

Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide

Sample Forms for Schools 7b

- 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 informed of 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 three sources:

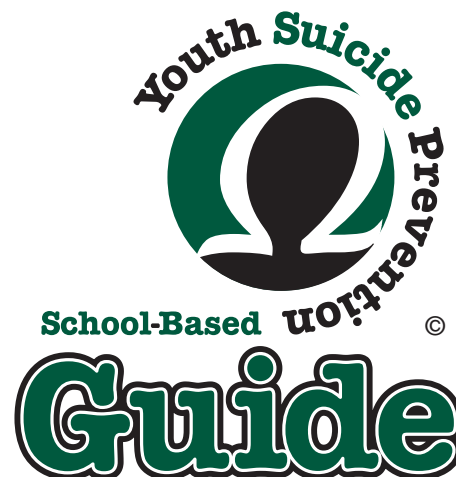
1. Underwood, M.M., Dunne-Maxim, K. (1997). Managing sudden traumatic loss in the schools: New Jersey adolescent suicide prevention project (revised edition). Piscataway, New Jersey: University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey—University Behavioral Healthcare.
2. The Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program. (2002). Youth suicide prevention intervention and postvention guidelines: a resource for school personnel. A program of Governor Angus S. King Jr. and the Maine Children's Cabinet.
3. Community Action For Youth Survival Project (SAVE). Retrieved May, 18, 2003, from the University of Illinois at Chicago: Institute for Juvenile Research, Department of Psychiatry. Funded by the Ronald McDonald House Charities.

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Sample Forms

7b



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Sample Forms for Schools 7b continued

Announcements to Students, Faculty, and Staff

Day 1

Morning, Day 1

Sample Announcement 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."

Sample Announcement For a Suspicious Death Not Declared Suicide

Morning, Day 1

"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."

Sample Announcement Primary or Middle School

Morning, Day 1

"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."

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:

"Today has been a sad day for all of us. We encourage you to talk about _____'s death with your friends, your family, and whoever else gives you support. We will have special staff here for you tomorrow to help in dealing with our loss. Let us end the day by having the whole school offer a moment of silence for _____."

Sample Forms for Schools 7b continued

Announcements to Students, Faculty, and Staff continued

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:

"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."

Sample Forms for Schools 7b continued

Notification Letter for Parents Following a Suicide

Date: _____

Dear Parent(s)/Caretaker(s),

The death of a child is a sad and tragic event, and the sudden death of our student, _____ (name), has touched both students and faculty here at _____ High School.

Based on the information provided to us by the medical examiner and the family, _____ (name of student) died by suicide on _____ (day), _____ (month) _____ (date).

The funeral arrangements are as follows: _____.
Mr. and Mrs. _____ (name) request that students _____
_____ attend/do not attend. In addition, donations may be sent in care of _____.

Since the news of the death, the school has implemented a crisis response plan to help the students and staff respond to this unfortunate death. In conjunction with colleagues from _____ (community agencies), the school continues to provide/has provided professionally staffed support stations available to all students. In addition, students continue to meet with staff from our counseling and social work departments.

In the days and weeks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and are going to require your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work through their feelings and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be sensitive and aware, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving adolescents.

If you feel your child is having difficulty and may benefit from additional support, please feel free to contact _____, the Crisis Team Leader, your child's guidance counselor, or myself so the school can be aware of the needs of your child. We are also supported by local mental health professionals and can provide you with referrals as needed. In addition, if you are interested in attending a parent/caretaker meeting, please contact _____ at _____ (phone) for further information and registration.

As the school community continues to cope with the loss of _____ (name), we invite your participation in the healing process. Please feel free to contact the school at any time with questions or concerns.

Sample Forms for Schools 7b continued

Formal Statement to Notify Media of Suicide

_____ High School is sad to report that it has confirmed the death of one of its students, _____, with the medical examiners office and the deceased's family. _____ (first name), a _____ -year-old (age) _____ (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.

- List community resources
- List 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.



Notes





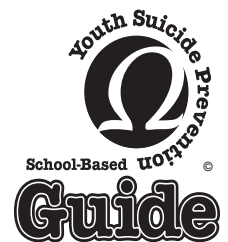
Notes



Notes

Additional information corresponding to the items in this checklist can be found in **Issue Brief 7b: Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide: Responding to and Working with the Media** at <http://theguide.fmhi.usf.edu>

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