



# Protocol for Student or Staff Death

**Updated October 2014**

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## MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 1, 2014

TO: School Administrators and Other Related Staff

FROM: Sandra Kowalski, Assistant Superintendent-Elementary Schools  
Shaun Kraska, Interim Assistant Superintendent-Secondary Schools

RE: Protocol Manual Update

The loss of a school community member, be it staff or student, is a difficult situation. This manual was developed in order to assist building administrators and other crisis team members in dealing with the many events and possible situations that may arise due to an unfortunate loss.

This manual is organized to be as practical and useful as possible. It is structured to define the various tasks school crisis team members will need to address. It is also understood there is no set procedure or plan that will be followed lock step because each event and each school will have unique circumstances and tasks.

One thing we do ask, after an event in which this manual has been used, is that the crisis team meets to review the manual and offer suggestions for improvement to its contents.

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## **DUTIES OF THE PRINCIPAL Crisis Response Checklist**

### **Prior to the Event:**

(Keep at home)

- ✓ Student Roster (updated quarterly)
- ✓ Phone Tree
- ✓ Response Checklist (this document)

### **IMMEDIATELY**

(Upon notification from family/agency)

- Verify the Death (Do not make decision or announcement until verified)**
  - Family – *As soon as appropriate*
  - Police Department - *Take ID to prove your identity*
    - Fairbanks - 459-6500
    - North Pole - 488-6902
  - Alaska State Troopers - 451-5100
  
- Notify Central Office**
  - **Sandra Kowalski**, assistant superintendent elementary (K-6)  
456-2723 (home), 750-3114 (cell)
  - **Shaun Kraska**, assistant superintendent secondary (7-12)  
455-6658 (home), 590-0348 (cell)  
Sandy and Shaun are backup calls for each other
  - **Karen Gaborik**, superintendent  
**(Call if Sandy and Shaun are not available)**  
590-3755 (cell)
  
- Contact School Crisis Management Team**
  - Set meeting time
  - Delegate tasks as appropriate
  
- Script Message for the Staff Meeting**

Be sensitive to the event and needs of the family (see sample in appendix)

  - As soon as appropriate, contact the family, asking what the family would like to be shared
  - Extend condolences
  - Obtain any pertinent information from the family to share – copy on soft colored paper
  
- FERPA Guidelines**
  - Staff should follow the same rules when determining what student information is released, as if the student were still alive (FERPA guidelines on pages 49-52)
  
- Start School Staff Phone Tree**
  - Read scripted message including time for staff meeting before or after school, whichever is soonest.
  
- Hold School Crisis Team Meeting**
  - Suggested tasks to cover at School Crisis Team Meeting
  - Identify adult supervision for early arriving students during staff meeting
  - Identify media center and direct media to Public Relations director if needed.

## **DUTIES OF THE PRINCIPAL Crisis Response Checklist**

### **Immediate Responsibilities of the Principal (cont.)**

- Delegate tasks as appropriate
- Make arrangements for bringing student's belongings to the family. Include: locker clean out, hall, PE, band, etc. Remember to check if locker is shared with another student. Place belongings in an appropriate container right away.
  
- Hold General Staff Meeting  
Suggested areas to cover at staff meeting:
  - Information regarding death; be as specific & clear as needed.
  - Review school procedures
  - Get copies of student's schedule
  - Have counselor visit each classroom
  - Designate specific locations for the counselors/students' support center
  - Distribute copies (or send via building email) of a statement to be read in all classes.  
Students are informed in classes, not in a large assembly or over the PA (read script verbatim)
  - Remind staff to rehearse any scripted message before delivering it to others
  - Keep routines as normal as possible
  - Encourage students to stay in class
  - Students who need support are sent to counselor or student support center
  - Discourage students from leaving school
  - Make arrangements to call parents of students who are very upset so they can be sent home, if needed. Try to keep a routine in place if possible
  - Remind staff of support services people in the area who can help adults who are affected. Be aware of the feelings of former teachers as well as current teachers. ( See *community resource listing*)
  - State location of media contact center
  - Direct all news media or inquires to central office
  - Schedule end-of-day debriefing with staff & teachers (optional attendance)
  - Moment of silence, if requested, to end meeting

### **ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL**

- Request additional central office assistance if needed i.e., subs, clerical, additional school counselors.
  
- Main office/communication center
  
- Deal with relevant phone calls
  
- Be focal point for confirmed information
  
- Refer all news media to appointed media contact person
  
- Meet with Crisis Team during the school day to determine procedures for subsequent days and to debrief.
  
- Visit each classroom to see how staff and students are doing.

## **DUTIES OF THE PRINCIPAL Crisis Response Checklist**

### **Ongoing Responsibilities of the Principal (cont.)**

- Discourage any dramatization, memorial services, PA announcements, or closing the school for the funeral.
- Send copies of all correspondence/messages to assistant superintendent (fax or e-mail) prior to sending out.
- Determine how information will be sent home.
  - Student hand-carry
  - Email
  - PowerSchool
  - Blackboard Connect
- Identify parents/volunteer role.
- Plan for student remembrance, if appropriate.
- Update central office regularly.
- Update staff regularly via e-mail.

**DUTIES OF THE BUILDING CRISIS TEAM MEMBERS**  
**Crisis Response Checklist**

- Counselor obtains deceased student's schedule and checks on student's classes.
  - Organize the library or other suitable room for a Student Support Center.
  - Assist both students and staff through crisis counseling (check & monitor).
  - Obtain class schedule of sibling/s of the deceased student and attend his/her classes.
  - Determine:
    - Friends impacted
    - Staff who were close to student
    - Rumor control for students' well-being - attempted suicide. (See "Suicide Prevention Manual")
  - Notify administrative secretary of any necessary materials needed for the Student Support Center.
  - Identify other possible support rooms as needed.
  - Debrief at end of the day.
- \* Work with assistant superintendent to determine if student had siblings/relatives at other schools.

## **DUTIES OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OR DESIGNATED ASSISTANT Crisis Response Checklist**

- Support the principal and carry out delegated tasks that may include the following:
  - Copy the deceased student's schedule and distribute to the Building Crisis Team
  - Meet with the teachers of the deceased student and inform them of the arrangements that have been made for counselor/Crisis Team members to attend the student's classes that day.
  - Identify siblings, boyfriend/girlfriend, as well as close friends of the deceased, and distribute information to the counselors/Crisis Team. (Make arrangements for counselors/Crisis Team members to talk to them.)
  - Notify other school support staff including coaches, librarians, cafeteria personnel, and custodial staff.

### **ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Support the principal.
- Be the liaison between the principal and the Crisis Team.
- Monitor the condition of the school community.
- Monitor the in school Crisis Team members.
- Monitor teachers of the deceased individual.
- Check all extracurricular activities and notify the organizer if deceased was a participant.
  - \* If high school, activities director and coaching staff/booster personnel should be notified.



## **DUTIES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY Crisis Response Checklist**

- Respond to students who come to the office and direct them to appropriate personnel or location.
- Find a picture of the deceased student and distribute to staff for identification at general staff meeting, if possible.
- Prepare copies of a statement for teachers and staff – run copies on soft colored paper (color coded for class, script for parents, etc.).
- Compile and run off a class list of students, parents, and phone numbers for callers to work from.
- Meet with other secretaries in the school to:
  - Review telephone protocol
  - Review the prepared statement
  - Determine their needs for support/relief
- Where possible, arrange for stand-by teacher to substitute for the Crisis Team members.
- Clear the principal's calendar.
- Provide food/beverages for staff/volunteers.
- Provide beverages for Student Support Center.
- Notify late or absent staff.
- Check to make sure materials listed for the Student Support Center are brought to that location (see end of Secretary Duties).
- Locate any other materials the Crisis Team members may need and deliver to the Student Support Center.
- Act as liaison for communicating information between central office and the principal when the principal is not available.
- Provided forms to staff :
  - Telephone Log – (*Sample Forms*)  
This telephone log allows a school to document phone inquiries and actions taken in responding to them. It can be particularly useful in high profile situations or instances where large numbers of people might be involved.

**DUTIES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY (cont.)**  
**Crisis Response Checklist**

- Student Contact and Follow Up – (Sample Forms)

The use of this form is critical for documentation and follow-up. Crisis responders and school counselors should use this form to record the names of any students with whom they have had direct contact. It should include the names of students you have worked with in individual or group situations. If a student transfers to another person or location, make sure you note this in the Personal Notes section of this form. Be sure to record critical information and any unique facts that might jog your memory at later time. It is important to identify any students you feel were particularly upset by the event and will need follow-up. Crisis responders also need to make note of the name of the school person to whom the forms were submitted.

**MATERIALS FOR STUDENT SUPPORT CENTER**

List of suggested materials:

Kleenex  
Flip Chart and Holder  
School Passes  
Markers/pens/pencils  
Scotch Tape  
Masking Tape  
Rolls of Paper  
Sign in/out Sheet  
Grief Handouts

Lined Blank Pages

Debrief of Event Sheet

**DUTIES OF ALL SCHOOL STAFF  
Crisis Response Checklist**

- Any staff member who has knowledge of a student's death through suicide or other cause immediately informs the principal either at home or at school. Should this contact not be possible, the staff member should call the assistant principal either at home or at school.
- Staff should contain the event as much as possible to protect the rights of the family.
- Staff should channel all communications through the principal's office.
- Staff should not contribute in any way to rumors or unsubstantiated information.
- Be sensitive to your own needs and the needs of your colleagues. Ask for or offer assistance as needed.
- Be observant and report any extreme or unusual reactions by students or staff to an administrator.
- Report any unsupervised student gatherings to an administrator so that support can be provided as needed.

**DUTIES OF CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT  
(ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE)  
Crisis Response Checklist**

- Communicate with building administrator to see what assistance is needed.
- Assistant superintendents will do a site visit if needed.
- Contact the other schools in the district and notify them with accurate information (see list in Miscellaneous section).
- Upon notification from school or building, the assistant superintendent notifies the community (see list in Miscellaneous section).
- Ask if principal he/she wants feeder school counselors contacted for additional assistance with students.
- Review letter to parents written by principal. Principal will decide distribution.
- For smaller schools send two admin secretaries to type letters, make copies and send email.
- Send 2 additional Principals to site if needed.
- Contact the school regularly to receive updates.
- Identify any siblings at other schools and notify the school of the situation.
- Contact School Board via Superintendent.
- Take guidance from parents as to what information to release; otherwise be vague.
- Distribute letters.

## Sample Forms

Following are sample documents with an explanation of how each can be used in the time of a crisis. Below are some general considerations when using these forms:

1. Fill out the forms as completely and accurately as time and circumstances permit.
2. Write legibly so the forms can be read by others.
3. Avoid using information that has not been verified.
4. Do not release any names until family members have been notified.
5. Crisis responders should be in place before any announcements are made to students or staff.
6. All information regarding the crisis should be released on a “need to know” basis and should follow established channels set forth in the Emergency Management Plan. Remain particularly alert to parents and media representatives who might be attempting to overhear your conversation.

### 1. Telephone Log

This log allows a school to document phone inquiries and actions taken in responding to them. It can be particularly useful in high profile situations or instances where large numbers of people might be involved.

### 2. Student Contact and Follow Up

The use of this form is critical for documentation and follow up. Crisis responders and school counselors should use this form to record the names of any students with whom they had direct contact. It should include the names of students you have worked with in individual or group situations.

**If a student transfers to another person or location, make sure it is note in the *Personal Notes* section of this form.**

Be sure to record critical information and any unique facts that might jog your memory at later time. It is important to identify any students you feel were particularly upset by the event and will need follow up. Crisis responders also need to make note of the name of the school person to whom the forms were submitted.

### 3. Event Debriefing – Administrator

After the crisis is over use the form to record Crisis Management Team suggestions on how to improve protocol.

### Telephone Log

Student Name	Caller Name	Date/Time	Concern/Question	Answer/Action	Action Taken By

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Completed by \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT CONTACT AND FOLLOW UP**

Student Name	Caller Name	Date/Time	Concern/Question	Answer/Action	Action Taken By

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Completed by \_\_\_\_\_

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PROTOCOL FOR DEATH OF A STUDENT OR STAFF MEMBER

EVENT DEBRIEFING FORM - ADMINISTRATOR

Please indicate how each suggested activity (areas in bold) proceeded adding suggested changes/additions.

Event Recap

Time of Notification: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please return to the Assistant Superintendent's Office within one week of the event.*



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## Sample Documents

The sample communication documents in this section are for example purposes only. It is important that crisis situations which could result in a letter home be funneled through the appropriate assistant superintendent's office and the director of public relations. The superintendent will be kept informed by assistant superintendent's office and the superintendent will alert the Board.

Below are some general considerations when using these forms:

1. Fill out the forms as completely and accurately as time and circumstances permit.
2. Write legibly so the forms can be read by others.
3. Avoid using information that has not been verified.
4. Do not release any names until family members have been notified.
5. Crisis responders should be in place before any announcements are made to students or staff.
6. All information regarding the crisis should be released on a "need to know" basis and should follow established channels set forth in the Emergency Management Plan. Remain particularly alert to parents and media representatives who might be attempting to overhear your conversation.

### SAMPLE DOCUMENTS AND SUGGESTED USE

1. **Sample Scripted Phone Dialog for Calling Parents–Death of Student or Faculty Member**  
This information is designed to be read aloud, word-by-word when it becomes necessary to inform the parents of a particular class about the unexpected death of a student or teacher. This approach will help ensure that parents hear the same information.
2. **Sample Memo to Staff – Death of Student or Staff Member**  
This memo can be used to notify and inform your faculty about a loss at your school. It lists several general suggestions teachers might want to use with their students after they arrive in class. If needed, counselors and Building Crisis Team members can help teachers discuss the death with their students. It is critical that crisis responders are available and in place before any general announcements are made to groups of students. There is always the possibility of mass hysteria which would place extra stress upon the teachers and the administration and make it more difficult to get the students settled at a later time. If after-hours or weekend notification is needed, alert your staff by using a "phone tree."
3. **Sample Letter to Parents – Death of Student or Staff Member**  
This letter can be used to notify and inform parents about a crisis situation that has occurred at your school. It also provides several general strategies parents might want to use to assist their child in coping with a crisis event. It is important that any reported factual details be as accurate as possible so as to assist with rumor control. A follow-up letter can be sent once funeral arrangements are known.
4. **Sample Memo to Faculty – Student or Staff Suicide**  
When holding a faculty meeting or individually notifying staff is not practical, you will want to inform your staff with a memo as soon as the suicide has been confirmed. Attempt to

## Sample Documents

anticipate questions that might be asked and try to answer them as accurately and honestly as possible to minimize rumors. As soon as possible, a meeting with the entire staff should be held to address such issues as suicide prevention and the potential for “contagious/copycat” suicides. If after-hours or weekend notification is needed, alert your staff by using the phone tree.

5. **Sample Letter to Parents – After a Suicide Death**

This letter can be used to notify and inform parents about a suicide that has occurred at your school. It also provides several general strategies parents might want to use to assist their child in coping with a crisis event. It is important that any reported factual details be as accurate as possible so as to assist with rumor control. A follow-up letter can be sent once funeral arrangements are known.

6. **Sample Letter to Parents – Funeral Notification of Student or Staff Member**

This communication essentially relays information and allows people to arrange their schedules in case they choose to visit the family at the funeral home. This may be a second mailing since this information may not be available when the initial death notice is sent out.

## **1. Sample Scripted Phone Dialog for Calling Parents**

The information in the following pages is designed to be read aloud, word-by-word when it becomes necessary to inform the parents of a particular class about the unexpected death of a student or teacher. This approach will help ensure that parents hear the same information.

Sample ***Scripted Phone Dialog for Calling Parents***  
**Death of a Staff Member**

SCHOOL: Dial phone number

FAMILY: "Hello"

SCHOOL: My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am calling from \_\_\_\_\_ School. Please do not be alarmed. Your child is all right.

We are calling all of the parents of students in **(staff name)**'s class. I regret to inform you that **(staff name) (passed away / was fatally injured this morning while driving to work - words to fit event)**.

**Listen**  
***Pause for reaction***  
***Provide support if needed***

Members of the Building Crisis Team will be working with our counselors and other staff members to help our students and staff deal with their feelings of shock and loss.

The students in **(staff's name) class will be told / were told** of about this tragic event. A general announcement will be made and a moment of silence will be taken **(when – near the end of the school day)** to express our concern and sympathy regarding this loss of a member of our school.

We will notify you if your child appears particularly upset by this event. You are welcome to come to school if you feel the need. If at all possible, please try to have someone at home when your child arrives.

**Optional:**

**Over the next several days you may want to make yourself available to your child to talk about what has happened and to provide reassurance. You may want to discuss what your family can do to show your concern and sympathy for the family of (staff name) as well as decide if your child should attend the wake or funeral.**

**A wide range of emotion might be expected and changes in eating and sleeping habits could occur. Changes that do not seem to improve over time should be brought to the attention of the school counselor or a mental health professional.**

If you have any questions or if you need to contact us for any reason, our number is \_\_\_\_\_.

<p><b>Note:</b> If necessary, consult with or ask one of the counselors or Building Crisis Team members to speak with the parent regarding specific concerns or questions.</p>
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Sample ***Scripted Phone Dialog for Calling Parents***  
**Death of a Student**

SCHOOL: Dial phone number

FAMILY: "Hello"

SCHOOL: My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am calling from \_\_\_\_\_ School. Please do not be alarmed. Your child is all right.

We are calling all of the parents of students in **(name of teacher or particular class)** class. I regret to inform you that **(student's name) passed away/was fatally injured this morning – (work words to fit event).**

**Listen**  
**Pause for reaction**  
**Provide support if needed**

We have members of the school's Building Crisis Team working with our counselors and other staff members to help our students and staff deal with their feelings of shock and loss.

The students **will be told / were told** of **his/her** death at **(time)**.

If at all possible, please try to have someone at home when your child arrives.

**Optional:**

**Over the next several days you may want to make yourself available to your child to talk about what has happened and to provide reassurance. You may want to discuss what your family can do to show your concern and sympathy for the family of (student's name) as well as decide if your child should attend the wake or funeral.**

**A wide range of emotion might be expected and changes in eating and sleeping habits could occur. Changes that do not seem to improve over time should be brought to the attention of the school counselor or a mental health professional.**

If you have any questions or if you need to contact us for any reason, our number is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Note:** If necessary, consult with or ask one of the counselors or Building Crisis Team members to speak with the parent regarding specific concerns or questions.

Actual ***Scripted Phone Dialog for Calling Parents***  
**Death of a Student**

SCHOOL: Dial phone number

FAMILY: "Hello"

SCHOOL: My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am calling from \_\_\_\_\_ School. (Principal) has asked me to call parents of (teacher)'s class to let them know some sad news regarding a student in the class. On Tuesday afternoon, (grade) student \_\_\_\_\_, passed away from injuries received in an automobile accident in North Pole the previous evening.

**Listen**  
**Pause for reaction**  
**Provide support if needed**

We have members of the school's Building Crisis Team working with our counselor and other staff members to help our students and staff deal with their feelings of shock and loss.

The students in the school were told this morning of \_\_\_\_\_'s death.

If at all possible, please try to have someone at home when your child arrives today as they may need some extra support. Your student will be bringing a letter home with suggestions of ways you may want to help them deal with this tragedy.

We are helping students work through this and thought this phone call would be helpful to you as well.

FAMILY: **Pause for response**

SCHOOL: Thank you. Good bye.

**Do not engage in more conversation about the accident or the family.**

## 2. Sample Memo to Faculty – Death of Student or Staff Member

This memo can be used to notify and inform your faculty about a loss at your school. It lists several general suggestions teachers might want to use with their students after they arrive in class. If needed, counselors and Building Crisis Team members can help teachers discuss the death with their students. It is critical that crisis responders are available and in place **before** any general announcements are made to groups of students. There is always the possibility of mass hysteria which would place extra stress upon the teachers and the administration making it more difficult to get the students settled at a later time. If after-hours or weekend notification is needed, alert your staff by using a “phone tree.”

Sample **Memo to Staff** - Death of a **Student**

Memorandum

TO: Faculty and Staff

FROM: (principal's name)

RE: Loss of a Student

Date:

It is with great sadness that I must inform you that we have lost a member of our school family.

**(Student's name) died/was killed/passed away... At this point/I was told that/I recently learned that... (facts about death/accident – when, where, how, etc.)**

The Crisis Building Team will be available to work with the staff and students from our school to assist anyone who is upset by this tragedy.

Listed below are several suggestions which may assist grieving staff and students in dealing with their feelings of loss:

- Discuss what has happened, relay relevant facts, answer questions, and attempt to dispel rumors.
- Discuss what staff and students might expect from themselves and others (i.e., grief process and individuality of process).
- Share memories and thoughts.
- Discuss ways to respond individually and as a class.
- Identify students in need of assistance and send them to the office or contact **(name)**.

If you need assistance for your students or yourself, please contact **(name)**.

Please be advised that I am letting you know this information in advance so you can prepare for the school day. However, in order to provide better support, **please do not inform your students of this loss until you are notified that the Building Crisis Team is in place.**



Actual **Memo to Staff** - Death of a **Student or Staff Member**

TO: Faculty and Staff

FROM: (principal's name)

RE: Loss of a Student

Date:

**Teachers: Please read this statement to your students at 9:10 this morning immediately after the morning announcements.**

(Principal) has asked me to let you know of some sad news about a student in \_\_\_\_\_'s (grade) class. Yesterday afternoon, one of her students, (name of student,) passed away from injuries received in an automobile accident in North Pole the day before. We are very sad for \_\_\_\_\_'s family and \_\_\_\_\_'s class at this time.

Mr. Emery and other counselors are available today to help our students and staff deal with their feelings of shock and loss.

(optional) "Here's our class plan for dealing with this sad news."

Other information for teachers:

- 1) Encourage students to stay in class
- 2) Students who need support may be sent to counselor or student support room #
- 3) Discourage students from leaving school; counselor(s) will make arrangements to call parents of students who are very upset so they can be sent home
- 4) Be observant and report any extreme or unusual reactions by students or staff to (principal) or (counselor)
- 5) Discuss what staff and students might expect from themselves and others (i.e., grief process and individuality of process)
- 6) Balance sensitivity and school business as usual
- 7) Direct all parent (or media) questions regarding this incident to (principal)
- 8) Do not share anecdotal information/rumors you may have heard with students or parents
- 9) Phone calls will be made this morning to all parents of (teacher's) class
- 10) Letters will be sent home with all students at the end of the day

Actual ***Memo to Staff*** - Death of a ***Student***

TO: (School name) Staff and Students

FROM: (principal's name)

RE: Accident

Date:

Teachers: Please read this to your students.

Many of you are aware that an accident occurred this morning on the Richardson Highway involving two of our students. It is with a great deal of concern and sadness that I must inform you that one student, \_\_\_\_\_, is in very critical condition at this time. Our other student, \_\_\_\_\_, was not seriously injured and is currently at home. At this time, it would be appropriate, out of respect for the families, to **not** call their homes or the hospital. We will provide additional information as it becomes available.

The District Crisis Team is available in the auditorium for staff and students who would like support. Teachers – please provide a pass to any student who requests one or refer students who appear to need assistance.

The accident is being investigated by the Troopers. The details of the accident are unknown at this time. Please discourage speculation and rumors.

We understand this will cause turmoil and confusion during this time of final exams. Let's pull together as a (school name) family to help each other through this difficult period.

Sample **Memo to Staff** - Death of a **Staff Member**

Memorandum

TO: Faculty and Staff

FROM: (principal's name)

RE: Loss of Staff Member

Date:

It is with great sadness that I must inform you that we have lost a member of our school family.

**(Staff's name) died/was killed/passed away...)** At this point/I was told that/I recently learned that... **(facts about death/accident – when, where, how, etc.)**

The Crisis Building Team will be available to work with the staff and students from our school to assist anyone who is upset by this tragedy.

Listed below are several suggestions which may assist grieving staff and students deal with their feelings of loss:

- Discuss what has happened, relay relevant facts, answer questions, and attempt to dispel rumors.
- Discuss what staff and students might expect from themselves and others (i.e., grief process and individuality of process).
- Share memories and thoughts.
- Discuss ways to respond individually and as a class.
- Identify students in need of assistance and send them to the office or contact **(who?)**

If you need assistance for your students or yourself, please contact **(name)**.

Please be advised that I am letting you know this information in advance so you can prepare for the school day. However, in order to provide better support, **please do not inform your students of this loss until you are notified that the Building Crisis Team is in place.**

### **3. Sample Memo to Parents – Death of Student or Staff Member**

This letter can be used to notify and inform parents about a crisis situation that has occurred at your school. It also provides several general strategies parents might want to use to assist their child in coping with a crisis event. It is important that any reported factual details be as accurate as possible so as to assist with rumor control. A follow-up letter can be sent once funeral arrangements are known.

Sample **Letter to Parents** – Death of a **Student**

*(print on school letterhead)*

(Date)

Dear Parent,

It is with great sadness that I must inform you about the tragic loss of one of our students. On **(insert day and morning/afternoon/evening)** we learned that **(student name)**, a **(grade)** student in **(teacher's name)** class was killed while **(what happened)**.

The school staff was informed of **(student's name)**'s death during a meeting before the students arrived at school. Students were told about this tragic event after they arrived at class. **(Any other things that will be done could be listed here.)**

Members of our Building Crisis Team have been working with our counselors and other staff members to help students and staff deal with their feelings and emotions.

Please realize that reactions to death (and stress) are varied and can depend upon such factors as age, personality, previous losses, and relationship to the victim. If you feel your child has been affected by this situation, you can assist your child by doing the following:

- Take time to listen to and talk with your child about what has happened.
- Reassure your child that you will be available to help him/her through this difficult time.
- Help your child verbalize some of the feelings he/she might be feeling but is unable to express.
- Reassure your child that you will do all you can to keep him/her safe. Providing specific examples may help to reduce some of the fear and anxiety.
- Discuss some of the things you and your child might do to express your concern for the victim's family. **If you decide to allow your child to attend the funeral and/or memorial service, it is best that you or some responsible person accompany your child.**

Any changes in your child's behavior, which seem extreme and/or do not seem to go away, should be brought to the attention of the school guidance counselor or someone in the community of your choosing who can assist your child. We will continue to have staff available at school to assist our students in coping with this loss.

Thank you for your support and assistance.

Sincerely,

Actual ***Letter to Parents*** – Death of an ***Elementary Student***

Dear Parent,

Earlier today, we announced to students the tragic loss of a \_\_\_\_\_ grader. At this time we do not know the cause of death. We are writing to you as it is our hope that no rumors will be spread. It is very important to not speculate about something so devastating.

Members of our Crisis Team have been working with our counselor and other staff members to help students and staff deal with their feelings and emotions.

Our counselor urges us to remember that reactions to death are varied. You can assist your son or daughter by taking time to listen and talk about what has happened and talk about the differences between rumor and fact. We want to respect the privacy and emotions of this family.

We have included a list of adults that are available to you over the weekend should the need arise. Please don't hesitate to call if you need someone to talk to.

Our thoughts are with this family during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Actual **Letter to Parents** – Death of an **Elementary Student**

Dear Parents:

Early this morning, your child was informed of some sad news regarding a student in \_\_\_\_\_'s class. On Tuesday afternoon, kindergarten student \_\_\_\_\_ passed away from injuries received in an automobile accident in North Pole the previous evening.

The school staff was informed of \_\_\_\_\_'s death before students arrived; students were told about this tragic event by their teachers when they arrived at class.

Members of our Building Crisis Team have been working with our counselor and other staff members to help students and staff deal with their feelings and emotions.

Please realize that reactions to death (and stress) are varied and can depend upon such factors as age, personality, previous losses, and relationship to the victim. If you feel your child has been affected by this situation, you can assist them by doing the following:

- Take time to listen to and talk with your child about what happened.
- Reassure your child that you will be available to help him/her through this difficult time.
- Help your child verbalize some of the feelings he/she might be feeling but is unable to express.
- Reassure your child that you will do all you can to keep him/her safe. Providing specific examples may help to reduce some of the fear and anxiety.
- Discuss some of the things you and your child might do to express your concern for the victim's family. **If you decide to allow your child to attend the funeral and/or memorial service, it is best that you or some other responsible person accompany your child.**

Any changes in your child's behavior which seem extreme and/or do not seem to go away should be brought to the attention of the school guidance counselor or someone in the community of your choosing who can assist your child. We will continue to have staff available at school to assist our students in coping with this loss.

Thank you for your support and assistance,

Sincerely,

Actual ***Letter to Parents*** – Death of a ***Middle School Student***

Dear Parent,

Earlier today, we announced to \_\_\_\_ students something very important and sad.

State Troopers notified us this morning that \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_ grade student at \_\_\_\_\_, had died.

At this time we do not know the cause of death. We do know rumors are being spread. It is really important that we do not speculate about something so devastating. As we learn more, we will let you and students know what happened.

Members of our Crisis Team have been working with our counselors and other staff members to help students and families process this news.

Counselors urge us to remember that reactions to death are varied. You can assist your son or daughter by taking time to listen and talk about what has happened, covering the differences between rumor and fact. Reassure your son or daughter that you will be available to help him/her through this difficult time. Help them to verbalize their feelings. Discuss some of the things that might be done to express concern and provide emotional support during this time of loss.

We will continue to have staff available at the school to assist students in coping with this loss.

Sincerely,



Sample **Letter to Parents** - Death of a **Staff Member**

*(school letterhead)*

Dear Parent,

A very sad thing has happened in our school community. This weekend, one of our staff members, (**name of staff and grade taught**), was hit by a car on his way from the beach and was killed. According to his family, a car crossed over into his lane and hit his car head on. He died at the scene of the accident. We are all profoundly saddened by his death.

We have shared this information with your child today and had discussions with all the students. Bereavement counselors, teachers and other support staff have been, and will continue to be, available to students, staff, and parents. Please contact the school if you have any questions or concerns.

As a parent, you may want to talk with your child about death because it impacts each person in different ways. How children react will depend on the relationship they had with the person who died, their age, and their prior experience with death.

Your child may:

- Appear unaffected
- Ask questions about the death repeatedly
- Be angry or aggressive
- Be withdrawn or moody
- Be sad or depressed
- Become afraid
- Have difficulty sleeping or eating

We suggest that you listen to your child. If he or she wants to talk, answer his or her questions simply and honestly and be prepared to answer the same question repeatedly.

Our thoughts are with (**family name**).

Sincerely,

#### **4. Sample Memo to Staff – Student or Staff Suicide**

When holding a faculty meeting or individually notifying staff is not practical, you will want to inform your staff with a memo as soon as the suicide has been confirmed. Attempt to anticipate questions that might be asked and try to answer them as accurately and honestly as possible as to minimize rumors. As soon as possible, a meeting with the entire staff should be held to address such issues as suicide prevention and the potential for “contagion/copycat” suicides. If after-hours or weekend notification is needed, alert your staff by using the “phone tree.”

Sample ***Memo to Staff*** - After a ***Student Suicide*** Death

MEMORANDUM:

TO: Faculty and Staff  
FROM: (principal's name)  
RE: Suicide of (name of student)  
DATE:

I am asking you to discuss the death of **(student's name)**, a **(grade)** student, with your class at the beginning of school. Some students will already be aware of **his/her** suicide. Others will be learning of the death from you. It is recommended that you give your class an opportunity to hear the following facts from you, to ask questions, and to discuss their feelings. You can expect some students to be angry and upset as well as sad. Please be sensitive to their feelings.

*Insert appropriate known details:*

**It has been reported that (student's name) committed suicide yesterday evening around 8:00 p.m. He was rushed by ambulance to the emergency room where the doctors were unable to revive him. The medical examiner has ruled his death a suicide. We do not know why (student's name) chose to kill himself/herself.**

Students may be excused from classes for **(student's name)** funeral if they bring a written excuse from their parents. **Funeral arrangements are still pending. I will give you that information when I receive it. The family will be at the funeral home tomorrow evening beginning at 7:00 p.m. if anyone wished to pay his/her respects and extend sympathy.** You may wish to discuss with your students/class ways they can show their concern individually or as a class.

The Building Crisis Team members will be in the school building throughout today and the rest of the week as needed. If you wish some assistance in discussing **(student's name)** death with your class, a team member will come to your classroom. Please identify any student you think needs further help dealing with this tragedy and send him or her to the **(designated area)**.

Today may be a very difficult one for you as well as for our students. Building Crisis Team members will be in the **(designated area)** if you wish to talk further about this incident.

Sample **Memo to Staff** - After a **Staff Suicide** Death

MEMORANDUM:

TO: Faculty and Staff

FROM: (principal's name)

RE: Suicide of (name of staff)

DATE:

I am asking you to discuss the death of (**staff's name**), a (**position in school**), with your class at the beginning of school. Some students will already be aware of **his/her** suicide. Others will be learning of the death from you. It is recommended that you give your class an opportunity to hear the following facts from you, to ask questions, and to discuss their feelings. You can expect some students to be angry and upset as well as sad. Please be sensitive to their feelings.

**Insert appropriate known details in paragraphs below:**

It has been reported that (staff's name) committed suicide yesterday evening around 8:00 p.m. He was rushed by ambulance to the emergency room where the doctors were unable to revive him. The medical examiner has ruled his death a suicide. We do not know why (staff's name) chose to kill himself/herself.

Students may be excused from classes for (**staff's name**) funeral if they bring a written excuse from their parents. **Funeral** arrangements are still pending. I will give you that information when I receive it. The family will be at the funeral home tomorrow evening beginning at 7:00 p.m. if anyone wished to pay his/her respects and extend sympathy. You may wish to discuss with your students/class ways they can show their concern individually or as a class.

The Building Crisis Team members will be in the school building throughout today and the rest of the week as needed. If you wish some assistance in discussing (**staff's name**) death with your class, a team member will come to your classroom. Please identify any student you think needs further help dealing with this tragedy and send him or her to the (**designated area**).

Today may be a very difficult one for you as well as for our students. Building Crisis Team members will be in the (**designated area**) if you wish to talk further about this incident.

## **5. Sample Letter to Parents – After a Suicide Death**

This letter can be used to notify and inform parents about a suicide that has occurred at your school. It also provides several general strategies parents might want to use to assist their child in coping with a crisis event. It is important that any reported factual details be as accurate as possible so as to assist with rumor control. A follow-up letter can be sent once funeral arrangements are known.

Sample **Letter to Parent** - After a **Suicide Death**

*(print on school letterhead)*

Dear Parent,

I have very sad news to share with you. We learned last night that **(student's name)**, a **(grade)** in our school, died by suicide. According to police reports, **(how and where)**. We have shared this information with all of the students in their first period class this morning] **(when was announcement made)**. We hope that you will be able to talk with your son or daughter about the death.

Suicide is a difficult death for most people to understand and accept because it raises many unanswerable questions. We never really know why a person kills their self. There can be a variety of factors that lead to an individual's suicide death. Sometimes students, especially **(student's name)** friends may wonder if they could have prevented the death. Others may feel that it was somehow their fault. It is important that students have an opportunity to communicate about these concerns and receive help if they need it.

Counselors, teachers, and other staff have been and will continue to be available for the students, parents, and staff to talk about thoughts, feelings, and concerns. Please contact us at school if you have any questions or concerns.

Our thoughts are with the **(student's name)** family as they deal with their **(son's or daughter's)** death.

Sincerely,

*Optional wording if school is planning a community meeting:*

A meeting will be held (date, time, location). It is open to parents, students, and staff. A bereavement counselor will be presenting information on the suicide issues including symptoms to watch for and prevention efforts. Please plan to attend.

6. Sample ***Letter to Parents – Funeral Notification*** of Student or Staff Member

This communication essentially relays information and allows people to arrange their schedules in case they choose to visit the family at the funeral home. This may be a second mailing since this information may not be available when the initial death notice is sent out.

Sample Letter to Parents - **Funeral Notification** of Student

*(print on school letterhead)*

Date

Dear Parent,

The **(school's name)** community was saddened to learn of the reported death of one of our students, *(student's name)*. The death of any young person is a loss, which in one way or another, diminishes each of us. The tragic circumstances of **(student's name)** death are perhaps more shocking and more difficult to accept.

We have asked the assistance of the Building Crisis Team to help our school community deal with this loss. We are doing everything we can to help your child and our staff through this difficult experience. You may anticipate more questions and a need to talk about this incident for the next several weeks.

**(Student's name)** funeral will be held at **(place of funeral)** on **(date at time)**. Your child may be excused from school to attend the funeral with written permission from you. We encourage you to make arrangements to accompany him or her and you will need to provide your own transportation. The school will remain open for those students who choose not to attend.

If you have any concerns regarding your child's reactions to this loss, our school counselors and Crisis Team members will be available to assist you.

Sincerely,



Sample **Letter to Parents - Funeral Notification** of **Staff Member**

*(print on school letterhead)*

Date

Dear Parent,

The **(school's name)** community was saddened to learn of the reported death of one of our staff, *(staff's name)*. The death of any person is a loss, which in one way or another, diminishes each of us. The tragic circumstances of **(staff's name)** death are perhaps more shocking and more difficult to accept.

We have asked the assistance of the Building Crisis Team to help our school community deal with this loss. We are doing everything we can to help your child and our staff through this difficult experience. You may anticipate more questions and a need to talk about this incident for the next several weeks.

**(Staff's name)** funeral will be held at **(place of funeral)** on **(date & time)**. Your child may be excused from school to attend the funeral with written permission from you. We encourage you to make arrangements to accompany him or her and you will need to provide your own transportation. The school will remain open for those students who choose not to attend.

If you have any concerns regarding your child's reactions to this loss, our school counselors and Building Crisis Team members will be available to assist you.

Sincerely,

Sample ***Parent Information Packet - Death*** of a Student

(School letterhead)

Date

Dear Parent,

I am enclosing a packet of information to help you as you work through potential grief issues with your child over the death of his or her classmate. We made every attempt today to call each family in **(teacher's name)** class to inform you of the death of another classmate, **(student's name)**. The information in this packet might be helpful in providing guidance and support in your efforts to help your child through the process of grief.

A team of staff members will be available for support and a listening ear to students and parents, not only today but throughout the next week to watch for areas of concern or need in the grief process. Should you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Principal

**Various suggestions of grieving taken from a number of handouts:**

Your child may experience reactions to the death of a classmate and you may see your child showing or demonstrating the following behaviors:

1. Mood swings
2. Irritability
3. Intense dreams
4. Tearfulness
5. Withdrawal from family and friends
6. Increase or decrease in activity level

All of the above are NORMAL reactions. Grief is a process that takes work and your child is attempting to work through his/her feelings.

You can support your child by:

- Listening carefully (let them talk about the loss, listen without pre-judging or trying to change their mind, let your child cry and vent feelings of sadness, anger, guilt)
- Spend time with your grieving child.
- Reassure your child that he/she is safe.
- Don't take anger or other feelings personally (let them know you are sorry such an event has taken place and that you want to help and to understand their needs).

### **How Do You React to Sudden Death of Someone You Know**

- Tightness in throat, swallowing is difficult
- Chest heaviness, may resemble heart attack, may have breathing irregularities
- Empty feeling in stomach, loss of appetite
- Have difficulty sleeping, dream patterns change
- Feel restless and look for activity but find it difficult to concentrate
- Feel as though the death isn't real, that it couldn't have happened
- Feel guilty or angry over things that happened or didn't happen in the relationship with the deceased, hyper-irritability
- May feel angry at the person who died
- Feel need to tell and retell things about the one who died and about the experience of their death
- Feel mood change over the slightest thing
- Cry or feel the urge to cry at unexpected times
- Feel the need to take care of other people who seem uncomfortable around us by politely not talking about the feelings of loss

Grief is a universal experience. Each person's grief is individual, depending on upbringing and previous experience. There are similar reactions, though, which most of us experience in varying degrees after a death. There is a pattern in human grief that is inevitable. Grief is not a weakness, a lack of faith, but is a physical and psychological necessity. We cannot avoid grieving.

Grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than society recognizes. It is a natural but complex process that includes love, anger, frustration, fear, bewilderment and loneliness.

Grief is cathartic and therapeutic. As you talk over the experience, the pain will gradually decrease. In fact, most grief reactions will eventually diminish in severity by themselves, for you have resources within you which enable you to recover from traumatic experiences such as bereavement.

*Excerpts from the book – When Death Impacts Your School by The Dougy Center - The National Center for Grieving Children and Families (ISBN 0-8905434-05-6. (A copy of this book is included in this manual).*

## **Grief Responses of Students**

Everyone grieves differently. Students will react in their own way to the news. Their reactions are impacted by a variety of factors including:

- Their age and developmental level
- Their relationship, if any, with the deceased
- Their previous experience with death
- The support systems available to them
- The modeling of grief responses from those around them
- Whether the death was anticipated or unexpected
- The nature of the death

*I'll never forget how my daughter laughed when I told her her mother died. At first, I was baffled. Then I quickly realized her nervousness.*

John S.

Of course, not all students will want to talk about the death. You may see students reacting in a variety of ways including being quiet or withdrawn, talking a lot, crying, getting angry, laughing, acting aggressive, looking sad or thoughtful, or any combination of reactions. Each response should be accepted and allowed, as long as it is not harmful to the student or another person. Each response is valid and important to that particular student. Remember that each person grieves differently. It is important for each student to feel heard and accepted. Remember also that the grief issues will not end at the end of the school day. They can continue into outside activities and home life. Helping parents understand and cope with these issues will be important in the student's life both at school and home.

Here is a list of common responses of the grieving child or teen:

### Academic Responses to Grief

- Difficulty focusing or concentrating
- Failing or declining grades
- Incomplete work, or poor quality of work
- Forgetfulness, memory loss
- Over achievement, trying to be perfect
- Language errors and word finding problems
- Inattentiveness
- Daydreaming

### Social Responses to Grief

- Withdrawal from friends
- Withdrawal from activities or sports
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Changes in relationships with teachers and peers
- Changes in family roles (e.g., taking on the role of a deceased parent)
- Wanting to be physically close to safe adults
- Inappropriate sexual behavior/acting out
- Stealing, shoplifting

## Common Responses of the Grieving Child or Teen (continued)

### **Physical Responses to Grief**

- Stomachaches, headaches, heartaches
- Frequent accidents or injuries
- Increased requests to visit the nurse
- Nightmares, dreams or sleep difficulties
- Loss of appetite or increased eating
- Low energy, weakness
- Hives, rashes, itching
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Increased illness, low resistance to colds and flu
- Rapid heartbeat

### Spiritual Responses to Grief

- Anger at God
- Questions of “Why me?” and “Why now!”
- Questions about the meaning of life
- Confusion about where the person who died is
- Feelings of abandonment and emptiness
- Doubting or questioning previous beliefs
- Seeing the future as meaningless

### Identifying Students Who Are At Risk

Any student can potentially be at risk after a death. Communicate with your faculty about observing, listening to, and attending to the needs of grieving students. They can help identify those who need a little extra support. Certain students you may want to pay attention to include those who are:

- Directly impacted by the crisis
- Not directly impacted by the current crisis but handling a recent tragedy in their own life
- Undergoing the stress of accumulated losses (e.g., deaths, divorces, moves, parental unemployment, etc.)
- Receiving support for special needs
- Dealing with other mental health issues (e.g., depression, eating disorders, behavioral problems, anxiety disorders, etc.)

At-risk behaviors associated with grief may include:

- Aggressiveness
- Truancy or increased absences
- Defiance, non-compliant behavior
- Lack of follow through on assignments
- Falling or failing grades
- Depression
- Suicidal threats or behavior
- Increase in drug or alcohol use
- Increase in risk-taking behaviors

Students who engage in at-risk behavior should be monitored. If the behavior is frequent, and continues overtime, or if it is dangerous, refer the student to a counselor for additional support.

## The Long Term Plan

Grief does not end the day after the funeral. It is not over in a week, a month, or even a year. Grief is an ongoing process that diminishes in intensity but is forever a part of life. The implication for students and faculty is that there will be grief eruptions that are unplanned but powerful. For example, if a shooting has occurred in your school, another shooting somewhere in the country will bring up memories and fears and grief that seemed to be gone.

On the anniversary of the death, students will remember what happened. Acknowledge the date and let students know that you are remembering the person who died on that date. It is important to plan ahead for anticipated events such as the anniversary of the loss or when a similar event occurs. If you follow the media coverage on anniversaries following shooting deaths in Dunsblane, Scotland; Littleton, Colorado; and Springfield, Oregon, for example, it is common for teachers, parents and school personnel to make comments like, “We thought this was behind us and that everyone had gotten over it, but the feelings of the kids poured out as if it happened yesterday.” This should not surprise us!

## Six Principles of Grieving

When a school community experiences a crisis involving one or more deaths, everyone grieves. We grieve the death of those individuals as well as the inevitable life changes that occur as a result of the loss. While we can prepare ourselves to better manage a crisis, nothing quite prepares us for the grief we experience after a death. And, unfortunately, there are no quick fixes. That’s why we offer some basic principles of grieving. These are helpful to keep in mind because they apply to any of us who have experienced a death.

1. *Grief is a natural reaction to loss.*

When a person dies, those who are impacted by the death experience emotional and physical reactions. Grief is experienced throughout the life span from infancy to adulthood, although the reaction will vary from person to person. Grief does not feel natural in part because we cannot necessarily control our emotions or other symptoms. The sense of being out of control may be overwhelming or frightening. Grieving is natural, normal, and healthy for bereaved students and adults.

2. *Each student’s grief experience is unique*

While many theories and models of the grieving process provide a helpful framework of tasks or stages of grieving, the path itself is a lonely, solitary, and unique one for every individual. No book, article, or grief therapist can predict or prescribe exactly what a student or an adult will –or should- experience on this path. Those who wish to assist people in grief do so best by walking with them along the path in the role of listener and learner, allowing the griever to teach about his or her unique grief journey.

3. *There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve*

Coping with death does not follow a set pattern or set of rules. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve. There are, however, “helpful” choices and behaviors that are constructive, life-affirming actions. Examples might include talking about the death, getting involved in a support group, or creating artwork to memorialize the person who died. Other responses are not helpful, destructive, or even harmful, causing long-term complications. These might include the use of drugs or alcohol to “numb” the pain, stifling feelings, and avoiding the grief process altogether. The sheer pain of loss often feels “crazy”. It can be challenging to decide which thoughts, feelings and actions are helpful and which are not. Following a death, grieving students get plenty of advice

from others about what they should and shouldn't do, feel, think, and believe. What is often more helpful than advice is nonjudgmental listening, helping them to sort through the options and alternatives they see.

4. *Every death is unique and will be experienced by your students in different ways.*

Students react differently to the death of a parent, sibling, friend, teacher or principal. Each relationship is unique. Some of the grief literature talks about loss in an almost competitive way as if some losses are worse than others. You may read that the death of a child is the worst loss, or that suicide is the hardest death to get over. Comparisons about which death is the worst are not helpful, and may lead to unrealistic expectations or demands. While a student may speak for himself/herself about how he/she experienced different losses, one cannot categorically say that any loss is worse, or easier than another. Each person should be respected in his or her way of coping with the death.

5. *The grieving process is influenced by a multitude of factors.*

There are many factors impacting how a student may react to a death. Some of these include:

- The social support systems available to the student (family, school, community, friends)
- The nature of the death and how the student interprets it
- The status of "unfinished business" between the student and the person who died
- The relationship with the deceased
- The emotional and developmental age of the student
- How the community views the death (stigmatized deaths such as homicides, suicides, and AIDS deaths are often looked at very differently than deaths by illness or accident.)

6. *Grieving never ends. It is not something the student will "get over."*

This is perhaps one of the least understood aspects of grief in our society. Most people are anxious for us to put the loss behind us, to go on, to get over it. When a person dies, the death leaves a vacuum in the lives of those left behind. Life is never the same again. This does not mean life can never again be joyful, or that the experience of loss cannot be transformed into something positive. But grief does not have a magical end. People comment on the pangs of grief 40, 50 or 60 years after a death. For the student at each new developmental level or experience of personal accomplishment, the grieving process will be re-experienced in some new way.

*"I just want to shout  
'You're wrong! Grief  
never ends.' I don't  
care what they say."*

Philip, 13



WHERE ELSE CAN I GO FOR HELP? (elementary level)

Students can find more information about coping with the death of a loved one and dealing with their grief by asking a parent or other adult to take them to the library or bookstore. The school library could be a good resource too.

The Dead Bird by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Remy Charlip (New York: Harper Trophy, 1995). (This was originally published in 1958.)

This book tells the story of some children who find a dead bird, bury it, and say their good-byes; for ages 4-8.

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo F. Buscaglia (Austin, Texas: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1983)

This story explains life and death in terms of the passing seasons; for ages 9-12.

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst, illustrated by Erik Blegvad (New York: Atheneum, 1971)

When Barney the cat dies, his young owner feels so sad that he can't do anything. His mother suggests that he write a list of ten good things about Barney, so the boy can think about all the good times they had; for ages 4-8.

When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1996)

The words and pictures in this helpful book explain death, grief and how to cope; for ages 4-8.

## **COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

### Alaska and National Resources

Emergency Services: Fire, Police - 911  
Poison Control: 1-800 222-1222  
Hospital: 452-8181

#### **CRISIS LINES-** (all are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

**Careline Crisis Intervention** - Toll-free telephone number will be **1- (877) 266-4357**  
Statewide suicide prevention and crisis intervention services to Alaskan residents. The hotline will be staffed locally from 6:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. on Monday through Thursday and overnight on Friday and Saturday. During the hours the hotline is not locally staffed, the statewide hotline will be covered by the Hopeline National Network.

#### **Covenant House- 1-(800) 999-9999**

This is a national crisis line that provides counseling for suicide, depression, relationships, drugs, alcohol, etc.

#### **Runaway Hotline – 1(800) RUN-AWAY (786-2929**

This is a national crisis line that counsels on all issues. This line can be used by parents of runaways or by teens living on the streets that would like to leave a message for their parents.

#### **Girl's and Boy's Town Hotline - 1 (800) 448-3000**

This is a national crisis line that counsels on all issues.

#### **COUNSELING SERVICES**

- Fairbanks Community Behavior Health Center, 3830 Cushman, 452-1575
- Fairbanks Counseling and Adoption, 912 Barnette St., 456-4729
- Fairbanks Psychiatric and Neurological Clinic, 1919 Lathrop, Suite 220, 452-1739
- Family Centered Services of Alaska, 1825 Marika, 474-0890
- Resource Center for Parents and Children, 1401 Kellum, 456-2866
- Tanana Chiefs Health/Mental Health Services, 201 1<sup>st</sup> Ave., Ste. 300, 452-8251 x 3140
- Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, 452-7273

#### **HEALTH**

- Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center (ANHS), 1717 Cowels St., 451-6682
- Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, 1650 Cowles St., 452-8181
- Interior Community Health Center, 1606 23<sup>rd</sup> Ave., 455-4567

#### **MILITARY SERVICES**

##### Ft. Wainwright

- Army Community Services, 353-6267
- Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), 353-1377

##### Eielson AFB

- Chaplains, 377-2130
- Family Support Center, 377-2178
- Mental Health and Family Advocacy, 377-4041 or 377-4042

#### **SUPPORT GROUP**

- Bereaved Parents' Support Group, 474-0311
- Parent Warm Line, 452-4588

## FERPA Quick Reference Guide

*How can you easily follow FERPA requirements for release of student records?*

Use the set of simple questions listed below to ask any person who is requesting personally identifiable student information. Remember that you must verify that their response is valid.

- 1) Is the person the parent/guardian of the student?
  - If yes – after verification, release the requested information
  - If no – do not release information and ask the next question
  
- 2) Is the person an employee of the district who needs access to perform their job?
  - If yes – after verification from that employee’s supervisor, release the requested information and place a note in the student’s file
  - If no – do not release information and ask the next question
  
- 3) Does the person have written parental permission to receive the student information?
  - If yes – after verification, release the requested information and place a copy of the permission in the student’s file
  - If no – do not release information and ask the next question
  
- 4) Does the person have a subpoena (court order) for the information?
  - If yes – after verification, release the requested information and place a copy of the subpoena in the student’s file
  - If no – do not release information and ask the next question
  
- 5) Is the information requested part of the student’s directory information (i.e., name, mailing address, school attended, grade level, dates of attendance or graduation)?
  - If yes – determine if directory information is restricted on this child (look at the demographic student information screen in PowerSchool Premier)
  - If directory information is not restricted then you may release directory information only. If directory information is restricted, then you may not release information.
  - If no – do not release information.

If the answer to all of these questions is no, but the person still insists on obtaining the information, please have them contact Information Systems 452-2000 ext 11212.

## Fairbanks North Star Borough School District FERPA Guidelines Regarding Release of Student Information

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 1974) pertains to all student records kept by the school and/or district. This includes the contents of the permanent record file and any other files kept on students either at your school or at central office. This includes (but is not limited to) health records, special education records, discipline records, Title I records, etc. The student's records are basically broken down into two main types of information:

1. **Directory Information**
2. **Personally Identifiable Information**

### 1. **Directory Information**

By school district policy, directory information consists of the following student information:

- Name
- Awards & Honors
- Mailing address (not resident address)
- Current school
- Current grade level
- Dates of attendance or graduation

Note: Student *phone number* is **not** included as directory information as specified by School Board policy. The one exception to the law prohibiting release of student phone number is when releasing to military recruiters. Parents can specify whether or not they want their student's phone number included.

**All** requests for *directory information* should be routed to the Information Systems/Student Records department at central office (452-2000 ext. 11212) so that we can make sure restricted students are excluded from these directory information lists. In our school district, we have a Directory Release form for parents to select specific restrictions each school year. Directory information restriction is coded on the student's PowerSchool Premier database by school administrative staff. Based on that information, Information Systems will reject any directory information request for students whose data has been restricted.

### 2. **Personally Identifiable Student Information**

Student information that is not part of directory information is considered personally identifiable student information.

***Under What Conditions can we release Personally Identifiable Student Information?***

There are specific situations where a school administrator can release personally identifiable student information to persons other than the parent/guardian. These two situations are:

- If you have written permission of the parent/ guardian, or
- If you receive a court order (subpoena) for the information.

There are a few exceptions to the above rule as follows:

- If a police officer declares that he/she needs specific student information because of a health or safety emergency, then you must provide this information to them, and parent consent to release the information is not required.
- If a police officer or social worker is conducting a criminal investigation of child abuse or sexual abuse by the parent/guardian, then written permission of the parent or a court order is not needed to obtain access to student records.
- A biological parent (even though they are not the legal guardian) has a right to receive any and all student records for their child, unless there has been a specific court order which prohibits the biological parent from access to the child's records. The biological parent must show proof of identification and the parent's name must appear on the child's birth certificate.
- Any school district employee can access student records if they need this access in order to perform their job responsibilities.
- There are certain additional restrictions that also apply to a student's sensitive information. These restrictions are covered by the free and reduced meal, social-economic status, or special education programs. Last, certain information is restricted such as discipline and medical data. See below for more information.

***Brief Review of Specific Situations:***

- 1) Juvenile Probation Officers – Probation officers (POs) have written parental permission for access to school records when they are doing a pre-disposition report. Also the "Findings and Order for Disposition of Delinquent Minor" (this is a court document) contains specific language for the release of student records in order to monitor the probationary period. The PO must show documentation relating them to the specific student.
- 2) Social Workers from the Office of Child Services (OCS) – In nearly all the cases where OCS is conducting an investigation, the investigation involves child abuse or sexual abuse. Social workers from OCS who are conducting an investigation for child abuse/neglect or sexual abuse do not need written parental permission or a court order, but you should ask the social worker if this is indeed an investigation of child abuse or sexual abuse. [Note: You should “never” assume you are talking to OCS over the phone, but rather take their name and number and call the OCS direct line back (451-2650) asking for the OCS employee by name.]

- 3) State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services – Parents who apply for public assistance are required to sign a release of information form for student records from the school district. The Information Systems department at central office has a procedure worked out with public assistance such that we provide verification of enrollment upon receipt of a copy of the parent permission form.
- 4) Law Enforcement Officers – This includes State Troopers, city police and military police. Providing Law Enforcement Officers with student information is in **direct violation** of FERPA. The only exception within FERPA for allowing the police access to student information without parent permission or a subpoena is when the request is related to a health or safety emergency. When you are contacted by police to provide information contained in student records, and it IS NOT related to a health or safety emergency you will need to see the written parent permission and/or subpoena issued by the court. Please refer problems in this area to Information Systems at central office (452-2000 ext 11212).
- 5) Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) – Guardians authorized by court order. One agency in Fairbanks is the CASA group. CASA provides Guardian Ad Litem services to the Fairbanks community. In any case, the Guardian Ad Litem “must” show proof through a court document that they have been assigned to the named student as the GAL. A copy of the court document should be filed with such requests.