

CHECKLIST – RESPONDING TO SUICIDE

These checklists are available to you and your team for extra support, however, **follow your Crisis Plan located in your EOP (Emergency Operations Plan)**. In the EOP are the correct procedures and personnel that will help guide you through a crisis. If a suicide occurs at your school The District Crisis Team will come assist your school.

On the following pages, you will find the helpful Quick Guides listed below:

- #1 First Day Procedures
- #2 Staff Meeting Considerations
- #3 Counseling Area for Students
- #4 Follow-up Staff Meeting

QUICK GUIDES – RESPONDING TO SUICIDE

#1 FIRST DAY PROCEDURES

- _____ Notify school staff and any other essential persons of the suicide as soon as possible via staff phone messenger after school or written note during the school day
- _____ Follow Crisis Plan located in EOP (proper district contact procedures).
CASS will provide district level support since additional help will be needed to keep grief support groups small and to conduct suicide screenings as needed
- _____ Determine other schools that may need to be informed of the suicide (e.g., schools with siblings, feeder schools, etc.) and identify who will contact these schools
- _____ Conduct a Crisis Team meeting to develop a plan on how to respond to the crisis
- _____ Arrange to empty the victim's locker(s) before school. Look for any notes the student may have left
- _____ Determine if the victim left any e-mail or web page messages
- _____ Delete the victim's name from the attendance roster and automated phone calling system
- _____ Determine how much help is needed from staff outside of the school. Assign responsibilities to each person and provide name tags in order to identify who is responsible for helping students and staff
- _____ Determine how to respond to offers to help from parent and community persons
- _____ Anticipate the need to sensitively reject student requests for memorials (lower the flag, flowers on locker, special page in the year book, etc.)
- _____ Plan on how to limit students' open access to phones/internet
- _____ Establish an early check-out procedure where upset students are released to an adult and are supervised at home
- _____ At the end of the day:
 - _____ Conduct a Crisis Team meeting to determine if additional help is needed for the next day, how students will be helped, and any changes to the plan
 - _____ Plan to see students needing follow-up the next day

#2: STAFF MEETING CONSIDERATIONS

- _____ Conduct a staff meeting before school to describe the crisis plan and how students will be notified and helped. Tell staff that the goals are to keep the students safe and to allow them to talk about their feelings and reactions to suicide.
- _____ Encourage teachers to talk about the suicide by keeping students in their classrooms when possible instead of sending them to the counseling area. Help the teachers (1) understand there will be a range of student reactions and (2) realize there is no such thing as the “right thing to say”. The goals are to allow the students to talk about their feelings by asking questions, to defuse strong reactions to insensitive comments, and to help identify adults with whom the students can talk.
- _____ Give the staff a written description of the plan, information about grief and loss and suggestions on what to say and do
- _____ Give the staff the *confirmed* details of the suicide in order to help defuse any rumors. Make sure to release only information provided by the authorities and family.
- _____ Triage: ask the staff to identify any students who they think will have a difficult time coping with the suicide
- _____ Advise teachers to delay moving the victim’s desk for a designated amount of time after which all the assigned seats can be changed. The same approach applies to posted pictures or work produced by the victim.
- _____ Advise the staff not to connect the suicide to other student deaths or predicting other future tragedies at the school. Solicit their help in creating psychological distance between the victim and surviving students.
- _____ Offer assistance to teachers who are concerned about talking to their classes
- _____ Introduce anyone from outside the school who will be assisting students and staff
- _____ Inform the staff of the letter to be sent home to parents, if there will be one.
- _____ Tell staff to refer all questions from the media, parents, and community to the principal or designee & keep the media away from the students
- _____ Identify any students and staff members who likely will be upset about the suicide and determine how best to help them
- _____ Decide how and when to notify students of the suicide (DO NOT USE THE P.A. SYESTEM, please!)
- _____ Determine the location of a counseling area in the school for working with extremely upset students
- _____ If necessary, determine a separate location for meeting with concerned parents and identify who should do this

- _____ Anticipate the need to conduct suicide screening interviews of students who are reacting to the suicide. Identify trained persons available to conduct interviews

- _____ Identify who will contact the victim's parents. Tactfully encourage holding the funeral after the end of the school day. Don't agree to use school space for a memorial or funeral. If needed, assist the parents in locating community resources for the visitation and funeral.

- _____ Develop a letter to parents informing them of the suicide and how their child was assisted at school. The letter is sent home the first day of the crisis and should include suggestions for how parents can support their child over the days and weeks to come.

- _____ If the suicide was witnessed, determine if Group or Individual Psychological First Aid is needed for students and/or staff members. If so, make the arrangements to provide it.

- _____ Arrange for a student services staff member to follow the victim's class schedule in order to talk with classmates about the suicide. The purpose is to increase the psychological distance between the students and the victim and to talk about normal feelings of grief and loss.

#3 COUNSELING AREA FOR STUDENTS: CONSIDERATIONS

- _____ Arrange for a check-in and check-out procedure for admitting students to and releasing students from the counseling area.
- _____ Have staff members working with students keep a student contact log describing who was helped, nature of concerns, recommended actions, and whether or not follow-up is needed (see Forms section of this manual).
- _____ Triage student need. Attempt to have a ratio of one helping adult per one to two students in the counseling area. Having large groups of grieving students with a single adult is difficult to manage.
- _____ Have distressed students escorted to the counseling area
- _____ Assign an administrator to the counseling area to assist in dealing with sensitive or disruptive situations.
- _____ Arrange for school-based staff (specifically counselors and teachers with planning periods) to work with the team helping students in the counseling area in order to have familiar persons working with the students.
- _____ Have plenty of tissue available in the counseling area
- _____ Provide pens, markers, and paper for students to make sympathy cards, if they choose.
- _____ Arrange for additional phones for use by staff to contact parents.
- _____ Arrange easy access to student schedules.

4 FOLLOW-UP STAFF MEETING

- _____ Have the Principal, Team Leader or district level staff conduct the meeting.
- _____ Give updated information.
- _____ Allow staff to express concerns and reactions to the crisis event.
- _____ Identify staff/students who need continued support services. Identify students and staff who might be returning the next day for the first time who may need support.
- _____ Remind staff to continue to refer all questions from the media, parents, and community to the principal or designee. Keep the media away from the students.
- _____ Provide ongoing support to staff members. Inform them of available resources.