



**Hastings and Prince Edward
District School Board**

**HASTINGS
AND
PRINCE
EDWARD
DISTRICT
SCHOOL
BOARD**

TRAGIC EVENT RESOURCE GUIDE

May 2011

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Introduction

Tragic events are a reality that schools face. The response of the school can ease the problem or contribute to it. Educators realize that tragic events do impact on student performance and life in school. Other students and staff are affected by tragic events as well as the person directly involved. The way that an event is handled within a school and the educational system can significantly reduce negative consequences.

This document is intended to provide the school administrator with a quick reference which highlights the main considerations to take into account when faced with a tragic event. It is not intended to be a comprehensive manual dealing with all of the issues surrounding death, suicide and grieving.

Resources and supports are available from the Child and Youth Counsellor Team who have knowledge and experience in this area. The Central Child and Youth Counsellor Tragic Event Response Team will provide:

- in-services and/or resource materials to schools
- support, recommendations and direction to principals and school personnel
- direct support in the school when requested by the school administration

To enable this document to serve as a quick reference it has been divided into six sections:

- **Tragic Event Guidelines:** A guideline for administration to follow in the event of a tragic event.
- **Suicide/Homicide:** A guideline which addresses specific issues and considerations surrounding suicide/homicide.
- **Samples/Handouts:** Suggested outlines for letters home, sample scripts to be read to students and handouts for staff, students and parents.
- **Referral Services:** Lists community services which are available to help with the problems surrounding a tragic event.
- **Action Plan For Creating A School Based Tragic Event Response Team.**
- **Appendix: School Memorials: Should We? How Should We? By William Steele, PsyD, MSW**

The goals of this document are to help a school in a crisis situation to:

- maintain a reasonable routine
- allow for appropriate expression of grief or loss
- identify children/students or staff who might be at risk
- identify and quickly access available resources within the Board and the community

What is a Tragic Event?

A tragic event is virtually anything out of the ordinary, something unexpected that disrupts the emotional well-being of students and staff members. Within this broad umbrella are crises and traumatic events, which may require somewhat different responses. There are at least three possible levels of response to a critical incident:

- legal (involving the police or justice systems);
- medical (threats to physical health and involving physicians and hospitals);
- mental health (response required to help people deal emotionally and psychologically with trauma).

The following, while not intended as a complete list of the possible critical incidents which could befall a school community, is illustrative of the type of occurrences for which the information in this **Resource Guide** should be helpful:

- death (expected or sudden) of a current or former student, staff member, parent or sibling of a student, spouse or child of a staff member, by suicide, homicide, accident or illness;
- serious accident involving a student or staff member;
- serious illness of staff member or student;
- staff member or student arrested, accused of a serious crime;
- disease threat (e.g., meningitis);
- assault of a student or staff member;
- a fire at the school;
- an armed intruder in the school
- a bomb threat or other threat requiring evacuation of the school;
- an accident involving serious injury, witnessed by students;
- a student reacting to a substance overdose.

Tragic Event Response Teams

The odds are high that a critical incident will affect a school sooner rather than later. Such an event is usually extremely disruptive and upsetting to the school community. Recovery from a critical incident is much faster if people know how to respond and are able to contain the crisis and to limit the damage. There is no better plan than good preparation.

School-Based Tragic Event Response Team

It is strongly recommended that each Principal establish a School-Based Tragic Event Team. At the **Secondary** level, teams should consist of Administration, Guidance Personnel, Child and Youth Counsellor, Key Teacher. At the **Elementary** level, Principal may contact their Child and Youth Counsellor and access the CYC Team for additional supports. Secretarial staff is key during a tragic event as they are often dealing with communication (telephone inquiries, letters home, etc.).

Central Child and Youth Counsellor Tragic Event Response Team

When a tragic event occurs, principals shall contact the CYC assigned to their school to consult regarding the appropriate response. The coordination of additional CYC support may be organized by contacting the CYC Supervisor. Each crisis is unique and requires a concise assessment as each situation arises. This assessment may change as time and events unfold.

Section 1

TRAGIC EVENT GUIDELINES

Responding to a Tragic Event – Guidelines

Crisis Occurs:

Step One: Assess the Problem

Clarify Facts from reliable sources (police, family if appropriate). Separate fact from rumour. It is important to clearly establish the wishes of the family concerning the school's involvement.

Reflect on your own state of mind given that you will be caught up in the grief of the situation. This may allow you to make more appropriate decisions as to the delegation of responsibilities.

Obtain Permission from the family to release the name of the deceased or injured person(s).

Step Two: Notification / Action

Inform Staff:

Contact the Tragic Event Response Team for your school. In the event of a multiple death event, increased support staff will likely be needed.

The Principal shall notify the following individuals: (recommended communication chain on page 8)
(timing and order may vary)

- Superintendent of the School or Department (who will notify Director, then Trustees)
- School Child and Youth Counsellor
- Child and Youth Counsellor Supervisor
- Communications Officer
- School Staff via telephone tree (telephone contact preferred over electronic communication; gives staff an opportunity to discuss the situation)
- Other persons directly associated with the school (absent staff members, support staff, parent volunteers, feeder schools or other schools which might be involved, i.e. siblings of student)

Meet with staff:

Depending on the nature of the crisis, all teaching and non teaching staff should be involved. When possible, notify staff of the event and stand up staff meeting prior to school opening via telephone tree (if crisis occurs during the school day schedule the stand up staff meeting as soon as possible). The stand up staff meeting (approximately 15-20 minutes) should address the following:

- Clarify the facts, have picture of deceased available.
- Introduce any members of the School Based and/or Child and Youth Counsellor Tragic Event Teams who are present.
- Allow time for staff to discuss and internalize this information.
- Explain how students should be informed (Script: see Section 3 – Samples and Handouts).
- Some teachers may not feel emotionally able to share information with their class. Administration may need to identify support staff (i.e. CYC/Tragic Event Team) to go into the classroom for support and/or to read the script for the teacher.
- Assess the needs of students and staff. Identify students who may need additional support.
- Supply help may be necessary to relieve some of the teachers of regular duties.
- Inform staff of additional supports/resources available to them (i.e. school CYC, CYC Tragic Events Team, EAP counsellor) and provide handouts (see section 3).
- Decide if any scheduled events need to be cancelled.
- Inform staff of location of counselling centres within the school.
- Request that staff check e-mail regularly throughout the day for any new information.

Inform Students:

P. A. announcements are **NOT** recommended. **Do Not Announce Via Assembly.**

- Provide a written script for staff (see Section 3 – Samples and Handouts). It is recommended that classroom teachers or designated staff read the prepared script directly to the students.
- Prepare teaching and non teaching staff for a variety of grief reactions (see Section 3 – Samples and Handouts).
- Set up a system to notify those students and staff members who are not present in the building that day.

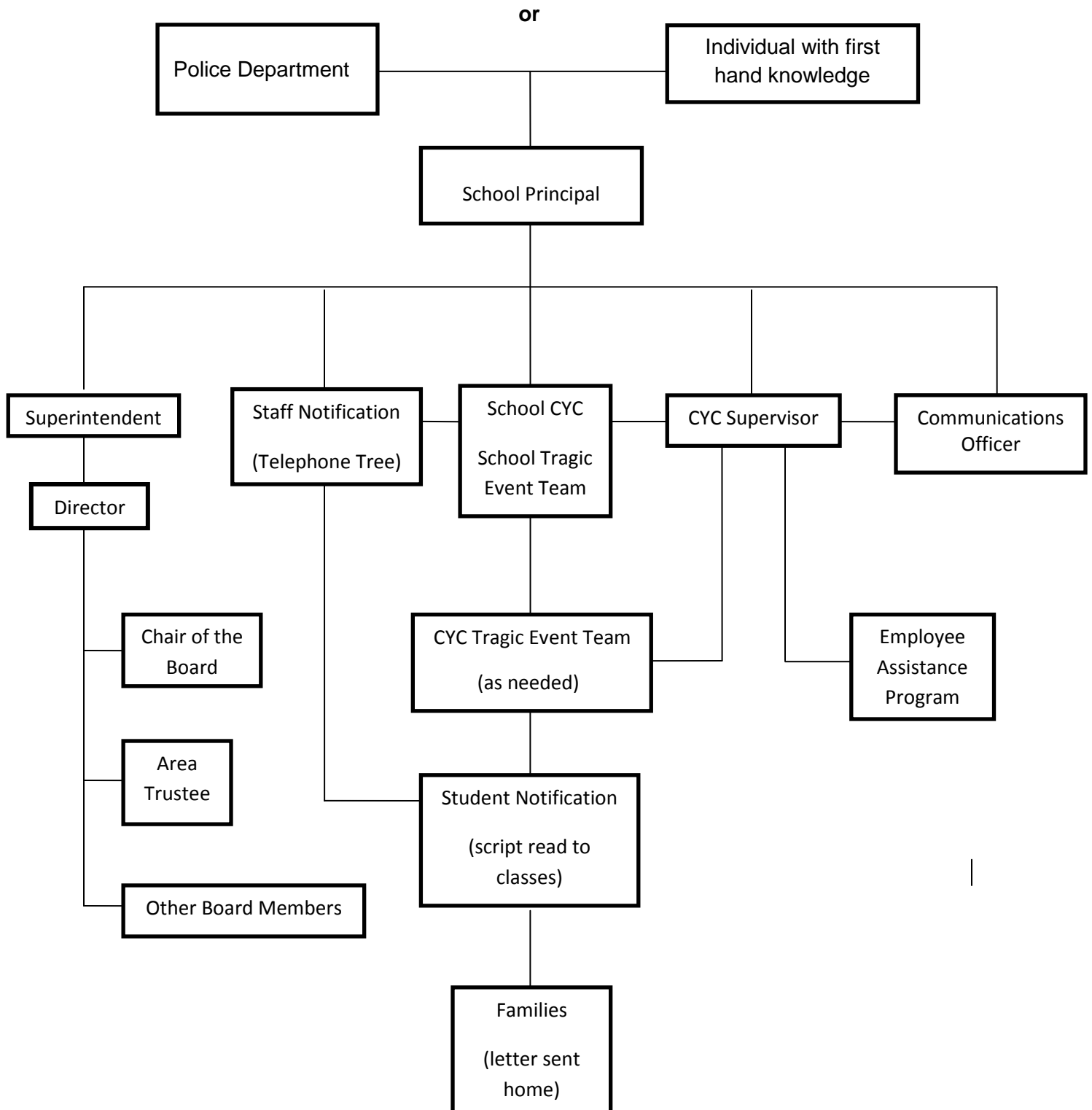
Additional Action Steps:

- Consider flying the flag at half mast when dealing with the death of a current student or staff.
- Arrange for a quiet place for the Tragic Events Team to work.
- Be aware that impromptu memorials may be set up at various locations (desk, locker). These are difficult to remove once established. Prevention is preferred.
- Designate one person to be the contact with the family of the student or staff member involved. Be prepared to respect cultural and religious differences.
- All media contact should go through the HPEDSB Communications Officer.
- Designate staff to handle telephone enquiries from the community members, and indicate what the appropriate response should be.
- Continue to keep students and staff up-to-date with information as it becomes available.
- Prepare a letter to be sent home at the end of the day that includes a short factual statement about the incident, the school's response to it, funeral arrangements, with permission, and condolences to the family (see Section 3 – Samples and Handouts).
- Arrange a staff debrief meeting for the end of the day to be facilitated by the Tragic Event Team.
- Determine the wishes of the deceased's family regarding school involvement in the funeral. Contact the family to find out about funeral arrangements and whether it would be appropriate for students and staff to attend.
- Advise students and staff of funeral arrangements and the best way to express condolences. If appropriate, make changes to the school schedule to accommodate the funeral, or the absence of teachers who cannot be in class.
- Express the school's condolences to the family of the deceased (flowers, letters, cards, etc.).

Step Three: Follow-Up

- Pull the OSR and maintain it in the possession of the principal until advised otherwise. Make changes to computer data, mailing lists, etc., if necessary. Advise the Special Education Office, if applicable, so records can be amended.
- Arrange to have the student's locker/desk/teacher's desk, etc. cleared and belongings gathered, if appropriate. Confer with family as they may choose to be involved in this process. The Child and Youth Counsellor will have suggestions regarding how to handle these tasks.
- Contact your School Photography Company to enquire about current year school pictures that can be made available to the family (Lifetouch Canada will provide a package free of charge).
- Be prepared to respond to requests for memorialisation. The Child and Youth Counsellor may assist with guidelines in this area (see Appendix A: "School Memorials: Should We? How Should We?" by William Steele, PsyD, MSW. Reprinted from *Trauma and Loss: Research and Intervention*, V4N2.)
- Monitor the behaviour, performance, attendance and support of students and staff on an on-going basis, especially those thought to be greatly affected by the incident. Advise your CYC about these individuals.

Tragic Event Communication Chain



Identifying Needs

Administrators Need:

- Information about the death
- Information about the deceased
- System for contacting necessary tragic event team members
- Strategy for responding to media requests (contact HPEDSB Communications Officer)
- Support
- Opportunity to debrief

Teachers and Other School Staff Need: (Administrative, Secretarial, Custodial, Etc.)

- Information about the death
- Information about the school's response plan
- Permission to grieve
- Place to grieve
- Preparation for student's reactions
- Guidance in structuring school activities
- Involvement in the identification of high-risk students
- Information about resources within the school and community
- Support
- Opportunity to debrief

Students Need:

- Information about the death
- Permission to grieve
- Place to grieve
- Outreach to students most affected by the death
- Information about resources within the school and community
- Support

Parents Need:

- Information about the death
- Information about the school's response
- Preparation for children's reactions
- Information about school and community resources
- Support

Child and Youth Counsellors Need:

- Information about the death/event
- Information about the school's response plan
- Quiet/private space(s) to work with students/staff
- Opportunity to access support from additional CYC team members
- Opportunity to debrief
- Support

Four Tasks of Grieving

Task	School Response
<p>TASK 1:</p> <p>To accept the reality of the loss</p>	<p>Acknowledge the loss. Don't ignore what happened, but make sure it is talked about in a structured, controlled manner. Your taking active control is one way to minimize the situation getting out of control.</p> <p>Stick to the facts! Use written communication whenever possible to minimize speculation, rumours or gossip about the death. Steer clear of making value judgements, offering explanations or attributing blame. Having data that is as factual as possible assists in helping people acknowledge that the loss has really occurred.</p>
<p>TASK 2:</p> <p>To work through the pain of the loss.</p>	<p>Provide a time and place to grieve. Recognize that the first day after the death is the most chaotic and that the level of visible grief will decrease after the funeral. Provide students and staff with opportunities for individual and group expression of their grief.</p> <p>Assess the needs of high-risk students and use your CYC and/or community resources to provide them with assistance. Anticipate the critical times when the intensity of the loss might resurface (holidays, special school events and anniversaries) and reach out to those who might have trouble getting through. Remember that close friends of the deceased may have more difficulty 6 to 9 months after the death with the long-term implications of the loss and may benefit from support at that time.</p>
<p>TASK 3:</p> <p>To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.</p>	<p>Assist people in managing without the deceased. This may be as simple as arranging for substitute teachers or as complicated as helping people recognize and reassign the emotional roles filled by the deceased. Recognize that the empty desk, locker or parking space left by the deceased student is a concrete reminder to the entire school of the loss. Involve students in problem-solving to address how to handle these reminders in unsensationalized ways that both respect the deceased and recognize the fact that life must go on.</p>
<p>TASK 4:</p> <p>To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life.</p>	<p>Give your school time to come to terms with the loss. Remember the resolution of grief is a focus on the meaning of life of the deceased, not on his/her death. Use caution in your selection of memorial activities and avoid expressions that will be continued reminders of the traumatic death. Recognize members of the school community who seem to be stuck in the process and refer them for additional help.</p>

Managing Sudden Traumatic Loss in the Schools, Underwood & Dunne-Maxim

Working with the Media during a Crisis

During a crisis, conveying timely and factual information is critical. It can help to dispel rumours and relieve anxieties.

Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board utilizes a centralized approach when responding to media during crisis situations. The Director of Education, or designate, is the official spokesperson. The Communications Officer is the primary contact person and is responsible for coordinating media and public communications through the Director and other school/board officials. No other employee is authorized to speak with reporters or to agree to interviews on behalf of Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board unless directed by the Communications Officer or a member of Senior Administration.

School administrators and staff are responsible for maintaining school and class operations as normal as possible. During crisis situations, student safety is paramount and should be handled as the first priority at all times.

Students and the media

Often during a crisis, reporters will attempt to speak with students to try to find out more about the individual(s) involved, the situation itself, and their personal feelings. It is important to keep in mind that students are not authorized to speak on behalf of Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board. Equally as important is to keep in mind that, although students may seem eager or willing to speak with reporters, there is exposure to them doing so. Their comments will be lasting; they will not go away. Their image and comments will be posted on the Internet and forwarded through social media channels.

Prepare students for the possibility of reporters contacting them. For example, advise students that:

- They are not allowed to speak with reporters while on school property
- If they agree to be interviewed, they should be respectful in their comments and reflections about the individual(s) involved, the situation itself and their personal feelings
- If they are interviewed, they should let their parents know right away
- They should be reminded that their comments will be public and will last 'forever'

Death of a Staff Member

Special Consideration

Whenever a staff member dies (teaching and/or non-teaching staff) some additional considerations are necessary. HPEDSB's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) should be accessed for support and staff debriefing. The EAP Co-ordinator may be available to attend the school to support staff. Speak to the CYC Supervisor to arrange this.

Appoint a liaison to maintain contact with the family

One person may be selected to maintain contact with the family. The person could be the principal or someone else whom the family knows. While the role of the liaison person can vary, some functions include:

- keeping staff informed with respect to funeral arrangements
- identifying needs
- arranging tributes (see Appendix A: "School Memorials: Should We? How Should We?" by William Steele, PsyD, MSW. Reprinted from *Trauma and Loss: Research and Intervention*, V4N2. - the Child and Youth Counsellor may assist with guidelines in this area)
- advising the family to contact Human Resources and Payroll/Benefits

Notify the Human Resources Department

Human Resources and Payroll/Benefits carry out a number of activities which are helpful:

- determine pension benefits and insurance coverage prior to the family's inquiries
- determine other benefits to which the family may be entitled
- notify others who can be of assistance: Administrators, Federation President(s)

Issues and Questions Which May Arise After a Tragic Event

Identify Other Students at Risk

It is difficult to predict who will be dramatically affected by a tragic event. Sometimes a student or staff member far removed from the person involved may react very strongly. The behaviour may be a reflection of prior grief - i.e., the death has triggered painful memories or associations. This is called reflected grief. Deal with these situations very carefully. Ensure that all staff members are aware of this possibility and that negation of the feelings does not occur.

Religious/Cultural Differences

Families with different religious and/or cultural backgrounds have varying support systems and traditions. Ensure that the staff member designated to contact the family is sensitive to the differences. Schools must maintain a balance to meet the needs of family and community.

Maintain Program Balance

Carry on regular school business as soon as possible. If the school comes to an emotional standstill, reflected grief may take over. Make special provisions for staff and students who need time to adjust but return to normal routines quickly. Do not attempt to judge who should or should not be affected by the death. Take evidence of grief as proof of grief and permit all students who appear to need time to adjust to take the time. In the event of excessive grief, seek professional help from outside agencies.

Employee Assistance Program

Some staff members may need more support than fellow staff members can or should provide. HPEDSB's EAP Co-ordinator may be available to attend the school to support staff. Speak to the CYC Supervisor to arrange this. Make all staff members aware of the program, by providing referral information. An E.A.P. representative may also visit a staff meeting to discuss specific services available to staff members. Individual staff members may need a private reminder of the help available if grief is debilitating.

Ongoing Discussion

Provide opportunities at staff meetings, curriculum meetings or some other time for staff to assess ongoing needs of students. Identify any changes in student behaviour that may be linked to the tragic event - i.e., increased vandalism, attendance problems, and apathy.

Letters to Parents of Classmates

Although some students may or may not have been close to the deceased, the feelings of grief from previous losses can be "triggered" by the death. Parents need to know that a tragedy has occurred so that they can support the young person at home.

A letter home should be brief and include: (see sample section).

- Expression of sympathy to the parent(s)/spouse of the deceased.
- Appropriate explanation of the facts surrounding the death, funeral details and how the school will be handling attendance at the funeral.
- Some details on how the school handled the event.
- Concluding comments which outline available resources/support for parents and/or children and how to access them.

Memorials & Awards

Memorials can trigger a trauma response in some individuals. It is important to respect the needs of all grievers. Long term public grieving that ongoing public memorials and awards create should be avoided. Schools are a closed setting where students do not have the option of attending. Permanent public memorials in schools are strongly discouraged.

Alternatively, private tributes such as memory books, cards or a dedication page in the year book are recommended. Ideas that provide a pro-active sense of "doing" something, perhaps a fundraiser with money to go towards something that was important to the family, can be considered. Try to avoid the likelihood that annual public grieving may result from an award. This is particularly evident when memorial trophies or scholarships are awarded yearly. **One-time** gifts with appropriate tributes are preferred. In all cases, **monitor** memorials and awards carefully.

Each death needs to be acknowledged with similar importance. One life is not more important than another. It is widely accepted that memorializing a suicide can create contagion and the possibility of another suicide. Each time a memorial or award is considered, it is imperative to ask the questions regarding appropriateness in the event of suicide or other death.

For further information on the issue of memorials, please see Appendix A: "School Memorials: Should We? How Should We?" by William Steele, PsyD, MSW. Reprinted from Trauma and Loss: Research and Intervention, V4N2.

Anniversaries

Trauma is stored in the body. When the anniversary of a crisis or traumatic event approaches, it is common for individuals to experience unexpected emotions, often not realizing the origin of these emotions. As a result, one may engage in behaviours in which he/she may not otherwise engage. This is commonly referred to as the Anniversary Effect.

Original feelings and reactions to the event often re-emerge on the anniversary. In such cases, survivors are experiencing a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. It is important to reassure survivors that there was nothing wrong with them for having these concerns at this time. Ultimately, it is the role of supporters to help them handle the anniversary reaction in a healthy, positive way.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Coordinator may be accessed to provide staff with an information session on Trauma and our reactions to it. Speak with the CYC Supervisor to begin this process. Staff is encouraged to seek out individual support through the EAP, as needed. As well, CYCs may be accessed to provide additional supports (or referrals) for students who may be experiencing the anniversary effect.

Section 2

SUICIDE OR HOMICIDE

Suicide as a Tragic Event

The Impact of Student Suicide:

Experts agree that death by suicide may have a far greater emotional impact on students than other deaths. Consequently, the following information will outline suggested interventions specific to student suicide.

Suggestions on How to Intervene With Students after a Suicide:

Decisions on how to discuss suicide with students should be thought out carefully and designed to meet the particular needs of the school environment. Not all the following outlines will be suitable for each school; therefore, the “Tragic Events Response Team” should review the guidelines and establish suitable responses for the individual school prior to experiencing a suicide. The suggestions should be reviewed regularly so that all relevant personnel are able to respond to the issue with urgency and sensitivity.

Suggested Actions:

- As with other events, a first step is to establish factual information from the family or the police. The gathering of this data helps in the formation of the response in collaboration with the principal of the school. If the family is agreeable it may be appropriate to acknowledge that the death was a suicide or an “apparent” suicide. The age of the student(s) will impact on decision making. See section 3 (samples) for suggestions.
- A meeting with staff to provide the available factual information is typically the next step. It is important to address the death honestly, openly and empathically. Attempts to delay communication of factual information tend to lead to the rapid spread of rumours (many of which may be even more hurtful and confusing than the truth).
- The meeting with staff will help teachers to anticipate pupils’ questions and reactions and alert everyone to be vigilant for vulnerable individuals. This step is critical to the identification of those persons in the school who are most “at risk” as a result of the suicide.
- In identifying students who are at heightened risk, attention should be paid to close friends of the deceased, those with a history of previous suicide attempts, pupils with serious emotional problems, as well as others who might identify with the victim (even though they may not have even known the student who died). Friends and peers could also be a good source for this information.
- If possible, inform close friends of the deceased privately before the death is announced to the student body.
- Teachers should be given a brief written statement or script to read to their classes. Avoid announcing the suicide over the P.A. or to a large gathering of students. Statements should include the basic facts but should avoid precise descriptions. Always respect the family by honouring their wishes regarding information sharing.
- Questions of confidentiality and parents’ wishes present special challenges. Parents of the deceased are often unprepared to acknowledge that the death was a suicide. Their response to the question: “How would you like the facts to be described?” may provide guidance to subsequent steps in the communication process within the school.
- Designated meeting rooms should be made available and utilized throughout the day by students and staff who require assistance.
- Carry out rituals and routines as you would any other deaths experienced by the school.
- Permit participation in funerals. Provided the parents of the deceased have no objections, all who wish to attend the funeral should be allowed to do so. This type of tragedy tends to trigger emotions from one’s own experiences even if the deceased was not a close friend.

Special Consideration:

The sudden death of a student is invariably tragic. When a young person chooses to take his/her own life the impact is especially devastating and lamentable. For a variety of reasons, a suicide must be considered differently from other tragic events in a school system:

- Feelings expressed are typically more intense. Expressions of anger and guilt may be especially troublesome and those affected by the suicide will likely need help coping with the enormity of their emotional pain.
- Emotional contagion must be monitored carefully. There is a real danger that an emotionally vulnerable adolescent could imitate the suicidal behaviour. This danger may persist for some time after the event. Students identified as “at risk” should be referred to the Child and Youth Counsellor or a Community Agency for ongoing counselling.

Why Grief Following a Suicide or Homicide is More Complicated Than “Normal Grief”

Suicide	Homicide
The act itself is accompanied by social stigma and shame.	There is shock at the sudden, unexpectedness of the event.
The intense search for the “why” or reasons for the suicide can lead to scapegoating or blaming.	The violence of the event causes emotional distress.
The suddenness of the event allows no time for anticipatory mourning which may temper the initial shock.	Guilt and blame that can involve “blaming the victim”.
Investigations by police, etc. can heighten guilt and stigma.	Survivors may worry about the randomness of life and one’s personal lack of control over certain life circumstances.
Guilt is exacerbated by the fact that the death might have been prevented.	Anger at the perpetrator can turn into revenge.
Feelings of rejection and desertion effect survivors’ self-esteem.	There is often a prolongation of pain and grief through the legal investigation.
Survivors may fear their own self-destructive impulses.	Closure may be difficult because of lengthy court actions.
Questions about the inherit ability of suicide are raised for family members.	

Memo to All Staff Regarding Suicide

Please keep the following in mind during the week ahead:

- Suicide is not the result of normal adolescent stresses nor is it the result of one single event. It is the product of a complex interaction of many factors in the life of an adolescent who is at risk. Avoid discussion with students that speculate on the causes or attribute blame for the death.
- Students are experiencing a loss and consequently must grieve the death of their classmate (or faculty member).
- Students will experience a wide range of emotions; there is no “right way” to feel; each person has a unique response to crisis.
- Talking about feelings in open discussion is an appropriate way of expressing grief.
- Classroom activities may need to be altered, especially in the first few days after the death. If you have questions about a particular activity planned for your classes, feel free to consult with your administration or a member of the Tragic Event Response Team.
- Reassure students that thinking about suicide is not the same as committing suicide. Students who seem concerned about their own suicidal impulses should be referred for further assessment.
- Join the group in their situation by your use of the words “we” and “us” (e.g., “All of us at school are very shocked at what happened”). Knowing adults share their grief and confusion can be comforting to students and provides a lesson in the universality of emotions.
- Give the group time to struggle with the “search for the whys”. Review the facts of the student’s death but do not let this dominate the discussion. It will continue for some time outside the group and your task is to help students understand that this search ultimately has no answer. In suicide, the reasons are buried with the victim; in homicide, they lie with the assailant. Point out that part of the reason that this search for answers is so important is that we are trying to understand and gain some emotional control over an event that represents, for us, the survivors, the epitome of being out of control. While we need to ask “why?” our real task is to move away from the circumstances of the death to an appreciation of what the deceased’s life has meant. To encourage this, ask students to share memories of the deceased. Students may also want to review their last contact with the deceased. Going back in time to when the deceased was still alive allows us to review what has happened, while being a bit more prepared psychologically for the outcome. This process is called “obsessional review” and is more evident immediately after one hears the news of the death. When it continues over time, it may signal the need for referral and evaluation.
- Remember to pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication. Sometimes the students who are the most distressed say the least. You may want to take a particularly quiet student aside to ask more privately about his/her feelings. While numbness is a normal grief reaction, silence may also hide overwhelming feelings that might be less overwhelming if they are put into words.
- Recognize that just as each student may express grief in an individual and idiosyncratic way, so, too, may your small groups differ in the expression of grief. Some groups may be able to discuss plans for attendance at the funeral or condolence messages to the family while other groups may be overwhelmed with feelings and primarily need support. Don’t force your agenda on the group; taking your lead from their discussion is the way to be of most help.
- For most students, the small group experience will provide enough support to assist them in their grieving. If you are concerned about a student, however, discuss your concerns with another staff member or your Child and Youth Counsellor. Staff who has experience in assessing student risk should be available to talk individually with students who appear more vulnerable than the general school population.

In the days that follow it is important to ensure that normal routines are re-established. However, ongoing assistance may be necessary for students having difficulties.

Common Student Reactions and Recommended Staff Response to Suicide

While the emotional responses of students do not occur in a uniform manner, they are somewhat predictable in nature. The following summary of reactions and responses is adapted from Lamb and Dunne-Maxim's "Postvention in Schools, Policy and Process" in *Suicide and Its Aftermath*, Edward J. Dunne, Karen Dunne-Maxim and John L. McIntosh, eds.:

Student Reaction	Staff Response
<p>Shock and Denial. Initially students may appear remarkably unresponsive to the news of a suicide. They find it difficult to accept the reality of the death. "You have to be kidding!"</p>	<p>Staff needs to assume a stance of anticipatory waiting, acknowledging the shock and demonstrating a willingness to talk when students feel ready.</p>
<p>Anger and Protection. Students will look for someone to blame. Anger may be directed at adults in the deceased's life, including school staff. "Why did they let it happen?"</p>	<p>Staff members can listen to student feelings. Explaining that blame is a normal reaction to an event that can't be explained is sometimes helpful.</p>
<p>Guilt. Typically students who knew the deceased may move from blaming others to blaming themselves. "If only I had talked to him more."</p>	<p>Staff can help by reminding students about the limits of personal responsibility.</p>
<p>Anger At The Deceased. This is not uncommon, even among those who were not really close to the deceased. "How could he be so stupid to do such a thing?"</p>	<p>Allowing some expression of anger is ameliorative. Staff can point out that feeling angry that someone has chosen to leave us is normal. A simple acknowledgement of this feeling may lessen its intensity.</p>
<p>Anxiety. Students may begin worrying about themselves. "If he could kill himself because he was upset, maybe I (or my friends) could, too."</p>	<p>Discussion should be guided toward helping students differentiate between themselves and the deceased. Problem-solving options and alternatives to suicide can also be introduced.</p>
<p>Loneliness. For those close to the deceased, returning to valued interactions with friends may seem impossible. "Being with my friends seems so empty without her around."</p>	<p>It is important that people not feel alone with their grief. Staff can foster sharing by encouraging students to work together in finding positive ways to help each other move on with their lives.</p>
<p>Hope and Relief. Making it through the normal feelings depends upon an acceptance of the reality of the death and a belief that the pain and hurt will eventually subside. "I know I'll feel better in time."</p>	<p>Staff should recognize both the importance of mourning and the fact that the process takes time. Remaining open to the expression of feelings by students is helpful.</p>

Homicide as a Tragic Event

Why Grief Following a Suicide or Homicide is More Complicated Than “Normal Grief”

Suicide	Homicide
The act itself is accompanied by social stigma and shame.	There is shock at the sudden, unexpectedness of the event.
The intense search for the “why” or reasons for the suicide can lead to scapegoating or blaming.	The violence of the event causes emotional distress.
The suddenness of the event allows no time for anticipatory mourning which may temper the initial shock.	Guilt and blame that can involve “blaming the victim”.
Investigations by police, etc. can heighten guilt and stigma.	Survivors may worry about the randomness of life and one’s personal lack of control over certain life circumstances.
Guilt is exacerbated by the fact that the death might have been prevented.	Anger at the perpetrator can turn into revenge.
Feelings of rejection and desertion effect survivors’ self-esteem.	There is often a prolongation of pain and grief through the legal investigation.
Survivors may fear their own self-destructive impulses.	Closure may be difficult because of lengthy court actions.
Questions about the inherit ability of suicide are raised for family members.	

Memo to All Staff Regarding Homicide

Please keep the following in mind during the week ahead:

Homicide is an extremely frightening event because it is violent and unpredictable. It is also relatively infrequent.

- Students are experiencing a loss and consequently must grieve the death of their classmate (or faculty member).
- Students will experience a wide range of emotions; there is no “right way” to feel; each person has a unique response to the crisis.
- Talking about feelings in open discussions is an appropriate way of expressing grief.
- Classroom activities may need to be altered, especially in the first few days after the death. If you have questions about a particular activity planned for your classes, feel free to consult with any Tragic Events Team Member.
- Life will return to normal. However, it will take time and vary from individual to individual.

Common Student Reactions & Recommended Staff Response to Homicide

When dealing with homicide, it is important to remember that faculty and staff may experience reactions that are similar to those of the students because the violence inherent in homicide is something to which most adults are usually not exposed. It is, therefore, important to make sure that faculty have an opportunity to deal with their feelings prior to responding to the needs of students.

<p>Student Reaction Shock The sudden unexpectedness of a homicide, combined with its violent nature, may initially overwhelm students. Because of the dramatic nature of the event, some students may react in an equally dramatic way to the news; others may appear numb.</p>	<p>Staff Response Staff needs to be prepared for outbursts of behaviour, particularly among those who had a close relationship to the deceased. Initial hysteria can be contained by a calm and reassuring staff presence.</p>
<p>Sadness This reaction usually surfaces after the shock has worn off. Crying and preoccupation with talking about the victim are common.</p>	<p>Staff Response Encourage students to discuss the event and their reactions to it. It is important to point out that people express grief in different ways. Validate the range of reactions students may experience.</p>
<p>Anxiety Students may worry about their own safety, especially if the perpetrator has not been apprehended. Anxiety can also be generalized to worrying about the randomness of violence and personal lack of control in life.</p>	<p>Staff Response Staff should allow students to express their fears. Realistic concerns should be addressed by problem-solving ways to maximize personal safety. While more generalized anxiety should be acknowledged, it can be put into perspective by focussing on the relative infrequency of homicide and the unique characteristics of this particular situation. Providing students with the structure and the control of the school schedule will also decrease anxiety.</p>

Section 3

SAMPLES & HANDOUTS

Sample Scripts for Staff:

Although the students may or may not have been close to the deceased, the feelings of grief for previous losses can resurface with the death. Staff and students need to know that a tragedy has occurred so they can support each other and curtail any rumours that may escalate response reactions.

The information script should be brief, delivered in a personal manner, “face-to-face”, not via the PA system and should include:

- Name (as long as permission to release has been obtained) and brief facts surrounding the incident in accordance with family wishes.
- Condolences to friends and family.
- Information around Support/Counselling available. Who? Where? When?

Sample Script Re: Student or Staff Death

To: All Staff

Please read this script to all students in your home room immediately following announcements.

Should you require assistance in delivering this message, please ask your Admin or a member of the Tragic Event Response Team.

Please shred this document appropriately after reading it to the class.

We have some sad news to share. We regret to inform you of the death of a school name student (a former school name student), student's name.

Our sympathies go to his/her family and in particular to his/her sister/brother, sibling's name who is in class.

We know that staff and students may be upset on hearing this news.

Counsellors are available for support all day in/at location. Please let me or another teacher know if you would like to go to location.

We will share more information with you as it becomes available.

Sample Modified Script for JK/SK students who are not directly involved

To: JK/SK Staff

Please read this script to all students in your home room immediately following announcements.

Should you require assistance in delivering this message, please ask your Admin or a member of the Tragic Event Response Team.

Please shred this document appropriately after reading it to the class.

I have some sad to share with you.

You may see some students and adults in the halls or outside at recess today, who are sad or upset.

A student/staff member at our school, name of individual and grade, died when.

If you see someone who is feeling sad or upset, what can you do to help them to feel better?

***Some students may talk about a death they have experienced (even a pet).
Reflect for them how we feel sad when these things happen,
then bring it back to how we can help.***

Sample Scripts Regarding Suicide/Suspicious Death

It is critical to prepare a statement about the death for release to staff and students.

Note that the recommended means of communication to students is by classroom teacher.

The statement should include the facts as they have been *officially* communicated to the school. Be extremely careful not to overstate or assume facts not in evidence. Do not engage in speculation. This leads to gossip and rumours which can be damaging and hurtful to the family. For example, if the official cause of death has not yet been ruled suicide, avoid making that assumption. There are also many instances when family members insist that a death was accidental, even when there is evidence that it was suicide. Directing your announcement to the appropriate grade level of the students is also important, especially in primary or junior schools. The following are some examples of how to address these dilemmas:

Sample Script for a Death Officially Declared a Suicide:

This morning we heard the extremely sad news that name of student/staff member took his/her life last night. I know many of us are saddened by his/her death and send our condolences to his/her family and friends.

Child and Youth Counsellors will be available all day for anyone needing support. We will share more information with you as it becomes available.

Sample Script for a Suspicious Death - Not Declared a Suicide

This morning we heard the extremely sad news that name of student/staff member died last night from a gunshot wound. This is the only information we have officially received on the circumstances surrounding this event.

I know many of us are saddened by name's death and send our condolences to his/her family and friends.

Child and Youth Counsellors will be available all day for anyone needing support. We will share more information with you as it becomes available.

Sample Script – Elementary School

(For primary grades not directly involved, please see modified script above)

We want to take some time this morning to talk about something very sad. Name of student/staff member and grade, died unexpectedly last night. At this point, we do not officially know the cause of name's death.

Death is a difficult issue for anyone to deal with. Even if you didn't know name, you might still have some emotional reactions to hearing about this.

Child and Youth Counsellors will be available all day for anyone needing support. We will share more information with you as it becomes available.

**Sample Script for Office Staff (Optional) - Regarding Response to Community Inquiries
(Excluding requests from the media)**

**All media inquiries are channelled through the
Communications Officer at the Education Centre.**

School name administration has been informed of the death of deceased's name .

Students have been told about name 's death. Child and Youth Counsellors are available to those who wish to speak with someone about their feelings.

Include information regarding the funeral depending upon family wishes.

The funeral will be at place on date at time .

Visitation will occur at place on date at time .

or

Name 's family has indicated that the funeral arrangement is private.

Sample Letters to Parents/Guardians:

Regardless of the circumstances, a clear message to the parent(s)/guardian(s) is needed to alert them that there has been a death and that we have informed the students in a supportive manner. The letter needs to provide accurate information, dispel rumours, and, where warranted, give direction for future action as quickly as possible.

A letter home should be brief and should include:

- Expression of sympathy to the family of the deceased.
- Explanation of the facts surrounding the death, funeral details and support for those who choose to attend the funeral to grieve with family and friends.
- Some details on how the school will be dealing with the loss – CYC support etc.
- Concluding comments which outline how parents may access additional supports if needed.

Sample Letter - Death of a Student

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We wish to extend our condolences to the name of family family in the recent tragic death of their (son/daughter) name of student. (Possible additional sentence addressing the circumstances or facts of the accident or illness, with permission). Name was a description (ie, happy, outgoing) student in name of Teacher's grade level class.

It is difficult to accept the loss of such a young person. Dealing with death affects each of us differently based on our relationship to the individual lost and/or our own trauma history. I encourage you to discuss name of deceased's death with your child, as you feel appropriate. Please realize that (children/adolescents) respond to tragedy or grief in different ways. I have enclosed some information on grief that may assist you.

Child and Youth Counsellors were in the school today as part of our Tragic Event Response Team. We can assure you that this support will continue to be available as long as it is needed. Many students participated in the creation of cards for presentation to name of deceased's family. This process itself can be very therapeutic.

The school supports any student's need to attend the funeral. We understand that this is a time for family and friends to find comfort in the company of each other. Funeral services will be held on date and time at location.

Our collective thoughts are with the surname of student family. Name of deceased will remain in the hearts and thoughts of (his/her) classmates, the staff and the name of school community.

Please feel free to call me at phone number if you have any questions or concerns about your child.

Sincerely,

Principal

Sample Letter - Death of a Staff Member

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We regret to inform you of the death of a school name (Teacher/Educational Assistant/staff member), name of staff member. Name of teacher taught grade at our school since year (or other such statement reflecting the deceased appropriately).

Funeral services will be held at location of funeral on date and time of funeral. In order to allow staff representatives to attend the funeral, there will be necessary adjustments of program and /or time tabling for several classes on date and time.

Child and Youth Counsellors have been in the school assisting students and staff as part of our school's Tragic Event Response Team. Your child may wish to discuss this loss with you.

The School Council Meeting scheduled for date and time has been cancelled.

Our collective thoughts are with the surname of deceased family. Name of deceased will remain in the hearts and thoughts of the staff, students and the name of school community.

Sincerely,

Principal

Sample Letter – Death of a Parent

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We regret to inform you of the death of a school name parent, parent name. Our sympathies go to the family, and in particular to (his/her) (daughter/son), student name, who is a grade grade student at our school.

The School Child and Youth Counsellor was here today to visit some of the classrooms and will be available for further support if required.

Funeral arrangements are unknown at this time.

Our collective thoughts are with the surname of deceased family. Please feel free to call me at telephone number if you have questions or concerns about your child.

Sincerely,

Principal

Sample Follow-Up Letter (Optional) – up to one week later

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Last week we wrote to inform you of the tragic death of deceased's name. The staff and students of the school continue to struggle with this loss.

Child and Youth Counsellors have been in the school assisting students and staff as part of our school's Tragic Event Response Team. Some students may require an ongoing connection with counsellors, perhaps as a result of their own trauma history. If your child seems unusually upset over a long period of time, you may wish to pursue a referral for counselling outside of the school. We would be pleased to help identify appropriate community resources and to assist you with a referral.

Again, we express our deepest sympathies to the deceased's family name family. If there is anything further we can do at this difficult time, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Principal

Perceptions of Death & Typical Reactions by Age

Age	Perceptions of Death	Typical Responses
Infancy (0 to 3 years)	no concept of death, can experience loss, loss of primary care-giver is extremely traumatic	Irritability, crying, listlessness, withdrawal, sleeping, eating problems
Pre-School (3 to 5 years)	limited idea of death, death as reversible temporary, confused with sleep, magical concepts (i.e. feeling responsible), many associate death with an image or event, concrete interpretation of “gone to heaven”	denial or sadness evident, fantasies of reunion or return, fears of punishment or abandonment, regression (bed-wetting, thumb sucking, clinging), frequent, intense but short periods of mourning, negativism, attention-seeking
Latency (5 to 9 years)	growing idea of reality of death, concrete questions re body decay, cessation of body functions (i.e., are eyes closed?), great fears of death, mutilation, body injury, still magical thinking, death personified as ghosts, monsters, sees death as punishment for wrong doing, avoidable, happens to others	understands but thinks only others die, asks very specific questions, intellectualizes, emotional regression, physical ailments, socially inappropriate behaviour, poor concentration in school feeling responsible, fears of abandonment, anger towards others
Pre-Adolescent & Adolescent (9 to 16 years)	beginning to understand and accept the mortality of life, transition from concrete to more mature abstract, awareness of physiological causes of illness and death, confused self-perception with loss of primary role model, dramatic, intense reactions, reliance on personalized rituals	idealization of deceased, constant questioning about death, covering up emotions, anxiety and fearfulness, unpredictable responses, inappropriately “taking on” role of lost family member, behaviour problems at home and school (i.e., drugs), suicidal behaviour, rebellion, decline in school performance
Late Adolescent & Adult (17 years to adult)	knows and understands the meaning of death, and how the loss can affect their life or cause changes in the family.	wide variety of possible reactions and behaviours depending upon past experiences, presence of support systems and personal ability to cope with the stress of the loss

Talking to Children about a Sudden Death

Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Do feel comfortable asking for help from the School Child and Youth Counsellor or Tragic Events Response Team Member.	Don't force a child to participate in a discussion about death.
Do develop an environment in which students feel perfectly safe to ask any questions and completely confident of receiving an honest answer.	Never link suffering and death with guilt, punishment and sin.
Children need information and reassurances. Use correct terminology related to death.	Don't be judgmental; don't lecture. It's all too tempting to make a point or moralize.
Do listen and empathize. Make sure you hear what is said and not what you think the student ought to have said.	Don't force a "regular day" upon grieving students; but at the same time don't allow the class to be totally unstructured. Offer choices of activities, e.g., Letters, Journals, Discussion.
Do allow the students to express as much grief as they are able or willing to share with you.	Don't say "I know how you feel" unless you truly do.
You can share your own feelings and tell about your own memories of the deceased but don't idealize.	Don't force others to look for something positive in the situation.
Do say "I don't know" when you don't know.	Don't feel you must handle this alone. Ask for help.
Do recognize that classroom routines and management may be disrupted. This is natural – be flexible.	Don't expect "adult responses" from children and teenagers. Their grief responses may seem inappropriate to you (i.e. Giggling).
Do maintain a sympathetic attitude toward the student's age-appropriate responses.	
Do organize activities that will allow students to tangibly express their grief (e.g. memorials, letters, pictures, etc.).	

Talking with Young Children about Death: Strategies for School Systems

- Recognize that children are not born with a fear of death. This is something that is passed on to them from adults. Protecting children from death and their feelings about it by not talking about the event may only complicate grieving.
- Talk to the children about the death as soon as possible after it occurs to prevent them from hearing misinformation and rumours from other sources.
- Because classroom teachers are familiar to children, they should lead the discussions whenever possible. Avoid impersonal announcements over the public address system.
- Give children honest explanations about what happened. Detailed focus on the specifics of the death is not usually necessary and may frighten younger children. It is important to acknowledge that all information about the event may never be available and we have to be careful about believing everything we hear, since rumours are often created to fill vacuums in data.
- Review with children the many different ways we can react to loss and reinforce that there is no one way or right way to feel. What is important is to recognize our feelings and talk about them.
- Explain that sometimes a current loss can make us remember and re-experience previous losses in our lives. We may find ourselves thinking about a death in our own family, for example, that happened a long time ago and not understand that these thoughts have been triggered by this current death.
- Understand that children express feelings through their play, art work or written work. Be sensitive to the messages that may be conveyed in these ways.
- Recognize that children may need what seem like endless explanations about what happened because of their immature ego structure. Their obsessional questions may be a way to deal with the confusion they are experiencing in trying to understand and come to terms with the event.
- Help children to remember the deceased and integrate these memories into their lives.

Helping Parents Help Their Children

Age	Needs	Reactions	Parent Response
0 to 3 years	closeness to primary caretaker, consistency in environment & routines, unable to verbalize feelings so may act them out in misbehaviour	irritability regression in behaviours, bed wetting, thumb sucking, clinging to caretaker, physical aggression	maintain as much consistency/routine as possible, assure consistently of your love, keep the atmosphere calm, spend as much time together as possible
3 to 5 years	self-centred, blames self; believes their actions control others behaviour, fears abandonment, crying	regression in behaviour irritability, aggression and hostility	attention/reassurance of love, nurturing through cuddling, explain changes that are occurring, teach appropriate ways to release hostility
5 to 9 years	sadness, increased crying or withdrawal, fear of the future	school work declines, conflict with friends	constant reassurance, maintain consistent routine, talk to teachers, teach appropriate ways of acting out aggression
9 to 16 years	extreme anger often covering intense emotional pain, depression/loneliness, headaches, stomach aches	withdraw from friends/activities, school grades decline acting out behaviours such as stealing, cheating, drug/ alcohol abuse	keep lines of communication open, honestly answer their questions, seek help from counsellors, make home a nurturing place to be
17 to adult	frequent mood swings, outward denial of inner turmoil, fears parental illness tests limits	drug/alcohol use sexual activity decline in school performance severe depression/ withdrawal from family/friends violence, aggression to self or others	seek outside counselling reassurance of love and concern set clear fair limits and expectations make time for communication and attention, ask family/friends to increase support to adolescent

Questions Commonly Asked by Parents & Caregivers

What if I'm so upset that I don't want to talk about it?

Give your child an honest explanation when you are crying, angry or obviously upset. When both you and your child have been involved in a traumatic situation, you are each experiencing your own emotional reactions. It may be particularly distressing for you to answer your child's many questions or to watch play activities that re-enact your painful memories. You may want to take "time outs" and ask a trusted family friend or relative to help.

Will my child become dependent and clingy forever if I give in?

Children go through an adjustment period following trauma. Your child will be less likely to need extra attention from you over time if his or her needs are met early on.

Why does my child keep asking the same questions over and over again?

Until adolescence, children lack the intellectual ability to understand what has happened — what death means, why unexpected tragedies can happen. They keep trying to get information and then forget it or misunderstand it, all in an effort to make sense out of the upheaval in their world. Younger children don't understand that death is permanent, so their repeated inquiries are because they expect everything to return to normal.

My child feels guilty: what can I do to help him?

Children often respond to upsetting events by feeling responsible for them and then guilty about the consequences. Ask your child to explain his or her perception of the event. Listen carefully to whether he or she attaches a sense of responsibility to some part of the description. Attempt to rationally explain the facts of the situation and emphasize that no one, least of all your child, could have prevented it.

How can the school help?

It is a good idea to inform the school of a trauma in your child's life. Your child's teacher can be sensitive to changes in your child's behaviour and will be able to respond in a helpful way.

If I don't feel that the world is safe, how can I reassure my child?

It is normal to feel vulnerable and unsafe following a traumatic event. However, the actual probability that the event will occur again is usually very low. Even if you are feeling unsure, your child will benefit from hearing, "The event is over. Now we'll do everything possible to stay safe and together we can help things get back to normal." Establishing routines for your child will also help you to feel secure.

When should I get outside help?

External events may reactivate the trauma. For example, Halloween with its scary themes may bring back the fear related to a recent trauma like homicide. Young children who used to enjoy the holiday may be reluctant to participate in trick or treating, and parents might do well to come up with alternate activities that are less anxiety provoking. Likewise, T.V. shows with similar themes to the trauma may also cause distress or actual real-life events that are similar will most likely serve as reminders of the original trauma. Media attention can also replay a trauma for both children and adults. Especially during court proceedings, the media tends to replay the original event daily to remind us of any details we may have forgotten. Being prepared for these reminders, whatever their source is the best way to cope with them.

How to Help Your Child Conquer His or Her Fears

When Your Child Has Been Exposed to a Trauma and/or Grief Situation

What should you do when your child has been exposed to a traumatic situation? Don't automatically assume that your child is experiencing what you, as an adult, are experiencing. Children experience trauma differently than adults. A child's age and developmental level often determines how they perceive the traumatic incident.

Many parents "have a talk" with their child about the traumatic incident. Although talking with your child is important, you won't know what your child is experiencing unless you listen.

Ask your child these questions. Listen carefully to your child's responses. You may find that your child has been impacted by the trauma in ways you never thought possible.

Ask Your Child . . .

- *What worries you the most now?*
- *What upsets you the most now?*
- *What is the worst part, the hardest part for you now?*
- *What helps you feel a little better?*
- *What helps you feel a little safer?*
- *Do you have any questions about what has happened or anything anyone has said?*

What Can You Do?

Reassure your child or teen that he or she is safe, and that you are also okay by doing the following:

- Listen!
- Maintain routines.
- Turn the television off or allow your child to only watch shows that aren't covering the incident. (Adolescents may need to watch because, like adults, they have a need to know. Keep it to a minimum – no more than a half-hour and be sure to discuss what your child saw and heard by asking questions and listen carefully to his responses and opinions.)
- Do not criticize any regressive behaviors, such as a child's need for comfort food. Allow your child to be sad or afraid. Reassure your child that you will be there to take care of him. Tell your child that the sadness, hurt, or fear that he may feel now will change in time.
- Encourage your child to exercise some sense of control for the next few days by letting him make decisions about what he wants to eat, and wear.
- Spend time together. This means together, not you in one part of the house while your child is in another part of the house.
- Encourage your child to engage in physical activities as well as activities that let him feel better.
- When needed, help separate fact from fiction. Fiction tends to escalate one's fears.
- Do not speculate or exaggerate.

Child Development and its Relationship to Grief and Loss

What can Parents Do To Help? Reference: Myers, D. (1986) Psychology, New York, Worth Publishers

3 - 6 years

General Concepts of Development

- Egocentric
- Focuses on one thing at a time
- Inanimate things can be alive
- Magical Thinking -- Child believes that just thinking about something can make it happen
- Continues to learn about the world through senses
- Play is critical to development
- Time is reversible, may be able to recall some very memorable past events
- Continues to develop trust

Concept of Death

- May have concept of death, depending upon the experience
- Death may be caused by thoughts or feelings (Magical Thinking)
- May be interested in physical and biological aspects of death and the dead body
- May think death is like sleep
- Senses caregiver's emotional distress

Grief Issues

- May appear fine
- May respond to death with irritability, change in sleep, eating and play patterns
- May regress
- May be concerned with who will be caregiver
- May show feelings, thoughts through play because he may not have the vocabulary to explain self
- May be very attached to remaining caregiver and fear separation
- May ask questions repeatedly
- Very curious
- Physical reactions and acting out behaviours

What can you do to help?

- Answer questions
- Maintain a schedule
- Take photos of deceased so that child will be able to look at them at a later date if needed
- Take child to a portion of the funeral/service
- Use appropriate vocabulary for age
- Provide play opportunities
- Model/encourage appropriate expression of feelings and memory sharing
- Keep a journal for child if important events, ceremonies, newspaper clippings and stories

Child Development and its Relationship to Grief and Loss

What can Parents Do To Help? Reference: Myers, D. (1986) Psychology, New York, Worth Publishers
7 - 12 years

General Concepts of Development

- Egocentric
- Beginning to understand cause and effect
- Concrete-operational: understands concrete concepts
- Magical Thinking -- Believes that just thinking about something can make it happen (This is lessening)
- Continues to learn about world through senses
- Play is critical to development
- Peer relationships are becoming very important
- Self esteem is developing

Concept of Death

- Death is sometimes thought of as ghosts
- beginning to understand the finality of death
- May be interested in physical and biological aspects of death
- May feel that he caused death

Grief Issues

- May appear fine
- May respond to death with irritability, change in sleep, eating and play patterns
- May regress
- May be concerned with who will be the caregiver
- May feel a stigma at school or around peers
- May be very attached to remaining caregiver and fear separation
- May be concerned about future of self and others
- Very curious
- Physical reactions and acting out behaviours

What can you do to help?

- Answer questions
- Maintain a schedule
- Take child to funeral or service if he chooses
- Include child in funeral/service
- Use appropriate vocabulary for age
- Be honest and factual
- Provide play opportunities
- Model/encourage appropriate expression of feelings and memory sharing
- Keep a journal for child of important events, ceremonies, newspaper clippings and stories
- Keep in contact with school

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Adolescent Development and its Relationship to Grief and Loss What can Parents Do To Help?

Reference: Myers, D. (1986) Psychology, New York, Worth Publishers

General Concepts of Development

- Formal operational: thinks abstractly, like an adult
- Egocentric
- Attempting to find a balance in terms of independence and dependence of caregiver
- Peer relationships are very important
- Self esteem is developing
- Searching for identity

Concept of Death

- Death is final, an end to physical life
- Realization of own mortality and thinks about the meaning of life
- May be interested in physical and biological aspects of death
- May feel that he caused death
- Understands future and what loss will mean

Grief Issues

- May appear fine
- May respond to death with irritability, change in sleep, eating, school and social behaviours
- May be concerned with who will be caregiver
- May feel stigma at school or around peers
- May be attached to remaining caregiver/family
- May be concerned about the future of self or others
- May attempt to take on role of deceased
- Struggles with needing support and not wanting it

What can you do to help?

- Answer questions
- Maintain a schedule
- Be available when teen wants to talk
- Be honest and factual
- Reduce expectations
- Model/encourage appropriate expression of feelings and memory sharing
- Keep a journal for adolescent of important events, ceremonies, newspaper clippings and stories
- Keep in contact with school
- Start a family communication journal

Source: Parents Resource Center www.tlcinstitute.org

How to Help Your Teen Conquer His or Her Fears

What should you do when your teen has experienced loss? Don't automatically assume that your teen is experiencing what you, as an adult, are experiencing. Teens experience grief differently than adults. A teen's age and developmental level often determines how they perceive the incident.

Many parents "have a talk" with their teen about the incident. Although talking with your teen is important, you won't know what your teen is experiencing unless you listen.

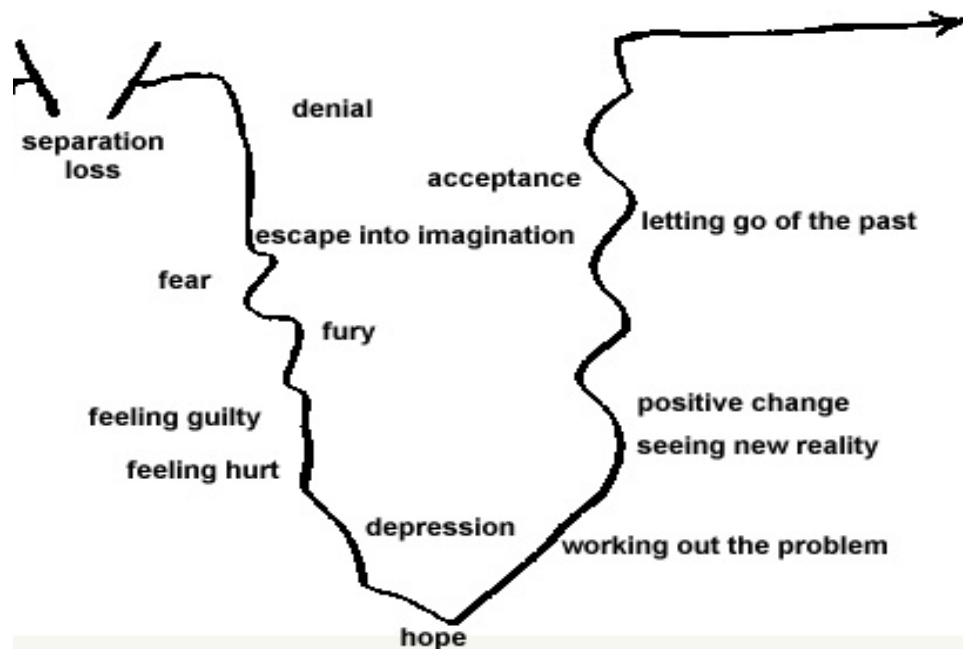
Ask your teen these questions. Listen carefully to their responses. You may find that your teen has been impacted in ways you never thought possible.

Ask Your Child . . .

- *What worries you the most now?*
- *What upsets you the most now?*
- *What is the worst part, the hardest part for you now?*
- *What helps you feel a little better?*
- *What helps you feel a little safer?*
- *Do you have any questions about what has happened or anything anyone has said?*

Grief Stages

The following is a picture of the stages of grief. Grief is like a snowflake, no two reactions are the same. These stages are a sample of what someone who is grieving may experience at different times in the process. Grief is not necessarily a path you follow but more of a journey and you can be in any stage at any point in the process as you move toward acceptance.



Grief Stages

(Kübler-Ross; adapted by Graver & Morse 1986)

Positive ways of coping with the feelings about the death of a friend

- We can cry alone or with someone who seems to care.
- We can sort out our feelings in an internal dialogue in a quiet place or on a long walk.
- We can find a private place to yell out.
- We can burn emotional energy through work or vigorous physical activity.
- We can sing, make music, draw, or write about our feelings in a journal.
- We can produce or construct something tangible, and choose to share it with others, or not.
- We can reminisce over moments of pleasure and fun about our friend with others, especially those who had similar memories.
- We could create or participate in an activity that commemorates the life of our friend.
- We could participate in an activity that our friend would have enjoyed or would want us to do.
- We can talk about our sadness and other feelings with friends, family members or a professional counsellor.

Adapted from the book *The Heart of Grief* by Thomas Attig. Copyright © 2000 by Oxford University Press Inc. New York, NY.

Normal Grief Reactions and When to be Concerned

A Message To Students Who Learn About The Sudden Death Of A Fellow Student

Most people feel surprised, confused, frightened, angry, or sad after they hear that someone at their school has died suddenly. If the death was a homicide or suicide it can be even more disturbing. This event may be upsetting to fellow students for days. If the person who died was a friend the effects can last even longer. Most of the disturbing thoughts and feelings will fade away over time. This happens sooner with people who let themselves feel sad and cry, talk openly about it right away, and stay involved with supportive friends. It is not a sign of weakness or illness to feel sad and express sadness!

In the teen years we think we are so strong, smart, fast, agile and invincible. Death is not something we think will happen to us or to someone we might know. It can be shocking when another teen dies. When this happens we are reminded of the fact that life is not something we can take for granted. Some of us may feel more vulnerable. It is natural for us to have disturbing dreams, be more careful and avoid situations or things that remind us of the death event. However, some go to an extreme with their sadness, guilt, anger or scared feelings. This can be a serious problem if it interferes with normal activities, like eating and sleeping, going to school, concentrating in class, completing homework, passing tests, working, getting along with family and friends, etc.

Professional counselors agree that most people begin to get back to their normal routine within days, have periods of sadness for several days or weeks and remember the event for many months, sometimes years. But when should a person become concerned about the way they are feeling following a death?

If after about three weeks you are feeling several of the following:

- Really unhappy, sad or empty inside most of the day
- An obvious loss of interest or pleasure in activities or friends most of the day
- A noticeable change in appetite
- Shame, self-blame or a lot of guilt nearly every day
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much nearly every day
- Crying spells or loss of energy nearly every day
- Concentration problems, difficulties making decisions and negativity about the future

You need help!

Please talk to your parents, a trusted adult or a professional counsellor.

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Normal Grief Reactions and When to be Concerned

A Message To Students Who Witnessed The Sudden Death Of A Fellow Student

Most people feel surprised, confused, frightened, angry, sad, or lonely after someone they personally know dies. When the person dies right in front of them it is really shocking. For some people the sights, sounds and even smells and feelings are remembered for days or weeks. Most of the disturbing memories fade away over time. This happens sooner with people who talk about it right away; let themselves feel sadness and other related emotions and stay involved with supportive friends.

In the teen years we think we are so strong, smart, fast and agile. It can be shocking when another teen dies. When this happens we are reminded of the fact that life is not something we can take for granted. Some of us may feel more vulnerable. It is natural for us to have disturbing dreams, be more careful and avoid situations or things that remind us of the death event. However, some who witness a death become really disturbed by it through no fault of their own. This can be a serious problem when it interferes with normal activities, like eating and sleeping, going to school, concentrating in class, completing homework, passing tests, working, getting along with family and friends, etc.

Professional counselors agree that most people begin to get back to their normal routine within days, have periods of sadness for several days or weeks and remember the event for many months, sometimes years. But when should a person become concerned about the way they are feeling following a death?

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- Concentration problems, difficulties making decisions and negativity about the future

Or after about a month you have several of the following:

- Frequent upsetting memories of the event when wanting to think about something else
- Frequent nightmares about the event
- Intense emotional reactions to anything that is a reminder of the event
- Extreme behaviors in order to avoid any reminder of the event
- Withdrawal from friends and family nearly every day
- An exaggerated reaction or jumpiness to things that would mildly startle others
- A feeling as if the event were happening again, such as in a flashback

You need help!

Please talk to your parents, a trusted adult or a professional counsellor. © 2000 by Jerry Ciffone, SD U-46, Elgin, IL

Section 4

REFERRAL SERVICES

Referral Services:

Bereaved Families of Ontario, Quinte

Box 23116
Belleville, Ontario K8P 5J3
Telephone: 613-962-0103

Service: An association of families who have lost a child through death.

Children's Mental Health Services

200 Dundas Street, West
Belleville, Ontario K8N 1E3
Telephone: 613-966-3100

Madoc473-1685
Picton476-8252
Trenton392-4331
Bancroft 332-3807

Service: Children's Mental Health Services provides assessment, consultation and treatment for children, adolescents and their families with emotional and behavioural

Counselling Services of Belleville & District

12 Moira Street East
Belleville, Ontario, K8P 2R9
Telephone: 613-966-7413

Service: C.S.B.D. provides the following programs:
Individual, Marital and Family Counselling Services
Vocational Counselling and Support Program
Family Court Clinic
Behavioural Consulting Services

Edith Fox Life and Loss Centre: Lambs for Children

1931 Northport Road
Prince Edward County
Telephone: 613-476-1128

Service: Kathleen Foster-Morgan is a Clinical Psychotherapist who offers individual and group counselling to children dealing with loss

Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board

156 Ann Street
Belleville, Ontario K8N 1N9
Telephone: 613-966-1170

Service: Child and Youth Counsellor Team.
Employee Assistance Program (Quinte Counselling) 613-966-4262

Hospice Prince Edward

P.O. Box 2022
Picton, Ontario K0K 270
Telephone: 613-476-2181 ext. 4253

Service: Offers bereavement counselling for children and adults.
Has a lending library of resources.

North Hastings Counselling Centre

16 Billa Street
Bancroft, Ontario K0L 1C0
Telephone: 613-332-3826

Service: A satellite out-patient clinic of B.G.H. Department of Psychiatry providing assessment, guidance, counselling and therapy for adults and their families.

Parent-Child & Youth Clinic

Edith Cavell Building
245 Dundas Street, East
Belleville, Ontario K8N 5K5
Telephone: 613-969-7400 ext. 2691

Service: A satellite of Belleville General Hospital, Department of Psychiatry, serving the families of children up to 15 years of age with behavioural, social or family problems, or special emotional needs. Provide assessments, counselling and therapy plus parent education.

Quinte Health Care - Belleville General

P.O. Box 428
Belleville, Ontario K8N 5A9
Telephone: 613-969-7400

Crisis Intervention Centreext 2753 / 1-888-757-7766
Mental Health Clinic ext 2228
Department of Psychiatry ext 2425

Service: Belleville General Hospital offers many assessment, diagnostic and treatment services for children and adolescents referred by medical personnel. The Crisis Intervention Centre provides services to adolescents 16 years and over. Mobile outreach is available 24 hours.

Salvation Army

Family and Counselling Services
295 Pinnacle Street
Belleville, Ontario K8N 3B3
Telephone: 613-968-6834

Service: Provides clothing, summer camp, Christmas sharing program, counselling and referral, emergency shelter and food for persons in need.

Referral Service (continued)

Telecare

P.O. Box 503
Belleville, Ontario K8N 5B2
Telephone: 613-962-4111
Bancroft Telephone: 613-332-2000

Service: A confidential telephone distress centre. Purpose is to listen to any caller with a concern (loneliness, depression, grief, family, marital, etc.) in a non-judgemental, caring fashion. Run by trained volunteers.

The Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit

Belleville

179 North Park Street
Belleville, Ontario K8P 4P1
Telephone: 613-966-5500

Trenton

5 Stewart Street
Trenton, Ontario K8V 4T9
Telephone: 613-394-4831

Centre Hastings

12 St. Lawrence Street
Madoc, Ontario KOK 2KO
Telephone: 613-473-4247

North Hastings

Hwy. # 62
Bancroft, Ontario KOL 1CO
Telephone: 613-332-4555

Service: Public Health Nursing Department provides school counselling on health related problems and potential members for the Tragic Events Response Team.

Youth Habilitation Quinte Inc.

210A Front Street
Belleville, Ontario K8N 2Z4
Telephone: 613-969-0830

Service: The provision of comprehensive counselling and assessment services to young people who have long-standing, unresolved problems which relate to schooling, the family, work, the law, addiction, developmental impoverishment, mental deficiency, self-emotional adjustment, abuse and physical disabilities.

Section 5

ACTION PLAN

Action Plan for Creating a School-Based Tragic Event Response Team

Action	Responsibility
<p>Decide who will be on your Tragic Event Response Team Consider:</p> <p>Child and Youth Counsellor Vice-Principal Guidance Personnel Additional Teacher(s) - should be someone who can be freed easily from teaching duties</p>	<p>Principal</p>
<p>Call Meeting of Tragic Event Response Team Agenda:</p> <p>Review Tragic Event Resource Guide Note actions which your school should take when faced with a tragic event. Create a scenario of a tragic event and “run through” a simulation. Consider preventative programs (re: suicide) which may be suitable for your school and develop an Action Plan.</p>	<p>Principal</p>
<p>Selection of team members is critical as each must model a high degree of sensitivity, discretion, good judgement and team work. It would be helpful if a plan could be made to have team members readily available during teaching periods. Perhaps the most important qualities to look for when selecting the individuals for the team are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ strong interpersonal skills ➤ willingness to contribute. ➤ ability to listen: compassion, friendliness and approachability, willingness to be on the team ➤ prior beneficial experience in dealing with crisis situations ➤ leadership and decision-making ability, e.g., people who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follow through • communicate well • respect confidentiality ➤ demonstrated ability to remain calm and maintain composure in high stress situations ➤ proven ability to work well as a team member 	

School-Based Tragic Event Response Team (possible template)

School Name:

Date:

	Name	School	Work Site Telephone	Home Telephone
Principal:				
Vice-Principal:				
Administrative support from another school				
School Staff Members:				
Child & Youth Counsellor:				

In-Service Required/Requested (specify):

Appendix

School Memorials: Should We? How Should We?

By William Steele, PsyD, MSW
Reprinted with permission from:
Trauma and Loss: Research and Intervention, V4N2

School Memorials: Should We? How Should We?

By William Steele, PsyD, MSW

Reprinted from *Trauma and Loss: Research and Intervention*, V4N2

Abstract: *The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children regularly receives calls from school personnel asking about in-school memorials, memorial services, and memorial practices in schools. Consensus indicates that these memorials are not appropriate when associated with suicide. Beyond this one area of agreement, there are a variety of opinions on memorials for those who have died. Practices are varied and do not always consider the long-term difficulties “in school” memorials can create for students as well as for administrators. This commentary discusses these possible long-term problems, examines the potential traumatic aspects of the ongoing reminders that school memorials can represent for some, and follows with recommendations regarding permanent memorials and memorial services practices.*

Several students die in an “active shooter” situation or as the result of a major car accident. The school erects a permanent memorial for these students. Months later, another student dies. Should this student be included in the permanent memorial or should another memorial be created? Within the next two years fourteen more students die. Some die by violent means, others by non-violent means. Some are well liked; others are not at all liked. What should you do regarding their inclusion in the memorial?

Many administrators at schools where permanent memorials have existed for a few years are now realizing that the immediate and long-term issues they present can be larger than administrative parameters, responsibilities, and resources of their schools. Just a few of the difficult challenges include, but are not limited to the following: student and staff deaths, the causes and circumstances of their deaths, variations in their status, variations in cultural views and customs, size and location of the memorial, politically and economically influential parents who want something different for their child, and resources needed to maintain these memorials.

The only nationwide consensus regarding establishing memorials and memorial services in schools following student suicides is that memorials are not appropriate. Most accept and understand that memorializing a student who takes his/her own life communicates to those predisposed to suicide, “If you want to get noticed, kill yourself” (www.suicidology.org - Media Guidelines for Reporting on Suicide).

Beyond suicide there is no consensus about memorials. In fact, there are a wide variety of opinions and practices. These range from creating garden memorials on school property to restricting memorials to a specific time frame, size of lettering on memorial plaques to varied yearbook practices. Some policies basically say that each situation will be studied at the time and decisions made by a cross section of school representatives.”

Healing garden memorials themselves are quite varied. At Rancho Cucamonga High in California (Torrejon, 2004), rose bushes and plaques identify deceased students. Santana High School in San Diego, California (Torrejon, 2004) created a healing garden to remember what happened and “the sanctity of human life.” Some gardens honor staff. The Ashland High School (Torrejon, 2004) garden has only one plaque to honor all the students. The school did not want to start listing names fearing it would leave students wondering who would be next. Another variation is the “remembrance garden” at Lewiston High School in Maine (Torrejon, 2004) which uses bricks to identify retired staff and others who wished to be remembered for various reasons.

Memorial web sites, often designed by students, are on the rise. More often student memorials are quickly created at student lockers, parking spaces, and other areas on school property. Some districts allow memorial plaques but determine the size of the plaque as well as the size of lettering on it. There are different practices related to yearbooks; some allow poems, student letters and photos while others have a memorial page listing no more than the names of those who died. Still other schools identify the foundations that can receive memorial donations or those materials that can be purchased with donations in memory of the deceased. Recently, students are coming to school wearing T-shirts with their peer's picture and often a message on the back.

There is a general consensus that memorials provide an avenue for healing, a place to visit (National Association for School Counseling, 2004, www.naspoline.org/neatmemorials). People can come together to support one another as well express their feelings in a supportive environment. Given the acceptance that memorials serve a beneficial purpose for most, the question still remains, "Do memorials belong in schools?"

Are School Memorials Appropriate?

Should memorials, other than for suicide, be created within schools? And if so, what guidelines should be considered? To partially answer these questions it is necessary to understand the nature of trauma and, specifically, issues of exposure, as both influence guidelines for memorials.

Any situation that results in a desire to create a memorial is likely to be traumatizing for some students as well as staff (Steele & Raider, 2001). Abundant research describes the many child and adolescent manifestations of trauma (Pynoos, 1988, van der Kolk, 1996). The area of concern associated with memorials is that which deals with exposure and arousal, also referred to as "activation."

Trauma is a state of terror in which victims feel unsafe and powerless to do anything about their situation (Steele & Raider, 2001). Trauma is also accompanied by worry; often worry about "it" happening again and "will I be next?" Arousal is a psycho-physiological and neurological state of readiness for the "next time." Physical proximity to the actual location of the tragedy and or to visual reminders activates the arousal response (van der kolk, 1996; Rothchild, 2000). Memorials, although beneficial for many, are also activating for many, especially those already vulnerable due to their own personal trauma experiences. This constitutes a significant number of students in any facility.

Memorials can be activating because of the simple fact that they provide an ongoing visual reminder of what happened. Arousal can also lead to a decrease in cognitive function, the ability to attend, focus, retain and recall, and the ability to process information-- primary learning functions. Furthermore, prolonged arousal also leads to aggressive, assaultive behaviors. From this perspective memorials in the school or on school property do pose a risk for many simply because in this "closed" environment it becomes almost impossible for students to avoid the physical reminders. There is no choice. Memorials need to be an opportunity of choice, as we all grieve differently. For some, it is healthier not to be reminded.

The concept of "exposure" or physical proximity to reminders is supported by many years of research; the memorials need to be moved out of the school environment into the community where they can either be easily accessed by those who need their comfort and benefits or easily avoided by those who are activated by the "reminders." Community memorials provide the same benefits as school memorials while avoiding the many conflicts and challenges created when erected in closed environments such as schools.

Long-Term Complications

Where will the resources come from to maintain the memorial, especially the larger memorials, like gardens? How large will the memorials be allowed to grow? In reality, many deaths can occur within a few years. From 1996 through 2003, Slippery Rock High School in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area experienced 23 tragic student deaths (Clark & Woodall, 2004). The numbers can grow quite rapidly. Do you really want students to be reminded daily of how many have died? What if the memorial or

parts of that memorial are destroyed? Not all students will react favorably to memorials created for an individual student and vandalism can occur. Once the practice of creating a permanent memorial begins, how will the school respond to the politically and economically influential parents in the community who insist that their child be given a separate memorial? Are schools prepared to respond to the friends and families of students with much less status or those who have been disruptive students? Sometimes people will question the value of including a “less desirable” student to the memorial. Who is going to make the value judgment as to who is included and who is excluded? Should exceptions be made for different students or different situations? School boards do fluctuate and make exceptions to the rules. (see www.splc.org/report, Student Press Law Center.)

Recommendations

If memorials can be a beneficial healing experience for some, while an activating experience for others, what is recommended? Many students do need that opportunity to express themselves, feel connected to others, and to let others know the value their friend brought to their lives. However, others need not be reminded. We each need to grieve in our own way, to do what is most helpful for us individually.

Based upon the knowledge of traumatic exposure as well as the complexity of school systems and school populations, it is recommended that schools do not create permanent memorials of any kind, but do in fact, look to the larger community to make the memorial a community memorial. Community memorials, such as healing gardens, mosaic tile walkways and walls, sculptured works created to represent the spirit of the deceased or the value of life, certainly are beneficial for many. Being in the community, however, the choice to visit or avoid is retained. Community memorials allow for not just students to be remembered, but staff, families and all members of that community who suffered a tragic or untimely death, as well as those who made noteworthy contributions.

Guidelines

Following are several guidelines based upon what is known about exposure to reminders. These practices can help those who are grieving and fulfill their need to “do something” to express themselves to others.

• Memorials Can Be Temporary

A temporary memorial is one that can provide students the opportunity to express themselves and to give testimony to their peers, as well as learn how to also direct their generosity to surviving family members. The opportunity to participate in temporary activities and projects can help them come to accept the finality of their loss. Temporary memorials are very important to healing and do not create the significant problems and challenges of permanent memorials in schools. An initial memorial site where students and staff can place flowers, poems, pictures, and teddy bears, can be located in an area where those who wish not to be reminded can easily avoid that location, while others have easy access. However, it is to be temporary. A natural time to remove the materials is often following the funeral, but do so in a formal way that leads to the presentation of all these symbols of caring to the family. This provides students the opportunity to experience the tremendous help they can be to grieving family members. This is a wonderful “teachable moment” and completes the need most of us have to feel as if we have done something helpful and meaningful.

• T-Shirts Picturing the Deceased

T-Shirts with a picture of the deceased student or students is a memorial itself, but one that also needs to be time limited. T-shirts are another way for students to express themselves, but because they are visible to many, some may become activated by this visual. Students wearing memorial T-shirts will need help in channeling their need to be visible and publicly associated with the deceased student. Involving these students in activities that fulfill this need, helps to diminishing the need to wear the T-shirt. Students can write notes and cards to

family members for formal presentation or, better yet, be given the opportunity to meet with the family to directly communicate their thoughts and feelings to the family. They can help establish a drive to raise monies for the school foundation in memory of their friend. Depending upon the nature of the death they could organize efforts to develop recommendations related to prevention of such deaths. They could be invited by the crisis team of that school district to contribute their suggestions as to what was or would be more helpful should such a situation happen in the future. However, at some point the wearing of t-shirts, which is not part of the dress code for many schools, must end. It will be much easier if students have been involved in other related activities as well as educated to be sensitive to the way their tribute can be difficult for others. This too is a teachable moment regarding consideration for others.

- **The Need to Do Something**

In the numerous articles about memorials posted on the Internet, not one discusses the conflict between staff and students that can be created in the first few weeks after a death, especially when administrators face the difficult challenge of saying “no” to specific behaviors and desires of students. Problems most frequently emerge when the student’s need to do something is not channeled into activities that become meaningful for family survivors, when students are not participants in determining how best to show support during memorial services. Students who continue to challenge school policy regarding memorials often have other personal issues triggered by the death of their friend. Some may need further intervention. Maintaining a dialogue and attempts to reach agreeable solutions becomes another “teachable opportunity” to develop supportive relationships with these students. Providing a range of activities for students retains their need for choice provides experiences they may not otherwise have been able to provide themselves, and communicates administrative/system support of their need to grieve and to somehow find a way to manage the wide range of emotions they experience.

- **School Newspapers**

School newspapers can be considered a temporary memorial. Students will expect to read about that student(s), what happened and what others have to say about the student and, in some cases, the circumstances of the death. We recommend that the guidelines established by the American Association of Suicidology regarding the reporting of a suicide be followed (www.suicidology.org). These guidelines are based upon well-documented research related to contagion and the modeling of that suicide act in order to be also publicly acknowledged. This is a difficult task for editors who must find a balance between what is helpful and what becomes a glorification. Highlighting the values the student communicated or lived by, their favorite activities and songs, but most importantly why they will be missed, constitute responsible, helpful information for those who are closest to the student. After articles in the student newspaper have been published, bring students together to discuss their thoughts, their responses, what they liked or did not like about what they read. Again, involving the students helps to defuse otherwise intense reactions. Students certainly could be asked to submit their thoughts in writing to the newspaper staff before and after, as students often identify life issues that are important, do have merit and deserve consideration.

- **School Foundations**

We recommend schools establish a school-based foundation that families and students can contribute to for the purpose of funding specialized programs, services, in-service trainings, materials, and equipment. Attention therefore, is not on any one single family, student, or staff person. Foundation contributors can be listed in the yearbook and school newsletters. Materials, services, programs, etc. that are made possible through this funding can be acknowledged with, “This equipment was made possible from the families, businesses, and benefactors in our community.”

Memorial Services

Again, it is important to involve students in the planning of memorial services when such services allow for student participation. Some students will not want to attend services. They need to be provided alternative activities. Use symbols of life that deliver positive messages and hope. Music, balloons, and candles can all be effective in focusing on our ability and strength to survive painful experiences. It is recommended that memorial services are not conducted in the school but again, at a community facility such as a church. In some communities the school gym or auditorium is the only facility large enough to hold a large group. Should the decision be made to use the school, schools should not allow media coverage. Administrators have no control over what reporters decide to communicate. Most administrators who have allowed the media to attend have regretted it. Speeches, testimonials, music, poems, and other performances, need to be previewed and approved. This necessitates that several staff and crisis team members work with the students as they prepare. Conflict can arise regarding the appropriateness of some of their material, and what they wish to do. It must be brought to their attention that their message could have an impact on the larger student population.

Following any memorial service students need to have the opportunity to talk about their thoughts and reactions one more time. This is also a time for crisis team members to normalize their reactions and talk a bit about what life will be like without their best friend. Let them know healing will take time and, should they need to just sit and talk in the future, team members will be available. Above all, those students closest to the deceased will need permission to laugh and enjoy themselves in the weeks and months to come without guilt, acknowledging that real friends want the best for one another.

Conclusion

There are a number of articles written about the benefits of a community memorial. The Oklahoma Memorial is somber yet a beautiful testimony to those who were killed in the bombing of the Federal Building. It certainly helps families to give some meaning to the senseless death of their loved ones. Memorials in the community simply do not present the problems such memorials in closed environments, like schools, present. When a student is allowed to speak to other students or at a school assembly problems can arise because of the diverse yet closed assembly. When that same student presents the same message in a community setting open to others to attend, the message will be heard and reacted to quite differently.

Unfortunately, there is no long-term research on the impact permanent school memorials have on its population, on its constantly changing population. However, the anecdotal information from those who have dealt with problems they never anticipated when that permanent memorial was approved does, and should, cause concern. We know that because of the disturbing effects of exposure to ongoing reminders that rethinking permanent memorials in schools is necessary.

Memorials can be very beneficial, but for some they can be very activating. Anyone who needs to, should be allowed to easily avoid the unwanted memories and fears memorials can trigger. Most school memorials today are impossible to easily avoid. In contrast, community memorials are much easier to avoid. Temporary memorials are helpful and appropriate but must be time-limited and removed from the school. Students must be involved in the planning of memorial services and activities and ultimately these students and their activities need to be directed at supporting the family of the deceased student. The nature of the death can be the beginning of efforts and campaigns to prevent similar deaths. Moments of silence are appropriate and, when death impacts a large part of the student body, a brief reminder and moment of silence on the anniversary of that death is appropriate.