

Missouri School Counselor's Crisis Plan

Revised 2012

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. Because schools are committed to providing for the well being of their students, the counselors in Missouri have joined together to help each other help schools in crisis.

This handbook is a collection of materials and suggestions. Some of it was developed by SMSCA, some of it comes from trainings SMSCA has had, some from resources listed at the end of this booklet, and some of it from districts across the state, such as Mid-Missouri.

Counselors are the best at helping each other, and this project is one of the best examples of counselors helping counselors help children.

The original Missouri School Counselor's Crisis Plan was collated by Sonie Trotter, Retired Professional School Counselor of Cabool Middle School, Cabool, Missouri. With the help of counselors from various Missouri school districts, this manual was adopted and revised by the Missouri School Counselor Association.

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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 third leading cause of death. In addition, many young people are now involved in violent deaths. Schools are committed to providing for the emotional well being of students. During a crisis, a team can further this emotional well-being of students in several ways:

1. Local staff members may be in need of personal support during a crisis.
2. The crisis team functions, as the local school needs it to, from individual counseling with students, to meeting with entire classes, to consulting with local staff members. The team members are flexible enough to meet the needs of the particular school within the framework of that school's crisis plan.
3. A crisis team member can serve as a consultant to an administrator or counselor, rather than having an entire team travel to the school.

It will be the goal of the crisis team to help schools return to normal relatively soon while caring for the emotional needs of the school community. The team will help schools with the initial crisis, leaving them to better care for students in the following days.

The Chinese symbol for crisis means both danger and opportunity, and it is our wish that students come through a crisis in a healthy way.

Chapter 1

Preparedness

District Responsibilities

The individual districts will enforce the plan, and should already have a plan in place. Many schools already have a plan, and know exactly what they need a team to do. Of course, all situations are different, and no one can be completely prepared for a crisis, but a plan for a school building and one for the district should help.

Memorials

It is very important that school districts address the issue of memorials before the need for them arises. When a school suffers a loss through an accident or suicide, it is often suggested that the school becomes involved in memorializing that student.

It is strongly suggested that schools DO NOT become involved in the business of memorials. To have a funeral or memorial service at school is highly inappropriate and can cause problems for students and family members in the future. A school gymnasium is not a good place to hold services, and the school should have a policy in place to prevent this from being requested.

In addition, a board policy on memorials that will be considered will prevent confusion and pain when a crisis occurs. A general scholarship fund or books donated to the library are two suggestions. To allow an elaborate memorial for some students and not for others can be very hurtful and confusing, and can be avoided with advance planning by the school district.

Crisis Intervention Worksheet

This document is designed to organize personnel prior to, during, and after a crisis to minimize the trauma and focus resources.

Date _____

School _____

Phone _____

Principal _____

Home Phone _____

1. _____

Phone _____

2. Crisis Team Members

Phone

3. Phone Tree

4. Media Information (Phone Numbers)

Radio Stations

TV Stations

Newspapers

Media Contact Person _____

5. Building security; plan for monitoring entrances to building

Entrance Location	Who Will Monitor Entrance
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

6. Plan for notifying faculty

_____ Faculty Meeting Possible Times for Meeting _____

_____ Contact faculty by phone at their homes

Activate phone tree or decide who will place calls.

_____ Send memo to each faculty member-explaining crisis

7. Plan for notifying students that a crisis has occurred

_____ Teachers announce crisis to their individual classes

_____ Announcement made over the intercom

8. Plan for informing parents

_____ Letter home

_____ Who will write the letter.

_____ Parent meeting

_____ How to notify of meeting

9. Arrangements for group counseling

Location Room #	Person Responsible for Group
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

10. Follow up activities

- _____ Crisis Team Evaluation (*Located in Chapter 3*)
- _____ Crisis Team Members complete Individual and Group Counseling Summary (*Located in Chapter 3*)
- _____ Crisis Team Members Complete Activities Summary (*Located in Chapter 3*)

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 Actions 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 intervention team.
- _____ D. In the event of death, remove the name from the class roll and other forms of communication. Intercept any disciplinary, scholarship, testing, or special placement notifications that may be sent to the family. Remove personal items of the deceased from lockers, desk, etc. Put personal items of the deceased in a safe place to be returned to the family at an appropriate time.
- _____ 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 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.
- _____ 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 to the building team coordinator.

- _____ 1. Use telephone tree to notify faculty before arrival at the school and 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 has not been reached, reassure faculty/staff that further information will be forth coming.
 - _____ 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, 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 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 – must be appointed by the building principal at the beginning of each school year.
 - _____ a. Consults with principal when a possible crisis or emergency situation occurs.
 - _____ b. Coordinates Plan:
 - Use of assistance from other buildings
 - Substitute Personnel
 - Room Assignments
 - Meeting Times
 - Notification
 - Media Coordinator and Staff Communications
 - Phone Chain and Other Communication
 - _____ c. Manages monitoring and documentation process
 - _____ d. Organizes daily debriefing sessions
 - _____ e. Distributes identification badges to all incoming personnel
 - _____ f. Delegates any of the above responsibilities
- _____ 2. TEAM
 - _____ a. Assists the principal and /or coordinator with developing specific plan for responding to the crisis.
 - _____ b. Accepts the responsibilities delegated by the building coordinator or principal.
 - _____ 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 team leader.

- _____ h. Relays confidential information to personnel director that pertains to the loss.
- _____ i. Anticipates and manages other building, family, and community needs.
- _____ j. Assists other buildings when approved by the associate superintendent responsible for communication.

_____ D. Responding to the Media:

- _____ 1. Prepare a plan for communicating with the media before an emergency/crisis occurs, which includes:
 - _____ a. Who will be the contact and spokes person.
 - _____ b. Where the media will be located within or outside the building.
 - _____ c. Who will be responsible for the building security with respect to the media (they should not be allowed to disrupt the management team or the classroom activities).

_____ E. Responding to Parents/Community

- _____ 1. Activate plan for working with the media.
- _____ 2. Install additional telephone lines, if necessary, in assigned workroom.
- _____ 3. Be calm, patient, and courteous when dealing with callers.
- _____ 4. Reassure parents that the emergency/crisis management team is at work to keep their children safe.
- _____ 5. 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.
 - _____ b. In answer to “What are you doing to keep my child safe?” enumerate measures presently in operation.
- _____ 6. Thank the parents for calling.
- _____ 7. Give time and place, if parent meetings are scheduled.

_____ 8. 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

_____ c. Evaluation

INSERT DISTRICT PHONE TREE HERE

Chapter 2

Crisis Interventions

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 schoolwork, household chores, or other leisure activities.
 - Lack of interest in usual activities – Their minds is preoccupied with other thoughts and feelings and what 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 it 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 ones.
- 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.

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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 care 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 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, but accept the 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 (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. Let students 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.

Discussion Suggestions

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. Why 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 the 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, allows each person to finish his or 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 facts/information 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
 - Cry
 - Write a letter
 - Ride a bike
 - Keep a journal
 - Clean your room
 - Dance
 - Help someone else
 - Listen to music
 - Run
 - Rearrange your room
 - Read a book
 - Create something
 - Go for a walk
 - Draw
 - Plant something
 - Dig in the dirt
 - Yell at your pillow
 - Set some goals
 - Get a neck rub

Tips for Working with Upper Elementary 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 disturbance/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.

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 exists. 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.
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 that 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.” 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 in _____ for those students who need to and/or 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 support 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 OK – 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 have resurfaced 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 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
 - e. consider using an activity as suggested in the packet on Dealing with Death.

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
 - Recognize and acknowledge your own feelings of loss and grief.
 - Talk to someone you trust about your feelings. The staff support room is in _____.
 - Be realistic about what you can do. Maybe you need to take some time for yourself. Do it.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.

Handling Crisis Situations Tips for Teachers

1. Be honest. Before classes find out all the information you can and, according to the instructions from administration, 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 group 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 this can be a valuable learning experience.
10. In case of the death of a classmate or teacher, it's 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 more angry if they are not given time to grieve. Removing the contents of a desk and/or locker should be left to the family. This should be arranged by the school's administrator.
11. 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.
12. In the case of the 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 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 yourself.
12. Obtain outside help if necessary.

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

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. Be realistic about what you can do.
3. Recognize and acknowledge your own feelings of loss and grief.
4. 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.
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.

Suggestions for Communicating with the Media

The administrator in charge of school communication should work directly with building administrators on press coverage when outside media is likely to be involved. All media questions and statements may be deferred to that office. However, information of a written nature should only be released after consultation with the designated administrator.

Before a Crisis Occurs

Prepare a preliminary plan for communicating with the media prior to a crisis situation. This plan should be short and simple. It should have activities, roles and responsibilities clearly defined. For example, it should be decided in advance.

- Who is to be called?
- Who should make the contacts?
- Who is to communicate with the media?
- (no one has to speak with the media)
- Where the media is to be located within or outside the building
- Who is responsible for building security with respect to the media?
- (they should not be allowed to disrupt the crisis intervention efforts)
- How staff is to handle contact from the media

At the Time of a Crisis

Briefly state the known facts of the situation, but do not give name of victims or persons responsible. Do not go into depth, or say more than is needed. Do not speculate about motives or feelings. If civil authorities are involved, refer questions that require their expertise. Review what is being done to respond to the situation. In general terms, identify the support being provided to the students, their families and staff. Emphasize that the primary goal is to help the students through the crisis situation. Let the media know that the school will try to maintain or quickly return to its normal routine and schedule, based on the response of staff and students and how well people are coping. Do not give details or the names of the people involved. Try to portray people in as positive manner as possible.

Script for Announcing Event:

1. _____ (was killed, was seriously injured, is seriously ill, committed suicide). Then relate the facts that were related during the 7:30 a.m. faculty meeting or the initial faculty meeting concerning this issue. Be certain that whatever is shared has been cleared with the family of the victim(s).

2. Options for dealing with student/class reactions.

Allow for discussion, i.e., say “how do you feel about what I just read”. What other concerns/needs do you have?

A. Points to consider in discussion:

- Don't be flippant.
- Don't be excitable; emotional control is an important behavior to model.
- Don't preach; preaching can produce anger.
- Don't minimize students' reactions.
- Don't use jargon; talk in language the students understand.
- Don't expect to have all the answers to students' questions and concerns.
- Don't dramatize death.

Not everyone will be comfortable leading a discussion; if help is needed, contact your building coordinator.

At the beginning of each class, teachers should allow a few minutes for students to talk about their reactions to the situation. Teachers should try to resume the normal class schedule as soon as possible.

3. How to respond to feelings students might experience.

Take every complaint and feeling the person expresses seriously. Do not dismiss or discount the person's concerns; however, reassure the person that all perspectives need to be considered.

4. Look for signs of emotional reactions over several days that may need attention and then refer to counselors or designated crisis center:

- Crying
 - Major change in student's behavior
 - Withdrawal from normal class participation
 - Change in student's work/study habits
 - Excessive daydreaming
 - Increased absences
 - Passivity in class
 - Defiance, especially if this was not a problem before
 - Lingering sadness (sadness for several days is to be expected, but IMPROVEMENT should be seen within one week to ten days)
5. Escort students in distress to a designated room for assistance.

Sample Announcements

In Classroom: (Individual Loss)

Johnny will not be in school today. His mother was killed in a automobile crash last night. A truck on Highway 10 struck her car. 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 him.

In Classroom (School-wide 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 very shocking to all of us. Would anyone like to share/talk about what they are feeling?

CHOOSE ONE OR TWO OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS. COMPLETE THE STATEMENTS BY SHARING YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED. YOU MAY WRITE OR DRAW.

I remember when...

I feel...

I wish...

When we....

Happy times I remember...

My thoughts today are...

You are/were...

Sometimes I wanted...

I wish I told you...

My memories are...

I need...

I want...

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 OK 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 or 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

Chapter 3

Crisis Evaluation

After a Crisis Occurs

The evaluation forms in this section may be found helpful in writing a follow up report for the administration of a school/district. Any report could aid with revisions of adopted policies dealing with a crisis.

Announce any meetings for parents or the community that will be scheduled. Include any other information, such as memorials or special activities that is important for the public to know.

Publicly thank any district employees, students, parents, or outside persons who played an important role in responding to the crisis and who deserve recognition. This may be most appropriate after the crisis has been resolved. The information can be part of the press release that provides an update on the situation. Press releases will need to be cleared by the school communication office.

Take Care of Yourself

1. Recognize and acknowledge your own feelings of loss and grief.
2. Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.
3. Be realistic about what you can do. Maybe you need to take some time for yourself. Do it.
4. 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.
5. 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.
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.

Crisis Team Evaluation

School _____

Date of follow-up _____

Respondents _____ Position _____

Nature of emergency/crisis _____

Please complete this evaluation of the recent services provided for your school by the Emergency/Crisis Management Team.

1. Was the service delivery of the crisis team timely?

Very _____ Somewhat _____ Not at all _____ NA _____

Comments _____

2. Did the services of the crisis team meet your school's individual needs?

Very _____ Somewhat _____ Not at all _____ NA _____

Comments _____

3. Did faculty consultation meet your faculty's individual needs?

Very _____ Somewhat _____ Not at all _____ NA _____

Comments _____

4. Was the in-service to the faculty effective?

Very _____ Somewhat _____ Not at all _____ NA _____

Comments _____

5. Was individual counseling provided to students a valuable aspect of the crisis team's service?

Very _____ Somewhat _____ Not at all _____ NA _____

Comments _____

6. Was group counseling provided to students a valuable aspect of the crisis team's service?

Very _____ Somewhat _____ Not at all _____ NA _____

Comments _____

Group Counseling Summary

Team Member(s) _____

Date _____ Time _____

Purpose of group _____

Intervention strategies utilized _____

Brief Summary _____

Students Present

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Activities Summary

School _____ Date form Completed _____

Principal _____

Nature of Crisis _____

Dates of Site _____

Team Members on Site _____, on-site Coordinator

School personnel involved in direct service to students:

Name _____ Position _____

Name _____ Position _____

Name _____ Position _____

Type of services provided by Team:

Team Contacts

Number of students assisted individually or in small groups _____

*Total student contacts _____

Number of staff assisted _____

*Total student contacts _____

Number of families assisted _____

*Total family contacts _____

Team recommendations _____

**Includes multiple sessions with the same individuals*

Chapter 4

Special Circumstance: Grief Counseling

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

Personal Possession Plan – As soon as possible, a member of the Crisis Team goes to the student’s locker and other areas where he/she may have possessions to empty the contents. This keeps a mass of students from witnessing removal of the possessions and prevents students from memorializing the locker or other occupied area.

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.

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, and 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 make-up 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 Crisis Team member or school counselor will need to follow through with this procedure.

Sample Board Policy:

Crisis Plan/Memorials and Memorial Services

The Anywhere School District recognizes its responsibility to have effective written emergency procedures for crisis situations. These procedures will be outlined in a handbook that has received approval from the Board of Education. The handbook will be reviewed and revised as necessary.

It is very important that school districts address the issue of memorials and memorial services before the need arises. When a school suffers a loss through an accident or suicide, it is often suggested that the school become involved in memorializing that student.

It is the policy of the Anywhere School District to NOT become involved in the business of memorial services. To have a funeral or memorial service at school is highly inappropriate and can cause problems for students and family members in the future. A school gymnasium is NOT a good place to hold services and this policy will prevent this from being requested for student/faculty services. To allow an elaborate memorial for some students and not for others can be very hurtful and confusing and can be avoided with advance planning.

Memorial and Memorial Services shall be treated as follows:

1. Any memorial contributions generated by schoolmates will be limited to educational resources (i.e. books, videos, etc.), living memorials (i.e. trees, flowers, etc.) or items related to appropriate extracurricular activities. In no case will identifying labels, plaques, or pictures be an acceptable part of the memorial contribution by friends or families.
2. Memorial contributions made by family or friends can be directed to individual or general scholarships, educational resources, living memorials, items related to extracurricular activities or facilities. Scholarship plaques will remain as long as the scholarship is in effect.
3. No funeral or memorial service for student or faculty will be held on school property. However, the student body may participate in a brief time of remembrance. The family of the deceased will be notified.

Adopted: Date

Anywhere School District, Anywhere, Missouri