issues to address or avoid in their eulogy, worship services, and youth activities. Again, safeguard confidentiality while providing general information and suggestions about how the community and school can work together.

Postvention in Other Schools

Postvention services may extend beyond a classroom, grade, or school building. The tragedy may affect students and adults in other settings. Suicidal behavior can be the result of contagion. Feeder schools, where the deceased had friends or relatives, or adjacent school districts may have students who are affected by the death. The postvention coordinator needs to identify and arrange to contact these other sites. A family member or spokesperson can provide reliable information regarding the deceased individual's previous school placements, present and recent participation in community activities or membership in community organizations. Planning a comprehensive postvention program may involve cooperation between various schools within a district, between districts, and between schools and other community groups.

Communications within the School Community: Responding to Rumors

Rumors arise during the aftermath of a tragedy. When people under stress try to comprehend something shocking, they speculate on why the tragedy occurred. Speculation seems to be a normal part of the reaction to a crisis. However, speculation tends to perpetuate rumors and add to the chaos of a tragedy. The facts, as we know them and can share them, are the best defense against rumors.

Keeping staff informed on the current facts of a tragedy can help dispel rumors. When a new rumor arises, tell the students or staff what you know to be true. If adults cannot immediately refute the rumor, find an appropriate source to address the rumor as honestly and accurately as possible. For example, when a suicide occurs there is often an attempt to place blame directly or indirectly. This is a form of scapegoating. The goal in this situation is not to deny the reality of a conflict that may have existed, but to avoid placing blame or responsibility. If a student, or group of students, allegedly were malicious towards the victim and contributed to the victim's suicide, then information provided in a sensitive and timely fashion could be helpful. Sometimes the only answer is "To the best of my knowledge, that is not true," or "If I find out anything about that (rumor) being true, I will let you know. At this time I don't believe that information is accurate."

As information becomes available, the postvention coordinator or principal can put it in a brief factual memo sent to all staff involved in the postvention. This information can also be shared at the faculty meeting at the end of the day.

Communications with the Media

Responding to the media after a tragedy can be difficult. Every situation must be treated separately. It is recommended that the school work with a media specialist to develop a policy about dealing with and responding to the media in the aftermath of a suicide. Faculty and staff should be instructed to refer any media inquiries to the designated district spokesperson. The school district should urge staff to refrain from making statements about the tragedy or the school's postvention activities to anyone from the media.

Only designated officials should have contact with the media during the crisis. They should have training in media relations, including how to respond to media questions, how to conduct interviews with reporters and journalists, and how to conduct a press conference. They may also need training in how to write a press release.

When the school must respond to the media, the spokesperson should prepare a written statement for release to those media representatives who request it. The statement should include a very brief statement (without details about the death of the student) as well as information about the school's postvention policy and program. It may also include an expression of the school's sympathy to the survivors of the deceased. The statement may include references to responsible media reporting in a postvention situation, emphasizing, for example, the positive action that the school is taking to help student survivors and providing information about available community resources for troubled students.

Media representatives should not be permitted to conduct interviews on the school grounds. Media representatives should be excluded from parent and student group meetings, to protect the information shared by parents who are concerned about their children. Whenever it is necessary to ask representatives from the media to leave the school grounds, this should be done in a calm and matter-of-fact way, requesting their cooperation. If available, school security may assist with escorting the media.

Supporting the Postvention Team

Team members require their own support during the intense stress of a postvention. (Attachment 13- strategies to help individuals cope after experiencing a trauma) Members should always have ready access to water and nutritional foods, whenever possible. Team members should take turns dealing with the high-intensity aspects of a postvention.

Carefully planned continuing education “refreshers” are one of the best ways to support and sustain team members. Advance preparation of a policy and designation of duties can alleviate anxiety and reduce the stress of postvention work. Provide each postvention team member with a “crisis kit” of essential forms, directories, personal items, maps, and handbooks. (See Attachment14)

Memorials

General Concepts

Any memorial activity is bittersweet. The memory of someone who is dear can be pleasant, yet in his or her absence painful. This is true regardless of how the death occurred.

Immediate grief may be accompanied by countless questions and speculations about the events that resulted in death. Mourners need some way to make sense of the death, some cognitive comprehension that allows them to “file” this tragic event in their memory. Once the facts of the tragedy are accepted, the manner of death ceases to be the focus and the loss can be more fully addressed. Mourning is bringing to the public aspects of one’s own grief. It is sharing the burden of one’s pain. Mourning can facilitate the grief process. It allows public recognition of the person’s life and a sharing of feelings on a community level. How an individual mourns is a personal choice, influenced by one’s community as well as by his or her own beliefs and values.

Memorials Following a Suicide

In the case of a suicide, a memorial may be arranged among the family, and representatives from the school. The important issue in a memorial following suicide is that the focus be on the person, not on the method of death.

Yearbook Memorials

It is important to help adolescents and younger students understand that the yearbook is a celebration of memories that will remain in their possession for many years to come. The yearbook represents a collection of many different persons’ memories, recollections, contributions, writings, and photographs. Therefore, a guiding concept is to avoid overwhelming the primary purpose of the yearbook, a celebration and remembrance of mostly happy times. In other words, do not allow students to turn the entire yearbook

experience into a memorial. To do this would be to deny many students and their families the joys that a yearbook offers.

The approval of the deceased student/faculty member's surviving family is crucial to the process. Prior to designing any memorial in the yearbook, the yearbook faculty advisor should meet with the family of the deceased to determine their wishes, preferences, concerns, and feelings about a memorial.

The proportion of the memorial to the entire yearbook is important to keep in balance. The memorial should not overwhelm or dominate, for example, the senior class section of the book. The content and visual qualities of the memorial are important. There should be adequate space given to a photograph or two, but without reference to the details of the death. Avoid dramatic colors and designs, as they detract from the overall goal of a yearbook. Consider including a photograph of the deceased, even if the photograph is supplied by the family or from a previous school year. This may be less dramatic than a blank or darkened space. Keep in mind that the yearbook memorial is but one way in which students and faculty may remember and honor their friend.

Graduation Activities After a Death

Commemorations at the end of the school year can be especially painful for the victim's loved ones. If a high school senior has died, make private arrangements with the family of the deceased to meet them and present them with their child's diploma. This should be scheduled near the day of graduation, as they will be feeling left out of that day. The principal, superintendent, or some "authority" from the school should go, accompanied by someone who knows the family. If there are any awards banquets, etc. where the student would have been recognized, then the same idea is helpful. It is not recommended to leave an empty chair at the ceremony because the visual may trigger strong reactions from other students and attendees.

At the actual graduation ceremony, a word of recognition about the tragedy is helpful, especially if a statement that indicates that the school has recently reached out to the parents/family by visiting them and presenting the diploma can follow it. This kind of statement seems to put other parents and students at ease and shows compassion. The superintendent or principal may want to mention a memorial fund or other memorial that the school is arranging. This is not a "must do."

Deal with the tragedies at the beginning of the ceremony, so that you can say what you have done and then move on to the happy evening that is well deserved by students and their families. Do not be surprised if students mention the tragedies in their remarks.

Check with the victims' families to see if they have any particular wishes that you may be able to honor—developing a memory book of photos for them, donating a book to the library in the victim's name, etc. Do not leave the victims' names off the list of graduates.

Anniversary Dates

A 'revisiting' of grief feelings can resurface on or near the anniversary date of a tragic loss. This can be a normal 'remembering' or it may be of more intensity. This can include unresolved grief or a postponed response called delayed grief reaction. Faculty and staff, if reminded of the anniversary, can be prepared to monitor and support students at that time.

Adults are not immune to this. Depending upon their own personal history, various staff members may also 'revisit' the loss. The postvention team may consider a follow-up program on the anniversary date. Be aware that similar responses may occur on special occasions like the victim's birthday. Other potentially difficult dates include the first holidays, games, recognition dinners, proms, and graduation without the victim.

Attachment 1

School District Postvention Coordinator- Sample Agenda for Initial Meeting

Team Meeting

1. Assign someone to record information.
2. Identify all resources available to the district.
3. Get single contact person for each agency, with cell and office phone numbers.
4. Identify schedule when outside agencies can be available.
5. Triage, set priorities for what needs to be decided/addressed within:
 - a. 12 hours (prior to opening of school first day following incident)
 - b. 18 hours (before school is out the first day following incident)
 - c. 24 hours (before school opens second day following incident)
 - d. 48 hours (or before funerals)
 - e. Reoccurring priorities (those things to be addressed each day this week)
 - f. Next week's issues
 - g. Short-term issues (e.g., musical, any other school-sponsored gatherings)
 - h. Longer-term issues (e.g., graduation, senior recognition dinners)
6. Identify where and when the crisis counseling team briefings will take place. Goal: keeps everyone informed about any developments so that the plans can be modified.

Attachment 2

Some Questions You May Have. . .

What do I say to the victim's family?

A simple "I'm sorry" is all right. If you can add something about what the person meant to me, or what you liked about the person, that might be helpful. If you are at a loss for words, then just express your sympathy and wait until later to have a longer conversation.

I feel like I'm "losing it." What's the matter with me?

A sense of disorientation, disbelief, forgetfulness, or being in a "daze" is common to individuals who are experiencing a sudden loss. You may feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster, or that you cannot regain control of your thoughts and feelings. This is a normal reaction to a sudden, highly stressful event. As time passes, you should begin to feel more in control of your thoughts, memory, and feelings.

What if I don't have these reactions? Is something wrong with me?

People respond to death and sudden loss differently. These reactions are only an example of how you might feel. You may feel differently from day to day. You may experience one reaction and never experience another. Accept your feelings and reactions as they come. Talk them over with someone you trust. Avoid those who tend to pass judgment on your feelings. Remember: There is no single "right" timetable or process for grief and recovery.

I keep thinking about other losses and sadnesses. They aren't even connected to this. Why am I doing this?

This is a normal reaction. New losses often remind us of past sadnesses. The present tragedy may stir feelings you have experienced before, or it may elicit new feelings. What is important is that you are able to recognize and talk about these losses. It may help to think about your strengths and how you have coped with other tragedies.

Attachment 3

ANNOUNCEMENT OF DEATH

On (date), a student (staff member) from our school, (name the deceased), died tragically.

We are all saddened by this loss. A sudden loss like this can cause many strong feelings. It is good to talk to someone about these feelings.

We recommend that you speak to your parents about this and share your reactions. It is important to let your parents know how you feel.

In other schools where this has happened, students have also found it helpful to speak to a counselor. The school is sensitive to this need and has arranged to have counselors from (name of agency) available to talk with you (time and place).

Arrangements to see a counselor can be made at the (guidance office or other location).

Attachment 4a

SAMPLE LETTER FOR PARENTS OF ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN

Dear Parents and Guardians,

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the death of a member of our school community, (Add the name of the student or staff person, if you choose) who died on (Add the date).

A sudden loss like this can have an effect on students. For that reason, we hope that you will listen to your child as well as discuss with them their feelings and reactions to this tragedy. Sudden death is always painful to understand, and your child may experience signs of stress.

These include:

- sleep difficulties (i.e., nightmares, trouble falling asleep, and sleeping too much)
- changes in appetite
- inability to concentrate
- absentmindedness
- irritability
- thoughts about death or dying
- isolation
- withdrawing from normal activities and friends
- increased aggression or acting out
- regressive behavior (i.e., thumb-sucking)
- guilt
- separation anxiety
- fearfulness and worries
- sensitivity to change in routine
- use of alcohol or other drugs
- risk-taking behaviors (i.e., riding a bike carelessly; use of firearms, and "dares" to participate in dangerous behaviors)

(Use this paragraph if you suspect that students are at risk for suicide.)

We are especially concerned about risk-taking behaviors and strongly recommend that you remove any guns from homes where there are young people experiencing grief and related stress. Similarly, remove from your child's access any medications, drugs, or alcohol. Young people may be overwhelmed by their feelings and not use good judgment, especially if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Your child may resist these restrictions, but safety is our first concern.

Counselors from (Add the name of the agency here) will be available at the school for several days to talk with students who are experiencing stress. If you have concerns about your child, please call (Add the name, title, and telephone number of the school contact for parents to call.) (Add any additional information regarding parents' consent for their child to be seen by agency personnel, according to your school district's policy.)

If your child was (a friend of the youth who has died) (close to the staff member who died), we urge you to call us for additional suggestions. After school hours, you may call (Add the name, title, and telephone number of the after-hours school contact for parents who cannot call during regular school hours.)

On behalf of (name the school), I have extended our sincere condolences to the family of (name the student or staff person, or refer to them as "the student" or "the staff member") on this sad occasion. We will continue to inform you of the school's steps in supporting students and their families. Please do not hesitate to call us if you have any questions or information that you would like to share.

Sincerely,

(Principal of the school or other school official)

Attachment 4b

Sample Letter for Parents of Adolescents

Dear Parents and Guardians,

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the death of a member of our school community, (Add the name of the student or staff person, if you choose) who died on (Add the date).

A sudden loss like this can have an effect on students. For that reason, we hope that you will listen to your son or daughter as well as discuss with them their feelings and reactions to this tragedy. Sudden death is always painful to understand, and your adolescent may experience signs of stress.

These include:

- difficulty sleeping
- changes in sleeping
- inability to concentrate
- absentmindedness
- irritability
- increased aggression
- thoughts about death or dying
- isolation
- withdrawing from normal activities and friends
- guilt
- fearfulness and worries
- use of alcohol or other drugs
- risk-taking behaviors (i.e., riding a bike carelessly; use of firearms, and "dares" to participate in dangerous behaviors)

(Use this paragraph if you suspect that students are at risk for suicide.)

We are especially concerned about risk-taking behaviors and strongly recommend that you remove any guns from homes where there are young people experiencing grief and related stress. Similarly, remove from your adolescent's access any medications, drugs, or alcohol. Young people may be overwhelmed by their feelings and not use good judgment, especially if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Your adolescent may resist these restrictions, but safety is our first concern.

Counselors from (Add the name of the agency here) will be available at the school for several days to talk with students who are experiencing stress. If you have concerns about your son or daughter, please call (Add the name, title, and telephone number of the school contact for parents to call.) (Add any additional information regarding parents' consent for their adolescent to be seen by agency personnel, according to your school district's policy.) If your son or daughter was (a friend of the youth who has died) (close to the staff member who died), we urge you to call us for additional suggestions. After school hours, you may

call (Add the name, title, and telephone number of the after-hours school contact for parents who cannot call during regular school hours.)

On behalf of (name the school), I have extended our sincere condolences to the family of (name the student or staff person, or refer to them as "the student" or "the staff member") on this sad occasion. We will continue to inform you of the school's steps in supporting students and their families. Please do not hesitate to call us if you have any questions or information that you would like to share.

Sincerely,
(Principal of the school or other school official)

Attachment 5

Reactions to Sudden Death: What to Expect

Sudden death is always painful to understand, and you may experience signs of normal bereavement and stress.

These include:

- difficulty sleeping
- changes in appetite
- inability to concentrate
- absentmindedness
- irritability
- thoughts about death or dying
- isolation
- withdrawing from normal activities and friends
- guilt
- fearfulness and worries
- anger and resentment
- physical symptoms
- use of alcohol or other drugs

Because you have experienced a traumatic loss, you may notice that you are responding in these ways, too:

- avoidance of any reminders of the event
- a feeling that this is not real, disbelief, “numbness”
- thoughts about the accident that interfere with your activities and your concentration

What You Can Do

- It is really important that you take care of yourself during this stressful time. Try to eat some nutritious foods and drink plenty of water so that you do not become dehydrated.
- Don't use drugs or alcohol.
- Try to follow a regular schedule for sleep or rest when you can.
- Talk about your feelings and reactions with friends and family members you can trust.
- Try not to focus too much on the “What if” and the “Why” questions.
- Protect yourself from any additional stresses that you can avoid.
- You will probably start to feel better within a few weeks. If you do not start to feel better, talk to your parents or to an adult at school.
- If one of your friends does or says something that worries you, please tell an adult. Getting help for a friend could be the most important conversation you ever have.

Attachment 6

Common Symptoms After a Critical Incident

After experiencing a traumatic event, it is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience a wide range of emotional or physical reactions. These responses may appear immediately after the event, or some time later. They may last for a few days, a few weeks, or even longer. Don't worry - these are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. It is important to understand that like the flu, your reactions will run their course and you will feel better in time. The following are some of the most common symptoms:

Emotional

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Depression, Sadness, Grief
- Feeling hopeless or Helplessness
- Feeling Numb
- Irritability
- Inappropriate Emotional Response
- Anger
- Guilt, survivor guilt
- Denial
- Agitation
- Feeling overwhelmed

Cognitive (Thoughts)

- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Memory problems
- Shortened attention span
- Overly critical
- Preoccupation with the event
- Flashbacks
- Hyper-vigilance
- Overly sensitive
- Nausea/Diarrhea
- Shallow breathing

- Twitches/Tremors
- Dizziness/Faintness
- Chills/Sweating

Behavioral

- Social withdrawal/Silence
- Hyper-alert to environment
- Suspiciousness
- Emotional outbursts, loss of control
- Changes from typical behavioral
- Avoiding thoughts, feelings or situations related to the event
- Changes in communication
- Change in sexual function
- Increased consumption of alcohol or other chemicals
- Loss or increase of appetite
- Inability to rest

Physical

- Easily startled/Jittery
- Fatigue
- Changes in appetite
- Sleep disturbances and nightmares
- Headaches
- Grinding teeth
- Feeling uncoordinated

Attachment 7

Guidelines for Talking with Students in the Aftermath of a Sudden Death

Note to staff: Make sure you take care of yourself! Be aware of your own stress reactions. Younger students will likely follow the reactions of the adults around them. As soon as possible, allow private/adult time for your own reactions so you can be composed for your students. You may feel there isn't much you can say or do. Yet, coming to school and experiencing the tragedy with your students shows that you care and that individuals supporting one another can survive a tragedy.

Explain that it is normal to feel emotions such as shock, fear, sadness, guilt, or anger. Encourage students to talk about these feelings with parents, friends, and counselors. Identify additional natural supports such as extended family, clergy, coaches, and, youth leaders.

Let students know that there is no "right way" to feel after a tragedy. Remind them that people deal with grief differently, and they need to be patient and tolerant with each other.

Do not expect students to "resolve their grief" after talking with someone about it. Grief is a process, and students need to work through that process in order to reconcile themselves with their loss.

Do not try to "cheer students up." They need to experience the grief process, even though it is often painful. You may want to offer your condolences to students.

Help to clarify facts about the death. Correct errors and rumors, if necessary. Stress that no one is to blame for the suicide. No one "caused" the victim to take his or her own life. The victim's decision-making ability may have been impaired.

Do not glamorize a suicide in any way. In discussing it, focus on recovery of the survivors and alternative methods of dealing with problems.

Encourage students to describe their memories of better times spent with the deceased.

Talk candidly with students about what they can expect at the funeral home and funeral service and how they should dress and conduct themselves. Emphasize that the family's wishes should be respected.

Rehearse possible condolence messages to the family. This is a new experience for most students and they don't know what to say.

Emphasize that help is available to all students, not just those students who were friends or family members (or students of a teacher who has died.). Make sure students know where to go to get help for themselves or for a friend who is depressed or suicidal.

Attachment 8

OBJECTIVES OF THE GRIEF LECTURE

1. Participants will know that after death, grief is normal.
2. Participants will know different emotional aspects of grief.
3. Participants will know four ways to cope with grief.
4. Participants will know the difference between typical grief reactions and functionally impairing reactions.
5. Participants will know what resources are available for youths experiencing suicidality, depression, or other crisis.

Attachment 9

Student Help Card

Name and telephone number of two adults they you can contact in a crisis:

1. _____
2. _____

Help Card Resources:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	1-800-273-8255
National Hopeline Network	1-800-784-2433
Meridian Health Care Emergency Services	1-800-333-2647 or 1-765-286-1695
Crisis Test Line	Text HOME to 741741
National Youth Crisis Hotline	1-800-448-4663
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services	1-800-662-4357
A Better Way	1-765-747-9107
A Better Way 24-Hour Crisis Line	1-765-288-4357
Connect 2 Help	Dial 211
Wapahani High School	1-765-289-7323
Selma Middle School	1-765-288-7242
Selma Elementary School	1-765-282-2455

Additional/Appropriate resources provided by students:

Attachment 10

Confidential Roster for Individual Screenings

School: _____ **District:** _____

Date: _____ **Screener:** _____

Student	Reason Referred	Grade	Recommendation	Parent Contact	Follow-Up Date

Attachment 11

CONFIDENTIAL STUDENT SCREENING FORM FOR TRAGIC DEATH

School: _____ **District:** _____ **Date:** _____

Name: _____

Attach E-Card from Final Forms containing demographic information & contacts.

Relationship (circle all that apply)

- 1. Boyfriend/girlfriend
- 2. Close friend
- 3. Friend
- 4. Acquaintance
- 5. Neighbor
- 6. Other

Exposure to Death (circle all that apply)

- 1. Witness
- 2. Found victim
- 3. Funeral attendance
- 4. Heard about it

Outcome (Complete after interview)

- School staff to monitor/screen
- Rescreen
- Referred for evaluation
- Referred to: _____

Reason: _____

Additional Notes/Concerns/Follow-Up: _____

What was the individual's general reaction to the incident: _____

Affective symptoms: (Indicate whether symptoms were present before and/or after incident.)

Before the incident	After the incident	Symptom
		depressed mood
		irritability
		angry mood
		excessive guilt
		hopelessness
		anhedonia
		sleep disturbances
		appetite disturbance
		fatigue
		poor concentration
		psychomotor retardation
		psychomotor agitation

Drug or alcohol use: (Describe frequency, quantity, and concerns about use)

Before the incident	After the incident	Drug or Alcohol

Conduct or discipline problems

Before the incident	After the incident	Conduct Problems
		Violation of school rules
		Running away
		Suspensions
		Stealing
		Fighting
		Referral to law enforcement

School Problems: (describe) _____

Other stressors/losses: (describe) _____

Before	After	Symptom	Before	After	Symptom
		Recurrent thoughts			Difficulty concentrating/mind going blank
		Excessive anxiety and worry			Physical response to reminder of event
		Recurrent dreams			Irritability
		Restlessness or feeling keyed up, or on edge			Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless/unsatisfying sleep)
		Fear of recurrence			Exaggerated startle response
		Being easily fatigues			Avoidance of the trauma
		Psychological distress at reminder of incident			Sense of foreshortened future
		Muscle tension			Inability to remember event
		Feelings of detachment			Inability to experience emotions

Screening for Suicidal and Violent Behaviors

Screening Item	Description
Hopelessness	
Present thoughts of suicide	
Suicide plan	
Intent to act on plan	
Acts anticipating death	
Available weapons/medications	
Has youth told anyone	
Has thoughts of revenge	
If so, against whom	
Has homicidal ideation	
If so, against whom	
Previous suicidal behavior	

If so, what	
-------------	--

Has the individual been in treatment before: _____

Is the individual in treatment now: _____

With whom: _____

Contact: _____

Additional Information: _____

Checklist:

- Help Card
- Safety Plan
- Parents informed to remove weapons
- Parents informed to remove drugs (including securing prescription medication)
- Parents informed to remove alcohol

Attachment 12

SAFETY PLAN

1. Child/Adolescent agrees not to act on suicidal thoughts or urges.
2. Child/Adolescent, parents, and therapist identify stressors or “hot topics” that have in the past led to suicidal thoughts, urges or behaviors and agree to a “truce” around such topics.
3. Child/Adolescent, parents, and therapist rehearse strategies to cope with suicidal thoughts should similar precipitants recur.
4. Child/Adolescent will structure activities in a way that will reduce potential for suicidality.
5. Child/Adolescent will tell parents or counselor if they are having suicidal thoughts. Child/Adolescent will have the phone numbers of emergency contact person(s) and Emergency Room.
6. Child/Adolescent will present themselves at an Emergency Room, call 1-800-suicide, or call 911 if there is no one available to help.

Attachment 13

What YOU can do for YOURSELF

When you've experienced a trauma, it can be a shock to your whole system. The following are some ideas to help you cope with any physical or emotional symptoms you may be experiencing.

- ✓ Eat well-balanced and regular meals, even if you don't feel like it.
- ✓ Get plenty of rest.
- ✓ Exercise regularly. It can help work off some physical symptoms, leaving you feeling calmer and better able to relax. If you are feeling lethargic it can help energize you and clear your mind.
- ✓ Avoid caffeine, especially if you are having trouble sleeping.
- ✓ Avoid the use of drugs or alcohol, including prescription and over the counter to numb the pain. It will only complicate or delay your recovery.
- ✓ Structure your time and set priorities.
- ✓ Maintain your basic normal routine, but give yourself permission to skip the extras for a while.
- ✓ Don't make any major life changes or decisions.
- ✓ Do make as many small daily decisions as possible to reassert your sense of control.
- ✓ Don't try to avoid or deny reoccurring thoughts or feelings about the incident. They are normal and will decrease over time.
- ✓ Give yourself permission to feel rotten and to share your feelings with others.
- ✓ Do things that you enjoy.
- ✓ Take mini-breaks: go out to dinner, take 10 minutes alone, watch a movie.
- ✓ Talk with people you trust: your family, friends, coworkers.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to reach out. People do care.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to set limits with others when you don't feel like talking. You don't have to discuss the incident or your feelings when you don't want to.
- ✓ Don't label yourself as "crazy." Remind yourself you are having normal reactions.
- ✓ Write down your thoughts and feelings. This can be especially helpful if you are having trouble sleeping or when you wake from a troubling dream.
- ✓ Ask for help if you need it. If you are having trouble coping on your own help is available from many sources:
 - Professional assistance from a counselor may sometimes be necessary. This does not imply weakness or craziness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful to handle by yourself.
 - In the workplace you may be able to get assistance from your co-workers, the human resources department, or company EAP. Church, friends, family, and other community resources can be valuable sources of support.

Attachment 14

Recommendations for Postvention Crisis Box Contents

Phone List(s) including:

- Phone chain for the crisis team and faculty
- Student emergency numbers to reach parents (and out-of-town emergency contact numbers for students, as recommended by FEMA and the Red Cross)
- Agency, emergency, and community response numbers
- Floor plans for schools, if you will have to orient community support members to your building

Items to Have on Hand:

- First-aid kit
- Backup batteries
- Cellular phone or hand radio, and charger
- Battery-operated radio
- Personal hygiene products
- Contact lens case/solution
- Pens/pencils/erasers
- Paper, post-it notes
- Kleenex
- Nonperishable snacks
- Bottled water
- Copies of Postvention Manual
- Copies of Attachments 1-13

Reference

Kerr, M. M., Brent, D. A., McKain, B., & McCommons, P. S. (2003). *Postvention standards manual: A guide for a school's response in the aftermath of sudden death (4th Edition)*. STAR Center Publications: Pittsburg, PA.