

# School Crisis Response Handbook



**School Emergency Response Plan and Management Guide**  
**School Crisis Response Handbook**

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# SCHOOL CRISIS RESPONSE HANDBOOK

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# ***SCHOOL CRISIS RESPONSE HANDBOOK***

## **Introduction**

The primary purpose of this *DCPS Crisis Response Handbook* is to assist school staff and administration in managing school crises in a universal, consistent, and appropriate manner. This manual is intended to create and foster a proactive approach to potential crises in schools. It prepares the total school community to cope with the possible impact of a destabilizing occurrence. What makes this manual especially valuable is that it can be applied and adapted to the particular culture and organizational structure of each school.

This handbook includes suggested procedures and resources to guide the School Crisis Team. All responses to crisis situations promote the school system's goal of a safe and orderly learning environment by reducing the impact of grief and loss that interferes with the normal school functioning and the learning process.

Materials compiled in this handbook were adapted from resources used in Howard County Public Schools, Montgomery County Public Schools, Fairfax County Public Schools, DC Department of Mental Health – School Mental Health Program, as well as past DC Public Schools Crisis Response Handbooks.

### **What Is a Crisis?**

A crisis is defined as a death or other traumatic event involving a student or staff member due to an accident, community violence, suicide, homicide, illness, natural disaster, or terrorism that interrupts the normal day-to-day functioning of the school.

### **Who Is Responsible for Responding to a Crisis?**

Each school has a School Crisis Team comprised of the principal, assistant principal(s), school counselor(s), health assistant and/or nurse, school psychologist, and social worker. One of these team members should be identified as the School Crisis Team chairperson. School-based teams provide prevention information, intervention, and support to school staff, students, and parents during and in the aftermath of a crisis or traumatic event. This team is also responsible for deciding if additional support is needed from the Central Crisis Team.

### **When Is the Central Crisis Team contacted?**

The decision to contact the Central Crisis Team is made by the principal, in consultation with the coordinator of the School Crisis Team and the Supervisor of Social Workers. If it is determined that additional support is necessary, the Supervisor of Social Workers contacts the appropriate team members. The role of the Central Crisis Team is to provide consultation and support to the School-based Team. The Central Crisis Team is comprised of social workers and psychologists from DCPS and DMH who have advanced training and expertise in the area of crisis management. The Supervisor of Social Workers remains available for consultation.

# *DCPS CRISIS RESPONSE PROTOCOL*

- The school principal will identify all school-based team members who will be responsible for coordinating the school's crisis response and post names around the school. The principal will either serve as chair of this School Crisis Team or designate a team member to serve as the chairperson.
- The principal/designee will assess impact of crisis on the school community that may affect students, staff, parents and local community members.
- The principal/designee contacts the following to inform of crisis event and give assessment information:
  - Office of Assistant Superintendents (202-442-5055);
  - Division of School Security (202-576-6962); and
  - Supervisor of Social Workers/Central Crisis Team Coordinator (202-442-5138 or 202-442-4800).
- The Supervisor of Social Workers/Central Crisis Team Coordinator will assess the Crisis Response Level of Need and deploy Central Crisis Team members to school.
- The Supervisor of Social Workers/Central Crisis Team Coordinator (202-442-5138 or 202-442-4800) will also assign one deployed Central Crisis Team member as Team Leader.
- Central Crisis Team members will reassess the situation with the School Crisis Team and principal.
- Central Crisis Team members will coordinate onsite intervention with School Crisis Team members with input from the principal/designee.
- If deemed necessary, Central Crisis Team members will bring other trained and certified mental health personnel to create and implement a plan of action.
- Principal, School Crisis Team, and Central Crisis Team members will provide up-to-date information to staff regarding the crisis, plan of action, and any other relevant information.
- Students will be provided debriefing, counseling, and/or support according to the plan of action.
- Staff members will be provided debriefing, counseling, and/or support according to the plan of action.
- Appropriate correspondence will be sent to parents and community.
- Followup services for students will be planned and scheduled.
- Crisis team is debriefed.
- Documentation of incident will be completed.

# ***DCPS CRISIS RESPONSE PROTOCOL***

## **Glossary of Terms**

**Crisis**—an event that produces a temporary state of psychological disequilibrium and a subsequent state of emotional turmoil that disrupts the educational program.

**School Crisis Team**—may consist of administrative team members, on-site social worker, school counselor, school psychologist, nurse, health/physical education teacher, peer mediation coordinator, and an on-site community mental health provider if there.

**Crisis Response Level of Need**—

- **Level 1**—School-based response to a crisis event—School Crisis Team (SCT) responds. For example, a current or former staff member dies after a long illness.
- **Level 2**—Central Crisis Team response to a crisis event—SCT and Central Crisis Team (CCT) both respond. For example, unexpected death of a current student or staff member on or off campus.
- **Level 3**—DCPS/DMH team response to a major emergency or community crisis event—SCT, CCT, and DMH respond. For example, shooting at the school, community disaster such as a major fire, natural disaster or terrorism.

**Central Crisis Team**—consists of trained DCPS social workers and psychologists as well as school mental health providers from the Department of Mental Health.

## **Pre-Crisis Planning**

The school principal will identify all school-based team members responsible for coordinating the school's crisis response and post names around the school. The principal will either serve as chair of this School Crisis Team or designate a chairperson. The principal will meet with the Team to discuss their roles and responsibilities and to review the pre-crisis planning process.

### **Prepare Telephone Tree**

- Administrator;
- School psychologist;
- School counselor;
- Social worker;
- Health assistant/nurse; and
- Other staff.

### **Assemble Crisis Intervention Packets and Related Materials**

- Determine the materials needed including maps of the school building, lists of teachers/room assignments, copies of bell schedule, including lunch and recess times, name tags, tissues, crayons, markers, construction paper, and copies of yearbooks or memory books.
- Determine where these materials will be stored, such as, front and/or guidance office.
- List of School Crisis Team Members.

### **Determine Where Crisis Intervention Support Will Occur**

- Determine where crisis team members will meet with students/staff individually or in groups.
- Determine the sign-in procedures for visitors.
- Determine where parents will meet if they arrive at the school.
- Determine where crisis team members will meet to plan and have access to telephone



## *Roles and Responsibilities*

### *During a Crisis*

A number of roles should be performed by key personnel. This list represents, at a minimum, what responsibilities key personnel have in responding to a crisis.

#### *Administrator only—*

- Verify facts of the crisis incident.
- Authorize intervention efforts.
- Consult with school security to assure the safety of the students, staff, and community.
- Notify appropriate central office personnel of crisis incident and other affected schools.
- Notify school-based administrators and school-based student services personnel of crisis incident.
- Initiate phone tree for school-based personnel.
- Be highly visible, show presence, support and control of crisis.
- Facilitate before-school faculty information meeting.
- Keep all teachers and other school-based personnel updated on facts, events, circumstances, funeral arrangements, etc.
- Inform parents of facts, events, circumstances, funeral arrangements, etc.
- Provide direction about rescheduling activities.
- Reschedule activities, appointments, and meetings not of an emergency nature.
- Consult with public information officer regarding release of information to media and public.
- School Crisis Team Chairperson and/or Administrator:
  - Help coordinate intervention efforts with principal approval.
  - Verify facts of crisis incident.
  - Meet to assess the degree of impact and extent of support needed.
  - Assemble School Crisis Team, and, if necessary, the Central Crisis Team.
  - Establish preplanning meeting time for crisis team members as appropriate.
  - Develop statement to share with teachers and other school-based personnel.
  - Develop statement to share with students.
  - Identify at-risk staff.
  - Provide follow-up as needed for staff and students and monitor behavior.

#### *Central Crisis Team Leader—*

- Assist in planning, coordinating, and provisioning for school-based crisis response.
- Complete all paperwork in timely fashion.
- Send paperwork to Supervisor of DCPS social workers and Program Director of School-based Mental Health of the Department of Mental Health.

#### *Central Crisis Team—*

- Be available during school hours to school-based and central office-based administrators and student services personnel for consultation in the event of a school crisis.

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- Share responsibility outside of school hours for consulting with school-based and central office-based administrators and student services personnel in the event of a school crisis.
- Assist in the coordination, planning, and provision of school crisis responses by the Central Crisis Team.

#### *School-based counselor and/or school social worker—*

- Support intervention efforts.
- Reschedule activities, appointments, and meetings not of an emergency nature.
- Provide individual and group counseling.
- Maintain a list of students seen by support staff. Make follow-up calls to families of students in distress and recommendations for the family to provide support and/or follow-up.
- Monitor and provide follow-up services to affected students.
- Be available to staff and provide support, as needed.

#### *Faculty—*

- Provide accurate, factual information to students.
- Identify students who need support and refer them to school-based support personnel.
- Facilitate classroom discussions that focus on helping students to cope with the crisis; if appropriate, provide activities such as artwork or writing to help students cope.
- Dispel rumors.
- Answer questions without providing unnecessary details.
- Model an appropriate grief response and give permission for a range of emotions.
- Structure classroom activities, postpone and reschedule tests, quizzes, and assignments, as appropriate.

#### *Nurse/Physical Education Leader in absence of nurse—*

- Administer first aid.
- Request that paramedics and an ambulance be called, as necessary.
- Appoint someone to meet paramedics at the designated entrance (s) and give directions to the location of the injured.
- Arrange for someone to travel with students to the hospital, as appropriate.
- Call for additional school nursing assistance, as needed.
- Ask for coverage by a principal's designee if the nurse is needed elsewhere.
- Refer distressed students and faculty to school-based support personnel.

#### *Secretary—*

- Provide accurate, factual information via written statement to inquiring parents and community members.
- Supervise visitor sign-in procedures.
- Direct central office and Central Crisis Team members to appropriate locations.
- Refer distressed students and faculty to school-based support personnel.
- Provide secretarial support to school-based and Central Crisis Team members, such as copying, as needed.

## ***CRISIS RESPONSE FORMS***

For Level 2 and Level 3 Crises

### **DCPS Crisis Response Model: Level of Crisis**

#### **Level 1**

School Based response to a crisis event—SCT responds. For example, a current or former staff member dies after a long illness.

#### **Level 2**

Central Crisis Team response to a crisis event—SCT and CCT both respond. For example, the unexpected death of a current student or staff member on or off campus.

#### **Level 3**

DCPS/DMH Team response to a major emergency or community crisis event—SCT, CCT, and DMH respond. For example, a shooting at the school, community disaster such as a major fire, natural disaster, or terrorism.



# ***PHONE-CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE REQUEST: BASED NEEDS ASSESSMENT***

**The person first informed of the school crisis should complete this form. In most cases, this will be the Supervisor of Social Workers.**

Person Taking Call: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Call: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Calling: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Onsite Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Response Site: \_\_\_\_\_

1. **What** happened/what was the crisis event?
2. **When** did it occur?  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time of day \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Where** did the crisis/event occur?
4. **Who** was *directly* involved or affected (person witnessed event, was a close family member/friend, a victim, etc.)? Please specify **how** the individuals were involved or affected and how many people/classrooms are affected.  
Age groups: \_\_\_\_\_  
Primary language: \_\_\_\_\_
5. **Who** was *indirectly* involved or affected (community, neighborhood, school, classmates, etc.): Please specify **how** the individuals were involved or affected and how many people/classrooms are affected.  
Age groups: \_\_\_\_\_  
Primary language: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you have an internal crisis management team and/or counselors?  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_  
What actions/interventions have been completed (has information been provided to students/staff, have any groups been held, etc.)? (If applicable, please provide copy(ies) of information available if/when team arrives): \_\_\_\_\_

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Results:

7. What other agencies/offices are involved or have been contacted (police, fire department, DOH, DCPS, CACRT, DMH, etc.)?

Contact person/number for the agency:

Services/interventions/support they are providing:

Results:

8. Has any information about the crisis been disseminated to the various populations affected by the crisis (letter sent home to parents, town meeting, media, etc.)? Please have a copy(ies) available if/when team arrives.

9. What type(s) of support or services are you requesting?

\_\_\_\_\_ Providing information/materials

\_\_\_\_\_ Presentations

\_\_\_\_\_ Debriefings

\_\_\_\_\_ Crisis counseling/stabilization

\_\_\_\_\_ Bilingual counselor/translator

\_\_\_\_\_ Don't know/unsure

\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. Is there any other information that you would like to add that might be helpful to our response team?

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#### For Internal Purposes Only

Does this call require an immediate deployment of staff? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

What other agencies/offices need to be contacted? \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE: Fax this form to CENTRAL CRISIS TEAM leader. If incomplete, leader needs to complete form once at the school.**

**Fax number:** \_\_\_\_\_

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<b>Needs Assessment Planning/Intervention Recommendations</b>	
<b>Students</b>	<b>School Staff</b>
<p><b>Classroom Presentation:</b>  <b>Topic/Focus:</b>            _____            ____ # Classrooms            ____ # Clinicians needed            List grade levels:            _____</p> <p><b>Small Support Group</b>            ____ # Groups (support)            ____ # Clinicians needed            List grade levels:            _____</p> <p><b>Individual Session</b>            ____ # Students            ____ # Clinicians needed</p>	<p><b>Fan Out/Faculty Information Meeting</b>            ____ # Clinicians needed</p> <p><b>Operational Debriefing</b>            ____ # Clinicians needed</p> <p><b>Small Support Group</b>            ____ # Groups (support)            ____ # Clinicians needed</p> <p><b>Individual Session</b>            ____ # Staff            ____ # Clinicians needed</p>
<b>Community</b>	<b>Parents/Families</b>
<p><b>Town Hall Meeting</b>  <b>Topic/Focus:</b>            _____            ____ # People attending            ____ # Clinicians needed</p>	<p>____ <b>Letters Sent Home</b></p> <p><b>Small Support Group</b>            ____ #Parents/adult family members            ____ #Clinicians needed</p> <p><b>Individual Session</b>            ____ # Adults            ____ # Clinicians needed</p>

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<b>Persons Directly Impacted</b> (victim, witnessed event, close friend, family member of victim)	
<b>Students</b>	<b>School Staff</b>
<p><b>Small Support Group/Defusing (grades Pre-K-5)</b>            _____ # Groups (defusing)            _____ # Groups (support)            _____ # Clinicians needed            List grade levels:            _____</p> <p><b>Small Support Group/Debriefing (grades 6-12)</b>            _____ # Groups (debriefing)            _____ # Groups (support)            _____ # Clinicians needed            List grade levels:            _____</p> <p><b>Individual Session</b>            _____ # Students            _____ # Clinicians needed</p>	<p><b>Debriefing</b>            _____ # Teachers            _____ # Administrators            _____ # Support Staff            _____ # Clinicians needed</p> <p><b>Individual Session</b>            _____ # Staff            _____ # Clinicians needed</p>
<b>Parents/Families</b>	<b>Community</b>
<p><b>Debriefing</b>            _____ # Parents/adults            _____ # Clinicians needed</p> <p><b>Individual Session</b>            _____ # Adults            _____ # Clinicians needed</p>	<p><b>Debriefing</b>            _____ # People involved            _____ # Clinicians needed</p>

**Comments:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

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# DAILY INTERVENTION SHEET

## Intervention Site (include address/phone)

Circle one: Day one Day two Day three Day four Additional Days \_\_\_\_\_

### STUDENTS

# Implemented

# Not implemented\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Classroom Presentation(s)

Small Support Group

Debriefing/Defusing

Individual Sessions

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL # students seen**

### STAFF

# Implemented

# Not implemented\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Operational Debriefing

Small Support Group

Small Group Debriefing

Individual Sessions

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL No. staff seen**

### PARENTS/FAMILY

# Implemented

# Not implemented\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Letter sent home

Debriefing

Individual Sessions

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL No. parents/family members seen**

### COMMUNITY

# Implemented

# Not implemented\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Town hall meeting

Debriefing

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL No. community members seen**

Which interventions were recommended but *NOT* implemented, and why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Please describe what was effective:**

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*Please describe what was challenging and issues that were raised:*

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<b>Central Crisis Team</b>				
<b>Sign-In Sheet</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Sign In/Sign Out</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>School Phone</b>

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<b>Crisis Response Student Sign-In Sheet</b>					
<b>School</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Teacher's Name/Grade</b>			
<b>Name of Student Seen</b>	<b>Services Received</b>	<b>Follow-up Needed?</b>	<b>Individual</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Debriefing</b>
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No
					__ Yes __ No

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<b>Crisis Response Staff Sign-In Sheet</b>			
<b><i>STAFF</i> Name</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Follow-up Needed?</b>
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Copies: Coordinators, School Counselor.

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**Crisis Response Followup Student Identification Sheet**

School		Date	
Name of Student/Teacher	Reason for Referral	Who Saw Them?	Type of Follow-up Needed

## ***CRITICAL INCIDENT AFTER-REPORT***

**Complete this form** following implementation of services by the Crisis Team Leader and Supervisor of Social Workers who gathered information and coordinated the interventions.

**E-mail completed form** to Supervisor of Social Workers at [sandy.spears@k12.dc.us](mailto:sandy.spears@k12.dc.us)

**Name of Person(s) Completing Form:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Report:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Intervention Site (include address):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date(s) of Intervention(s):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Central Crisis Team Leaders(s) if appropriate:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School Contact Person:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Brief Description of Critical Incident:** \_\_\_\_\_

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<b>Names of Clinicians Involved:</b>	<b>Total # Hrs</b>	<b>Role of Clinicians:</b>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**List action(s)/interventions the site/school implemented prior to CRISIS TEAM response:**

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**List other agencies involved/present:**

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**Describe services other agencies provided:**

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# SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

## STUDENTS

# Implemented	# Not implemented*	
_____	_____	Classroom Presentation(s)
_____	_____	Small Support Group
_____	_____	Debriefing/Defusing
_____	_____	Individual Sessions
	_____	<b>TOTAL No. students</b>

## STAFF

# Implemented	# Not implemented*	
_____	_____	Operational Debriefing
_____	_____	Small Support Group
_____	_____	Small Group Debriefing
_____	_____	Individual Sessions
	_____	<b>TOTAL No. staff</b>

## PARENTS/FAMILY

# Implemented	# Not implemented*	
_____	_____	Letter sent home
_____	_____	Debriefing
_____	_____	Individual Sessions
	_____	<b>TOTAL No. parents/family</b>

## COMMUNITY

# Implemented	# Not implemented*	
_____	_____	Town hall meeting
_____	_____	Debriefing
	_____	<b>TOTAL No. community</b>

Which interventions were recommended but *NOT* implemented, and why?

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**Please describe what was effective:**

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**Please describe what was challenging and issues that were raised:**

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#### **Follow-up Recommendations Provided to Response Site**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Monitor high-risk students/exposed persons (NOTE: Determine who will followup with the high-risk and/or absent students and staff).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Distribute provided information as necessary (e.g., normal reactions to grief).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Link with community resources/refer for additional mental health services (See list of Core Service Agencies).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Perhaps contact the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Contact DMH/ACCESS HELPLINE for additional services.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
-

# ***CRISIS TEAM DEBRIEFING***

Debriefing should occur at the end of each day in which staff is working at a critical incident site.

Please include members of School Crisis Team if they are assisting with the crisis response.

**Person Leading the Debriefing:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Debriefing:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Staff Present at Each Debriefing**

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

**Please address these points at the debriefing:**

- Check-in;
- Emotional reactions;
- Reassess needs of school/clinicians;
- If necessary, plan for next day/days; and
- If necessary, communicate with coordinator/clinicians for next day.

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ***COMMUNITY RESOURCES***

- DC Mental Health Access Help Line:** 1-888-793-4357
- Children’s National Medical Center:** 111 Michigan Ave., N.W  
Washington, D.C 20010  
Referral and Information Service  
1-888-884-BEAR (2327)
- Hospice Care of D.C.:** 4401 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20008  
202- 244-8300 Office
- Wendt Center for Loss and Healing:** 730 11th Street NW, Third Floor  
Washington, DC 20001-4510  
202-624-0010

## GENERAL REACTIONS TO DEATH

### School Resource Sheet to Assist in Responding to a Crisis

For all ages: Avoid jargon, clichés, technical terms, or euphemisms when working with students (e.g., *Tears won't help*, or *He or she would have wanted you to...*, or *It's nature's way*.)

Be direct and use statements such as *died* rather than *passed on*, etc.

Developmental Ages and Possible Reactions to Death				
Age	They Think:	They Feel:	They Do:	Interventions:
3–5 years (preschool)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death is temporary and reversible</li> <li>• Finality of death is not evident</li> <li>• Death means deceased taking a trip, sleeping</li> <li>• Or wonder what deceased is doing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Withdrawn</li> <li>• Confused about changes</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Cranky (feelings are acted out in play)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cry</li> <li>• Fight</li> <li>• Show interest in dead things</li> <li>• Act as if death never happened.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide them with words for some of their feelings: grief, sadness, numbness.</li> <li>• Answer correctly and lovingly. Be honest. Don't tell half-truths.</li> <li>• Short-term regressive behaviors are normal.</li> <li>• Say to children, "Let's see what we can do to make this less scary for you."</li> </ul>
6–9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About the finality of death</li> <li>• About the biological processes of death</li> <li>• Death is related to mutilation</li> <li>• A spirit gets you when you die</li> <li>• About who will care for them if a parent dies</li> <li>• Their actions and words caused the death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Withdrawn</li> <li>• Confused about the changes</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Cranky (feelings acted out in play)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behave aggressively</li> <li>• Appear withdrawn</li> <li>• Experience nightmares</li> <li>• Act as if death never happened</li> <li>• Lack concentration</li> <li>• Have a decline in grades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children need permission to concentrate on mourning before they can be expected to move forward.</li> <li>• Offer constructive ways to express their feelings.</li> <li>• Support groups can be very helpful.</li> </ul>

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<b>Developmental Ages and Possible Reactions to Death (continued)</b>				
<b>Age</b>	<b>They Think:</b>	<b>They Feel:</b>	<b>They Do:</b>	<b>Interventions:</b>
<b>9–12 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About and understand the finality of death</li> <li>• Death is hard to talk about</li> <li>• That death may happen again</li> <li>• About what will happen if their parent(s) die</li> <li>• Their actions and words caused death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Lonely</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Abandoned</li> <li>• Guilty</li> <li>• Fearful</li> <li>• Worried</li> <li>• Isolated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behave aggressively</li> <li>• Appear withdrawn</li> <li>• Talk about physical aspects of death</li> <li>• Act like it never happened, not show feelings</li> <li>• Experience nightmares</li> <li>• Lack concentration</li> <li>• Have a decline in grades</li> <li>• Joke about death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permit them to talk or role play.</li> <li>• Acknowledge normalness of feelings and reactions.</li> <li>• Encourage expressions of emotions.</li> <li>• Help them to share worries.</li> <li>• Reassure them with realistic information.</li> <li>• Acknowledge the physical sensations as part of their reactions to stress (e.g., stomach aches, headaches, weakness, dizziness, rapid heart beat).</li> <li>• Discuss student’s concerns with their parents.</li> <li>• Encourage constructive activities on behalf of the injured or deceased (e.g., cards, memory books, and posters).</li> <li>• Help them to retain positive memories.</li> </ul>
<b>12–Up Adolescents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About and understand the finality of death</li> <li>• If they show their feelings, they will be weak</li> <li>• They need to be in control of their feelings</li> <li>• Only about life before or after death</li> <li>• Their actions and words caused death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Lonely</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Abandoned</li> <li>• Guilty</li> <li>• Fearful</li> <li>• Worried</li> <li>• Isolated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behave impulsively</li> <li>• Argue, scream, fight</li> <li>• Allow themselves to be in dangerous situations</li> <li>• Grieve for what might have been</li> <li>• Experience nightmares</li> <li>• Act as if it never happened</li> <li>• Lack concentration</li> <li>• Have a decline in grades</li> <li>• Exhibit acting out behaviors</li> <li>• Exhibit self-centered thoughts and behaviors, which may become exaggerated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge normalness of feelings and reactions.</li> <li>• Encourage expressions of emotions.</li> <li>• Help them to share worries.</li> <li>• Reassure them with realistic information.</li> <li>• Acknowledge the physical sensations as part of their reactions to stress (e.g., stomach aches, headaches, weakness, dizziness, rapid heart beat).</li> <li>• Discuss student’s concerns with their parents.</li> <li>• Encourage constructive activities on behalf of the injured or deceased (e.g., cards, memory books, and posters).</li> <li>• Help them to retain positive memories.</li> </ul>

## ***STUDENT REACTIONS TO SUICIDE***

### **What They Think**

- Students often question why the person committed suicide.
- Students often question what might have been done to prevent the suicide.
- Students most affected may struggle with how they will be viewed by others.
- Students may have death-related or suicidal thoughts.

### **What They Feel**

- Students may experience a stronger sense of guilt, shame, and anger.
- Students may feel a diminished sense of reality.
- Students may experience a strong sense of shock and confusion.

### **What They Do**

- Students may experience sudden changes in personality.
- Students may experience sudden changes in weight or appearance.
- Students may experience sudden changes in grades or participation in school activities.
- Students may experience social withdrawal and isolation.
- Students may experience heightened risk-taking behaviors.
- Students may experience prolonged and/or complicated grief reactions.

### **Interventions**

- Identify students at-risk for suicide.
- Provide support to students' grief reactions and assist them in coping with the loss. Do not challenge these feelings.
- Educate students on ways to get help with depression and suicidal thoughts.
- Send a strong anti-suicide message.
- Provide appropriate resources to assist students with suicidal feelings.
- Permit students to talk, write, draw, or use other constructive means to express their emotions.
- Have the school psychologist, counselor, or social worker follow up with students who exhibit prolonged grief reactions.

## ***GUIDELINES FOR MAKING A REFERRAL***

Although there is no timeline for grieving, there are times when a student or staff member's response may warrant additional support services. The following list of behaviors warrants monitoring:

- Complete and continued absence of any grief reaction;
- Clinginess;
- Panicky;
- Symptoms of separation anxiety—Increased fear of being separated from primary caregivers;
- Threats or attempts to harm themselves;
- Distancing self from family and friends
- Drug or alcohol abuse;
- Abusive behavior towards others or animals; and
- Extreme changes in behavior, such as lying, failing in school, fighting, regression, delinquent behavior, sexual acting out, eating and sleeping disturbance.

A grief reaction may be complicated when the person:

- Has been lied to regarding the death or circumstances surrounding the death and later learns the truth.
- Had a difficult relationship with the deceased.
- Has existing emotional problems.
- Has a history of family problems.
- Has had other recent losses.

If a student exhibits a number of these behaviors for an extended period of time following the loss, we recommend that the school counselor or social worker follow up with the student's family.

In the case of a staff member, the school counselor or social worker should discuss with the staff member how to seek additional support services. In the event that a staff member needs additional support, the Employee Assistance Program is available.

## ***SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR FACULTY INFORMATION MEETING<sup>1</sup>***

The (name of school) Family has suffered a tremendous loss with the death of (name of person). (Name of student) in 5<sup>th</sup> grade was killed by gunfire this morning as he was walking to school.

Whereas we are saddened by this unfortunate incident with one of our students, other students in the school will be greatly affected by this tragedy as well. In order to help you through this day, we offer you the following suggestions:

- Counselors, social workers and/or psychologists are in the building to support you. Please send word to the office if you need assistance and/or coverage:
  - For yourself; and/or
  - To take student(s) out who need counseling.
- A script for communicating this information to students will be provided to you.
- If you need a counselor to talk with your class, please send word to the office.
- If student(s) need(s) a time-out place, please send student(s) to the \_\_\_\_\_.
- A loss may often trigger memories of other losses children have experienced. Continue to be extra sensitive to any changes in behavior among your students. Some behaviors may include:
  - Acting out;
  - Crying;
  - Clinging;
  - Denial withdrawal;
  - Excessive talking; and/or
  - Nervous laughter.

Some suggestions for dealing with grief:

- Allow children the space and the time to grieve.
- It is okay for them to see you cry.
- Be flexible in the day's agenda.
- Allow children time to talk about the tragedy. (Remember, they will deal at their developmental level.)
- Assist them in finding ways of expressing their grief (e.g., art, cards to the family, letter, scrapbook, pictures, etc.).
- Some students may wish to plan some type of memorial. Help guide them. (Except if it's a suicide.)
- Grief may be ongoing and expressed in different ways.

A short staff meeting will be held immediately following dismissal to discuss further actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Howard County *Public Schools Crisis Response Manual*.



## *SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS<sup>2</sup>*

Dear Parents and Friends:

All of us at \_\_\_\_\_ were deeply saddened by the tragic loss of two of our students, \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_ grader, and \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_ grader, who died in a fire that destroyed their home on Thanksgiving morning. We, the faculty, students, and staff of \_\_\_\_\_, wish to extend our deepest sympathy and heart-felt condolences to the families, relatives, many friends, and classmates. \_\_\_\_\_ was a sensitive boy who had many friends at school. His teachers appreciated the effort placed upon his schoolwork and his cooperative nature in working with other students and teachers.

Although \_\_\_\_\_ had just begun his career at \_\_\_\_\_, he had already made lots of new friends who will deeply miss him. We join with the \_\_\_\_\_ family in their loss.

In order to assist our students and staff cope with the great sadness and shock of this tragedy, I requested and obtained needed support and resources of the District of Columbia Public Schools. Today, school counselors, social workers and psychologists from various offices and school locations have assisted us in dealing with our children and staff. We will continue to have resources available to help us through this most difficult time. If any of you or your family is upset and need assistance, please call me or our counselor, \_\_\_\_\_. If you notice a sudden change in your child's behavior and/or health, that is unexplainable to you, please contact us as we will continue to respond to any child who is upset or had problems in dealing with this tragedy. There is assistance available and we care.

When an event of this magnitude touches one of us, it affects us all. Our school is an important part of his community and we jointly share in the responsibility of the development of our greatest resource—our children. This tragedy, which occurred during a time of Thanksgiving, causes each of us to review our priorities and to think more carefully about what is important in our lives. Perhaps, from this comes a greater sense of family, community, and friendship.

Sincerely,

Principal

  
  

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Howard County Public Schools *Crisis Response Handbook*.

## ***STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL STAFF WHEN DEALING WITH A CRISIS<sup>3</sup>***

Due to our continued reactions to local violence, all of us may be more vulnerable to stress. There are a number of common reactions to the kind of stress you may be currently experiencing. They include, but are not limited to:

- Difficulty focusing or concentrating;
- Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks to other traumatic events;
- Sleeplessness or fatigue;
- Change in appetite, upset stomach;
- Crying, sadness;
- Irritability;
- Grief, anger, shock, disbelief;
- Feelings of guilt, self-reproach, quick temper;
- Headache, tightness in chest, shallow or heavy breathing; and
- Alcohol or other drug use.

### **Coping Strategies**

If you are experiencing any of these reactions, take care of yourself! You can:

- Take several slow, deep breaths to alleviate the feelings of anxiety.
- Talk about what is happening.
- Talk about your feelings with friends and loved ones.
- Create a daily routine so you feel in control.
- Eat balanced meals, even if you're not hungry, so your body has the energy to deal with stress .
- Take time to let your body relax and recover.
- Cry when you need to.
- Let anger out by participating in a safe, exhausting physical activity or exercise.
- Avoid the use of alcohol and other drugs and limit caffeine intake.
- Turn off the TV if watching the incidents is upsetting to you.
- Draw, paint, or journal.
- Avoid making any major decisions.

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\*Adapted From: Prince George's County Public Schools, *Crisis Response Handbook*.

## ***INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS<sup>4</sup>***

### **Memorandum**

To: All Teachers:

From : The Principal

Subject: Announcing the Death of a Student to the Class

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Please read this message to yourself. Then we would like this message to be read aloud to your class:

Sample: It is with great sadness that I inform you that yesterday, Lakesha Jones, an 11th grade student at \_\_\_\_\_ High School, died as a result of a fall and the internal injuries that resulted. She was transported to Shock Trauma, but efforts to save her failed. A police investigation of the circumstances is currently underway, and, until its conclusion, we will have no further information to share with you.

NOTE: If you do not feel comfortable reading this to the class or if you would like to have a support person in the room while you read this, please let a member of the Crisis Intervention Team, a counselor or an administrator know.

After you read this message, go on to say:

As you respond to Lakesha's death, be aware that it is not unusual for people to feel confused, upset, perhaps even angry or guilty when they think about incidents like this. Today, our guidance counselors and members of the Central Crisis Intervention Team will be available in the Guidance Resource Center throughout this morning for anyone who wants to talk about his or her feelings. Students who feel that they need to leave class at any time throughout the day to see a counselor should let their teachers know, and they will receive a pass to go to the Guidance Resource Center.

As further information on funeral and/or memorial services become available, this information will be shared. In the meantime, we will set up baskets in the Front Office and Guidance Office for any cards that you would like to have delivered to Lakesha's family.

If a student appears to need individual attention, please send him/her to the Guidance Resource Center. If you feel that you need some time to yourself, ask a Crisis Intervention Team member to relieve you so that you can seek assistance.

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Montgomery County Public Schools *Crisis Response Handbook*.

## *GUIDELINES FOR A CLASSROOM PRESENTATION*

When conducting a classroom discussion about a serious or crisis event, it is important to utilize a structure that permits students to:

- **Introduction**—Become aware of the facts and share their reactions/feelings about the incident.
- **Educate/Normalize**—Generate strategies for coping effectively with their reactions/feelings.
- **Conclusion**—Transition back to their normal school routine.

### *Points to Remember*—

- During the conversation, it is important to respect different perspectives and to be sensitive to the experiences of those previously affected by violence and/or loss.
- Let students know that they may be differently affected by this based on their own experiences with violence and/or loss.
- Student comments will, of course, vary in many ways.
- Endeavor to respect each student's feelings and comments.
- Be sensitive to students who may become upset by the discussion.

**Introduction phase**—Provides factual information, minimizes rumors and misperceptions using developmentally appropriate language and amount of detail. This information helps acknowledge and normalize students' feelings as they are shared. Read the sample statement below and then discuss the ground rules:

It is with great sadness that I inform you that yesterday, Timmy Turner, a third-grade student at our school, died as a result of a gun shot wound he suffered while walking home from school yesterday.

You may be having many thoughts and feelings about this, or you may not have been thinking much about it at all. All of these reactions are not unusual. Your thoughts or feelings may scare you because they might be new to you or seem strong. We are going to take a few minutes to talk about your feelings.

It's important to talk about how you feel with someone you trust. This could be your parents/guardians, a teacher, a friend, and a counselor. We can talk some now in class and answer your questions.

**Educate/normalize phase**—Generates a list of coping strategies that students may use, conveys confidence that coping is possible, informs students how to access help if necessary, and provides opportunities to identify those needing additional support.

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- It may not be unusual for many of you to be quiet, or want to talk, to be sleepy or very wide awake, be very tired, or need to be very active, or just feel very sad or angry.
  
- You may not be feeling anything and/or are not ready to talk about your feelings yet.
- What other feelings or thoughts do you have? (Consider charting)
- If it seems hard for you to concentrate because of any of these thoughts or feelings, please ask to see the counselor. (Emphasize that it is not unusual to have uncommon thoughts and feelings when something so terrible happens.)
- Sometimes when frightening things happen we look for reasons why. This is a time when it is not unusual for us to look for reasons why this happened. A lot of rumors can get started that are not at all helpful to the situation. Instead, let's try to help each other and support each other during this difficult time.
- What are things you can do to cope with their reactions?
  - Exercise.
  - Play with a friend.
  - Read a book.
  - Talk with a family member or adult friend.
  - Play music.
  
- Turn off the TV or walk away from it if watching news about the incidents is upsetting to you. Play a favorite video or listen to music instead.
- What are things you can do to help others? (Have the students list and add ideas.)

**Conclusion phase**—Notify students of upcoming related activities and transition them back to school routine.

- Remember that there are adults in the building and in your community who you know and trust. These adults are here to keep you safe. What other people or things can you think of that will help you feel safe? While in school if you want to talk about what you are feeling or thinking, just let me know and I will help you find someone to talk to.
- Students may want to make cards, write letters of sympathy to the family.
- If there are no other questions, Let's get ready for (tell them the academic activity).

## ***MEMORIAL GUIDELINES***<sup>5</sup>

In the aftermath of a crisis, students, staff, and community members will need a way to express their feelings. Middle and high school students may have a stronger need to do something positive to express their grief. Memorials promote the healing process and help to begin closure to a period of grieving. The following guidelines should be considered before proceeding with a memorial.

- The principal should assist the school in developing a memorial committee with student and staff representatives. Define the roles of the students, staff, and administrators, as well as who will make the final decisions. Families and others in the community may desire to develop an independent committee in order to develop their own memorial. If necessary, the memorial committee may consider contacting additional resources available through the English for Speakers of Other Languages or the Equity Assurance Office.
- Any activity or memorial sets a precedent for future activities. This is particularly important when considering the circumstances surrounding the crisis. Many times the life lesson the school has learned from a tragedy is more important than any memorialization.
- Careful consideration should be given to any permanent memorial, such as planting a tree, erecting a memorial garden, hanging plaques or portraits or other permanent remembrances. Instead of permanent memorials, schools are encouraged to consider "consumable" memorials, such as scholarship funds or donations to an organization suggested by the family. The best type of memorial is one that can benefit the entire community.
- In the event of a death by suicide, it is imperative that the school not memorialize the victim, but instead do something to prevent other suicides from happening. Developing a suicide prevention program or making a donation to an existing suicide program would be appropriate.
- Throughout the planning process, the school should work with the family but not allow the family or community members to dictate if and how a school memorial will be created.
- In the event of a crisis, students and others within the school and community may raise funds.
- However, the principal should assist the committee to oversee and plan for the use of the monies raised. The school needs to determine a plan for distributing donated funds. It is suggested that the school first use the funds to meet the victim's needs such as possible medical or funeral expenses. Any other funds may be considered for a memorial.
- If necessary, the school may consult with the local worship communities to gain more information about the family's cultural and religious beliefs. All memorial activities should take into consideration the family's beliefs.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from the Howard County Public Schools *Crisis Response Handbook*.