

Bereavement Resources Related To Development:

**children,
pre- teens,
and
adolescents**

Traumatic Loss Teams Guide for Teachers/Parents

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

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

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

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

After the announcement, children should be allowed to:

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

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

Teacher says,

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

Then asks,

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

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

- "Have people said or done anything that worries you about _____'s death?"
- "Do you have any worries about _____'s death that you'd like to discuss in the group or privately?" [You are looking for concerns that they may have "caused"]

Children may want to attend the wake or funeral service.

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

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

Considerations

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

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

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

Death within the Classroom

The death of a classmate can be as devastating to a student as the death of a family member. The teacher must remain sensitive to the needs of each class member to grieve on an individual basis as well as, as a member of an ensemble of students. The following are suggestions for grieving as a class of students:

“The empty chair”- It is a difficult decision when deciding to remove a student's desk. Leaving the desk for a few days can help young students accept the death and some students might want to leave personal statements of farewell at the desk. However, at times, it might be best to rearrange the classroom, or remove the desk at the end of the day.

Share the announcement of the death truthfully and factually. Allow the students to ventilate their feelings and memories, and affirm all expressions. Some comments might seem inappropriate or unfeeling, but these comments might be reflective of a student's awkwardness experiencing the grieving process.

Allow the students to describe a positive memory of the classmate. Some students might prefer to write this experience or draw a picture describing the experience. Some students might want to share, these pictures or writings with the family. Of course, the teacher might want to screen these documents prior to delivery to the family. Some students might want to express their feelings through individual play or share their concerns with a toy or pet.

If students will be attending the funeral or memorial service they might have questions concerning the proceedings. They might not know how to ask for assistance in this matter.

Watch for trouble signs among students such as increased aggression, withdrawal, at-risk behaviors, clumsiness or regression. Students might not be aware of positive means of channeling their anxieties and depressive feelings.

THE CHILD'S REACTION TO DEATH

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

Fear After Loss During Childhood:

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

Guilt After Loss During Childhood:

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

Anger After Loss During Childhood:

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

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

Confusion Resulting from Loss during Childhood:

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

Gender Differences in Mourning and Bereavement Behaviors

There have been some noticeable differences in the grieving behaviors of males and females. The following overview is offered for consideration. However, grieving is a personal matter and might be experienced differently depending on many factors such as age, culture, family traditions and values and previous experience.

MALES

internalizers
covert mourners
externalize anger
active
searching behaviors

FEMALES

externalizers
overt mourners
internalize anger
passive
nurturing behaviors

In general, for grieving males, thinking often dominates feeling and grief manifests as anger/guilt. Males tend to make internal adjustments to loss through activities, and may focus on problem- solving rather than expression of feeling. Males frequently need to withdraw to grieve privately. It is useful to assist males in problem-solving and to encourage a return to meaningful activities.

UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING THE SPECIAL NEEDS AT EACH DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE

PRESCHOOL AGE

The child does not understand the possibility of permanent destruction. They believe death is not permanent and is reversible. For example, the child whose pet has died may continue to act as if the dead pet is still alive. He or she may ask to feed it or look for it under the bed. Because most preschool children are not able to make a clear distinction between life and death, they see death as a deep but temporary sleep or abandonment or rejection.

AGES 5 TO 9

One of the major perceptions is that of death coming from an external source. Death is a bogeyman, a monster, a ghost, a skeleton, or an angel who comes to take people away. It comes from outside, and in that sense, it is not a person. Children think that by being clever and trying hard, they can escape death as they could escape an assailant. The majority of children think that death can be reversed or outwitted. Children in this age group also show an interest in burial as shown by "final rites" for pets.

AGES 9 TO 12

The majority understand that death is the end of life, that it is irreversible and that all things die eventually--even they may die someday. Death is no longer a bogeyman, but a biological process. They may also think that dying may be painful, and they begin to fathom the idea of death as obliteration or an after life. Some will consider abstract concepts, such as death is a vast darkness. There is also serious concern with the consequences of death and what changes will be necessary as a result of death. Anger and fear are often felt and verbalized with such statements as "It is not fair."

ADOLESCENTS

Death is understood as an abstract concept. Death is supposed to be distant. At the same time that they try to set themselves apart from death, they also fear it. Because of this fear, they may try to prove themselves more powerful than death. It is a teenagers' first realization of mortality, and some are moved to test their mortality. There seems to be some "magical" thinking among adolescents that death may not be permanent, and that after their own death, they may become observers of those activities and persons left behind.

UNDERSTANDING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

The Special Education Student will most often follow the same developmental stages of the grieving process as that of the regular education student. It is possible, however, that he or she may or may not go through all the stages and the time involved in each stage could vary considerably. Significant factors which attribute to this difference are as follows:

- Perceptual, cognitive and emotional deficits.
- Language capabilities, both receptive and expressive.
- The ability to think abstractly and/or concretely.

Any traumatic experience that creates sudden change in the routine of the handicapped student is likely to influence how that student responds to that trauma. The following examples are to assist you in developing a plan of action in an attempt to reduce the stress and maximize the success of the handicapped student's ability to deal with his or her grief following a crisis:

Student's Reaction	Teacher's Responses
Anger	<p>"It's OK to be angry."</p> <p>"This is what you do when you are angry and it gets you into trouble."</p> <p>"This is what you can do which will NOT get you into trouble." (Give specific examples which are age-appropriate.)</p>
Aggression	<p>Repeat techniques recommended for anger and substitute appropriate ways to release aggression.</p> <p>During a crisis, manipulate the environment rather than the student to prevent potential student/staff injury.</p>
Listlessness	<p>Keep the routine going as smoothly as possible with or without the student's participation. (Periodically let the student know that they may join in when he or she is ready.)</p> <p>Don't beg for participation.</p> <p>Be supportive and remain non-judgmental. Interject instructional material that is highly motivating to the student.</p>

GRIEF IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS

Grief is not a sign of weakness. It is rather a healthy and fitting response to a loss; a tribute to one who has *died*. Running away from grief postpones sorrow; clinging to grief prolongs pain. Neither approach leads to healing. Allow grief to have its way for a while; then gradually and gently, you can release yourself from its grip. Recognition of the appropriateness and value of grief is the first step in accepting the reality of the loss. The acceptance is the first sign of recovery.

Each of us is different, but for most people grieving follows a pattern, proceeds through stages. We do not all experience every phase. Nor do we move through grief at the same pace or with equal intensity. The following characteristics constitute the basic elements of the grief experience. Reviewing them might help you to identify your own pattern, determine where you are in the process and anticipate what you have *let* go through.

SHOCK

A period of numbness usually follows the event of death. One feels stunned, or like in a trance. Shock could last only minutes, or persist for days or even longer. The stage of shock allows a person time to absorb what has happened and to begin to adjust. People sometimes use alcohol, tranquilizers, or other methods to extend this period. There's also a tendency to leave decision-making to others. Yet, it is important to face the reality of the death and to regain control and direction of one's life.

EMOTIONAL UPHEAVAL

As shock wears off, grief gives rise to a variety of emotions. When such feelings seem overwhelming, we do well to defer major decisions. Other grievers, our family, counselors, or members of the OSM team can help us interpret and deal with

these feelings. As we come to understand what we experience, we can find appropriate ways to ventilate our emotions and to channel them to our advantage.

PHYSICAL DISTRESS

The mental and emotional upset of a loss can cause physical distress and make us vulnerable to illness. Grief sometimes causes us to neglect healthy nourishment and exercise, or to over indulge ourselves in drinking, smoking, or medication. We might need a professional's advice in regard to our symptoms, their causes, and their treatment.

PANIC

A death can often make the future seem uncertain. We might panic in the face of the unknown. Panic prevents concentration and defers acceptance of the finality of death. It tempts us to run from life, to avoid, and refuse to try. Patience with ourselves and a willingness to accept help from others will enable us to subdue panic and outgrow its confusion.

GUILT

Many people fault or blame themselves in the event of a death. We have all made mistakes, and sincere regret is the best response if a mistake has been made. However, unwarranted self-reproach can impact our mental health and impede our recovery from our grief. Since guilt is a common manifestation, help from family, friends, a counselor or the CISM team may be needed to help us gain a better perspective and to aid us in dealing with guilt feelings, whether justified or exaggerated.

HOSTILITY

People in grief naturally ask "Why?", "Why him?", "Why now?" and "Why like this?". Most of these questions have no answers. The resulting frustration

causes us to feel resentment and anger. We want someone to blame. If we can accept the lack of answers to "Why?", we might begin to ask, instead, what we can do now to grow through what has happened. It is then we have started to move beyond anger and toward hope.

DEPRESSION

Grievers, typically, but in varying degrees, experience loneliness and depression. This pain too, will pass. Reaching out to others is a key way to lessen loneliness and overcome depression.

AIMLESSNESS

At times in the grieving process, a kind of drifting occurs. Mourners find it difficult to return to familiar, even necessary, activities. Once we can begin to assess our potential for the future we will be able to move ahead in the process.

HOPE

In time and with effort, hope grows. We can express emotions without embarrassment or apology_ We can feel concerned for and show interest in others and our jobs. We can make decisions and assume responsibility for ourselves. The example of others who have experienced a similar loss and affect can serve as resources and a sign of hope for ourselves.

Adapted from the writings (of the same name) with permission of Jeffrey Kaufman, LSW

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ADOLESCENT GRIEF: Common Counseling Factors

SHOCK/DENIAL	Death offends their magical beliefs that people for whom they care are not <i>supposed</i> to die. If the person who dies is young, it upsets their sense of control over life. It may also take the form of apparently remaining "above it all".
ANGER	The rebel against the "unfairness" of death. They are intensely interested in determining who or what was at fault. They are surprised at the anger they feel for the deceased.
GUILT/BLAME	Their egocentricity causes them to feel that they may have indirectly caused the death of another. They ruminate about how they should have guessed what was wrong or could have treated another better when he/she was alive.
DEPRESSION become saddened LONELINESS will no	They may feel <i>drained</i> by the loss or <i>hopeless</i> . They by the increasing realization that a person they have known longer be an active presence in their lives. This may be their first permanent loss.
HOPE	They need to be encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings with others. They are old enough to take a leadership role in the mourning process. They must be reminded that this is probably the worst they have ever felt, but that they will survive.
INTELLECTUALIZING	Adolescents are often fascinated on an intellectual level with the existential questions which death raises for them. Their own mortality may be an issue for them to consider. They also may begin to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of life if it is something which can end so fast.
MARGINALIZED	They may complain to the counselor that they feel excluded in the family mourning process. They need to assert this need to be included in the mourning rituals.
OVERCOMPENSATION	They may feel the need to act "grown up" and take on too many responsibilities when a parent is at his/her worst. This may be a mask to avoid their own feelings of helplessness and disorganization.

HELPING A CHILD THROUGH GRIEF

DON'T:

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

SIGNS WHEN A CHILD'S GRIEF NEEDS OUTSIDE SUPPORT

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

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



GUILT/BLAME

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

DEPRESSION

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

LONELINESS

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



HOPE

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

INTELLECTUALIZING

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

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

TEACHERS' INFORMATION SHEET - Adolescence/Grief

ADOLESCENCE AND GRIEF

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

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

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

Too often adults in a family "marginalize" teenagers when a death occurs. It is not uncommon that if you or your school provides any training on death

education or offers group counseling on loss issues, this may be the first opportunity for some teenagers to express how they about a death in their family, as well as a chance to process some of their questions about death in general.

CLASSROOM ANNOUNCEMENT

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

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

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

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

POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

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

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

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

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

Sample Letter Sent Home Announcing Death of Student

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

Date

Dear Parents,

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Principal of School

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

Date

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Principal of School

Sample Letter Announcing Death of a Staff Member

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

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

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

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

We will have a prayer service _____.

Sincerely in Christ,

Principal of School

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

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

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

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

Typical Processing Questions:

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

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

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

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

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

SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

Announcing a Teacher Death

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

Announcing an Accidental Death

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

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

Announcing a Suspected, but Unconfirmed, Suicide Death

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

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

TO: Staff
FROM:

RE: Weekend Tragedy

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

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

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

HOMEROOM ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Sample Letter Announcing Death of a Staff Member

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

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

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

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

Sincerely in Christ,

Principal of School

Helping Students Cope with a National Tragedy

Some ideas to share with teachers and parents

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

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

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

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

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

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

What Can I Do as a Teacher?

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

What Should Parents Do?

- Try to help them understand what happened based on their developmental level. Be honest. Convey the facts as we know them. Tell them what is necessary.
- Children will take their cues in how to react based upon how adults are reacting.
- Children will have many different types of feelings. Assure them that all feelings are okay.
- Limit the amount of your child' s viewing of these events on television, radio and the internet

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

Source - National Association of School Psychologists

Guidelines for Addressing the National Emergency on September 11, 2001

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

Statement to be Read by Teachers to Students

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

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

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

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

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

Parent Letter
School Letterhead

Dear Parents/ Guardians:

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,