

Auburn Enlarged City School District

Crisis Intervention Plan

Portions of this plan were adopted from the crisis plan of Grand County School District, Moab, Utah with permission. A portion of this crisis plan was researched and written by the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement. Additional resource guides and educational materials were compiled from multiple resources and all sources will be cited.

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What is a Crisis Intervention Plan?

The purpose of a Crisis Intervention Plan and Team is to help address traumatic events through individual and group support for the entire school community. The plan outlines a set of procedures for administrators and crisis team members to follow in order to effectively manage a crisis in the school. A crisis in the school may be brought on by the death of a student or faculty member, as well as by a community loss and/or disaster. The plan also serves to provide various techniques and guides to assist administrators and faculty to support students and each other during such a crisis. Resources for family and the community will also be provided within the plan, in addition to educational resources.

The AECSD Crisis Plan is a living document and will be routinely updated and evaluated. The plan will continue to provide for the planning/prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery to crises.

Planning Phase

Intervention Model & Protocol

The plan outlines a set of procedures for all school personnel to follow during a crisis to minimize effort, confusion and rumors. The model is task-oriented and specific to assist administration and staff during a period when many may be grieving themselves.

Specific protocols are included for administration, teachers and the crisis intervention team. Procedures are included to assist teachers, administration, and counselors when speaking to students about death and/or traumatic events.

A crisis emergency phone tree has been developed and will be modified yearly. Email and the automated phone system will also be utilized to ensure all crisis team members are contacted and notified of the crisis.

Crisis team development will be completed through routine crisis preparedness planning, in-service training around school crisis, and consultation on issues of child development, trauma and bereavement. Additional prevention strategies to avoid, deter and/or stop a crisis may include **protection, mitigation (The action of reducing the severity, seriousness or painfulness of something), and response.**

Guidelines for Personnel Responding to the Death of a Student, Staff Member, or other Traumatic Event

Students and staff are encouraged to attend school after an event as schools can be the best setting to provide services to students (and staff) after a loss that affects the school community.

Responsibilities of School Personnel

The Crisis Intervention Team

The basic intervention team is composed of a crisis coordinator, social workers, school psychologists, principals, school counselors, SROs and nurses. The team consults with school administration and faculty to assist in implementing this plan. Outside agencies, organizations and resources are enlisted for help depending on the nature of the problem. Additional assistance may be obtained from community members or staff who can be of special assistance due to cultural awareness, counseling skills or relationship with the student and family.

The Crisis Intervention Team has been designated with the completion of seven major tasks which include:

- providing support and resources to the administration and faculty
- providing crisis counseling to groups and individuals
- identifying high-risk students and faculty
- designating staff to monitor and mitigate social media response to the crisis
- activating community resources for intervention and/or follow-up support
- contacting and informing parents
- assisting other schools that may also be affected by the event

Crisis Intervention Coordinator (IC)

AECS D's Crisis Intervention Coordinator is the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services.

Public Information Office (PIO)

AECS D's Public Information Office is the Administrative Office and is directed by Superintendents.

Principal/Administrator Primary Tasks:

- verify the death or event and obtain as much information as possible from primary sources (family, police, etc.)
- hold a faculty meeting to discuss the facts of the situation and to outline the intervention plan. If the event occurred over the weekend, consider opening up the building for the faculty on Sunday.
- emphasize facts to dispel rumors and speculation
- keep staff informed
- return to a normal school routine as much as possible.

Intervention Protocol

All information is directed to and verified by the Principal/Administrator assigned. The Principal/Administrator reviews the situation in consultation with the Intervention Coordinator.

The Principal/Administrator contacts the family (in person, if possible) to offer condolences, obtain information and discuss with the family what information may be shared with the school.

The Principal/Administrator should:

- notify staff, as appropriate, through activation of the phone tree prior to arrival to school if outside of school hours.
- hold a faculty meeting to discuss the plan of the Intervention Team
- provide hand-outs and resources for faculty to utilize
- hold a moment of silence, if appropriate
- coordinate all media statements with the Superintendent's Office

The Intervention Team meets with administrators and student services team to:

- exchange information
- identify vulnerable students and faculty and plan for follow-up
- contact parents of vulnerable students
- document all interventions

Crisis Intervention Coordinator Responsibilities:

- activate the crisis intervention team emergency phone tree
- determine if District-wide telephone message should go out on School Messenger after the building emergency phone tree has been activated
- meet with the Crisis Intervention Team to review outlined protocol

- attend staff meetings to outline plan and answer questions
- coordinate intervention management, counseling, and media access
- contact feeder schools to arrange interventions as needed
- contact community resources as needed
- provide resources and/or information
- assist in the principal's debriefing and evaluation
- email all staff
- check with principal regarding possible funding sources (i.e. PTO) for food for crisis intervention

Crisis Intervention Team Responsibilities:

- attend the planning meeting to discuss interventions and protocols
- identify and arrange for specific rooms and areas for group and individual counseling
- determine appropriate hand-out for staff
- attend faculty meeting
- offer to read statement to students for staff members who have recently suffered loss and/or are personally affected by crisis
- determine appropriate suggestions for parents on how to talk with their children, which will be included in the Parent Letter
- be available to go into classes with teachers to assist in discussions
- meet with individual students that are referred or request individual counseling
- identify students that may be "at risk" who need follow-up services or referral
- clarify information and dispel any rumors
- call parents of those students seen during the day, or who may be in need of further help
- coordinate parent meetings as needed
- provide information to staff, parents, and students
- attend debriefing and arrange follow-up services

Counselor (Psychologists, Counselors & Social Workers) Responsibilities

In addition to responsibilities above, Student Services staff should:

- have materials available for students whereby they can complete memory books, notes/cards to family, and/or writing/drawing options
- determine how shifts or breaks can occur for counselors over the course of the day
- one or more counselors assigned to checking back in with teachers during the day to see if they need a break

Crisis Team Documentation

A Crisis Checklist will be completed to help facilitate all essential roles and responsibilities. The Contact Log will be used to document crisis contacts between students and crisis team members who require follow-up as a result of the crisis. A student/staff sign-in sheet will document all other persons who attended individual and/or group sessions. Logs will be copied and given to the building principal who will review and forward them on to the Crisis Intervention Coordinator; originals will remain at the school.

The following required documents are linked below:

- [Crisis Checklist](#)
- [AECSD Contact Log](#)
- [Student/Staff Sign-In Sheet](#)
- [Site-based Crisis Based Response Team Members Log](#)

Teacher Responsibilities:

- attend faculty / staff meeting
- read any prepared announcement to students
- make referrals to the Crisis Intervention Team as needed
- keep all other students in the classroom
- help identify students who are in active crisis and/or need support
- provide information, clarify rumors and misinformation
- modify classes as appropriate
- work with the Crisis Intervention Team to coordinate follow-up services

Please note: The following document from The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement provides a comprehensive explanation of the guidelines above and should be reviewed by all Crisis Team members. A link to the electronic version is [here](#).

Bereavement is common among school children. For school personnel, this means that it is highly likely you will encounter a grieving student almost every day, even if you do not see any outward or visible signs of grief. In some communities, violent deaths may be sadly common – although students in these high-risk communities may appear to be “used to loss,” they are likely to have more difficulty adjusting to multiple losses.

Well-informed teachers and school personnel can be a source of support for students, but unintentionally they may, if not well-informed, be a source of stress. For example, not understanding reactions may lead to misinterpretation of behavioral reactions to loss as misbehavior and disrespect for others.

*Revised Summer 2022 during Professional Development Project by AECSD Student Services Team

How long it may take for students to adjust to the loss will vary, but most children are not “over a loss” in six months or a year. As such, appropriate services should be planned for the immediate aftermath, the months following the loss, and for the long-term.

Schools can be the best setting to provide services to students (and staff) after a loss that affects the school community:

- 1. Schools provide a familiar environment.*
- 2. Large numbers of students can be served.*
- 3. Many children will benefit from supportive services that can be readily provided in a school setting.*
- 4. Students coping after the loss can be monitored over time and referrals for clinical services can be facilitated as needed.*
- 5. Parents may be more willing to accept services provided in school settings, where the stigma associated with mental health services may be decreased.*

By the time children complete high school, most will experience the death of a family member or friend, with 5% of children experiencing the death of a parent by 16 years of age.

SCHOOL CRISIS TEAM INTERVENTIONS

Responding to a Student or Staff Death in a School Setting

When a death occurs, activate the school’s crisis team and plan to address the loss. Coordinate efforts with other schools that may also be impacted.

1. First, it is extremely important to verify the information (e.g., from family members or local authorities).
2. Next, determine what information the family would like to have disclosed (or what information has already been released publicly from a reliable source).
3. Once the death has been verified, notify the school staff and students.

NOTIFICATION

- 1. Notify the School Crisis Team and Develop a Plan.** Consider activating the school crisis team. If initial notification occurs outside of school hours, this may require initiating the phone tree or email to notify the school staff and to invite them to meet before school to organize a unified plan and to brief school staff. If notification occurs during school hours, this may require the distribution of a written statement or a staff meeting.

2. **Notify Teachers and Other Staff First.** Meet before school with school teachers and other staff to discuss what is known about the death. This gives teachers an opportunity to ask any questions they wish and to prepare themselves before they see their students in class. If a teacher does not feel able to talk to his/her students about the death, a member of the crisis team should be available to step in or assist with the notification.
3. **Notify Students Face-to-Face with Familiar Staff.** If a teacher has died, consider having a teacher from the same or a lower grade who is familiar with the deceased teacher's students, or a teacher from the school crisis team who is more comfortable, notify that class. Consider having this teacher remain with the class over the next couple days and have a substitute cover for the less directly impacted class.
4. **Prepare a Statement for Students.** Adults often struggle with what to say. With a prepared statement, teachers can give the same information to all students simultaneously. This should be done in small, naturally occurring groups such as homeroom or first period classes; every effort should be made to ensure that all students are present at the time this information is shared. Include information about the availability of mental health and support services and how students may access those services. Avoid use of public address systems or large assemblies to make such announcements.
5. **Prepare a Statement for Parents.** Draft a letter for parents to notify them about the death and what services are being offered to students and families. Assure parents that crisis teams have been mobilized and support services are available. *(Template letters, that schools can have in advance of a crisis so that notification statements can be quickly and easily prepared, are available at schoolcrisiscenter.org/resources/samples-templates.)*

CRISIS AND GRIEF COUNSELING AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES AT SCHOOL

1. **Help Students with Coping Behaviors to Support and Maintain their Attendance and Classroom Learning:** Following a loss, addressing the event with students directly may decrease the negative impact on school attendance and learning. This can be done individually and in group settings. Students may express many different emotions and feelings. The goal is to allow this expression in a safe and non-judgmental environment.
2. **Help Students Deal with Difficult Feelings:** Students may also have feelings of regret, particularly if they believe they had mistreated the individual in the past. Adolescents may be particularly vulnerable as a group with an increased risk of feeling depressed or anxious and engaging in self-blame or guilt related to the loss. If the death was a suicide (see Special Circumstances below), these feelings may be heightened.
3. **Help Younger Students:** Younger students may have more difficulty understanding death and are more likely to have literal misinterpretations in response to explanations (e.g., if told the deceased is in everlasting sleep, they may become fearful at bedtime). All students (and

staff) are likely to experience some guilt feelings after a death, even if there is no logical reason.

4. Establish Crisis Counseling or Grief Counseling Support Rooms and Protocols:

Establish procedures for leaving class (e.g., Will a pass be required? Should a student who is very distressed be escorted to the support room and for returning to class before the end of the period. If a student remains in the support room at the end of the period, be sure notice is provided to the classroom teacher for that period as well as the next one. Such actions ensure that the school has accurate knowledge about student whereabouts

In the immediate aftermath of a death, limit off-grounds privileges if indicated and establish procedures to clear students prior to leaving school grounds during the school day.

- More extensive services will be needed in the immediate aftermath of a school-wide crisis. Consider having support and counseling services available to students and school personnel before, during and after school hours in the immediate aftermath.
- Plan for ongoing and long-term services to be available to students. If the death was due to a school crisis, plans should be made for commemoration and memorialization, especially at the time of the anniversary of the death(s) (*Further guidelines on memorialization and commemoration can be found online at grievingstudents.org/module-section/commemoration-and-memorialization.*) Additional services should also be planned for dates and events that may serve as triggers for grief of students or staff, such as graduation, the prom, athletic events (if the deceased was an athlete), etc.
- Have substitute teachers available that can rotate among classes to allow teachers to seek supportive services in teacher/staff support rooms during school hours.
- If the death(s) are associated with a crisis that has impacted the community, consider some support services for parents at school in the immediate aftermath.
- School counselors, school nurses, school psychologists and school social workers can help teachers identify risk factors and signs of distress that may indicate the need for mental health services above what is offered at school. As with any counseling services, parents should be notified if additional services are recommended.
- Especially after traumatic losses (e.g., suicide or homicide), be proactive and set the tone for students to seek out counseling and support staff if they have troubling thoughts. Encourage students to identify friends they may be concerned about. These include students who have suicidal thoughts or have made threatening statements.

5. Guidelines for Identifying Students Who May be at Higher Risk for Emotional Distress:

- Students who were close friends of the deceased.
- Students who shared a class with the deceased. Have a member of the crisis team follow the deceased student's schedule to help determine classmates that may benefit from extra attention.

- Students who shared extracurricular activities with the deceased.
- Students who shared a similar characteristic with the deceased. This will depend on the circumstances of the death (e.g., chronic illness – other students with chronic illness; suicide after bullying – students who may be bullied or who had pre-existing depression; car accident – students that have recently received their driving licenses; or pedestrian accident – students who walk to school).
- Students with a troubled or strained relationship with the deceased.
- Students from other schools if the deceased recently transferred or has siblings at another school.
- Students with a history of prior or concurrent losses and/ or emotional difficulties.

6. Funerals, Memorial Services and Spontaneous Memorials

- **Participation of Students:** Students may wish to attend the memorial services and/or funeral of the deceased student or teacher. Talk to the family of the deceased and determine their wishes. If many students or staff are likely to attend, inquire if there may be visitation hours/memorial services outside of school hours. If the services are during school hours, establish a policy for student absence that allows students who have a close relationship to the deceased to attend. Have substitute teachers available for teachers who wish to attend the services. Consider arranging for crisis counseling staff to attend after-hours services that are likely to be attended by large numbers of students.
- **Spontaneous Memorials:** Informal memorials are likely to “spring up” after the death of a student or teacher. Plans to handle the flowers, cards, etc. should be made in advance. Determine the time period that the memorial will remain (e.g., one or two weeks), and communicate to students that the memorial will be removed after that time and indicate what will be done with the non-perishable items (e.g., stuffed animals will be sent to a local daycare center, etc.). Providing alternate commemorative opportunities for the students and engaging students early on in the response efforts or an announcement about the family’s wishes may help to minimize these spontaneous memorials.
- **Timing of Memorial Activities at School:** Commemorative activities and memorialization efforts should not be a focus of the crisis response in the immediate aftermath of a death. If done too soon, there may be a perception that the school is trying to “close the chapter” on grieving.

- **Equitable Policies:** In general, schools should avoid formal commemorative or memorialization activities or acts (e.g., naming a building or hanging a plaque) to mark the death of a popular student or staff member since failure to respond in the future in a similar manner to the death of a less popular student/staff may raise equity concerns; schools may be reluctant to provide similar responses after certain deaths (e.g., suicide, drug overdose) in order to minimize glamorization of the cause of death (see Special Circumstances below). Instead, less formal but thoughtful commemorative activities developed over time with active student involvement is often much more meaningful (and therapeutic) to students and staff. Such commemoration is more likely to recognize and preserve essential memories of the deceased than are more routine and reactive efforts instituted shortly after notification.
- **Constructive Expression of Grief:** Students may wish to write letters/draw pictures to send to the deceased student's or staff member's family. Be sure these are reviewed before sending them out. Also, be careful not to interpret the drawings and writings without adequate input from mental health professionals. Avoid activities that solicit public anonymous statements, such as creating places for students to express their thoughts anonymously about the deceased, as school teachers and staff will not be able to identify students who may express worrisome thoughts (e.g., suicidal ideation or threatening statements).
- **Handling Traumatic Reminders for Students:** School desks and lockers may serve as unwelcome reminders of the deceased student(s). Consider procedures for handling these, drawing on the input of the classmates.
- **Personal Effects of the Deceased:** Arrange with parents/ family members for the return of belongings that is at a time convenient for them, preferably after school hours. Have the personal effects available at the office so that parents/ families are not presented with the emotional challenge of having to clean out a locker or desk. Have a member of the crisis team or a school counselor present when parents come to retrieve a child's belongings.

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

1. **The Role of the PIO:** Media attention is likely after a death of a student or school staff. This is best handled by the Public Information Officer (PIO) of the district or the principal at the school site. Teachers, staff, and parents should be made aware that all media requests should be referred to this individual.

2. Protect Students from Being Re-Traumatized: The focus of all communications, including media coverage, should be on the protection of students and the school environment from unwanted intrusive attention. Television coverage of the event should not be watched in the classroom during school hours. Information about how to handle media requests can be distributed to parents.

3. Ongoing communication between parents and school teachers and staff about how students are doing will be important to ensure appropriate support and intervention services in the immediate aftermath of a death and in the long-term. Parents of children identified as at-risk for mental health difficulties should be given information about whom to contact with concerns and about positive progress. School personnel should also keep parents informed about their children's functioning at school (e.g., school work, peer relationships, and behaviors). Again, parents should be provided with information related to common reactions after a death as well as behaviors that may signal the need for more intensive mental health services.

4. The formal establishment of communications and liaison with community resources is important to develop prior to any type of crisis. Developing a relationship and crisis response role with community-based mental health professionals in advance of the need will allow the school to quickly and effectively activate these resources in times of need. They can provide mental health services at the school as well as be available for students and staff who may need more intensive services. Furthermore, mental health experts can assist schools in:

- Crisis team development
- Crisis preparedness planning and exercises
- In-service trainings around school crisis and bereavement
- Consultation on issues of child development, crisis and bereavement

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

1. Suicide of a Student: The suicide of a student creates unique issues for school personnel.

- Clarify with family about information they wish to disclose about the cause of death, but be aware if information has already been shared publicly by a reliable source.
- Identify students considered at greatest risk for mental health distress. (Use the same ideas as listed above, especially any students who may have known of the plan or students who may become "scapegoats" after the death.)
- Educate students, staff, and parents about warning signs and symptoms of suicide and distribute broadly information about hotlines and support services.
- Encourage students to seek help; de-stigmatize and legitimize the importance of mental health services and communication with others who can help.
- While being sure to acknowledge the individual who died, avoid romanticizing or glamorizing suicide.

- Minimize media coverage of the suicide.
- Be aware of any suicides in the larger community by maintaining good communication with other area schools, community mental health providers/agencies, and the police.

2. Other Situations When the Family May Not Wish to Disclose the Cause of Death (e.g., driving while intoxicated or other alcohol-related death, overdose, related to self-inflicted or intentional asphyxiation): As with any death of a student, initiate the school crisis plan and support services. Like suicide, the death may present a “window of opportunity” to educate students, staff, and parents about life-threatening behaviors and their consequences. Many of the issues to consider with suicide will also apply to these circumstances.

3. Circumstances in Which School Liability May be an Issue: Although the circumstances of the death do not have to be discussed, the death itself will need to be addressed and support services provided to staff and students. Sending letters to parents alerting them of the death as well as available services remains important.

4. Death of Student or School Personnel When School is Not in Session: If a death occurs that is likely to impact broadly the school community when school is not in session, such as over the summer or other vacation, involve the school crisis team in developing a plan including how to contact students and staff such as via telephone trees, email, and mailings.

School administrators may wish to offer the school building as a place for support services to be offered in the immediate aftermath of the event and may choose to communicate this through public media. When school resumes after the holiday or vacation, additional plans should be in place for notification of those students and staff not previously contacted. Have crisis team members and supportive services available once this information is shared with students and staff.

IMPACT ON LEARNING

Reactions after a loss can have a significant impact on learning. Students may:

- Show a decline in school performance
- Have difficulty mastering new material
- Become more irritable
- Become more withdrawn
- Become more anxious or depressed
- Become more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors such as substance abuse, promiscuity, reckless driving, and suicide attempts in adolescents
- Become focused on the loss

Students should be offered additional supports, such as tutoring or participation in mentoring programs to assist them in maintaining their academic progress before academic failure occurs,

which would represent an additional stressor. Allow breaks. Children grieve intermittently and cannot focus on their grief for extended periods. Resume the regular classroom schedule after the break.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

- **Listen** – to what students want to share with you. It may be difficult but just listening can be a powerful healing force.
- **Protect** – students from becoming re-traumatized. Sometimes other students may ridicule or bully students who are highly emotional or cry.
- **Connect** – with students who have suffered a loss by asking how they are doing; checking in with them on a regular basis; letting them know that you are available to listen; or giving them positive feedback about their attendance or classroom work.
- **Model** – adult behavior that shows them how responsible adults react to loss and respond to a crisis. Adults may grieve, but they continue to act with consideration and maintain calm routines at school.
- **Teach** – Crisis counselors can teach students about the common signs and symptoms of grief and/or trauma so that students can assess and understand their own behavior and learn new ways of coping.

Guidelines for interventions with individuals, groups & families

Intervention with Individual Students A crisis is usually a problem that an individual cannot solve on his or her own. It can be a death, a tragedy or any upsetting event. In helping someone cope during this time the following format may be facilitative:

Develop a Relationship:

Listen. Encourage the expression of feelings and actively listen. Be accepting and supportive, resist the urge to fix or minimize. Be patient.

Clarify the Problem:

A crisis causes confusion and disorganized thinking. Active listening will often assist in clarification and organization. Open-ended questions should be used to clarify the central issues and explore possible alternatives.

Evaluate the Seriousness of the Crisis:

It is important to remember that the situation might not seem serious to you but to the person in crisis it may seem hopeless.

Assess the Availability of Resources:

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What personal and community resources are available? Identify professional and informal resources that can be utilized.

Develop a Plan:

Planning should be concrete, realistic and appropriate. Some situations may be resolved simply by listening. Some cases may call for common sense advice. Other circumstances may need referral to community agencies. You may need to make the initial contacts. However, allow the individual to do as much as they possibly can. Don't allow them to begin developing an unhealthy dependency.

Follow Up:

Report any concerns to parents and administrators. Do not agree to secrecy if there is any potential danger to the person or to others. Offer continued support. Document your actions.

Interventions with Groups

- Establish a relationship and set the tone for the discussion. Model an open, caring and supportive style. Validate the sense of loss. Be directive. Arrange seating to facilitate discussion. Introduce yourself and have students introduce themselves if desired. Explain the group process as appropriate. Ask if there are any questions.
- Briefly state the facts and dispel any rumors. Express your feelings of sorrow and sense of loss.
- Use the word "death". Use reflective listening and empathetic style. Allow an emotional release.
- Observe participants and assess the degree of risk for each. Bring a sense of normality to feelings by validating and valuing each statement.
- You may want to have students tell you about the deceased, memories, feelings, thoughts, humorous experiences, etc.
- Discuss the commonality of feelings. Normalize feelings. Feelings are not "good" or "bad". Areas to explore may include guilt, anger, fear or anxiety, shock and sadness.
- Explore ways to acknowledge the death, show concern for the family and constructive ways to resolve personal feelings (i.e., cards, letters, talking with others, supporting others, and as appropriate, return to routine activity).
- Help students identify an adult they can discuss their feelings with (perhaps model how they can start the discussion).
- Briefly discuss defense/coping skills and how they can help or hurt us.
- Summarize and plan. Ask for additional questions or clarification. Re-identify individuals or agencies students can talk to about their feelings and obtain a commitment to use these resources.

NOTE: Students may have cultural or religious beliefs that may cause them to react or cope in ways that are not familiar. These issues should be family discussions and students should be encouraged to talk with their parents.

Interventions for Talking with Bereaved Families

People who are grieving hope to find supportive, caring and understanding people at their child's school. The staff of a school can communicate their concern in action and by the words that they use. "How are you?" is often a brief encounter greeting, but the bereaved person has a difficult time answering this question. Consider making a statement rather than asking a question. Use 'how are you?' sparingly, thoughtfully, and with a willingness to listen.

For further guidance for talking with children regarding natural disasters, the death of a loved one, shootings, and military conflicts, please read the National School Crisis Center resource linked [here](#).

Guidelines for Personnel for Responding to a Death by Suicide

After a Death by Suicide Response Protocol (Postvention)
"What is Postvention?"

Postvention is a term often used in the suicide prevention field. The definition below is from the U.S. national guidelines developed by the Survivors of Suicide Loss Task Force.¹

[Postvention is] an organized response in the aftermath of a suicide to accomplish any one or more of the following:

- To facilitate the healing of individuals from the grief and distress of suicide loss
- To mitigate other negative effects of exposure to suicide
- To prevent suicide among people who are at high risk after exposure to suicide"

<https://sprc.org/comprehensive-approach/postvention>

Goals of Postvention:

- (Intervention) Intervening to help students, staff, and families cope
- (Prevention) to minimize the chance for suicide contagion.

After a Suicide Death - Action Steps

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- Get the facts
- Assess the situation
- Share the information
- Avoid suicide contagion
- Initiate support services
- Develop memorial plans
- Postvention as Prevention (take time to review and revise existing policies)

(Review Model School District Policy for Suicide Prevention [here.](#))

Verification of Information: After death by suicide has been verified...

- Verify that the information is accurate
- Notify the School Crisis Team
- Find out what the family would like shared and what has already been reported by the media/authorities as soon as possible
- Notify students/ Staff and parents
- Determine what resources/support are needed

Activate the School Crisis Team

Involve the Public Information Office (PIO) to the school district (Superintendent)

- PIO should discuss coverage of the story with the media
- Media coverage should acknowledge the loss, but not sensationalize it (e.g., avoid front page, do not give details)
- Helpful link to Safe & Effective messaging
<https://sprc.org/keys-success/safe-messaging-reporting>
- You do not want suicide to look appealing for others (Contagion)
- PIO should also monitor district social media to decrease the chances of insensitive information, misinformation, or information that would potentially cause contagion to take place.
- The focus is on prevention and to provide information to help others (e.g., providing information on community resources)
- Administrator should share information with other leaders from other districts as students and staff could be impacted
- Assign a staff member to follow the students schedule and monitor students/staff interactions

Notify teachers and staff prior to students entering the building if possible

- Discuss with staff the factual information (only share cause of death if family has already given permission to do so)
- This will help dispel misinformation and quell rumors.
- This also allows staff to discuss and ask questions before they have to interact with students.
- This opportunity to discuss will allow staff to inform a crisis team member if they are uncomfortable reading or discussing the topic.
- This sends the message that it is okay to talk about death/ suicide
- Omit graphic details of the cause of death
- Prepare a statement for all designated teachers to read. This should occur in small naturally occurring groups. (e.g., homeroom teachers)
- As a part of the statement, include the availability of support for students and staff.
- Avoid use of a public address announcement or large assemblies.
- Teachers will notify students of the death by reading the prepared statement
- Outline procedures for how students can leave class and access support.
- Have attendance clerk/staff member send students who sign in late to a student services team member to be informed on the crisis (designated person would be best)

Administrator will prepare a statement for parents (PIO/Building Administrator)

- Notify parent/guardian of the death of a student (include cause only if given permission by the family)
- Provide resources being offered to students/families (e.g., link to website)
- Provide paper copies upon request
- Assure the parents/guardians that the crisis team has been mobilized and supports are available

Explaining and Listening about Mental Health Problems and Suicide:

- Helping students understand the connection between mental health problem and suicidal actions is helpful
- This is particularly true for young students who do not understand the cause of death
- With adolescence talk about the connection with depression and other mental health, substance abuse, and suicide.
- Note that when people are depressed their decision-making skills can be impaired.

- When discussing suicide, listening is more important than talking. Emotions are intense and the listener should be compassionate. The role is to listen and support, not solve.

How to address suicide when the cause of death cannot be disclosed

- While respecting the family's wishes, you can still address the topic.
- Example: If the family does not want the cause of death shared or is not in agreement with the media report do the following:
- ***“We are all saddened by _____ death. It is still under investigation. However, many of you have raised the question of death by suicide and /or suicide has been posted on some social media platforms or in the news. Because suicide is such an important topic, let’s talk about it.”***

Any discussion of suicide should include:

- Encouraging people to talk to someone/ information should never be kept secret/Young people should reach out to a trusted adult
- Identification of outside suicide resources (e.g., websites, hotline numbers, local support services)
- This information should be available prior to a suicide crisis and be located in places people can easily see or gather (e.g., main office, counseling office, lunch room, teachers’ lounge)
- Make sure students understand that this information is intended to prevent suicide, not to make people feel guilty.
- Encourage students and staff who have feelings of guilt to share those feelings with people they are close to or a trusted adult.
- Be sure to provide access to mental health providers so these feelings can be shared and explored in private.

Crisis and Grief Counseling and Related Support Services at School

- Availability of crisis, grief, and related support services after a death by suicide is important.
- This allows for support for students and staff in distress and considering suicide themselves or who become aware that someone else may be contemplating suicide.
- Provide students, staff, and families with information on support (who, when and where)
- Outline procedures for how students can leave class and access support.
- Create a staff support room and discuss arrangements for teacher coverage. Hire one or two substitutes to cover classes as needed

1. Help students learn coping behaviors to help them maintain their attendance and classroom learning
2. Help students cope with difficult feelings
3. Incorporate help from supportive school services

Individuals likely to benefit from additional emotional support

- Close friends of the deceased
- Those who had a conflict or a strained relationship with the deceased
- Individuals with a history of depression or similar problems
- Those who have a history of suicide attempts in the past
- Those who have been impacted in their life with a death by suicide.
- If students have shared a class with the deceased
- Staff who have been teaching or have taught or interacted significantly with the deceased.

Participation of students in funeral and memorial services:

- Speak with family about memorial services and determine their wishes
- If the family is allowing students and staff to participate in services...
 - Inquire about services being offered within school hours or outside school hours.
 - If services are during school hours, establish a policy for attendance
 - Encourage parents to attend services with their child.
 - Have substitute teachers available for teachers who wish to attend
 - Arrange for support staff to be available after the services

Students and staff wanting to participate in memorial activities:

- It is very important that schools have a memorialization standard in place and ensure that it is in the suicide prevention procedures.
- Schools should strive to treat all deaths the same way.
- It is important to memorialize a student in a way that does not glamorize or romanticize either the student or the death. (Prevent suicide contagion)(e.g., A special page in the yearbook or yearbook dedication is not recommended, flag will not be placed at half staff)
- Focus on how the student lived rather than how he or she died.
- School staff should work in conjunction with the family to assist students wanting to create memorial activities. It is best if ideas/activities are student driven.
- Memorials should be conducted off of school property, so as to not create a potential trigger for students and staff upon return to the school.

Spontaneous Memorials:

- Informal memorials are likely to spring up
- A plan to handle memorial plans should be made in advance
- Provide students and staff with the information about the family wishes and alternate commemorative events, so people know memorials are taking place.
- Determine the timing, communicate to students the memorial will be removed after a specific time, indicate what will be done after the designated time has passed. (e.g., stuffed animals will be sent to local daycare center)
- Timing of memorial activities at school. This should not be the focus of the crisis response in the immediate aftermath of the death.. If done too quickly, there may be a perception that the school is trying to close the chapter too quickly. (insensitive)
- Schools should avoid formal (permanent) commemorative memorialization activities or acts. (e.g., naming a building, plaques)
- Failure to respond similarly in the future will bring up equity concerns.
- Less formal and thoughtful commemorative acts developed overtime with active student involvement is often more meaningful

Constructive expression of grief

- Students can write letters, draw pictures, create a memory book for the family etc. Staff should review and oversee the activities for appropriateness
- Refrain from making judgements about writings and pictures created by students without student services consultation.
- Avoid activities that allow the expression of anonymous statements about the deceased
- Be aware and sensitive to the fact that school desks and lockers can trigger as reminders of the deceased.
- Personal effects of the deceased - arrange with family members to pick up personal items. Staff gather the belongings together for the family. Choose a time that is most convenient to them and have a student services staff member available when they come pick up the belongings. (e.g., Main office)

Special Considerations unique to a death by suicide:

- While providing interventions for students, staff and families, the support team is also trying to prevent contagion.
- Minimizing the possibility of contagion is done in the following ways...
 - A discussion with local media should take place to ensure that while they acknowledge the loss it should be in a way that does not sensationalize suicide.

- Monitor social media accounts and do not allow for any anonymous ways to share information surrounding the death.
- Memorializing the student or staff member in a way that does not glamorize or sensationalize the person or the death. (See details above).
- It is critical to ask the family what information they are allowing to be shared and proceed accordingly.
- It is important to omit the graphic details of the death if known.
- Address the topic of suicide as a timely preventative measure. Do this in general if the family does not want it attached to the cause of death of their loved one. (See example above on how to do that).
- Make sure that everyone understands that talking about how to prevent suicide is intended to increase the chances of preventing it, not to make people feel guilty.
- Encourage students, staff, and family members who are experiencing guilt surrounding the cause of death to talk about it and seek support.
- Monitor closely students and staff who have known depressive disorders, past suicidal ideation, attempts, have experienced a suicide by someone close to them or has recently had a strained/conflictual relationship with the deceased.
- Be sure not to rush memorial activities, so as to not appear like the school is trying to move past the recent tragic event too quickly. (insensitive)
- Adolescents are vulnerable to suicide contagion, but they are also resilient if the information shared and support is handled in a way that fosters resilience.
- **It is very important to ensure equity in addressing all deaths. Schools should strive to treat all deaths the same way. Without this consistency, school staff risk prejudice and can deeply hurt those closest to the deceased (especially in a death by suicide).**

[Resources for Postvention of a Suicide](#)

Mitigation & Protection Phase

Communicating with the Media about Suicide

Involve the Public Information Office (PIO) of the school district (Superintendent)

- PIO should discuss coverage of the story with the media
- Media coverage should acknowledge the loss, but not sensationalize it (e.g., avoid front page, do not give details)
Helpful link to Safe & Effective messaging
<https://sprc.org/keys-success/safe-messaging-reporting>

- Ensure that suicide is not portrayed as an appealing or justified option for others, which can lead to contagion
- PIO should monitor district social media to decrease the chances of insensitive information, misinformation, or information that would potentially cause contagion to take place
- The focus must be on prevention and providing information to help others (e.g., community resources, hotline numbers, support groups)
- Administrator should share information with leaders from other districts, as their students and staff could be impacted
- Assign a staff member to follow the deceased student's schedule and monitor student/staff interactions

Click [here](#) for Crisis Center letter templates

**** Managing and mitigating the social media response to the crisis event is critical. Click [here](#) for guidance on how to respond effectively.**

Special Considerations

The Crisis Intervention Team will be responsible for considering a number of variables related to communicating and managing a traumatic event. Some considerations include:

- informing faculty and/or students close to the deceased/event before sharing with larger group
- creating an announcement to dispel speculation and rumor and diffuse sensationalizing the event
- determination of the type of crisis (school wide, district-wide, and/or community wide)
- determination of people to be notified
- anticipation of how students, staff, or parents may react
- anticipation of possible media coverage
- preparation of a written statement to share
- potential legal issues
- briefing of secretaries on how to handle questions and direct inquiries to the proper spokesperson.

Anonymous Alerts

In an effort to prevent harm to self or others, the AECSD has implemented the use of an anonymous system for reporting concerns through [Anonymous Alerts](#). Students and staff are trained yearly on this system and the community is also apprised of this reporting tool.

Community Service Connections & Resources

The AECSD is in relationship with local community service mental health service providers. Mental health assessments are completed by the AECSD Student Service Team Members and community referrals are available as needed and upon request. Local service providers are also welcome into the school to provide services to their clientele.

Professional Development

The AECSD values professional development and best practice. Faculty are required to complete yearly safety training and encouraged to select additional training to support their area of interest.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL is currently being provided within classrooms, in addition to individual and group settings, as needed. Students also receive, at least yearly, instruction about Unity and Bully Prevention and the Dignity for All Students Act.

Recovery Phase

The aftermath of a Traumatic event or loss can have a long lasting effect on the school community. Social workers, psychologists, counselors, school administration and outside community agencies will continue to be a resource to students and their families during the recovery period of a crisis. School staff will be aware of the possible impacts of trauma on a student and are able to refer students to appropriate resources to assist with these. Please see the following tips for caregivers and reach out to your building staff if you feel your child is in need of additional support.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vmpEak_iG5L8ZvIJkxJu2iV8cUQ3uBbO0qKPjYe7p5q/view

For additional information on the renewal and recovery process of a school after a crisis please click on the link below.



<https://schoolcrisishealing.org/what-is-school-crisis-recovery-renewal/>

For additional information for teachers assisting students in the months after a crisis, please click on the link below:



<https://www.apa.org/ed/schools/primer/crisis.pdf>

Educational Resources for Families and Caregivers

Childhood Traumatic Grief

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Xx31YtxDoZb-6J0AZGiQ9_0_D8HZXtSPdPXBgbJpETM/view

*Revised Summer 2022 during Professional Development Project by AECSD Student Services Team

Building Resilience

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1y1eDEwhGZx7Vp0uRL6k1ftB6uL_aa3rvrt1a55gzC0A/view

Grief- Myth vs Fact

https://docs.google.com/document/d/18aLLiXzSBxdStyP5RXf0UWdh2I_F7aU2UMWPhSh4Tk/view

Developmental Theories & Grief

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nuVXwkZaoKv3R2_F7dcN36sVlo3kNMhzX7V3I7rgvA4/view

Variables of Childhood Grief & Adolescent Loss

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kXc4jDjUdHxB1xS1MmpQcxc8yRWqeesPxvcU8ra-ko/view>

Types of Losses of Childhood & Adolescence

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FpB462d8QB5oUz49H4PuLYDEarxYSQyolYLzfpGJ46E/view>

Tips for Caregivers- Helping your Child Cope with Death and Loss

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/18Qw9msYVTdZ2aPHpRHxwhbTSntuPsrhn2LXggPmJ0us/view>

Quick Do's & Don'ts

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O1GR6f8KCDOaKXYgLzd5xVBC0Y8OefqeBjuKtnPb96w/view>

Stages of Death, Dying and Grieving

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1M_U7B-6T5W7GfLEwbUPUqGIAXg4wZb7IMcS2ddTMKM/view

Online Resources regarding death, dying and loss

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UQ-1I2oXdTIT8cFHW6ecVh6_N0auy84DPptQVG4K8H4/view

Cayuga County Community Resources

*Revised Summer 2022 during Professional Development Project by AECSD Student Services Team

Counseling Services

Cayuga County Mental Health	315-253-0341
Cayuga Counseling Services	315-253-9795
Hospice of the Finger Lakes	315-255-2733
CASA	315-253-9795
SAVAR	315-253-9795
CHAD	315-253-9786
Hope for the Bereaved	315-475-4673
Hugs for Cara	https://www.facebook.com/hugsfromcara/ hugsfromcara@gmail.com

Housing/Homelessness

Department of Health & Human Services	315- 253-1011
Cayuga County Action Agency	315-255-1703
Rescue Mission	315-253-4801

Emergency Assistance

American Red Cross of Central New York	315-234-2200
Cayuga County Emergency Services/Management Office	315-255-1161
The Salvation Army	315-253-0319
Department of Health & Human Services	315-253-1011
Cayuga County Action Agency	315-255-1703

