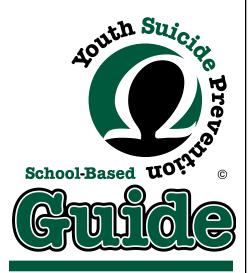
Checklist 7b



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Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide

Responding to and Working with the Media Sample Forms for Schools

- Announcements for Students, Faculty, and Staff
- Notification Letter to Parents Following a Suicide
- Formal Statement to Notify Media of Suicide
- Sample Response Form for Incoming Calls from the Media

The following announcements have been suggested for use when addressing students, faculty, and staff. These announcements should be presented in a small meeting room as soon as possible following the death. A member of the crisis team and possibly the principal should lead the meetings. The goals of the meetings are to inform the faculty, students, and staff and allow them time to express their emotions, and prepare them to meet and deal with a suicidal crisis. Faculty should be given accurate up-to-date information regarding the suicide first and they should be given time to express their emotions and concerns before informing their students. These sample forms were synthesized from four sources (see references for complete resource information):

- Managing Sudden Traumatic Loss in the Schools: New Jersey Adolescent Suicide Prevention Project (Revised Edition) by Underwood & Dunne-Maxim.
- Youth Suicide Prevention Intervention and Postvention Guidelines: A Resource for School Personnel by The Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program.
- *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools* by The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center.
- Suicide Postvention Guidelines: Suggestions for Dealing with the Aftermath of Suicide in the Schools by the American Association of Suicidology.

Announcements to Students, Faculty, and Staff Morning Day 1

Sample Announcements for When a Suicide has Occurred

"This morning we heard the extremely sad news that ______died by suicide last night. I know we are all saddened by his death and send our condolences to his family and friends. Crisis stations will be located throughout the school today for students who wish to talk to a counselor. Information about the funeral will be provided when it is available, and students may attend with parental permission." (2)

Or

"It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that one of our students, _____, has taken [his/her] own life. All of us want you to know that we are here to help you in any way we can.

A suicide death presents us with many questions that we may not be able to answer right away. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we ask that you not spread rumors you may hear. We'll do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us.

Suicide is a very complicated act. It is usually caused by a mental disorder such as depression, which can prevent a person from thinking clearly about his or her problems and how to solve them. Sometimes these disorders are not identified or noticed; in other cases, a person with a disorder will show obvious symptoms or signs. One thing is certain: there are treatments that can help. Suicide should never, ever be an option.

Each of us will react to _____'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Feeling sad is a normal response to any loss. Some of you may not have known _____very well and may not be as affected, while others may experience a great deal of sadness. Some of you may find you're having difficulty concentrating on your schoolwork, and others may find that diving into your work is a good distraction.

We have counselors available to help our school community deal with this sad loss and to enable us to understand more about suicide. If you'd like to talk to a counselor, just let your teachers know.

Sample Announcement for a Suspicious Death Not Declared Suicide

"This morning we heard the extremely sad news that ______ died last night. This is the only information we have officially received on the circumstances surrounding the event. I know we are all saddened by ______'s death and send our condolences to his family and friends. Crisis stations will be located throughout the school today for students who wish to talk to a counselor. Information about the funeral will be provided when it is available, and students may attend with parental permission." (1, 2)

Or

"It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that one of our students, _____, has died. All of us want you to know that we are here to help you in any way we can.

The cause of death has not yet been determined by the authorities. We are aware that there has been some talk about the possibility that this was a suicide death. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we ask that you not spread rumors since they may turn out to be inaccurate and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to ______ as well as [his/her] family and friends. We'll do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us.

Each of us will react to _____'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Feeling sad is a normal response to any loss. Some of you may not have known _____ very well and may not be as affected, while others may experience a great deal of sadness. Some of you may find you're having difficulty concentrating on your schoolwork, and others may find that diving into your work is a good distraction. We have counselors available to help our school community deal with this sad loss. If you'd like to talk to a counselor, just let your teachers know.

Please remember that we are all here for you." (3)

Please remember that we are all here for you." (3)

Announcements Morning Day 1

Sample Announcement for a Primary or Middle School

"We want to take some time this morning to talk about something very sad. (Name)______, an eighth grader, died unexpectedly last night. At this point, we do not officially know the cause of (his/ her) ______ death. Death is a difficult issue for anyone to deal with. Even if you didn't know ______, you might still have some emotional reactions to hearing about this.

It is very important to be able to express our feelings about ______'s death, especially our loss and sadness. We want you to know that there are teachers and counselors available in the library all through the day to talk with you about your reaction to _______'s death. If you want to talk with somebody, you will be given a pass to go to the library where we have people who will help us through this difficult time." (1, 2)

Announcements End of Day 1

At the end of the first day, another announcement to the whole school prior to dismissal can serve to join the whole school in their grieving in a simple, non-sensationalized way. In this case, it is appropriate for the building administrator to make an announcement similar to the following over the loud speaker (1, 2):

Announcements Day 2

On the second day following the death, many schools have found it helpful to start the day with another announcement by each teacher in their homeroom. This announcement can include additional verified information, re-emphasize the continuing availability of in-school resources, and provide information to facilitate grief. Here's a sample of how this announcement might be handled (2):

"We now know that ______'s death has been declared a suicide. Even though we might try to understand the reasons for his/her doing this, we can never really know what was going on that made him/her take his/her life. One thing that's important to remember is that there is never just one reason for a suicide. There are always many reasons or causes and we will never be able to figure them all out.

Today we begin the process of returning to a normal schedule in school. This may be hard for some of us to do. Counselors are still available in school to help us deal with our feelings. If you feel the need to speak to a counselor, either alone or with a friend, tell a teacher, the principal, or the school nurse, and they will help make the arrangements.

We also have information about the visitation and funeral. The visitation will be held tomorrow evening at the ______ Funeral Home from 7 to 9 pm. There will be a funeral Mass Friday morning at 10 am at ______ Church. In order to be excused from school to attend the funeral, you will need to be accompanied by a parent or relative, or have your parent's permission to attend. We also encourage you to ask your parents to go with you to the funeral home."

Notification Letter for Parents Following a Suicide

When cause of death has been confirmed as suicide (3, 4)

Date:	
Dear parents of	students,
	d is a sad and tragic event, and the sudden death of our student, (name), has touched both students and faculty here at High
School.	
	nation provided to us by the medical examiner and the family, (name of student) died by suicide on (day), _ (month) (date).
The funeral arrange	ements are as follows: Mr.
	(name) request that students
atte	nd/do not attend. In addition, donations may be sent in care of
	ssionally staffed support stations available to all students. In addition, students vith staff from our counseling and social work departments.
In the days and we are going to require through their feelir	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work ngs and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be
In the days and we are going to require through their feelir sensitive and aware	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work
In the days and we are going to require through their feelir sensitive and aware adolescents. If you feel your chil	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work ngs and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be e, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving d is having difficulty and may benefit from additional support, please feel
In the days and we are going to require through their feelir sensitive and aware adolescents. If you feel your chile free to contact	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work ngs and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be e, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving
In the days and we are going to require through their feelir sensitive and aware adolescents. If you feel your chile free to contact guidance counselo supported by local	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work hgs and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be e, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving d is having difficulty and may benefit from additional support, please feel , the Crisis Team Leader, your child's r, or myself so the school can be aware of the needs of your child. We are also mental health professionals and can provide you with referrals as needed.
In the days and we are going to require through their feelin sensitive and aware adolescents. If you feel your chile free to contact guidance counselo supported by local In addition, if you a	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work hgs and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be e, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving d is having difficulty and may benefit from additional support, please feel , the Crisis Team Leader, your child's r, or myself so the school can be aware of the needs of your child. We are also mental health professionals and can provide you with referrals as needed. are interested in attending a parent/caretaker meeting, please contact
In the days and we are going to require through their feelin sensitive and aware adolescents. If you feel your chile free to contact guidance counselo supported by local In addition, if you a	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work hgs and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be e, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving d is having difficulty and may benefit from additional support, please feel , the Crisis Team Leader, your child's r, or myself so the school can be aware of the needs of your child. We are also mental health professionals and can provide you with referrals as needed.
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In the days and we are going to require through their feelir sensitive and aware adolescents. If you feel your chil- free to contact guidance counselo supported by local In addition, if you a and registration. As the school comr	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work has and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be e, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving d is having difficulty and may benefit from additional support, please feel , the Crisis Team Leader, your child's r, or myself so the school can be aware of the needs of your child. We are also mental health professionals and can provide you with referrals as needed. at at (phone) for further information munity continues to cope with the loss of (name), we ation in the healing process. Please feel free to contact the school at any time
In the days and we are going to require through their feelin sensitive and aware adolescents. If you feel your chil- free to contact guidance counselo supported by local In addition, if you a and registration. As the school comminvite your particip	eks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and e your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work has and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be e, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving d is having difficulty and may benefit from additional support, please feel , the Crisis Team Leader, your child's r, or myself so the school can be aware of the needs of your child. We are also mental health professionals and can provide you with referrals as needed. at at (phone) for further information munity continues to cope with the loss of (name), we ation in the healing process. Please feel free to contact the school at any time

Notification Letter for Parents Following a Suicide

When cause of death has NOT been confirmed as suicide (3)

Dear parents o	students,	
-	n great sadness to inform you that one of our students, mpathies are with [his/her] family and friends.	_, has died. Our
	ts were given the news of the death by their teacher in [advisory. ncluded a copy of the announcement that was read to them.	/homeroom] this
een some talk nd we have as an be deeply l	th has not yet been determined by the authorities. We are aware about the possibility that this was a suicide death. Rumors may b ed the students not to spread rumors since they may turn out to artful and unfair to as well as [his/her] family and friend accurate information as it becomes known to us.	egin to circulate, be inaccurate and
roups today a	Crisis Response Team are available to meet with students individ well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the scho eed of additional assistance; we have a list of school and commu	ol office if you fee
vishes to atten	ut the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have i , we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the serv ing school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental hool.	vice. If the funeral
Please do not h oncerns.	sitate to contact me or one of the school counselors with any qu	estions or
incerely,		
chool Principa		

Responding to and Working with the Media

Samples of Formal Statement to Notify Media of Suicide

To be provided to local media either upon request or proactively.

"______High School is sad to report that it has confirmed the death of one of its students, ______, with the medical examiner's office and the deceased's family. ________(first name), a______-year-old (age) ________(first name), a_______(grade), died _______(day) [died by suicide]. He/she was a resident of ________ and was active in _______ at the school. Funeral arrangements are not available at this time. School counselors and community mental health representatives are available to any student who wishes

to talk about _____'s death." (1)

Or

"School personnel were informed by the coroner's office that a [___]-year-old student at [____] school has died. The cause of death was suicide.

Our thoughts and support go out to [his/her] family and friends at this difficult time.

The school will be hosting a meeting for parents and others in the community at [date/time/location]. Members of the school's Crisis Response Team [or mental health professionals] will be present to provide information about common reactions following a suicide and how adults can help youths cope. They will also provide information about suicide and mental illness in adolescents, including risk factors and warning signs of suicide, and will address attendees' questions and concerns. A meeting announcement has been sent to parents, who can contact school administrators or counselors at [number] or [e-mail address] for more information.

Trained crisis counselors will be available to meet with students and staff starting tomorrow and continuing over the next few weeks as needed." (3)

Be sure to provide local media outlets with a list community resources, suicide warning signs, and ways the media can be helpful with postvention.

Sample Response to Incoming Calls from Media

"The school has designated a media spokesperson. Please feel free to contact ______ with your questions and concerns. We would like to respond to your questions in an organized manner. To assist you, _______(name) will be meeting with concerned members of the media at ______ (time) in _______ (place). At that time we will provide information about the school's response to our loss and identify additional resources in the community to support the bereaved." (1)

References

Responding to and Working with the Media

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Notes



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