

# **Dealing with Schoolwide Loss**

## **A Professional Guide**

**The School Board of  
Sarasota County, Florida  
Pupil Support Services**

*Revised June 2018*

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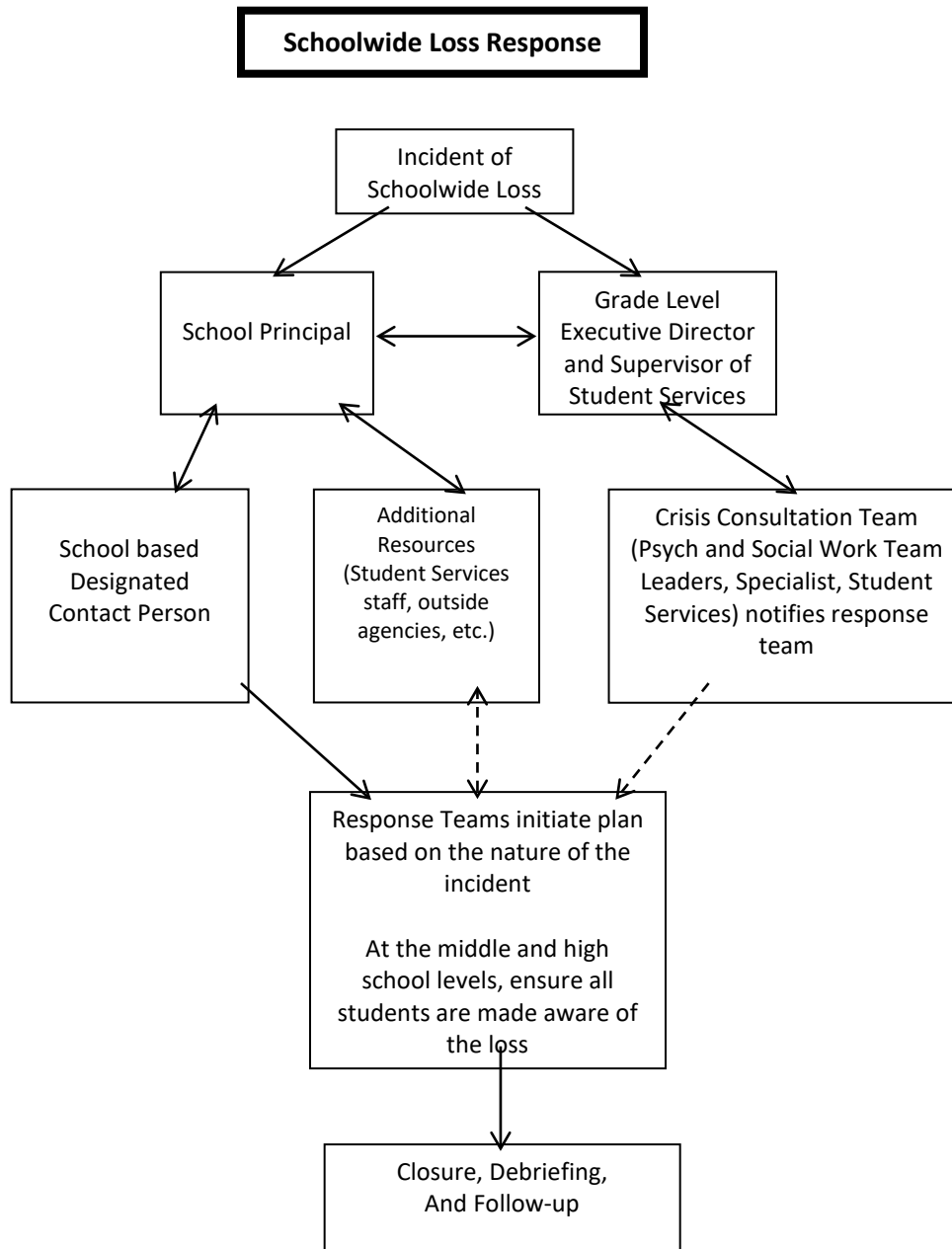
## **Introduction**

In a time of Schoolwide Loss, Student Services is prepared to provide assistance (along with the school-based team) in helping members of the school community deal with the loss. Typically, Schoolwide Loss may include the death of a student, teacher, etc. The school principal, the Director of Pupil Support Services or the Supervisor of Student Services may initiate a Student Services Crisis Team response. The Student Services team works jointly with the school based team in responding to the situation.

The flowchart (see page 4) is provided as a suggested guide in addressing a school-based crisis. As conceived, the school-based crisis intervention team will handle most situations. This Professional Guide provides suggestions for best practices. It is recommended that each school review this information and make changes to accommodate their particular campus needs. In the event that the loss is of a magnitude that necessitates additional assistance, the Student Services Crisis Team is prepared to provide that help.

This manual is the result of a collaborative effort of school psychologists, social workers, and Student Services specialists. The manual will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary. As you work with this guide and have suggestions for further revisions or training related to Schoolwide Loss, please contact the Supervisor of Student Services at 927-4036. It is recommended that any professionals who may be involved in a school crisis should review and familiarize themselves with the materials within this manual on an annual basis.

## Flowchart for Schoolwide Loss Response



## **Types of Crises and Response Overviews**

### **SUDDEN DEATH/ LOSS OF STUDENT OR STAFF**

The sudden death/loss of a student or staff member in the school system is a tragic event. This can include car accidents, homicide, and accidental deaths (i.e., drowning, sports related fatalities, etc.). When a sudden death occurs, members of the school community typically experience shock and denial. This reaction may be prolonged due to a variety of factors. The impact of a long-term illness and our response needs to be altered appropriately depending on the circumstances. For example, some people may experience survivor's guilt or have unresolved conflicts.

### **DEATH FROM A LONG-TERM ILLNESS**

If a student or staff member dies from a long-term or chronic illness, it may cause a disruption in the school community. These could include deaths from cancer, cystic fibrosis or other chronic illnesses. The specifics of a situation change with each event and alter the way we handle the crisis.

### **SUICIDE**

Teen suicide is the second leading cause of death among 11 to 19-year olds. Student suicide has a profound impact on the students, staff, and the community. Students and staff members who held a close relationship with the deceased student should be monitored and be reminded that counseling services are available. It is important to acknowledge the death but not to glorify the event.

If a student presents with *suicidal ideation* please refer to the appropriate staff member who has received Gatekeeper training (most often a school counselor, school psychologist, or school social worker). For more information, refer to the Duty to Inform link found on Sharepoint:

<https://sarasotacountyschools.sharepoint.com/teams/pupilsupport/studentservices/SitePages/Home.aspx>

### **ISSUES SURROUNDING NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY DISASTER SITUATIONS**

National and community disasters (e.g., September 11<sup>th</sup>, Columbine, hurricanes, or the homicide of a prominent figure) may have a direct impact on our students and staff. It is important to maintain a sense of order to the highest degree possible. Return to the normal school routine as quickly as possible and provide assistance to individuals in overcoming the impact of the event to prevent unnecessary disruption. To assist in the grieving process, memorials are often beneficial. Examples could include a mural, tree planting, donation to charities, or a dedication page in the school yearbook.

## RESPONSE GUIDE FOR ALL CRISES

### A. Assessment of Crisis

1. Complete Initial Crisis Information form as team convenes at onset of crisis and update as needed (see page 21).
2. Determine if additional support is needed and appropriate: school or community
3. Determine need for schedule adjustments

### B. Intervention: Communication

1. Faculty meeting
  - a. Review facts of crisis and disseminate information as appropriate
  - b. Inform teachers of the referral process for students
  - c. Share the statement you are asking the teacher to read during first period. If teacher is not comfortable with this, offer support staff to read the statement (see page 20 for examples).
  - d. Designate 1 to 2 support staff to follow the staff member or student schedule
2. Rumor control: use crisis intake form
3. Contact neighboring schools if appropriate
4. Refer media to Public Relations Director

### C. Intervention/Counseling

1. Room for group counseling
2. Room for individual counseling
3. Parent information center
4. Staff support center
5. Provide classroom counseling as needed
6. Refer to community agencies/ inform parents

### D. Intervention: Debriefing (daily)

1. Provide space to review actions of the day
2. Prioritize needs/personnel
3. Identify high-risk students/staff
4. Plan for follow-up

## Mitigation and Prevention: Key Roles and Responsibilities

### Administrator (Principal or Designee)

#### Mitigation and Prevention:

- Establish a Schoolwide plan for crisis intervention and Schoolwide Loss
- Review and update the plan yearly to reflect changes in school support staff and responsibilities
- Establish a “second in command” in case the administrator is not available
- Designate a school based contact person
- Establish and update a telephone tree
- Develop/update a school policy regarding memorials, plaques, etc.
- Establish a plan for student and staff attendance at memorial services and funerals
- Collaborate with school support staff on curriculum

### Student Support Staff

(School Counselor, ESE Liaison, Behavior Specialist, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, Home/School Liaison, etc.)

#### Mitigation and Prevention:

- Develop a list of community-based counseling resources (which provide services on a sliding fee scale) that may be given to parents/guardians.
- Obtain or create a list of possible interpreters available to the school.
- Prepare a box of supplies for use with groups of students and staff.
  - Tissues
  - Paper
  - Pencils and Crayons
  - Stamps
  - Ribbon
  - Pins
  - Books on grief and loss (various ages)
  - Counseling games or activities
- Prepare passes for teachers to provide to students for counseling
- Prepare handouts for teachers and parents on issues related to Schoolwide Loss (e.g., suicide warning signs)
- Facilitate groups and classes for students on skill development
  - Positive Choices/Anger Management
  - Friendship skills
  - Grief and Loss (e.g. Rainbows)
  - Social Skills
  - Tolerance
  - Bullying
  - Etc.
- Facilitate workshops from community agencies on the stages of grief and loss, child abuse and reporting, etc. (e.g., Hospice, Department of Children and Families, Child Protection Team/Center)
- Team members who are trained in the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) **PREPaRe** curriculum may wish to refer to that manual for further information and/or resources.

### Classroom Teachers

#### **Mitigation and Prevention:**

- Review information on grief reactions
- Assemble activities to help students process Schoolwide Loss
- Think about and discuss with Schoolwide Loss team how to address the issue of the student's personal belongings and school space (i.e., desk)

### School Resource Officer (SRO)

#### **Mitigation and Prevention:**

- Educate students and staff on:
  - Drinking and Driving
  - Drug Abuse
  - Seatbelt Safety
  - Domestic Violence
  - Homicide and Suicide Investigation



## **Crisis Response: Key Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Administrator** **(Principal or Designee)**

#### **Intervention**

- Notify Grade Level Executive Director and Supervisor of Pupil Support Services
- Verify the facts of the situation
- Contact school-based response team and have a planning meeting, including district support staff if possible (e.g. define roles, designate location for student/staff support, gather appropriate supplies, designate staff member(s) to follow student schedule, etc.).
- Notify school staff prior to enter school (e.g. school phone tree). Consider ancillary staff such as bus driver, cafeteria staff, after-care, etc.)
- Prepare a factual statement to provide to school staff who may interact with public. (see pages 14-20 of this manual)
- Consider a faculty meeting before school that addresses the following:
  - Review the procedures for the day, the availability of support services, and referral procedures for at-risk students
  - Assess staff needs and capabilities (e.g. team teaching for support, class coverage, etc.)
  - Provide staff with resources/handouts/factual statement
  - Discuss how students will be notified.
- Contact family to offer support. If appropriate, elicit input to respect their wishes (e.g. receiving student cards, attendance at memorial services, etc.)
- Notify parents/guardians of student body
- Consider holding a meeting after school for debriefing and planning

### **Student Support Staff**

**(School Counselor, Behavior Specialist, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, Home/School Liaison, etc.)**

#### **Intervention**

- Cancel non-emergency appointments and meetings to participate in crisis counseling.
- Notify school administration of your relationship with the family
- Notify school administration of specific family circumstances (transportation, guardianship, financial, religious beliefs, other family support)
- If siblings attend different schools, notify school of possible needed intervention
- Provide individual, small group, or classroom support services as needed
- Maintain a list of students needing and receiving counseling services
- Provide services to students identified as having a need
  - Notify parents of the needs of their students that may require additional support
- Assist staff who may be dealing with issues of loss
- Ensure that there is a liaison between the grieving family and school
- Notify staff of grieving family's needs and requests
- Assist in obtaining translators for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and families
- Assist, as needed, in contacting community support agencies to provide services
- Assess school climate and consult with administration on actions to be taken
- Team members who are trained in the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) **PREPaRe** curriculum may wish to refer to that manual for further information and/or resources.
- When assistance is requested at the time of a crisis from Pupil Support Services, the support provided is supplemental to school-based staff.

### Classroom Teachers

#### **Intervention**

- Openly and honestly acknowledge the situation
- Provide students with facts of Schoolwide Loss in age appropriate terms
- Allow students to express their feelings and validate those feelings
- Consult with school support staff (counselors, school psychologists, social workers) for additional resources and support
- Identify students who may need additional support services and refer to school support staff
  - For example:
    - Ask “Who was a close friend of \_\_\_\_\_?”
    - Ask “Who was an acquaintance of \_\_\_\_\_?”
    - Ask “Have you ever experienced a similar loss?”
- Provide opportunities for students to express thoughts and feelings through writing, discussion, and pictures
- Re-evaluate planned assignments and give consideration to modifying assignments
- Utilize assignments which help students express their feelings
- Postpone and reschedule tests as needed
- Monitor for students who may have unresolved grief and make appropriate referrals if necessary
- Monitor students’ time out of the classroom (e.g., time in bathroom, etc.)
- Share children’s books that deal with loss
- Provide student with the opportunity to remember “good times” and share with class

### School Resource Officer (SRO)

#### **Intervention:**

- Contact and help facilitate appropriate law enforcement
- Interview students and staff as needed
- Facilitate access to victim assistance services for families

## **Post-Crisis Considerations: Key Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Administrator** **(Principal or Designee)**

#### **Post-Crisis Responsibilities and Considerations**

- Meet with Schoolwide response team to debrief and plan follow-up services as needed
  - Review actions of the day
  - Identify strengths and weakness of intervention
  - Review status of referred students
  - Prioritize support staff needed for the next day
  - Allow time for emotional debriefing
    - Debrief and follow up with school staff to continually assess needs of staff and students
    - Assist in stopping any disciplinary, scholarship, testing, or special placement notifications that may inadvertently be sent to the family

### **Student Support Staff**

**(School Counselor, ESE Liaison, Behavior Specialist, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, Home/School Liaison, etc.)**

#### **Post-Crisis Responsibilities and Considerations**

- Monitor student's emotional state and discuss students at Intervention Assistance Team if appropriate
- Continue to monitor school climate to assess needs
- Follow up with students to assess need for further support services
- Continue with secondary responsibilities as needed
- Meet with administrator to debrief and plan follow-up services as needed
- Team members who are trained in the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) **PREPaRe** curriculum may wish to refer to that manual for further information and/or resources.

### **Classroom Teachers**

#### **Post-Crisis Responsibilities and Considerations**

- Allow time for students to grieve
- Refer to secondary responsibilities as needed
- Continue to be sensitive to student reactions and needs throughout the year
- Maintain communication with parents of your students to continually assess needs
- Debrief your reactions with your team members or school support staff (Take care of yourself!)

### **School Resource Officer (SRO)**

#### **Post-Crisis Responsibilities and Considerations**

- Provide assistance to students and staff as needed
- Refer to secondary responsibilities as needed

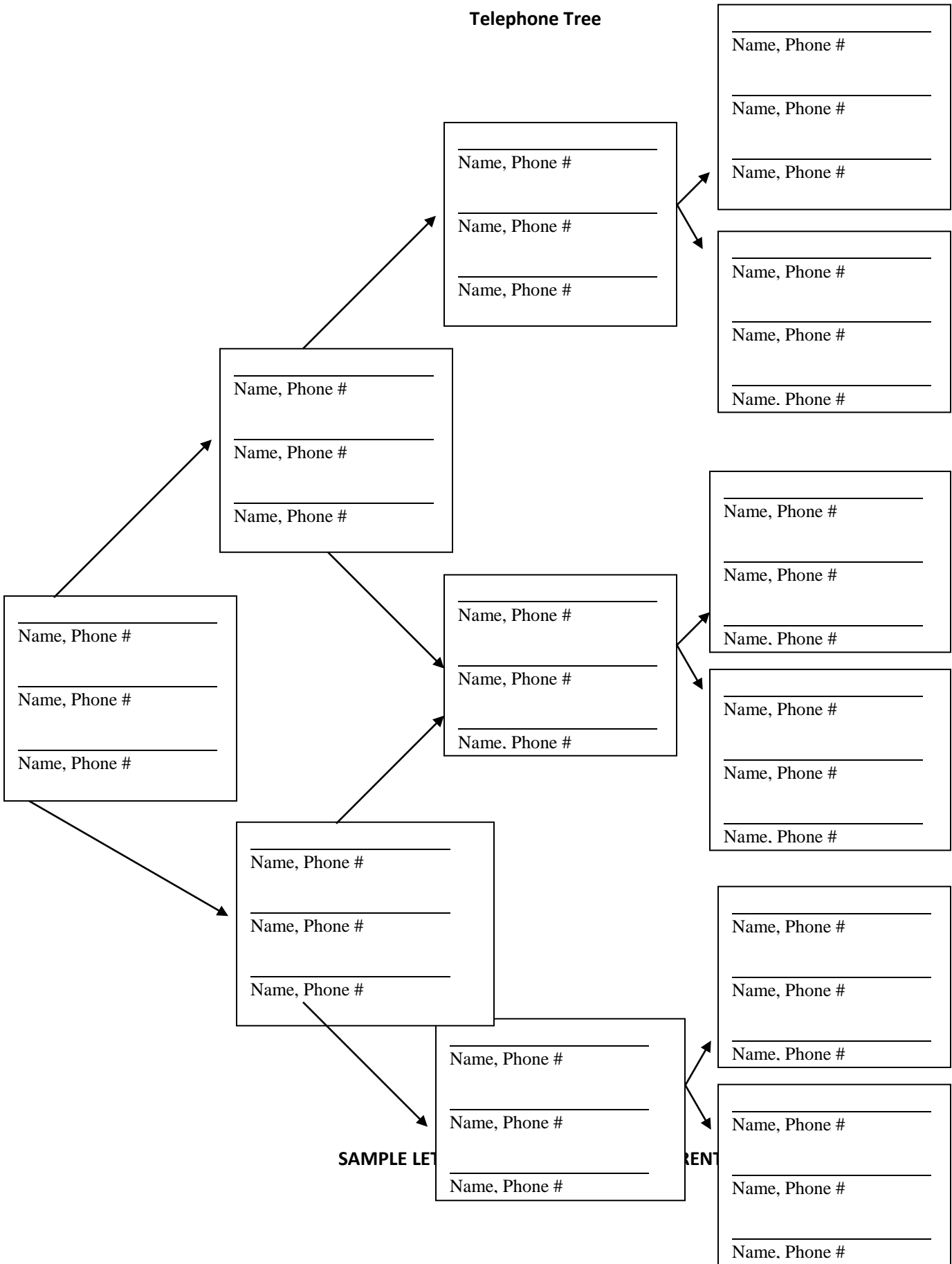
### **Appendix I: Sample Forms/Letters/etc.**

This section includes a variety of sample letters and announcements that can be used in communication with parents, teachers, and students. Some letters and announcements may also be suitable to use via email communication. The following recommendations should be considered regardless of what letter is chosen or developed:

- 1) Name and contact number for your school based designated contact person should be included.
- 2) Description of the event should be factual and specific.
- 3) Include what services will be available at the school. This can vary depending upon the specific incident that occurred.
- 4) Administrators are encouraged to let parents, teachers, and students know what additional information will be shared (e.g., funeral services, donation information, memorials, etc.).

Current available community resources are also included in the next section. The school based designated contact person should share these with families when further assistance is needed.

# Telephone Tree



(Date)

Dear Parents / Guardians,

The (school name) crisis intervention team has been asked to assist the students, faculty, and parents of (name of student) in coping with (identify/describe circumstances). The team includes school staff and district level personnel who have been specially trained to assist in crisis situations. In conjunction with school personnel, crisis intervention team members are available to help students deal with their reactions to the recent event(s).

Some students may request to talk with someone. Other students who could benefit from assistance are reluctant to seek help. We are asking you, therefore, as concerned parents, to let us know if you think your child could benefit from services. If you would like to talk to someone about these services, please call (give name and number of school-based designated contact person) and ask for services. Trained staff will be available to assist in this situation.

Sincerely,

Principal

## SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS REGARDING DEATH OF FACULTY MEMBER OR STUDENT

(Date)

Dear Parents / Guardians,

The students and staff of (school name) experienced a tragedy today with the death of one of our (year) grade (students/teachers), (name of student/teacher). All of us are grieving this tragic loss.

To assist the students and staff to handle this loss, a special crisis intervention team is serving the school. An increased level of individual and group counseling services has been made available. We will continue to provide these services to students as long as they are needed. You may contact the school directly to request these services for your son/daughter, if you feel they are needed.

Please be aware that your child may experience strong feelings in response to this tragedy, including sorrow and depression as well as anger and fear. Your child may have a special need at this time for your comfort and support; please try to be available to listen to them.

This is a very difficult time for all of us. We want to be sensitive to the needs of your son/daughter. Please contact (name of school-based designated contact person) at (phone number) if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Principal

## SAMPLE LETTER FROM PRINCIPAL TO FACULTY

DATE:

TO: Faculty

FROM: Principal

I understand that this is a very difficult time for faculty and students. It may be particularly difficult for some of you most directly related to this crisis. I would like to offer my condolences and my assistance in any way possible. As you may know, a crisis intervention team is available to assist us. The individuals on the team are available to the faculty and students who would like to talk about their reactions to the recent event(s).

The team has requested that you watch for students needing special assistance. These might be students displaying behaviors that are unusual for them. For example, they might be distraught, tearful, excessively quiet for long periods, excessively talkative, agitated, or disruptive. In some cases, students may approach you and request help. If such students come to your attention, please notify (name of school-based designated contact person).

If there is anything that can be done to help you or someone else, please let me know.



**SAMPLE LETTER FROM CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM MEMBER TO TEACHERS**

(DATE)

Dear Staff,

I met with the following students today to conduct grief counseling:

(list student name(s) here)

Please watch out for intense, prolonged, or unhealthy grief reactions. Children may be distracted, tired, impatient, forgetful, or have difficulty concentrating in the classroom setting. These reactions, and others such as recurring headaches or stomachaches, should be viewed as a natural part of the grieving process and children should not be punished for them. However, if symptoms do not subside over time, please send the student to his school counselor who can provide the student with additional support and resources. I will be touching base with these students tomorrow and again next week. I will also be providing Hospice counselor information for future needs.

It is important that these students feel supported as they progress through the stages of grief. Please provide suitable academic accommodations to support the students' efforts to manage their emotions and workload. I have attached a handout on death and grief for your reference. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

(Name, Title)

**Sample letter from school crisis team**

(Date)

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

The students and staff of (Your School's Name) experienced a tragedy today with the death of one of our (X) grade students, (name). (He/she) died (state manner of death). All of us are grieving this tragic loss. To assist the students and staff in handling this loss, the School Crisis Team is serving our school.

The school crisis team at (school name) worked with your child today to help in coping with this loss. The team includes school staff and district level personnel who have been specially trained to assist in crisis situations. During a crisis, it is not unusual for children to have strong reactions. Your child dealt with some of these reactions during a crisis intervention session. Your child may benefit from further support at home or at school. Attached is a helpful guideline when talking with your child.

Attached are handouts on some behaviors a grieving child may display and people in the community that are available if you believe your child needs more help than is available at school. If you would like to talk to someone about these services, please call (give name and number of school-based designated contact person).

Sincerely,

School Crisis Team

### **Sample Connect-Ed Message**

(date)

Good Evening. This is (your principal's name), your child's principal at (name of school). The students and staff of (your school's name) experienced a tragedy today with the death of one of our (subject of teacher) teachers, (name of teacher). (He/she) died (state manner of death). All of us are grieving this tragic loss. To assist the students and staff in handling this loss, the School Crisis Team is serving our school.

Losing a good friend is never easy. (His/Her) passing has been hard on our faculty and I am sure will be difficult on the students who knew (him/her). Counselors will be in guidance tomorrow, (date) for anyone who feels the need to talk to a friendly face. We will also be visiting (teacher name's) classes. Monitoring Facebook and other social media sites is always a good idea. As funeral plans are finalized, we will keep everyone informed.

In honor of what this special teacher stood for and believed in, let us rededicate ourselves to the love of learning that (he/she) embraced every day

## SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **In Classroom: (Individual Loss)**

Johnny will not be in school today. His mother was killed in an automobile crash last night. Her car was struck by a truck on I-95. Johnny will be very sad for a long time. Perhaps we can discuss some ways Johnny might be feeling and how we can all help.

### **In Classroom: (Schoolwide Loss)**

We have something very sad to tell you today. Johnny 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. Johnny died in the crash. It was sudden and he did not suffer.

(Remain silent a moment or two to allow information to be realized).

I know this is a very shocking to all of us and we have planned several things to help you.

### **Over P.A.: (Schoolwide Loss)**

Our school has suffered a great, great loss. Mrs. (name), the science teacher, has been ill with cancer for many months now. We just received word that her suffering has come to an end and Mrs. (name) has died. We will be commemorating Mrs. (name)'s contribution to our school community. At this time, I'd like each class to discuss the ways they would like to commemorate the life of Mrs. (name).

### **In Classroom: (Suicide)**

An unfortunate tragedy occurred to one of our students, (name of student). He/she took his/her own life on (date).

It is sad that this has occurred, because suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

**INITIAL CRISIS INFORMATION**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

School Crisis Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

**Victim Information:**

Victim's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age/Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Language: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Placement: \_\_\_\_\_

Extracurricular activities: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of Crisis:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Death of Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Illness \_\_\_\_\_ Suicide \_\_\_\_\_ Homicide \_\_\_\_\_ Accident

\_\_\_\_\_ Death of Faculty Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Illness \_\_\_\_\_ Suicide \_\_\_\_\_ Homicide \_\_\_\_\_ Accident

\_\_\_\_\_ Disaster: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Impact on School:**

Who: The students and staff affected by the person who has died.

\_\_\_\_\_

How: The circumstances of the death.

\_\_\_\_\_

Where: Location of incident.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Information for the Crisis Team on Site:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Medical Information

\_\_\_\_\_ Police Report

\_\_\_\_\_ Newspaper clippings

\_\_\_\_\_ Person(s) most knowledgeable about incident

**SCHOOL CRISIS TEAM SUMMARY SHEET**

(Confidential, for School Crisis Team use only)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Homeroom Teacher</b>	<b>Crisis Intervener (e.g. name and title)</b>	<b>Parental Contact (e.g. phone call, letter, in-person, etc.)</b>	<b>Follow-up (e.g. date of follow-up meeting, no follow-up judged to be needed, receiving outside, community-based support etc.)</b>
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Note. Adapted from PREPaRE: School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training Curriculum (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) by S. E. Brock, 2011, Bethesda, MD: NASP.

### Schoolwide Loss Administrator Checklist

Use the following checklist to prepare for response to a student or staff member death. Please reference the Schoolwide Loss Manual (specifically pages 9-10) for more detailed information.

Action Item	Completed
Notify Grade Level Executive Director and Supervisor of Pupil Support Services.	
Verify the facts of the situation prior to notification.	
Contact school-based response team and have a planning meeting, including district support staff if possible (e.g., define roles, designate location for student/staff support, appropriate supplies, designate staff member(s) to follow student schedule, etc.).	
Notify school staff prior to entering school (e.g., school phone tree). Consider ancillary staff such as bus driver, cafeteria staff, after care, etc.	
Prepare a factual statement to provide to school staff who may interact with public. Please refer to pages 14-20 of the Schoolwide Loss Manual for sample messages.	
Consider a faculty meeting before school that address the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the procedures for the day, the availability of support services, and referral procedures for at-risk students.</li> <li>• Assess staff needs and capabilities (e.g., team teaching for support, class coverage, etc.)</li> <li>• Provide staff with resources/handouts/factual statement</li> <li>• Discuss how students will be notified</li> </ul>	
Contact family to offer support. If appropriate, elicit input to respect their wishes. (e.g., receiving student cards, attendance at memorial services, etc.)	
Notify parents/guardians of student body.	
Consider holding a meeting after school for debriefing and planning.	

**Special Considerations Related to Suicide:**

School administration must allow students to grieve the loss, but must be careful not to allow them to glorify the person or their method of death.

- Do not organize memorial services for the deceased.
- Do not lower the school flags.
- Do not allow spontaneous (e.g., balloons, candles, flowers, etc.) or permanent memorials (e.g., trees, plaques, statues, etc.)
- Do not permit any dedication of yearbook, yearbook pages, or school newspapers to the deceased individual.
- Do not allow the establishment of a scholarship by either students or grieving parents. Instead, encourage contributions to a suicide prevention organization

## Appendix II: Community Resources for Mental Health Counseling

For specific and most current information on community agencies providing counseling / mental health services, contact United Way Suncoast by dialing 2-1-1 or (941) 308-4357. Find them online at <http://unitedwaysuncoast.org/>

### **Bayside Center for Behavioral Health**

**(941) 917-7760**

1650 S. Osprey Avenue, Sarasota 34239

*Bayside is the only crisis unit for children and adolescents in Sarasota County. Emergency services as well as inpatient and outpatient mental health services are provided.*

### **Centerstone**

**(941) 782-4150**

4010 Sawyer Road. Sarasota 34233

*Centerstone offers outpatient counseling and psychiatric services for children and adults.*

### **Children's Crisis Team**

**(941) 374-3213**

*Short term intensive counseling for children in crisis. The team is facilitated by Jewish Family and Children Services.*

### **The Florida Center for Early Childhood**

**(941) 371-8820**

North County 4620 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Sarasota 34235

South County 6929 Outreach Way North Port, FL 34287

*The Florida Center provides behavioral health services for children ages 0-8 and their families.*

### **Tidewell Hospice Palliative Care**

Sarasota 5955 Rand Blvd., Sarasota, FL 34238

**(941) 894-1794**

*Services are available throughout the county for children with a life limiting disease and their families, as well as for children in families where someone else is ill. The children's program also provides support for children in bereavement.*

### **Jewish Family & Children's Services**

North County 2688 Fruitville Road, Sarasota, FL 34237

**(941) 366-2224**

South County 7810 Tamiami Trail South, Venice 34293

*JFCS provides counseling services for individuals, couples and families, as well as support groups.*