

# CHAPTER THREE

## DEATH IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

[Death in the School Community](#)

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1. **PURPOSE:** To develop a crisis response to a death within the school community or person significant to the school community.
2. **WHAT TRIGGERS THE INTRVENTION PROCESS?** The death or anticipation of the announcement of the death of a person who has a significant relationship with the school. The person may be a teacher, student, staff or faculty member, or other significant member of the community.

**If death occurs on the campus:**

1. *Secure Area (disturb as little as possible; limit access until police arrive)*
2. *Contact local medical resource person*
3. *Contact administration*
4. *Call 911 (ambulance and police)*
5. *Continue to hold classes*
6. *Separate all witnesses until police arrive (To the extent possible, witnesses should not speak with each other or anyone else)*

### 3. PROCEDURES:

#### A. Identify appropriate procedures to protect the health, safety, and welfare of students.

1. Local Administrator or Crisis Intervention Specialist coordinates response. Some schools prefer to appoint two people to work together. This person or team will serve as the contact persons/coordinators.
2. Confirm death. If the death has been ruled a suicide or this is suspected please refer to Chapter Four – Suicide.
3. This situation activates the crisis team, which should be identified in advance by the local administrator. The crisis team may include the principal/local administrator, crisis intervention coordinator, pastor, teacher, counselor, psychologist, nurse or whoever may be helpful in your particular situation.

4. The local administrator/designee informs the staff. Specify how this will be done if the information comes in during the school day. If the information is received after the school day, the phone chain can be used to notify staff and to set up an emergency faculty meeting for the following morning before school. It is important that all faculty and staff be fully informed; each telephone tree caller must have accurate and identical information to relay.

**Note:** *with Internet accessibility and use, especially with students, immediate/timely response is imperative. If the death occurs during the summer, also consider having faculty contact students individually.*

5. The crisis team plans the level of response based upon the relationship of the deceased to the school community and the anticipated effect of the death.
6. At the faculty meeting:
  - An announcement should be distributed to be read at designated time (note that this should be read in the individual classrooms and not over the public address system or in an assembly).
  - Review logistics for referring students to one of the counselors
  - Directions given for handling media if appropriate

***Depending on the particular situation the following may be***

***appropriate:***

7. Provide designated rooms and school staff, IU personnel, and agency counselors for counseling grieving students after the death is announced. Determine if and how many additional mental health professionals will be needed.
8. The local administrator/designee notifies insurance company.
9. The local administrator/spiritual director and/or local clergy should contact the deceased person's parents and/or other immediate family to provide support and to alert them to the schools planned response.
10. In the event of a teacher's death, an experienced teacher (NOT a substitute teacher) should meet the deceased teacher's class(es) the following day and subsequent days if needed. A counselor should also be present.

11. If it is a student who has died, a counselor should follow the deceased student's class schedule throughout the day or meet with the class of the student to help classmates express their feelings and discuss concerns related to the death. The deceased student's desk SHOULD NOT be removed at this time.
12. Determine if any school activities (e.g., sports events or standardized tests, etc.) need to be canceled or postponed. Notify students and other schools.
13. Arrange for teacher substitutes for individual teachers. These persons should be familiar with the school and may serve as "pinch hitters" to relieve any teacher who is grieving or needs a break.
14. Identify the deceased student's close friends and other friendship groups (e.g. sports teams or activity groups). Identify other students who may be at risk due to deaths in their lives or other factors. Make contact with these students and/or their parents. Parents of severely affected students will be notified to prepare them for their children's return home.
15. If the cause of death has not been determined, contact local authorities to determine appropriate procedures. Do not remove personal effects of the deceased from his/her locker. Staff should be aware of the need to follow local regulations.
16. A letter to parents should be written and distributed to students to take home that day. This letter should include the factual information, information about services (if available), school response, likely reactions from children and resources if parents have further concerns. See [Attachment A](#) for sample letter.

**B. Who does what?**

1. Local administrator and/or Crisis Intervention Specialist \_\_\_\_\_ coordinates response.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ confirms death.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ activates crisis response team.  
Team members and phone numbers are:

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4. Local administrator or \_\_\_\_\_ informs staff.
5. Crisis team plans level of response.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ prepares announcement.  
\_\_\_\_\_ will be the room students needing to speak to someone are initially sent to. Rooms available to counselors are:

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7. Additional counselors can be called from (e.g. IU, Catholic Charities)\_\_\_\_\_. Contact person and numbers are:

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8. Local administrator/designee \_\_\_\_\_ notifies insurance company at\_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ will contact the family to provide support and to alert them to the school's planned response.
10. If it is a teacher who has died \_\_\_\_\_ will teach his/her class(es) the following day and subsequent days if needed. \_\_\_\_\_ will be the counselor present (or indicate where the counselor will be from \_\_\_\_\_).
11. \_\_\_\_\_ will be the counselor who follows the student's schedule if the deceased is a student (or indicate where the counselor will be from \_\_\_\_\_).
12. \_\_\_\_\_ will determine if any school activities will need to be postponed or canceled. \_\_\_\_\_ will notify students and other schools.

13. The following people can serve as substitutes for individual teachers:

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14. If the deceased is a student the crisis team will identify his/her close friends and other friendship groups (e.g. sports teams or activity groups). The team will also identify other students who may be at risk (this could be done at the morning faculty meeting). \_\_\_\_\_ will make sure that contact is made with these students and/or their parents.

15. If the cause of death has not been determined \_\_\_\_\_ will contact local authorities to determine and implement appropriate procedures.

16. \_\_\_\_\_ will write the letter for students to take home.

**C. When do they respond?**

When notified of the death. When a death is imminent preliminary planning can be done.

**D. What will the follow up be?**

1. There should be a brief meeting at the end of the day to review effectiveness and determine needs. Planning should be done according to needs.

**E. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- <http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/griefwar.html>
- <http://www.teachersandfamilies.com/open/parent/grief2.cfm>
- <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/grief.htm>
- <http://www.education.ucsb.edu/jimerson/lossres.html>

## ATTACHMENT A

SUGGESTED LETTER TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS ON THE DEATH  
OF A TEACHER, STAFF MEMBER OR STUDENT IN SCHOOL  
(Date)

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We are all saddened this week by the death of \_\_\_\_\_, one of our students. We have had psychologists and counselors present in our school today to assist the students and faculty with the questions and grief, which accompany a situation such as this.

You may see signs of sadness in your children over the next several weeks. For some students, a death of someone they know may remind them of some other loss in their lives. For other children this may be their first encounter with death. Children grieve differently from adults. It is important that they have the opportunity to express their feelings. Such behaviors as lethargy, over-activity, crying, sleeplessness, lack of appetite, disinterest in usual activities, avoidance of the event, guilt and fear are expected.

It is important that you deal honestly and directly with their questions. Referring to death as going to sleep or passing away may result in confusion. It is appropriate that you use the word "death" and refer to \_\_\_\_\_ as having "died". Should you have difficulty approaching this issue, your clergy and local mental health agencies are there to help.

If you would like additional information about talking to your children about death, we have material available at school. If your child's reaction is prolonged or extreme, agencies are available or we can provide additional resource information. (Insert local agency numbers here)

Funeral services are as follows:

PLEASE NOTE: School will be closed on \_\_\_\_\_ to allow our faculty, staff and students to attend the funeral services.

If your child wishes to attend the funeral, please be sure that you or another adult accompanies him/her. It is very important that children do not go through this experience alone.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding in these matters. Please keep the \_\_\_\_\_ family in your prayers.

Sincerely,  
Principal

