

Elementary (Grades K-6)

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Crisis Management
and
Suicide Prevention/Response

Northeast Vernon County R-I



Suicide Prevention and Response Plan

Youth suicide impacts the safety of the school environment. It also affects the school community, diminishing the ability of surviving students to learn and the school's ability to educate. Suicide prevention and awareness is an important goal for the Northeast Vernon County (NEVC) R-1 school district. NEVC R-1 will provide a safe environment to teach students the signs and symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts.

The following members serve on the Suicide Prevention/Crisis Team: Charles Naas, Emily Hudson, Chris Hudson, Kendall Ogburn, Steve Gray, Michelle Jones, Janet Connors and Marlene Hogan.

Any district counselors and/or community mental health counselors may be called to help assist with crisis as determined by Superintendent and School Counselor.

Suicide Prevention Education for Students:

Developmentally-appropriate, student-centered education materials will be integrated into the curriculum no later than 5th grade. The content of these age-appropriate materials will include: 1) the importance of safe and healthy choices and coping strategies, 2) how to recognize risk factors and warning signs of mental disorders and suicide in oneself and others, 3) help-seeking strategies for oneself or others, including how to engage school resources and refer friends for help.

Parental involvement and community resources

A student exhibiting suicidal behavior will be directed to meet with the school counselor, principal or member of the crisis management team. Parents/guardians will be contacted to discuss risk and assessment, coping skills and a safety plan if necessary. A basic list of local and national resources will be made available to parents/guardians and students. Educational information regarding suicidal warning signs and risk factors will be made available to parents and guardians.

Publication of Policy

The suicide prevention and awareness policy will be posted on the district web page for parents/guardians, students and district employees to view. Members of the crisis intervention team and/or principals will discuss and review this policy annually with all employees in the district.

Suicide Prevention and Response Protocol Education for Staff:

Any faculty member that has knowledge of a student's suicidal behavior or thoughts must contact their building counselor, principal or a member of the crisis intervention team. Student suicidal behaviors are NOT confidential and appropriate school personnel MUST be informed when the health, welfare or safety of the student is at risk.

If a student suicide behavior is made known to any school employee and the counselor, principal or member of the crisis team is not available, the employee will notify the student's parent/guardian, the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255)** or local law enforcement in an emergency situation. As soon as practical, the employee will notify the building principal and counselor.

All district employees All district employees will receive information annually regarding this policy and the district's protocol for suicide awareness, prevention and response. The importance of suicide prevention, recognition of suicide protective and risk factors, strategies to strengthen school connectedness and building specific response procedures will be highlighted. The following topics will be addressed in the training:

- Current trends in youth mental health and the impact mental health may have on suicidal thoughts.
- Warning signs that indicate a student may be at risk of suicide.
- Communications to students regarding concerns about safety. Asking for help and reporting unsafe situations can save a life.
- Review of suicide prevention policy and referral process.
- Suicide contagion.
- Universal screener.

If a student or staff member attempts suicide at school or during a school sponsored event, activate the Crisis Interventions protocols as well as take the following steps: (The staff member involved may request help from another staff member to assist.)

1. Call for the school nurse to administer first aid. If there is medical emergency call 911/ambulance to take student to the hospital. Do not leave the student alone.
2. Call the principal and superintendent's office to report the suicide attempt and action taken. The Superintendent will notify district employees with necessary information.
3. Remove any students/members in the immediate area and arrange for appropriate supervision. Provide support for them to process their feelings about what they have witnessed.
4. Call the student's parent/guardian. If the parent/guardian is not available, continue to call emergency contact numbers to reach the parent. If the parent/guardian refuses to get involved, or cannot be reached, call DFS to report the situation at 1-800-392-3738.
5. The counselor or other designated school personnel should report to the hospital until a member of the family appears.
6. If an ambulance is not needed, call the student's parents/guardian and wait with the student until a parent/guardian arrives at the school.
7. Formulate a re-entry plan with the parents/guardian, student and appropriate staff to address the needs of the student to return to school after an absence for hospitalization. If the student was treated at a hospital, a medical release will be recommended to return to school. If no medical assistance was needed, recommendations from the mental health professional who is counseling the student should be requested in writing. (A Consent to Release Information will need to be signed by the parent/guardian.)
8. Follow up with student on a continuing basis to check on his/her status.
9. The principal/designee will document in writing all actions taken.
10. Only the Superintendent or designee will address the media. Staff members will not make any statements to the media.
11. The Superintendent with the collaboration of the Suicide Prevention Team will determine whether school remains in session or is canceled for the day.

Steps to be taken in response to a potentially suicidal student or suicidal threat:

Administration—the school principal should be made aware of potentially suicidal student/employee and may be used as support when needed during crisis. Provide a copy of the Suicide Assessment form to administration.

a) Teachers

- Respond with empathetic listening and initial informational gathering. Do not promise to keep suicidal thoughts/actions confidential.
- Refer the student to the school counselor by walking them to the office or calling for an administrator/counselor to intervene.
- Notify the school counselor of students you suspect may be considering suicide. DO NOT email the counselor.

b) School Counselor/Nurse

- Explore the situation, gathering key information to check for indicators.
- Contact the student’s parents/guardian. Stress to parents/guardian that any talk of suicide is considered serious and warrants action.
- If you believe the student is currently a suicidal risk, keep him/her with you until a parent/guardian can pick up the student.
- Complete a Suicide Assessment form. Give a copy to parent/guardian and principal and keep a copy in the student’s file.
- Assist the parent/guardian in making the call for assessment/treatment if needed. Provide the mental health resource guide and crisis intervention helpline form.
- If parents/guardians refuse to seek help for their child, this can constitute child neglect. Contact DFS to intervene at 1-800-392-3738.
- Document the actions taken by school personnel.
- Notify the student’s teachers (on a need to know basis) about the student’s suicidal tendencies.
- Follow up with the student on a continuing basis to check on his/her status. Contact the parent/guardian to check on their progress with contacting referral agencies and discuss how the student is coping.

NOTE: If a threat is made during an after-school program, and no other school or district personnel are available, call one of the following hotline numbers:

Vernon County Access Crisis Intervention Hotline	1-800-833-3915
National Suicide Prevention Hotline	1-800-273-8255

For crisis response procedures involving the death of a student by suicide follow the protocols outlined in the Crisis Intervention Section.

Suicide Assessment Form—To be used with a student identified as possibly at risk of suicide.

Name of Student _____ Grade _____ Gender _____ Date _____ Time _____

Did the student come to your attention because of hospitalization for suicide ideation or attempt? ___yes ___no

If you answered yes to the above question, how did you learn of this event?

- Suicide attempt on school grounds
- Parent notified school personnel
- Student self-reported after event
- Notified by mental health provider
- Other _____

If no, how was the student referred to your office?

- Self-referral
- Student referral
- Teacher referral
- Parent referral
- Other _____

What signs prompted their concern? Check all that apply.

- Verbal statement about suicide/self-injury _____
- Written statements about suicide _____
- Universal screener for suicide
- Change in behavior
- Anniversary of a death
- Break up
- Changes in mood/stability
- Death of a family member/friend
- Drop in academic performance
- Kicked out/left home
- Giving away personal items
- Self-injury/harm
- Stress in life
- Isolating/withdrawn
- Unhealthy sleep patterns
- Recent or past suicide attempts
- Comment on social media
- Other _____

Concern:

Ask the following questions to the student.

Have you ever wished to be dead? _____yes _____no

Have you actually had any thoughts of killing yourself? ___yes ___no
If yes,
Do you have a plan? ___yes ___no
Do you have a date or when you plan to kill yourself? ___yes ___no
Have you ever tried to kill or harm yourself in the past? ___yes ___no
(If yes) When? _____
Do you have any means to carry out your plan? (weapons/pills,etc.) ___yes ___no

Did you speak to the student's parents/guardian? ___yes ___no
If yes: __by phone __in person __email Date_____ Time_____

If no, explain why not? _____

Parent/Guardian plan of action?

Did Children's Division need to be involved? ___yes ___no Name of Case Worker_____

Student Safety Plan (E.g. What are 3 coping strategies that keep you from acting on your suicidal thought? Who are 3 people in your life that you can trust and talk with?)

Were mental health provider resources provided to the student and or parent/guardian? ___yes ___no

Were suicide prevention resources provided to the student and or parent/guardian? ___yes ___no

Make a copy of this form and provide to: Administration___ Parent Mailed___ Parent Pick up___
Student file___ Copy sent home with student ___

Follow up information Date: _____

Was appointment made with family physician/mental health counselor/psychiatrist? ___yes ___no

Date of appointment_____

Name of provider_____

Suicide Prevention and Crisis Intervention Helplines

Vernon County Access Crisis Intervention Hotline (ACI) (Compass) 1-800-833-3915

The Behavioral Health Crisis Hotline (sometimes referred to as Access Crisis Intervention (ACI) line) is staffed by mental health professionals who can respond to your crisis 24 hours per day and 7 days per week. They will talk with you about your crisis and help you determine what further help is needed, for example, a telephone conversation to provide understanding and support, a face-to-face intervention, an appointment the next day with a mental health professional, or perhaps an alternative service that best meets your needs. They may give you other resources or services within your community to provide you with ongoing care following your crisis. All calls are strictly confidential.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-8255

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We're committed to improving crisis services and advancing suicide prevention by empowering individuals, advancing professional best practices, and building awareness.

Boys Town Crisis and Suicide Hotline 1-800-448-3000 or text "VOICE" to 20121

Boys Town operators are available 24/7 to provide you with immediate phone assistance and short-term crisis intervention and counseling for parent-child conflicts, marital and family issues, suicide, pregnancy, runaways, physical and sexual abuse. Operators also provide referrals to local community resources.

Crisis Text line Text "Talk" to 741-741

Trevor Project 1-866-488-7386

The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth ages 13–24.

Its website has information about the signs of suicide and a way to connect online with other LGBTQ youth. The TrevorChat is for online crisis chat 6 hours a day at www.thetrevorproject.org/chat

Trevor Text is for texting on Fridays late afternoon to early evening.

Text "Trevor" to 202-304-1200

Screening for Mental Health (Free)

Everyone experiences stress, sadness and anxiety from time to time—it's part of life.

But if you are feeling overwhelmed, depressed, or unable to do the things you once enjoyed, it may be time to assess your emotional health. If you are concerned about yourself or someone you love, take a few minutes to complete an anonymous self-assessment.

<http://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/hyho>

Crisis Management

ADAPTED FROM THE MISSOURI SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION CRISIS MANUAL - 2017 EDITION

Introduction

When a young person dies, whether from an accident, suicide, or violence, the school community is left in turmoil. In today's society, educators are continually faced with situations that can cause education to come to a complete standstill. Northeast Vernon County R-I schools are committed to providing for the wellbeing of our students, at to that end this handbook has been developed to help administrators and staff work through crisis situations.

Statement of Purpose

The leading causes of death for teenagers are accidents and suicides. In the State of Missouri, accidents are the leading cause of death among teenagers, and suicide remains the second leading cause of death. During a crisis, a team can further the emotional wellbeing of students in several ways:

1. The crisis team members work within the framework of the crisis plan.
2. A crisis team member can serve as a consultant to an administrator or counselor, rather than having an entire team travel to the school.
3. A crisis team member can provide support to local staff members during and after a crisis.

Crisis Team

Within the district, the following members currently serve on the Suicide Prevention/Crisis Team: Charles Naas, Emily Hudson, Chris Hudson, Kendall Ogburn, Steve Gray, Michelle Jones, William Dennis, Janet Connors and Marlene Hogan.

***Any district counselors and/or community mental health counselors may be called to help assist with crisis as determined by Superintendent, Principal, or School Counselor. ***

Additional Crisis Team counselors and/or support can be found by contacting the Southwest Region of Missouri School Counseling Association. Contact the critical incident co-chairs:

Robyn Fondren

rdfondren@spsmail.org
Delaware Elementary School
(417) 523-3700

Julie Baxter-Bennett

jbaxter@spsmail.org
Disney Elementary School
(417) 523-3660

Administrator's Checklist for Responding to an Emergency/Crisis

These guidelines have been written to help those involved to think ahead and plan for situations. The suggestions below are designed to be thorough, as well as flexible and adaptable. Discretion and judgment will determine their use.

I. Immediate Action to Be Taken

- _____ A. Principal or designated individual will verify information regarding emergency/crisis.
- _____ B. Notify affected buildings where siblings are enrolled or other family members are employed.
Confirm family information from them if necessary.
- _____ C. Activate building crisis team.
- _____ D. In the event of death...
 - Remove the name from the class roll and other forms of communication.
 - Intercept any attendance, disciplinary, scholarship, testing, or special placement notifications that may be sent to the family.
- _____ E. Secure the building. Activate plan for determining who is in the building. Distribute badges to incoming personnel or visitors.

II. Contact Family

- _____ A. Communicate with the family involved to express condolences and to check fact from rumor.
- _____ B. Explain school procedure to the family with regard to meeting with the staff in order to insure that the family's situation is handled with the utmost respect and to discuss the family's wishes in handling the situation.
- _____ C. Ask what facts the family would allow to be discussed. This information should be recorded or received in writing.
- _____ D. Repeat the information back to the family member who will serve as the contact person for the family.

III. School Plan of Action

- _____ A. Administrator's Responsibilities:

Any or all of the responsibilities below may be delegated.

1. Notify faculty before arrival at the school to inform them of a special faculty meeting prior to the beginning of the school day if emergency/crisis occurs after school hours.
2. Meet with faculty as soon as possible after the event if emergency/crisis occurs during the school day.
3. Include in the faculty meeting agenda:

- a. A printed statement approved by the family to be read verbatim by the classroom teacher. Decide the time the statement will be read. Emphasize need for hard facts to reduce rumors and fantasies. If family had not been reached, reassure faculty/staff that further information will be forthcoming.
 - b. A handout review covering recommendations for dealing with a loss in the classroom.
 - c. An announced plan for disseminating further information during the day, e.g. notes in boxes, runners, further faculty meetings.
 - d. The name and location of person in the building who can be called upon for accurate and current information.
 - e. An assessment of the individual faculty members' comfort levels in reading the prepared statement and discussing the situation with students.
 - f. An evaluation of the need for substitute personnel from other building teams.
 - g. A schedule of times and location for faculty to process loss, to share their experiences and offer suggestions. (Prior to this, buildings will have determined who will work with students and who will work with faculty.)
 - h. The area that will be designated as a workroom for the team.
 - i. The space available for small group counseling sessions.
 - j. The plan for handling the media including the name of the spokesperson.
 - k. Any other pertinent information.
4. Keep all parents informed of school's activities in connection with the emergency/crisis (i.e. letters to parents, parent meetings, e-mail, etc.).

B. Faculty Responsibilities

1. Read prepared statement at the designated time.
2. Provide an opportunity for students to discuss the incident and express their feelings.
3. Acknowledge emotions through discussion and involvement in constructive activities in the classroom.
4. Discuss strategies for students dealing with the media. Tell them the media may approach them but they do not have to talk to them.
5. Identify those who were close friends or who have suffered a similar loss and would like an opportunity to attend a group or individual meeting.
6. Identify students obviously in distress and talk to them or have another student help escort them to a group or individual counseling activity.

7. Request assistance from the building coordinator if a class has a large number of distressed students.
8. Shorten and re-structure assignments when appropriate. Postpone and reschedule tests as needed.
9. Know evacuation procedure. If evacuation becomes necessary, keep roll book at all times for accountability purposes. THIS IS IMPERATIVE.

C. Team Responsibilities

1. Coordinator (Appointed by the building principal at the beginning of each school year.)
 - a. Consults with superintendent/designee when a possible crisis or emergency situation occurs.
 - b. Coordinates plan:
 - i. Use of assistance from other buildings
 - ii. Substitute personnel
 - iii. Room assignments
 - iv. Meeting times
 - v. Notification
 - vi. Media and staff communications including designation of media area
 - vii. Phone chain and other communication
 - viii. Distribution of identification badges to all incoming personnel
 - c. Manages monitoring and documentation process
 - d. Organizes daily debriefing sessions
 - e. Delegates any of the above responsibilities
2. Team
 - a. Assists the Superintendent/Coordinator with developing specific plan for responding to the crisis.
 - b. Accepts the responsibilities delegated by the Superintendent/Coordinator.
 - c. Consults with and supports (on an as needed basis) the affected building's staff in reacting to and dealing with the crisis.
 - d. Provides direct support services to staff and students in distress.
 - e. Makes referrals to building coordinator for those needing follow-up support from outside resources.
 - f. Monitors the situation after the crisis has subsided and provides other follow-up services.
 - g. Collects data to submit to Superintendent/Coordinator.
 - h. Relays confidential information that pertains to the loss.
 - i. Anticipates and manages other building, family, and community needs.
 - j. Assists other buildings when approved by the Superintendent.

_____ D. Responding to the Media

1. The Superintendent/designee will be the contact and spokesperson for all media related items.
2. The Superintendent/designee will designate a staging area for media.
3. The Coordinator will be responsible for the building security with respect to the media (they should not be allowed to disrupt the management of the classroom activities).

_____ E. Responding to Parents/Community

1. Be calm, patient, and courteous when dealing with others.
2. Give all callers the same information, which includes these topics:
 - a. In answer to “What’s going on?” “What happened?”
Read the prepared statement which was read in the faculty meetings. Update information as often as possible, but make certain all persons answering the phone have the same printed information.
3. Reassure parents that the emergency/crisis management team is at work to keep their children safe.
4. Give all parents the same information, which includes:
 - a. In answer to “What are you doing to keep my child safe?”
Enumerate measures presently in operation.
5. Thank the parents for calling.
6. Give time and place, if parent meetings are scheduled.
7. Ask if parents have received letters if letters were sent.

_____ F. Follow Through

1. Ongoing monitoring
 - a. Staff and building team should monitor, for as long as needed, all students and staff for continued distress and their need for further intervention.
 - b. Documentation

District Phone Tree

Superintendent
Principals
Crisis Team
Counselors
Family
BOE/Community

Principals
Faculty/Staff
Students (uniform message)

Topics for Discussion at Teacher Meeting

1. Attached is a copy of “Young People and Grief.” This information may be helpful to you as you help students deal with their feelings.
2. Present facts as they are known. Stick to what the school has given you as information to present. Do not offer your opinions and/or what you may have heard from other sources.
3. Discuss procedures and support that will be available.
4. Discuss use of hall passes as means of student’s getting from class to support rooms. Emphasize the need for sensitivity in approaching students who may be in the hall. Emphasize the importance of monitoring exits. Be alert to students who may be in need of emotional support.
5. Explain that members of the Crisis Team will follow the victim’s schedule in order to speak to classes. Explain that other team members will be available for other classes if needed.
6. Go over teacher handout pertaining to grief and emphasize “if kids want to talk,” be sensitive.
7. Go over how to take care of teacher feelings (your own) and emphasize that support rooms and support are available.
8. Inform teachers of the mandatory debriefing meeting at the end of the day.
9. Discuss staff and students handling of the press/social media.
10. Inform teachers to notify Crisis Team members of names of students who may be high-risk.
11. Inform teachers to refrain from discussing death in terms of religious beliefs.
12. Reassure staff members that it is acceptable for them to have the need to grieve. If they are having a difficult time, they should ask for someone to cover their responsibilities until they are able to resume.
13. Emphasize the importance of watching each other, as well as the students. Don’t be afraid to “refer” a colleague if you see that they are having a difficult time. No one will be judged for the emotions they are experiencing.
14. Remind staff members that the bells may not ring as usual based upon the needs of the students. Let them know that they are to keep their students until the bells or someone directs them differently.

Teacher's Handout - All Levels

1. Attached is a copy of "Young People and Grief (see handout)." This information may be helpful to you as you work with students in helping them deal with their feelings.
2. A support room has been set up for students who need or want additional support. Members of the Crisis Team will be available for individual and group support. PLEASE LET STUDENTS KNOW WHERE THEY CAN GO FOR HELP, and follow the directions given for releasing them and monitoring their coming and going to these rooms. It is best to have students escorted to the various locations.
3. Please be especially observant for those students who experience a high level of distress and/or whose behavior indicates a strong grief reaction (see description of possible grief reactions in "Young People and Grief"). Bring or have students escorted by a staff member to the support room. Names of students who should be monitored or seen for follow-up should be given to counselors.
4. Counselors and members of the Crisis Team are available to come to classes to talk about common reactions to loss, to provide support, to answer questions- whatever you might need. Please contact if at any time you would like someone to come to your class.
5. If students ask questions or want to talk about their feelings, it is usually a good thing to let that happen for an appropriate period of time. During the discussion, some things you might include are:
 - a) Reinforce the idea that people grieve in different ways. All responses are okay. There is no "normal" way to feel.
 - b) Reinforce that people grieve for different reasons. It is acceptable for someone to have grief feelings even if they didn't personally know the victim. What they heard may resurface previous or recent experiences of their own.
 - c) Talk about what they can do with their feelings
 - Talk with people they trust
 - Encourage talking with a parent/guardian
 - Encourage talking to school staff
 - Inform them of the support room
 - Let them know it is fine to seek out help
 - d) Discuss what they can do to help each other
 - Reach out to each other/listen to each other
 - Accompany an upset friend to talk to someone
 - Let an adult know if a friend is very upset and might need to be sought out
6. Students may be encouraged to write letters or cards or other expressions of care that can be brought to the counseling center for delivery to the family.
7. State and reinforce the stability of a routine: "School will go on." Allow appropriate time for sharing of feelings and discussion, but return to scheduled instructional activities each day.
8. See counselors for additional materials if necessary.
9. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
 - a) Recognize and acknowledge your own feelings of loss and grief.
 - b) Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.
 - c) Be realistic about what you can do. Maybe you need to take some time for yourself. Do it.
 - d) Stick to a schedule as much as you can. It provides stability and the comfort of a normal routine.
 - e) Give yourself permission to mourn. No matter what the nature of your relationship, there is loss.
 - f) Give yourself the same latitude you give your students.
 - g) Be kind to yourself. You don't have to "get it all together" right away. You don't have to do it all, be strong for everyone, or take care of everything.
 - h) Treat yourself with the same gentleness and understanding you would anybody else.

Guidelines for Understanding and Responding to a Crisis

1. Here are some of the emotions you may observe in your students (or in yourself) following a tragedy.
 - Numbness, shock, denial- After a sudden death, you don't want to believe it has happened; you had no preparation for its occurrence.
 - Confusion- Why did this happen? I don't understand the circumstances. How could this happen to someone I know?
 - Fear- Could something like this happen again? Will something like this happen again?
 - Grief- Sadness, crying, a deep sense of personal loss
 - Anxiety- A difficulty in explaining or understanding the tragedy; things are not the same at school or in my class.
 - Depression- emptiness, unhappiness
 - Guilt- An irrational feeling of responsibility for the event. What could I have done to prevent it?
 - Anger- Why did someone do a violent, senseless thing? Why did others let it happen? Anger can be directed toward a specific person or persons or be a more general feeling of anger.
2. Here are some of the changes in behavior that you may see. Most, if not all of these changes, will be temporary. Children are resilient and do bounce back.
 - Lack of concentration- inability to focus on school work, household chores, or other leisure activities.
 - Lack of interest in usual activities- Their minds are preoccupied with other thoughts and feelings that would usually be very enjoyable may not have much appeal.
 - Greater dependency- A need to feel protected may result in their wanting to do more with you or not have you away from them for long periods of time; some kids may not want to be alone.
 - Problems with sleeping and eating- difficulty going to sleep, occasional bad dreams or a decreased or increased appetite are common physical reactions to a stressful event.
 - Overly quiet or overly talkative or a combination- adults may need to talk about a tragic incident over and over again, asking questions that may be unanswerable but needing to ask them anyway. This repetition is often a healthy way of working through the grief process; on the other hand, a student may not want to talk about it much with you, preferring to discuss with friends, classmates, parents- those who may have been closer to the tragedy; or the student may not want to talk with anyone about it.
3. Here are some things that teachers and parents can do to help a child through this difficult time.
 - Listen- Don't interrupt, he/she needs to be heard.
 - Accept feelings- They are valid feelings for this student, even though your feelings may not be similar.
 - Empathize- Let the child know that you recognize his/her sadness, confusion, anger, or whatever feelings he/she has about the tragedy.
 - Reassure- The student is not responsible for what happened.
 - Accept- The student may not want to talk about the trauma right away. Let him/her know you are willing to listen whenever he/she wants or needs to talk about it.
 - Be tolerant of temporary changes.
 - Maintain as much of a sense of routine as possible.
 - Provide additional activities if the students seem to have excess energy.
 - Don't hesitate to ask for help. This help can be sought from other parents, the school staff or an outside professional.

Adapted from Robert L. Lewis, Ph.D. - Clinical Psychologist, Clayton, MO

Handling Crisis Situations: Tips for Teachers

1. Be honest. Before classes find out all the information you can and, according to the instructions from administrators, share facts with students.
2. Give as much information as the students need to know. Cognitive and emotional development will determine how much and in what manner to share.
3. Allow time for students to express feelings, thoughts, and to ask questions. The amount of time will vary with the situation, age groups, and individual groups concerns.
4. Look for signs of distress in individual students use your school's process to refer students who are of concern. It might be in small groups or individual counseling, but be sure concerned students get attention.
5. Allow time for a break or recess after discussing and sharing. In cases of a continuing crisis remember to allow times for breaks.
6. Listen to your students' feelings.
7. Remember that everyone experiences and reacts to grief and crisis in a different way. There is no one-way to act.
8. Some students may express various religious beliefs about the death. Remind students that this is a time to honor the deceased and not a time to pass judgment. If a student seems to have a need to discuss a specific religious belief, encourage them to talk with a parent, family member, or member of the clergy.
9. In case of death, discuss ways to express sympathy with the class. This is often a first time experience for young people, and ways to express sympathy and the funeral process can be confusing. Death and crisis are a part of living, and his can be a valuable learning experience.
10. In case of the death of a classmate or teacher, it is best if the desk can be left empty to help students acknowledge the death. The same is true for a student's locker. Sometimes students are angrier if they are not given time to grieve.
11. Removal of student's personal belongings should be arranged by the school's administrator.
12. Keep students informed. If it is an ongoing situation, let your class know any relevant information as soon as you receive it, even if it means interrupting the class occasionally.
13. In the case of a student's death, remove their name from your roster to prevent accidentally calling out their name during upcoming roll calls by you or a substitute.

Tips for Working with Students in Crisis

All of us, at some time in our lives, experience a trauma or crisis. It may occur in various forms: an earthquake, a tornado, a fire, a car accident, severe physical injury, rape, or the death of a friend or love ones.

When events of this nature happen, we have what is called a grief response. No two people grieve in the same way, but the emotions or feelings are similar in everyone.

Each of us grieves differently and at our own individual pace. Grieving is hard work. You may feel sad, hurt and cry a lot. Crying is okay.

Your behavior may be influenced by your feelings. Here are some emotional responses that are expected and normal.

- Denial- "No...no, it can't be."
- Anger/resentment
- Guilt- "It must be my fault. If only I hadn't said what I said. I never said, 'I love you.'"
- Numbness or shock
- Tears- lots of tears
- Life seems out of balance.
- Disbelief
- Nightmares, sleep disturbances/bad dreams
- Sadness
- Feeling deserted
- Forgetfulness
- Increased substance use
- Withdrawing from friends and/or family
- Nervousness, anxiety: "What will I do now?"
- Loneliness/depression
- Self-pity
- Hostility/on edge
- Sorrow
- Self-doubt
- Fears of going crazy
- Easily excitable
- Asking questions- the same questions- over and over

Discussion Suggestions Do's and Don'ts

The following may be used as ways to encourage a discussion if the students are hesitant to speak or items to anticipate in the course of discussion.

1. It's hard to say what we feel, but it's important to do so.
2. Is it OK to feel _____, since I didn't even know them?
3. What do I tell outsiders when they ask me, "How can you stand to go to the school?"
4. Is it OK for me to cry?
5. What are things back to normal?
6. Is it OK for me to be happy- I don't have strong feelings, didn't know the victims, was absent..."

DO's

1. Do listen to the students and wait after you've asked a question to give them adequate time to respond.
2. Do allow students the opportunity to express any and all thoughts regarding the incident without judging or evaluating their comments.
3. Do be aware of your voice tone, keeping it low, even and warm.
4. Do help all students see that everyone shares similar feelings (i.e. "We're- not You're) all stunned that something like this could happen here" or "A lot of us (not you) are feeling angry.")
5. Do expect tears, anger, resentment, fear, inappropriate language (often due to tension and discomfort), stoicism (apparent non-reaction).
6. Do expect some students to become phobic and have sudden overwhelming concerns that may seem illogical to you but are very real to them.
7. Do be aware that this death could bring about the resurfacing of other losses for students.
8. Do encourage students to sit in a circle, or to make a more intimate grouping in which to have this discussion.
9. Do stress the confidential nature of the feelings and thoughts expressed in the discussion.
10. Do use your own thoughts and ideas as a means to encourage discussion, not as a means for alleviating your own feelings.
11. Do expect that other feelings of loss may emerge.
12. Do give accurate information about the incident. If you don't know an answer, say so.
13. Do squelch any rumors that may exist by either giving the facts, or researching what the "Facts" are and reporting back.

DON'T's

1. Don't give "should, ought, or must" statements (i.e. "You shouldn't feel like that." "We mustn't dwell of this.")
2. Don't use clichés (i.e. "Be strong." "It could have been worse.")
3. Don't ask questions without being ready to listen.
4. Don't try to make them feel better, let them know that it's okay to feel what they're feeling.
5. Don't isolate anyone- each will need to feel a part of the group
6. Don't expect the students to "get over" grief/recovery process within a certain time.
7. Don't assume a person is not grieving/reacting just because they don't look or act like it. Let them know you are available at any time (i.e. six weeks or three months from now), IF YOU REALLY ARE.
8. Don't let students interrupt each other, allow each person to finish his/her own statement.
9. Don't repeat what you have heard outside of the school setting. Stick to what has been communicated to you by the crisis team and/or administration. It is important for you to model and practice the elimination of rumors.
10. If you are a faculty member in the school of the deceased and have children in the school or know neighborhood children who attend the school, don't share any confidential information/facts within earshot of these children.

Tips for Students in Crisis

1. Remember that everyone reacts to pain and stress in different ways. Don't expect everyone to act or feel the same. Also, don't expect the pain to last the same amount of time for everyone.
2. In the case of death, remember that friends and family will need your care and concern long after the funeral is over.
3. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you aren't sure if you can cope.
4. Take care of yourself. Eat well; get plenty of sleep and exercise.
5. Try some of these ideas to help you handle stress and grief.
 - Talk to someone
 - Keep a journal
 - Listen to music
 - Cry
 - Clean your room
 - Run
 - Write a letter
 - Dance
 - Rearrange your room
 - Ride a bike
 - Help someone else
 - Read a book
 - Create something
 - Go for a walk
 - Draw
 - Plant something
 - Dig in the dirt
 - Yell at your pillow

Tips for Parents of Students Who Are Experiencing Crisis

1. Keep your child informed and updated, keeping in mind the developmental and cognitive level of the child. Children need to feel involved and as in control as much as possible.
2. Watch for signs of distress. Loss of appetite, aggression, acting out, being withdrawn, sleeping disorders, and other behavior changes can indicate problems.
3. Send your child to school if possible. The stability and routine of a familiar situation will help young people feel more secure.
4. Remember that everyone reacts to stress and/or grief in different ways. There is no one-way to act in a crisis situation.
5. Allow children the opportunity to express feelings. It is important to validate these feelings.
6. A good diet and plenty of exercise are important for children who are under stress. Encourage your child to eat well and get plenty of exercise.
7. Be honest about your own concerns, but stress your and your child's ability to cope with the situation.
8. Respect a child's need to grieve.
9. Provide somewhere private and quiet for your child to go.
10. Be available and listen to your child.
11. Remember to take care of yourself.
12. Obtain outside help if necessary.

Tips for Counselor/Crisis Team Members When Assisting in a Crisis Situation

1. Keep your life in balance.
 - a) Eat well and get plenty of exercise. A good diet and exercise is important when under stress.
 - b) Balance work and rest.
 - c) Stick to a schedule as much as you can. It provides stability and the comfort of a normal routine when your feelings are out of control.
 - d) Avoid new major projects or decisions.
2. Recognize and acknowledge your own feelings of loss and grief.
3. Give yourself permission to mourn. No matter what the nature of your relationship, there is loss. Give yourself the same latitude you give your students.
4. Be realistic about what you can do.
5. Meet with fellow Crisis Team members and be supportive of each other or form a support group with fellow counselors or staff members.
6. Be kind to yourself. You don't have to "get it all together" right away. You don't have to do it all, be strong for everyone, or take care of everything. Treat yourself with the same gentleness and understanding you would anybody else.
7. Debrief with the Crisis Team members and/or administration before going home.

Sample Announcements

Announcement information should be approved by family and building administrator(s)

Sample announcement that only affects one classroom: (Individual Loss)

John will not be in school today. His mother was killed in an automobile accident last night. A truck on Highway 10 struck her car. John will be very sad for a long time. Perhaps we can discuss some ways John might be feeling and how we can all help him.

Sample announcements for a school-wide loss:

We have something very sad to tell you today. John was driving home in the rain last night. His car swerved into an oncoming lane, was struck by a car and went off the road. John died in the crash. It was sudden and he did not suffer.

We have something very sad to share with you today. We've been notified that Elaine died last night. At this time, we have no further details to share. We will have counselors available for anyone who needs to talk. Please keep Elaine's family in your thoughts.

Sample announcements for student suicide:

Option 1 – When the death has been ruled a suicide

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that one of our students, _____, has taken [his/her] own life. All of us want you to know that we are here to help you in any way we can. A suicide death presents us with many questions that we may not be able to answer right away. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we ask that you not spread rumors you may hear. We'll do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us. Suicide is a very complicated act. It is usually caused by a mental disorder such as depression, which can prevent a person from thinking clearly about his or her problems and how to solve them. Sometimes these disorders are not identified or noticed; in other cases, a person with a disorder will show obvious symptoms or signs. One thing is certain: there are treatments that can help. Suicide should never, ever be an option. Each of us will react to _____'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Feeling sad is a normal response to any loss. Some of you may not have known _____ very well and may not be as affected, while others may experience a great deal of sadness. Some of you may find you're having difficulty concentrating on your schoolwork, and others may find that diving into your work is a good distraction. We have counselors available to help our school community deal with this sad loss and to enable us to understand more about suicide. If you'd like to talk to a counselor, just let your teachers know. Please remember that we are all here for you.

Option 2 – When the cause of death is unconfirmed

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that one of our students, _____, has died. All of us want you to know that we are here to help you in any way we can. The cause of death has not yet been determined by the authorities. We are aware that there has been some talk about the possibility that this was a suicide death. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we ask that you not spread rumors since they may turn out to be inaccurate and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to _____ as well as [his/her] family and friends. We'll do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us. Each of us will react to _____'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Feeling sad is a normal response to any loss. Some of you may not have known _____ very well and may not be as affected, while others may experience a great deal of sadness. Some of you may find you're having difficulty concentrating on your schoolwork, and others may find that diving into your work is a good distraction. We have counselors available to help our school community deal with this sad loss. If you'd like to talk to a counselor, just let your teachers know. Please remember that we are all here for you.

Option 3 – When the family has requested that the cause of death not be disclosed

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that one of our students, _____, has died. All of us want you to know that we are here to help you in any way we can. The family has requested that information about the cause of death not be shared at this time. We are aware that there has been some talk about the possibility that this was a suicide death. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we ask that you not spread rumors since they may turn out to be inaccurate and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to _____ as well as [his/her] family and friends. We'll do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us. Since the subject has been raised, we do want to take this opportunity to remind you that suicide, when it does occur, is a very complicated act. It is usually caused by a mental disorder such as depression, which can prevent a person from thinking clearly about his or her problems and how to solve them. Sometimes these disorders are not identified or noticed; in other cases, a person with a disorder will show obvious symptoms or signs. One thing is certain: there are treatments that can help. Suicide should never, ever be an option. Each of us will react to _____'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Feeling sad is a normal response to any loss. Some of you may not have known _____ very well and may not be as affected, while others may experience a great deal of sadness. Some of you may find you're having difficulty concentrating on your schoolwork, and others may find that diving into your work is a good distraction. We have counselors available to help our school community deal with this sad loss. If you'd like to talk to a counselor, just let your teachers know. Please remember that we are all here for you.

Young People and Grief

The grieving process is a normal, natural, and healing result of loss and pain is to be expected. Young people of all ages exhibit grief and reactions to grief. Guilt, anxiety, anger, fear, and sadness may be universal, and the expressions of these emotions may vary from day to day. Helping a young person and yourself through this difficult time may often feel overwhelming; however, knowledge of common reactions to loss may help you recognize behavior for what it is- grieving.

Possible Grief Reactions:

- Anger
- Aggression/acting out: starting fights, outbursts of temper, drop in grades, change of peer affiliation
- Explosive emotions: gentle tears, wrenching sobs, extremes in behavior
- Physiological changes: fatigue, trouble sleeping, lack of appetite, headaches, and stomach pains
- Idealization of the deceased
- Sadness/emptiness/withdrawal: overwhelmed by feelings of loss when realizes person is not coming back; feels extremely vulnerable
- Guilt/self-blame: “If only...” “Why didn’t I...?” Feels responsible for the loss, seeks self-punishment
- Disorganization: restless, unable to concentrate, uncontrollable tears, difficulty focusing
- Lack of feelings: denial; protection from pain; can be a form of numbness; may be difficult to admit and may generate guilt

How to Help a Young Person Experiencing Grief

- Use the terms “died/dead/death” rather than phrases like “passed away” or “taken from us.” Give an honest age appropriate explanation for the person’s death, avoiding clichés or easy answers. Straightforward, gentle use of the words helps a person confront the reality of the death.
- Explain and accept that everyone has different reactions to death at different times. The reaction might not hit until the funeral or weeks later.
- Reassure the young person that his/her grief feelings are normal. There is no “right” way to react to a loss. Give permission to cry. Let them know it’s okay not to cry if the young person does not typically react in that way.
- Permit or encourage the young person to talk about the person who has died. This is a vital part of the healing process, both at the moment of loss, but especially after the funeral.
- Do not attempt to minimize the loss or take the pain away. Phrases like “Don’t worry, it will be OK,” “He/she had a good life,” or “He/she is out of pain” are not helpful.

- Grief is painful. There must be pain before there can be acceptance and healing. It is very difficult to do, but most helpful to acknowledge the person's pain and permit them to live with it without trying to take it away or make it "better."
- Encourage the young person to talk about his/her feelings. Encourage communication first with family, but also be aware of other support people such as clergy, trusted adult, friends, and trusted peers.
- LISTEN. Listen with your heart. Listening to the feelings of the young person is most important. Listen through the silences. Just being present, showing you care by your listening is more important than knowing what to say or even saying anything at all.
- Help the young person decide about attending the funeral. The funeral can be a way to say goodbye, but abide by the young person's wish and express understanding if he/she chooses not to go.

A Grieving Person's Needs:

- To cry
- To be held
- To talk
- To be listened to
- To feel caring around them, to be with people they care about
- To understand how others may react

Activities Summary
(To be completed by team during closure)

School: _____ Date form Completed: _____

Principal: _____

Nature of Crisis: _____

Dates of Site: _____

On-Site Coordinator _____

Team Members on Site:

School Personnel Involved in Direct Service to Students:

Name: _____ Position: _____

Name: _____ Position: _____

Name: _____ Position: _____

Name: _____ Position: _____

Types of Services Provided by Team:

Team Contacts:

Number of students assisted individually or in small groups _____

*Total number of student contacts _____

Number of staff assisted _____

*Total number of staff contacts _____

Number of families assisted _____

*Total family contacts _____

* Includes multiple sessions with the same individuals

Team Recommendations:

Crisis Team Roles and Procedures in the Event of a Student Death

Northeast Vernon County R-1 Board Policy on Memorials

Sadly, the death of a student, former student, or staff member is an event that may occur at any time.

Temporary memorials can provide students the opportunity to give testimony to their peers, as well as learn how to direct their generosity to grieving family members. The opportunity to participate in temporary activities and projects can help students and staff come to accept the finality of their loss. An initial memorial site will be designated by the principal where flowers, poems, pictures, stuffed animals in an area where those who wish not to be reminded can easily avoid that location. Memorial items will be removed after the family funeral in a way that permits presentation of these symbols of caring to the family.

Memorials for staff and students lost through suicide will not be established. This policy is the result of the fact that recognition of student suicide may adversely affect others predisposed to suicide.

Personal Possession Plan

As soon as possible, a member of the administration goes to the student's locker and other areas where he/she may have possessions to collect the contents for family. This keeps a mass of students from witnessing removal of the possessions.

Follow Student Schedule

Purpose: To talk specifically with the class members of the classes shared with the deceased, provide factual information, answer questions, clarify any misinformation, provide support, and identify students who may need individual or group support.

Mechanics: Two people, preferably the student's counselor and another member of the Crisis Team, will follow the deceased student's, or the student involved, schedule hour by hour. One person should talk and explain, and one person will identify students who are not coping well and escort them to the group support room. (This could be the classroom teacher)

What to Say:

- Review the facts of the death or situation.
- Answer any questions to dispel any rumors or misinformation.
- Provide information on funeral and visitation arrangements if available.
- Explain what funerals and visitations are like and what to expect.
- Suggest what type of things they can say to the family members.

- Explain that a wide range of emotions are involved and how each person may be feeling differently. All feelings are OK. Encourage them to express their feelings.
- Encourage students to talk about the deceased and the memories they have of him/her.
- If there is a seating assignment, deal with the “empty chair.” Provide alternatives such as a new seating chart, removing the chair, or leaving the chair alone. The students need to make a decision but can be allowed to decide at a later time with the classroom teacher.
- Remind students of the group support room and other areas of support and the procedures involved in using.

NOTE: At the high school level, talking to classrooms is usually more informational in nature than an exchange with feedback and reaction from students.

Hall Monitoring

Purpose: To keep students in the building and to seek out those who may be in need of support.

Mechanics: Hall monitors will check out the “nooks and crannies” in the building, bathrooms, hallways, etc., to locate students who may be seeking refuge away from the mainstream. If students are interacting in groups, it may be necessary to approach the group and encourage them to use the group room. This will aid in monitoring class attendance.

Group Support

Purpose:

1. To provide one specific area for students to receive support, comfort, and express feelings, all under the supervision of trained Crisis Team members.
2. To keep grieving and upset students in the building.
3. To identify students who may need attention and support beyond that provided by the Crisis Team.

Mechanics: One room is designated the “group support room” and staffed with at least one or more Crisis Team members (depending on the number of students utilizing the service). Kleenex, water, and plenty of chairs with room to move around are necessary when setting up the room. Sign-in and sign-out forms are to be placed on a table near the door so students’ absences from class can be monitored. This information is given to teachers at the end of the day or the next morning.

What to Say: The role of the Crisis Team member assigned in the group support room is dependent on the makeup of the students present. Some students share, talk, and comfort each other without much encouragement from the Crisis Team members. Others will need some direction:

- Encourage students to express and talk about their feelings.
- Ask students to talk about memories they have of the deceased.
- Encourage students to ask questions and talk to each other.

Evening Follow-Up

Purpose: To follow-up on those students and staff who were identified as most affected by the traumatic event or those who are not coping well.

Mechanics: During the school day a list is compiled of students and staff described above. The list is divided among Crisis Team members and follow-up calls are made in the evening.

What to Say: Advise the parent/guardian of their child's situation. Check on current functioning, refer on to an outside counselor if necessary, or refer for further intervention by school counselor or Crisis Team member for the next day. A school counselor or crisis team member will need to follow through with this procedure.

Suggestions for Visits to Classrooms

1. Briefly explain why you are there... "If you are wondering why there are some strange- faced adults in the building today, it's because we are all counselors who are and were invited here by your counselor/principal because of the death of (person's name). We care about what you are going through and know it is tough. Because we were not as close to the person as you are, we are not suffering the way you and the teachers are- we just want to help out in any way possible." Emphasize that the teams or individual team members are not there to take the place of local counselors, administrators, or clergy, but that you are there to assist and help in any way that you can.
2. If you are following the schedule of the deceased, it's important to recognize the **"empty chair."**
3. Let all kids know that whatever they are feeling is okay. It may be anger, sadness, fear, confusion, guilt- anything, or even a mixture of these and/or other feelings.
4. Help them realize that different people will express feelings in different ways and that is okay. Grieving is a personal journey; not everyone will grieve in the same manner. "Try not to pass judgment because someone else does not seem to be hurting or suffering as much as you are."

5. Help the students understand that some people may not have “known (use the deceased’s name) or been “close” to them but what they have heard today may bring back memories of a similar loss or recent experience. It is acceptable for them to be dealing with their own feelings of sadness.
6. Help them understand that the intense sadness or hurt will not last forever. “Life will go on and the terrible hurt you are feeling right now will not hurt quite as much after some time passes. You won’t forget (person’s name), or course, but time will help and just because we have to go on with school schedules, jobs and everything else does not mean you care less for the person who died.”
7. Encourage expression of present feelings, be accepting of silence.
8. Inform students of the opportunities to meet and share in smaller groups.
9. Help them eventually share about some of their positive experiences they have had with (use the person’s name)- fun time, etc.
10. Compliment them for being supportive of each other and really helping each other.
11. If possible and it seems appropriate, walk around the campus with one to two students. Physical activity helps some students.
12. Invite students to write, draw, or speak about the student who died.
13. Do not be too structured. Allow students to sit close together, sit on the floor or on a desk or table if it’s safe. Sitting in a circle is a good way to draw people close together. This will develop intimacy and make members of the group feel together and equal.
14. Allow students to talk to one another.
15. Ask students to think of at least three words that would describe the victim(s) and go around the circle and share these words. Don’t force participation, most will want to share.
16. If there is a community wide crisis, let students tell what has happened at their homes and how they felt.
17. Sometimes students want to do something to express their sympathy to the family. The teacher or school counselor could encourage students to write letters or make cards. **School personnel need to read over the letters or cards to make sure they are appropriate before sending or delivering to the family.**