

SAMPLE LETTERS

The following are sample letters that could be sent to parents following a tragedy impacting the school community. Included are examples of letters regarding a variety of possible scenarios. The general purposes of a letter to parents include: fulfilling the need to notify them of confirmed information about the tragedy; informing them of typical reactions of children to a crisis at different age levels; alerting them to specific problems that may arise in their own children (such as contagion factors following suicide); and providing contact persons if their children are not reacting in a typical manner and need further intervention:

- Elementary age, death by natural causes with surviving sibling
- Elementary age, death of a staff member
- Middle school age, death by traffic accident
- High school age, death by suicide
- High school age, death by gunshot wound (intentional)

Elementary Age: Death by Natural Causes with Surviving Sibling

Date:

Dear Parents:

We received some very sad news this morning. XX, a student in Ms. Y's class, died yesterday due to xx. X's younger sister is in Mr. G.'s class. Our crisis team is working to help the children deal with the loss of their friend and to offer any support that is needed.

Death often will produce confusion and fear in a child. Younger children have difficulty understanding the finality of death and may expect that a dead person will return. Children may show clinging behavior or have difficulty sleeping. It is normal that they may worry about what would happen to them if one of their family members died. Between the ages of five and nine, children begin to understand that death is final. However, children at this age may misinterpret events leading to death. For example, they may believe that their thoughts or wishes harmed someone. Because most children think concretely, hearing accurate information that they can understand will help dispel rumors which could cause unnecessary worry. By offering your children emotional support, giving them an opportunity to talk, and by giving accurate information they can understand, you will be helping your child to understand and grow through a loss experience.

One of the difficult things for children is to know what to say to XX's sister when she returns to school. Your child could write a brief note or may want to offer the following statements:

"I'm sorry that XX died."

"I care about you."

"I'm sorry about what happened to your sister."

We understand that the funeral will occur on Saturday at 11:00 a.m. at xxxxxxxx. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's adjustment, please contact your child's teacher or our school counselor, xxxx.

Sincerely,
Principal

Elementary Age: Death of a Staff Member

Dear Parents:

We are saddened by the death of XX, one of our third grade teachers. Her family has shared that XX's death was due to complications from asthma. XX has been part of our school family for the last six years and she taught in another school system prior to moving to Raleigh. She will be missed by all who knew her.

Death can produce confusion and fear in children. A young child may not understand the finality of death and may expect the deceased to return. Children may worry that their own parents or teacher will die. For children with asthma or other medical conditions, the concern may be for their own wellbeing. By providing factual information, offering emotional support, and giving them a chance to talk, our School Crisis Team is working to help our students cope with their loss.

A funeral for XX will be held on Saturday at 11 a.m. at xxxxxx. If you have questions or concerns about your child, you may reach, XX, our school counselor at (tel. number).

Sincerely,
Principal

Middle School Age: Death by Traffic Accident

DATE:

Dear Parent:

We are saddened by the death of XX, a seventh grade student on the XXX team. XX died yesterday as a result of a traffic accident. XX was riding home with a friend and was struck by a car when stopped at an intersection. After being transported to Wake Medical Center, she died while in surgery due to massive internal injuries resulting from the accident. Our School Crisis Team has been helping students deal with the loss of their friend and to offer any support that is needed.

Please keep in mind that it is not unusual for middle school students to feel anxious, sad, fearful, angry, or vulnerable after such a traumatic event. Through encouraging discussion, being supportive of feelings and suggesting positive actions, you can help your child better deal with this event.

We understand that the funeral will occur on Saturday at 11:00 a.m. at xxxxx. If your child plans to attend, you are encouraged to accompany him or her to give any needed support.

If you have any questions, please contact your child's school counselor.

Sincerely,
Principal

Ms. X	6 th grade counselor	222-2222
Mr. Y	7 th grade counselor	222-2223
Ms. Z	8 th grade counselor	222-2224

High School Age: Death by Suicide

Date:

Dear Parents:

We are saddened by the death of XX yesterday due to a reported self-inflicted injury. A team of counselors, psychologists, social workers and school nurses are on campus offering support to students during this time of loss. Our goal is to make sure our school is running smoothly and to insure the safety of students and staff.

It is not unusual for adolescents to feel anxious, sad, fearful, angry, or vulnerable after such a traumatic event. Through encouraging discussion, being supportive of feelings and suggesting positive actions, you can help your child better deal with this event. There are several things that we are actively dealing with in which we need your support. Please talk with your child about the negative effect of rumors and the problems that can result from inaccurate information. The details surrounding this tragedy are under police investigation; therefore, we want to be careful to share only facts with our staff, students, and parents that have been substantiated. Also, please talk with your child about healthy means to deal with problems. Adolescents may need encouragement to take care of problems by talking to their parents, teachers, counselors, or other supportive adults. If you are concerned about your child's adjustment to this traumatic event, please contact your child's grade level counselor immediately. After school hours, you can contact Wake County Mental Health at xxx.

We understand that the funeral will occur on Saturday at 11:00 a.m. at xxxxx. If your child plans to attend, you are encouraged to accompany him or her to give any needed support.

If you have any questions, please contact your child's school counselor at xxxx

Sincerely,
Principal

High School Age: Death by Gunshot Wound

Date:

Dear Parents:

We are saddened by a shooting incident which occurred yesterday after school at the park near our campus. One student, XX, died as a result of a gunshot wound, one student is in stable condition and another student was treated and released. We are taking all necessary actions to make sure our school is running smoothly and to insure the safety of students and staff. Also, our School Crisis Team has been helping students deal with their loss and offering any support that is needed.

Please keep in mind that it is not unusual for high school students to feel anxious, sad, fearful, angry, or vulnerable after such a traumatic event. Through encouraging discussion, being supportive of feelings and suggesting positive actions, you can help your child better deal with this event. Please talk with your child about the negative effect of rumors and the problems that can result from inaccurate information. The details surrounding this tragedy are under police investigation; therefore, we want to be careful to share only facts with our staff, students, and parents that have been substantiated.

We understand that the funeral will occur on Saturday at 11 a.m. at xxxxx. If your child plans to attend, you are encouraged to accompany him or her to give any needed support.

If you have any questions, please contact your child's school counselor at xxx.

Sincerely,
Principal