

Postvention: *A Bereavement Planning Guide for Death by Suicide*

Guidelines for handling a staff or student death by suicide.



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Overview

Purpose of this Guide

Schools play an important role in helping students and staff adjust to the death of one of the members of their “school family.” This guide is designed to help facilitate the bereavement process in the event of a student or school staff member death by suicide.

Within the guide, you’ll find a variety of staff, parent and age-appropriate student resources to help the school community with the grieving process.

Why Postvention?

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center tells us, “**Postvention refers to activities which reduce risk and promote healing after a suicide death.** Although postvention is implemented after a suicide **it is essential that we prepare for postvention before a suicide** – by, for example, training first responders, coroners, funeral directors, faith leaders, emergency departments, clinicians, and journalists.”

Principles

These principles guided the development of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center’s [After a Suicide Toolkit](#), which guided this document.

- Schools should treat all student deaths in the same way. Having one approach for a student who dies of cancer (for example) and another for a student who dies by suicide reinforces the negative association that often surrounds suicide and may be deeply painful to the deceased student’s family and close friends.
- Adolescents are vulnerable to the risk of suicide contagion, that is, when a struggling student experiences the loss of another student to suicide and becomes at greater risk. Therefore, it is important not to inadvertently simplify, glamorize, or romanticize the student or his or her death.
- Adolescents are also resilient. With the proper information, guidance, and support from school staff, students can learn to cope with the suicide of a fellow student, process their grief, and return to healthy functioning.
- Suicide has multiple causes. However, a student who dies by suicide was likely struggling with significant concerns, such as a mental health condition that caused substantial psychological pain even if that pain was not apparent to others. But it is also important to understand that most people with mental health conditions do not attempt suicide

Considerations and Cultural Awareness

Effective postvention efforts take into consideration the cultural diversity of everyone affected by a suicide, including the family, school, and community. Your community may have differences in race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. Culture may significantly affect the way people view and respond to suicide and death. Key points involving cultural differences include the following (from the [After a Suicide Toolkit](#)):

- Be aware that the extent to which people are able to talk about suicide varies greatly, and in some cultures suicide is still seen as a moral failing.
- Be sensitive to the beliefs and customs regarding the family and community, including rituals, funerals, the appropriate person to contact, etc.
- Be sensitive to how the family or community may need to respond to the death before individuals outside of the family or community intervene to provide support.
- It is strongly encouraged to engage a “cultural broker” to act as a liaison between the family, community, and school if key members of school staff are not from the same racial, ethnic, or religious group as the person who died by suicide.
- Bring in interpreters and translators if there are language differences. If possible, have resource materials in different languages available for parents.

Using this Guide

This guide was carefully assembled by members of the Ottawa County Suicide Prevention Coalition in collaboration with the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District and the Ottawa Community Schools Network. It was created using national and local research and best practices. Most all of the content follows the guidelines from the [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools 2nd Edition](#) from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. Following the recommended steps in chronological order will help ensure appropriate and timely notification of incidents, and allow for timely implementation of bereavement activities that help students and staff cope with loss and grief.



Preparing for a Crisis

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
1		Prior to school start up each year, define roles and update contacts for the Crisis Response Team. Review and update the Roles and Communications Checklist	Ensure that all staff have updated contact information	Find more information on forming a Crisis Response Team in the After a Suicide Toolkit “Crisis Response Team Guidance” “Information on Crisis Response Teams”	Roles and Communication Checklist (Appendix A)
2		Review all the messaging and letters		Find more information about working with the media in the After a Suicide Toolkit “Working with the Media Guidance”	Message to Staff Message to Students (Appendix B) Message to Families Message for Media Staff Meeting Agenda
3		Identify who will be in the Public Information Officer (PIO) position (often a communications director/manager).		If your district's /school does not have someone assigned to this position year-round please feel free to reach out to Ottawa Area ISD or neighboring districts for assistance. We are all here to help each other.	

Preparing for a Crisis

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order (continued)**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
4		Determine if an outside mental health agency will be a part of your crisis response team. Contact agency to establish partnership.		Mosaic Counseling is willing to provide team support at no cost to districts.	Mosaic Counseling- Contact Sarah Lewakowski @ (616) 842-9160 Sarah's Cell phone after hours: 616-405-0743 After a Suicide Toolkit, "Bringing in Outside Help"
5		Memorialization-Review current policies and determine any policy changes that need to be made Attach memorialization policy in "Within 2 Days of Incident" section below.		Memorialization defined: Appropriately remembering and honoring a student who died without contributing to additional emotional trauma or suicide risk among other students	Example from Coopersville Public Schools After a Suicide Toolkit "Key Considerations"
6		List of Resources available in your district to staff			Resource Map Template

On the Day of the Incident

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
1	Any Staff Member	Make phone call to school Principal immediately upon learning of student or staff death.	Provide as many details as possible.	Do not text or email since that could lead to a delay in action if not checked right away	All staff members—employee directory for building. Building administrators and school secretaries—list of emergency contacts.
2	Principal	Notify Superintendent of incident.	Remind Superintendent not to share information or speak with media until the Principal speaks with the family.	Keep the family's wishes in mind each time you communicate information	
3	Principal	Make phone call to family representative.	Acquire sibling information if they attend district schools. This also applies to children or spouses who work in the district.		
4	Principal	Make phone call to School Resource Officer.	Confirm student/staff death with School Resource Officer. Ensure that the information provided by the family is not part of an investigation and is appropriate to share with staff and students.	School Administrators would have a 24/7 access phone number of School Resource Officer.	

On the Day of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order (continued)**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
5	Principal	Update Superintendent and Public Information Officer	Confirm that you have spoken to the School Resource Officer and provide approved information about the death.		
6	Principal, Public Information Officer and Superintendent	Review Roles and Communication Checklist			Roles and Communication Checklist
7	Principal	Make phone call to Tech Department.	Ask Tech Department to put a hold on staff or student email to prevent grieving families from getting unnecessary electronic messages.		Add your school's Tech Department Contact Information here

On the Day of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order (continued)**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
8	Principal	Make phone call to Crisis Response Team Leader.	Provide approved information and details for an emergency staff meeting.		Roles and Communication Checklist (Appendix A)
9	Crisis Response Team Leader	Crisis Response Team should meet 30 minutes prior to staff meeting to review information and plan for assistance.			
10	Principal	Send out text alert to staff with emergency meeting details.		Do not report student or staff death in the text. This should be delivered by the Principal during the staff meeting.	

On the Day of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order (continued)**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
11	Principal, School Secretary, Crisis Response Team Leader, Public Information Officer and Human Resources Representative	Meet before the emergency staff meeting, if possible, to review the district's bereavement crisis plan and develop a statement the Principal can share with staff. Create Staff Meeting (Before School) Agenda. Create a written statement teachers can read to their students so all students receive the same message. This message can also be used to inform parents/guardians. Determine how information will be given to parents/guardians. (ex. an alert text to check their emails).		Consider whether the Superintendent and/or other district administrators may wish to attend the staff meeting. Information about the cause of death should be withheld until the family has been consulted. Find more information about messaging in pages 57- 59 of the After a Suicide Toolkit	Staff Meeting (Before School) Agenda (Appendix B) Sample Death Notification for Students-(Appendix D) Message to Families: Staff Member/Student Death (Appendix D)

On the Day of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order (continued)**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
12	Principal, Crisis Team Leader, Public Information Officer	Gather materials needed for the staff meeting: written statements, instructions for teachers, information to teachers on how this will be shared with families, and other resources.	Statement that the district is sharing with staff, families and students.	Have an email prepared to send out immediately after the staff meeting that includes bereavement activities, directions on referring a student to a counselor or school social worker, and resources they can send to families to help their kids with grief.	Bereavement Activities for Teachers (Appendix F) Classroom Discussion Following Staff Member/Student Death (Appendix C)
13	Principal, Staff, Crisis Team Members and Appointed Admin.	Attend emergency staff meeting Send an email to staff immediately after meeting with information about the end-of-day debriefing meeting.	School Secretary should take notes for follow-up to questions/issues to be addressed during end-of -day meeting. Inform staff of end-of -day debriefing meeting.	Ask if any of the teachers are requesting a Crisis Response Team member be present for their next class to be a resource as they inform students about the death. Consider having a non-staff member lead this meeting. Have a list of Principal and Crisis Response Team members' phone numbers and email addresses to send in email to all staff.	Staff Meeting (Before School) Agenda (Appendix B)

On the Day of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order (continued)**

Order	Who	Action	Detail	Notes	Resources
14	Principal, Public Information Officer, Crisis Response Team	Create talking points for media inquiries.		It is important that a death by suicide not be sensationalized. Media coverage should acknowledge the loss, but not sensationalize it (e.g., avoid front page coverage or details about the means of suicide) or risk making suicide appear appealing to depressed or disenfranchised students. Find more information on forming a on reporting, see in the After a Suicide Toolkit section “Responsible Reporting after a suicide Guide”	Media Talking Points: Staff Member/Student Death (Appendix E)

On the Day of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order (continued)**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	
15	Principal, Public Information Officer, Crisis Response Team	Send email to parents/guardians with notice of death and resources attached. Send text/phone alerts to families to have parents/guardians check their email.	Email to include approved statements, and resources attached (ex. how to talk to your child, how to access district/school mental health professionals, how to access local counseling resources.)		Message to Families: Staff Member/Student Death (Appendix D) Bereavement Activities for Parents/Guardians (Appendix G)
16	Principal, Staff, Crisis Team Members and Appointed Admin.	Meet prior to staff debrief meeting for 15-30 minutes.	Meet with the Crisis Response Team to discuss new information, assess needs, and to review the agenda for the staff debrief meeting. School Secretary to take notes.		Staff Debriefing (End-of-Day) Agenda (Appendix E)
17	Principal, Staff, Crisis Response Team Members, Appointed Admin., (Outside mental health agency)	Hold end-of-day debrief meeting. School Secretary to send meeting notes to Principal and Crisis Response Team members after end-of-day debrief meeting.	Review the debrief agenda .	Consider having a non-staff member lead this meeting.	

On the Day of the Incident (continued)

Staff Responsibilities (done in conjunction with sequential items, the order does not matter)

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
18	Crisis Response Team Leader	Host Crisis Response Team meeting to identify staff or students who are at risk or may need School Social Worker support, counseling support, outside referrals or more frequent check-ins. Assign a note taker at the beginning of the meeting.	Question: will at-risk students identified benefit from a social work group? If so, contact the School Social Worker group to discuss plans for a meeting and then share meeting information with parents/guardians and seek permission for student/s to participate.	Any students or staff identified as “at-risk” will have a team member assigned to them for follow-up. Document students and assigned Crisis Response Team Consider your referral pathway for students / staff to receive support	
19	Principal	Review notes from staff meetings and follow-up on questions/issues. Determine if follow-up questions need to be handled on an individual basis (ex. send follow-up email to one staff member) or as a group in the next staff meeting. If it needs to be reviewed as a group, schedule the next staff meeting.			

Next Time Teacher Meets with Class

Teacher Responsibilities

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
1	Teachers	The class should be notified of death during the next class period (may or may not be the same day), using only the written statement provided by the Principal.	If a teacher wishes to have a Crisis Response Team member present to go over the information with the class, they should notify someone on the team.	Helping Students Cope Considerations Tips for Talking about Suicide Grief Tips for Teachers and Administrators http://bit.ly/2ATuVe4	Classroom Discussion Following Staff Member/Student Death (Appendix C) Sample Death Notification for Students (Appendix C) School Examples: Hamilton Middle Guide for Staff

Within 2 Days of the Incident

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
1	Principal, Crisis Response Team, Appointed Admin.	Meeting to review issues, concerns, feedback from staff and students, and review district/school's policy on memorials.		It's important the Principal is clear on the district/school's policy on memorials prior to contacting the family so that they don't agree to something or make promises they can't keep. “Making Decisions about School-Related Memorials” from the After a Suicide Toolkit “Key considerations for Memorialization from the After a Suicide Toolkit”	

Within 2 Days of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
2	Principal	Call family representative to determine if any family or school sponsored memorials will occur, and find out about funeral arrangements.	Determine what information about memorials can be shared. Ask if the family would appreciate cards from teachers or classmates.	Ask if any online memorials or vigils for classmates or friends are being planned, or if they prefer to remain more private. If students are invited, teachers should meet with classmates ahead of time to go over appropriate behavior expectations. Find more information on considerations for the school regarding funerals in the After a Suicide Toolkit section “Funerals and Memorial Services.”	
3	Principal, Crisis Response Team, Appointed Admin.	Meeting to review memorials and funeral service information shared by family and develop a plan (if any) for school efforts.	Create a statement for sharing this information with staff, students and their parents/guardians.	A school/district may choose to not sponsor an online vigil/memorial service, rather share information (only with family permission) about the family’s events with staff and students so they may participate.	

Within 2 Days of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order** (continued)

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
4	Principal	Include information on how students can access district/school mental health professionals and/or local counseling services. Send staff and parents/guardians a text alert to check their emails.			List of Ottawa County Therapists List of Allegan County Therapists

Within 2 Days of the Incident (continued)

Staff Responsibilities Within 2 Days of the Incident

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
5	Principal	Second staff meeting	Conduct a wellness check-in and share additional information on family wishes for receiving notes/letters and memorial service plans.	Make a plan for collecting the cards/email notes to give to the family.	
6	Teacher(s)	Card/letter making activity		Any cards or notes sent to the family need to be approved by teachers first to make sure they are appropriate. It might be easier to collect these via email.	Bereavement Activities to Use with Students (Appendix F)

Within 2 Weeks of the Incident

Complete the Following (done in conjunction with sequential items, the order does not matter)

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
1	Principal	Follow-up meeting with the Crisis Response Team.	Consider conducting a wellness check-in to determine any student/staff needs for ongoing services/referrals for counseling.	Save to review in the After Action Review (AAR).	Crisis Response Team Response Evaluation (Appendix H)
2	Principal	Staff meeting	Conduct a wellness check-in to determine any student/staff needs for ongoing services/referrals for counseling.	For more information on referral processes see The “ School Mental Health Referral Pathways Guide ” from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction	
3	School Counselor/Social Worker	Develop a Grief Group for students most impacted by the death. Make a phone call to students, parents/guardians with meeting days, time and duration (ex. This group will be available to you on Mondays from 9-10 AM through X date). Send follow-up email with details and group norms.	Identify students and obtain permission from parents/guardians to participate. Make sure they know this group is for invited students only and not parents/guardians.	Have an email prepared to send to students/parents/guardians with days, time and length of group. Initial student/parent/guardian contact will be by phone, followed by an email to confirm times/dates and norms for group.	Bereavement Activities to Use with Students (Appendix F) For outside support: Ele's Place-8 week grief support groups. Contact Julie DeJong at jdejong@elesplace.org.

Within 2 Weeks of the Incident (continued)

Complete the Following (done in conjunction with sequential items, the order does not matter)

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
4	School Counselor/Social Worker	Email staff to review signs of struggling students in need of support and process for referral. Put together a plan of continued support for students who are struggling.		Social workers or counselors should include their contact information in this email so that staff can reach them easily to refer a student.	
5	Principal/School Counselor/Social Worker	Call teachers who are most impacted by the death to see what additional supports they might need.	Meeting or email to first identify staff, then phone call to teachers.	If your district has an Employee Assistance Program, remind staff that they can access that resource.	

Completing the Bereavement Guideline Process

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
1	Principal, School Social Worker, School Secretary, Counselor, Crisis Response Team	Meeting to identify staff/students whose support needs are beyond school-based services.	Identify community mental health providers to make referrals. Identify steps Crisis Response Team needs to take in order to make sure families are able to follow through.	Might need to consider family's health insurance.	Ottawa County Therapists Allegan County Therapists Ottawa Suicide Prevention Resources Ottawa County Schools Network (OCSN) member schools can contact OCSN. For more resources: http://bit.ly/2DqfPxz
2	Social Worker or Counselor	Phone call or email (method of contact preferred by parent/guardian) to discuss ongoing mental health support.		Consideration: This might be via school social worker if a student has an IEP. However, this referral would be for kids who may benefit from additional outside support if they don't already have it. Social workers or counselors should document all attempts to contact families and document referrals made to the parent/guardian.	

Completing the Bereavement Guideline Process (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
3	Principal	Planning activity prior to returning to school.	Consider the need to address the loss with staff or students. Send the plan via email for Crisis Response Team to review.	Consider how much time has passed since the incident or if it would benefit staff to meet privately prior to teaching students the first day back.	
4	Principal	After Action Review (AAR) in consultation with Crisis Response Team and others involved in the response.	The AAR is a retrospective activity to reflect on the overall process for the purpose of learning and making improvements to the process/system. It is not a critique or evaluation, but is a format to encourage open dialogue for the purpose of improvement.	The AAR can be modified as needed, but it typically includes four parts: 1) What was expected to happen based on prior planning? 2) What actually happened (factual recap)? 3) What are variances between expected vs. actual and what accounts for the variance? 4) What should we keep in the process and what should we change? Often another question focuses on identifying training needs.	Guide to After Action Review http://bit.ly/3hQY8Hb

Completing the Bereavement Guideline Process (continued)

Complete the Following Steps in **Sequential Order**

Order	Who	Action	Details	Notes	Resources
5	Principal, Crisis Team	Work toward Implementing a Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Program	A prevention plan is not a substitute for responding to how students and others in the school community have been impacted by the death. Some experts suggest waiting several months or a semester before providing prevention education to students, teachers, and other school staff.		Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools Model School Policy on Suicide Prevention Checklist of Suicide Prevention Activities

Appendix A

Roles and Communication Checklist

Contacts (Fill in names for each position)	Contact Info (Cell phone number & email)	Who will contact (Principal or Superintendent's initials)	Invite to staff meeting (☐)
Public Information Officer			
Human Resources Representative			
Assistant Superintendent(s)			
Special Education Director			
Crisis Response Team Leader			
Other Building Administrators (ex: previous school or sibling schools)			
Staff or Coaches (who work with the student but aren't primarily in the student's assigned building)			
Technology Director			

Appendix B

Staff Meeting (Before School) Agenda

For other examples see the [The After a Suicide Toolkit](#), and [HEARDtoolkit](#)

1. Share Incident Details

- Only share verified facts about student death.
- Share accurate factual information about the death, honoring the family's request for privacy.
- Make clear the needs/preferences of the deceased student's family.
- Review importance of confidentiality (Note: this is very challenging with social media where often our students know information before we can talk about the information).

2. Review Crisis Team Plan

- Identify Crisis Response Team members and provide teachers/staff with their contact information.
- Discuss roles and responsibilities of staff, crisis team members, security, counselors, and district personnel (Introduce Supports).

4. Review Supports for Teachers

- Disseminate statements to be read by all teachers to their classes. (see appendix-?)
- Prepare for student reactions and questions by providing staff with the handouts Tips for Talking about Suicide and Facts about Suicide in Adolescents.
- Share with staff how to handle parent inquiries and plans for communicating with parents, including who parents should contact for further information and resources.
- Inform teachers of the time of the end of day debrief meeting.

Appendix B (continued)

3. Students of Concern

- Share students of concern list generated by Crisis Response Team.
- Have teachers name other students of concern who haven't already been identified by the Crisis Response Team.
- Explain plans for the day, including locations of crisis counseling rooms or other supports

5. Provide time for questions

- Give teachers an opportunity to ask questions.

Appendix C

Classroom Discussion Following Staff Member/Student Death

For other examples see the [The After a Suicide Toolkit](#), and [HEARDtoolkit](#)

Overview:

- It is important today to keep as much routine as possible during this time but please allow the space and time for your students to discuss and process the death of our staff member/student _____.
- Classrooms impacted the most should consider debriefing using the questions below.
- Consider having a Crisis Response Team member available for most impacted classrooms.
- All students that need additional support following this meeting should be referred to school counselors or social workers.
- Inform students of any time limits for the discussion (Example: “We are planning on ending today’s class on schedule at 3PM, but anyone who would like to talk more and we can make a plan to see that you have that chance to talk to someone.”).
- Just listen. No need to provide answers. Be careful not to overburden your students with your own history of grief. Instead talk about your present feelings with the present situation.
 1. Read the student crisis statement.
 2. Emphasize what students do if/when they need additional support.
 3. Consider starting with an activity (see appendix for other teacher-led classroom activities). Have students write/draw for 5-10 minutes about their reaction. Direct them to write down questions they have.
 4. Begin the discussion with questions. Give each student the opportunity to answer the question or to pass. Don’t force kids to talk. They may not want to share. It’s okay.
 - How did you learn about this traumatic event?

Appendix C (continued)

- What are you feeling? (educate students that all students will react differently and that there will be a range of emotions: shock, anger, sadness, regret)
- Feel free to share that grief is a lifelong journey. And that it is normal to feel sad or angry or have no emotion at all. (Metaphor: Grief is like having a full stomach. Our bodies need to process it so that we feel better. You will always remember it but in time the pain becomes less painful as we process it all.)
- What does this person mean to you?

Appendix D

Sample Death Notification for Students

When death has been ruled a suicide

For other examples see the [The After a Suicide Toolkit](#), and [HEARDtoolkit](#)

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died.

I'm also very sad to tell you that the cause of death was suicide. Many of you may also feel very sad. Others may feel other emotions such as anger or confusion. It's okay to feel whatever emotions you might be feeling. When someone takes their own life, it leads to a lot of questions, some of which may never be completely answered.

While we may never know why [NAME] ended [HIS/HER] life, we do know that suicide has many causes. In many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you're not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option.

Rumors may come out about what happened, but please don't spread them. They may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends. I'm going to do my best to give you the most accurate information as soon as I know it.

Each of us will react to [NAME]'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Some of us may have known [NAME] well, and some of us may not. But either way, we may have strong feelings. You might find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork for a little while. On the other hand, you might find that focusing on school helps take your mind off what has happened. Either is okay.

I want you to know that your teachers and I are here for you. We also have counselors here to help us all cope with what happened. If you'd like to talk to one of them, just let me or one of your teachers know or look for the counselors in [NOTE SPECIFIC LOCATION] between classes or during lunch. We are all here for you. We are all in this together, and the school staff will do whatever we can to help you get through this.

Appendix E

Sample Media Statement

To be provided to local media outlets either upon request or proactively.

School staff were informed that a [AGE]-year-old student at [SCHOOL NAME] has died. The cause of death was suicide. Our thoughts and support go out to [his/her] family and friends at this difficult time.

The school will be hosting a meeting for parents and others in the community at [DATE/TIME/LOCATION]. Members of the school's Crisis Response Team [OR NAME SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS] will be present to provide information about common reactions following a suicide, how adults can help youth cope, the emotional needs of adolescents, and the risk factors and warning signs for suicide. They will also address attendees' questions and concerns. A meeting announcement has been sent to parents, who can contact school administrators or counselors at [PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION] or [E-MAIL ADDRESS] for more information.

Trained crisis counselors will be available to meet with students and staff starting tomorrow and continuing over the next few weeks as needed.

Following is a list of warning signs and steps to take that were developed specifically for youth.

Youth Warning Signs	What to Do
Leaders in the suicide prevention field agree that the following warning signs indicate a young person may be at risk for suicide: • Talking about or making plans for suicide • Expressing hopelessness about the future • Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress • Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, particularly in the presence of the warning signs above.	If you notice any of these signs in a student, take these recommended steps right away: 1. Do not leave the student alone and unsupervised. Make sure the student is in a secure environment supervised by caring adults until he or she can be seen by the school mental health contact. 2. Make sure the student is escorted to the school's mental health professional. 3. Provide any additional information to the school's mental health contact that will assist with the assessment of the student.
Specifically, this includes significant: ○ Withdrawal from or change in social connections or situations ○ Changes in sleep (increased or decreased) ○ Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context ○ Recent increased agitation or irritability	If you notice any of these signs in a student, take these recommended steps right away: 1. Do not leave the student alone and unsupervised. Make sure the student is in a secure environment supervised by caring adults until he or she can be seen by the school mental health contact. 2. Make sure the student is escorted to the school's mental health professional. 3. Provide any additional information to the school's mental health contact that will assist with the assessment of the student.

Appendix F

Message to Families: Staff Member/Student Death

This letter is intended to be used if the death was a confirmed suicide and the family is ok with this being disclosed. For other letter examples see the [The After a Suicide Toolkit](#), and [HEARDtoolkit](#)

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with [HIS/HER] family and friends.

All of the students were given the news of the death by their teacher in [ADVISORY/HOMEROOM] this morning. I have included a copy of the announcement that was read to them.

The cause of death was suicide. Suicide is a very complicated act. Although we may never know why [NAME] ended [HIS/HER] life, we do know that suicide has multiple causes. In many cases, a mental health condition is part of it. But these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you or your child are not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option. I am including some information that may be helpful to you in discussing suicide with your child.

Members of our Crisis Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance. Note that children who are already vulnerable may be at greater risk due to exposure to the suicide of a peer. If you or your child needs help right away, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), call 911, or take your child to the nearest crisis center or emergency department.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school.

Appendix F (continued)

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or one of the school mental health professionals. We can be reached by calling [PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION]. Sincerely, [PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

There are many resources available to help you and your family, including:

- [Counseling Services in Ottawa County](#)
- [Counseling Services in Allegan County](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Hotline](#) or call at 1-800-273-8255

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or the school mental health professionals. We can be reached by calling

[PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION]. Sincerely, [PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

Appendix G

Staff Debriefing (End-of-Day) Agenda

Overview:

- This is an optional meeting and should not be required. All crisis team members should be present.
- It is best practice for the staff debriefing to be led by or co-led by a support person that does not work at the school. This could be an outside partnering mental health agency or support staff from another building.
- Leader of debriefing should stay afterward to address any further needs by staff members.

Introduction to Debriefing Process

- We understand that debriefing after a crisis helps staff, student and crisis team members to reflect on the successes and challenges of the school's responses; debriefing is also critical to handling the next crisis better and that the process needs to be approached with an emphasis on quality improvement rather than the assessment of blame.
- In order to make this a safe space for everyone to share and process, we must hold what has been shared in confidentiality.
- No one is required to talk, and your thoughts and opinions may help others in the room as well.

Debriefing:

- Offer verbal appreciation of the staff.
- Disseminate information regarding the death and/or funeral arrangements.
- Remind staff of the importance of documenting crisis response efforts for future planning and understanding.
- Discuss plans for the next day.
- Debrief, share experiences, express concerns, and ask questions.
- Remind staff that it is normal to question what happened and wonder whether we could have done something to prevent this.

Appendix G (continued)

- Remind staff that we know about suicide is that there are many layers and circumstances behind every suicide-not merely one action.
- Review the day's challenges and successes, including any students of particular concern.
- Check in with staff to assess whether any of them need additional support, and refer accordingly.
- Remind staff of the importance of self-care.

Debriefing Questions

- What was your involvement with the incident or relationship with the student/staff member who died?
- What were your initial thoughts when you found out what happened?
- Given you can't change what happened, what is the most painful or difficult part for you?
- Remember when I said a critical incident can disrupt one's ability to function and cause stress

Appendix H

Bereavement Activities to Use with Students

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE/OUTCOME	GRADE LEVELS	LINK
Drawing Activity	To help students identify feelings and where they hold stress in their bodies. This includes a mindfulness (body scan) activity.		Body Maps: Feeling Emotions in the Body https://bit.ly/37D3hxH
Ways to Remember	Mindfulness/grounding activities for students who are grieving.	All ages	Ways to Remember Loved Ones Activity https://bit.ly/2CeGYCN
What do you do with a feeling? (Early Elementary)	To help younger students identify feelings and coping strategies.	Preschool/Early Elementary	What Do You Do with a Feeling? https://bit.ly/2YCVNXe
Writing and Drawing Prompts for working with students individually.	Writing and drawing prompts that dig a little deeper into the death of a loved one. May or may not be suitable for group sessions.		Grief Resources Activities https://bit.ly/2zH7gNh
Change and Loss Workbook for students	Art and writing activities for students who have experienced a loss.		Change and Loss Workbook for Students https://adobe.ly/3enwSO0
Tips for creating a safe classroom	Provides teachers with ideas on how to provide a “safe” classroom for a grieving student.		Tips for Creating a Safe Classroom https://bit.ly/2YN9gvV
Poetry Writing	Helping students process grief through writing/poetry.		Grief and Loss Poems for Teens https://bit.ly/37BH8Qc Poetry Writing Template https://bit.ly/2BdBMPH
I wonder, I wish, I hope Writing Activity	Helps students process grief through writing. Also helps teachers learn the student’s level of understanding about the death and if they have additional questions. Might also help teacher assess		I Wonder, I Wish, I Hope Template https://bit.ly/3d8tntG

	if student needs referral to school's mental health professional.		
Circles of Support Activity	Helping students identify who their support system is and how to ask for help.	Early and Upper Elementary	Helping Students Understand Their Support System https://bit.ly/3fxKoyR
Grades K-5: Grief Drawing Activity (includes video for younger students w/Elmo from Sesame Street.	Activities and group discussion topics to help teachers process a death with younger students.	Early and Upper Elementary	Grades K-5 Grief Drawing Activity https://bit.ly/2N8QYQk
Writing or Drawing Activity	Allows students to write a letter or draw a picture to the family of the deceased. Pictures or letters could be scanned and sent to the teacher to review before sending to the family.		Sympathy Card Template https://bit.ly/30SCPPs
Poetry Writing	Helping students process grief through writing/poetry.		Grief and Loss Poems for Teens https://bit.ly/37BH8Qc Poetry Writing Template https://bit.ly/2BdBMPh
Managing overwhelming emotions: Virtual Calming Room website to find ways to calm, relax and cope with feelings and emotions	Helping students find tools and strategies to manage overwhelming feelings through visual relaxation, sounds, music, games, guided meditation, and apps	All ages	Virtual Calming Room https://sites.google.com/rdale.org/virtual-calming-room/home?authuser=0

Appendix I

Bereavement Activities for Parents/Guardians

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE/OUTCOME	GRADE LEVEL	LINK
Talking with children about tragic event through games, video, art with Sesame Street	Helping parents know how to talk to their child about death.	All ages	Sesame street PDF When Families Grieve (Sesame Street) www-tc.pbs.org/parents/whenfamiliesgrieve/documents/TLC3gp_CGG_ENGdigital_sm.pdf https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief/
Tips for talking to your child about grief.	Tips broken down into a range of ages and experiences, and information about what to say, who should say it, what to look out for and how to help.		
Tips for how to respond to loss in a healthy way.	Information for how to support your child after the suicide of a classmate.		Child Mind Institute Supporting Children After a Suicide of Classmate
Tips for Supporting Grieving Kids	Short article that provides parents with ideas on how to support their children who have suffered a loss.		Tips for Supporting Grieving Children https://bit.ly/3fAZ8wO
How to Tell Your Child Someone Has Died	Provides parents with a script for when they need to inform their child someone has died. Provides parents with resources and activities for grieving kids,	age specific 0-5 and 6-12	How to Tell a Child Someone Died https://bit.ly/2Y97s0W https://www.dougy.org/grief-support-resources/kids
FLIPBOOK for Parents: Children, Teens and Suicide Loss	Provides parents with indepth information about suicide, causes, age appropriate grief reactions to death by suicide, conversations and guidance to help children and teens cope, heal and grieve	Teen specific information after a suicide death: Cope, heal and grieve. Returning to school, pages 27-35 Resources: pages 39-42	https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/flipbooks/childrenteenssuicideloss/index.html?page=1

Appendix J

Crisis Response Team Response Evaluation

The Crisis Response Team (CRT) seeks your input to help assess the effectiveness of the intervention during the recent crisis at your school. Please take a few minutes to complete this form and return it to the Crisis Response Team Coordinator.

Please check the response that most closely reflects your evaluation of the following:

Speed of CRT's response to the crisis: ☐ Very delayed ☐ Adequate ☐ Very timely	Quality of communication with the school faculty and staff: ☐ Not informative ☐ Adequate ☐ Very explanatory
Comprehensiveness of CRT's response: ☐ Very delayed ☐ Adequate ☐ Very timely	Support and guidance to individual teachers and staff: ☐ Ineffectual ☐ Adequate
Effectiveness of team's response in meeting students' needs: ☐ Very delayed ☐ Adequate ☐ Very timely	Assistance to the administrative staff: ☐ Limited ☐ Adequate ☐ Very comprehensive
Assistance to teachers in the classroom: ☐ Not supportive ☐ Adequate ☐ Very supportive	Amount of time allocated for intervention: ☐ Insufficient ☐ Adequate ☐ Very sufficient ☐ Adequate ☐ Thorough

Support to families in need:

- ☐ Lacking
- ☐ Adequate
- ☐ Outstanding

Check the adjectives which best describe the students' reactions to the CRT's intervention:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ Satisfied | ☐ Positive |
| ☐ Angry | ☐ Apathetic |
| ☐ Negative | ☐ Ambivalent |
| ☐ Receptive | ☐ Relieved |
| ☐ Grateful | ☐ Hostile |

Please describe any significant reactions that the students had to the CRT intervention that should be considered in future interventions.

Appendix K

How Schools Can Help Prevent Suicide

[Checklist of Suicide Prevention Activities](#)

Experts recommend that schools use an approach to suicide prevention that includes the following:

- Identifying students at possible risk of suicide and referring them to appropriate services
- Responding appropriately to a suicide death
- Providing training and suicide awareness education for staff
- Educating parents regarding suicide risk and mental health promotion
- Educating and involving students in mental health promotion and suicide prevention efforts
- Screening students for suicide risk

Checklist of Suicide Prevention Activities			
Suicide Prevention Activities	Yes	No	Not Sure
Protocols for helping students at risk of suicide			
We have a written protocol for helping students who may be at risk of suicide.			
We have a written protocol for responding to students who attempt suicide at school it.			
We have established agreements with outside providers to provide effective and timely mental health services to our students.			
Protocols for after a suicide			
We have a written protocol for responding to the suicide of a student or other member of the school community			
Staff who will implement the suicide response protocol are familiar with this protocol and the tools that will help them fulfill their responsibilities			

We have identified community partners to help us in the event of a suicide.			
Staff education and training			
All professional and support staff have received information about the importance of school-based suicide prevention efforts			
All professional and support staff have been trained to recognize and respond appropriately to students who may be at risk of suicide			
Our school has staff who have been trained to assess, refer, and follow up with students identified as at risk of suicide,			
Parent/guardian education and outreach			
We educate the parents of our students about suicide and related mental health issues			
We have a sufficient level of participation in our programs to educate parents about suicide.			
Student education			
We have implemented at least one type of program to engage students in suicide prevention.			
Suicide prevention is integrated into other student health/mental health courses and initiatives.			
Screening			
We have implemented a suicide screening program, as described			
We have the support of parents, school staff, and community mental health providers for our suicide screening program.	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools. HHS Publication No. SMA-12-4669. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012.
<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669>

Appendix L

Other Resources for Schools

- [Steps for Responding to a Suicidal Crisis Checklist](#)
- [Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Mental Health Services
store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669](#)
- [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Suicide Prevention Resource Center
afsp.org/schools Guidelines for School-Based Suicide Prevention Programs American Association of Suicidology
sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/aasguide_school.pdf](#)
- [Youth Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention Guidelines: A Resource for School Personnel Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program maine.gov/suicide/docs/Guidelines%2010-2009--w%20discl.pdf](#)
- [Trevor Resource Kit The Trevor Project thetrevorproject.org/resourcekit](#)
- [Supportive Families. Healthy Children: Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender \(LGBT\) Children Family Acceptance Project familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement
schoolcrisiscenter.org/](#)
- [Supporting the Grieving Child and Family American Academy of Pediatrics
schoolcrisiscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Final-Clinical-Report-Supporting-the-GrievingChild-and-Family.pdf](#)