



**Good Spirit**  
SCHOOL DIVISION

# **Traumatic Events Response Guide**



## **Appendix A**



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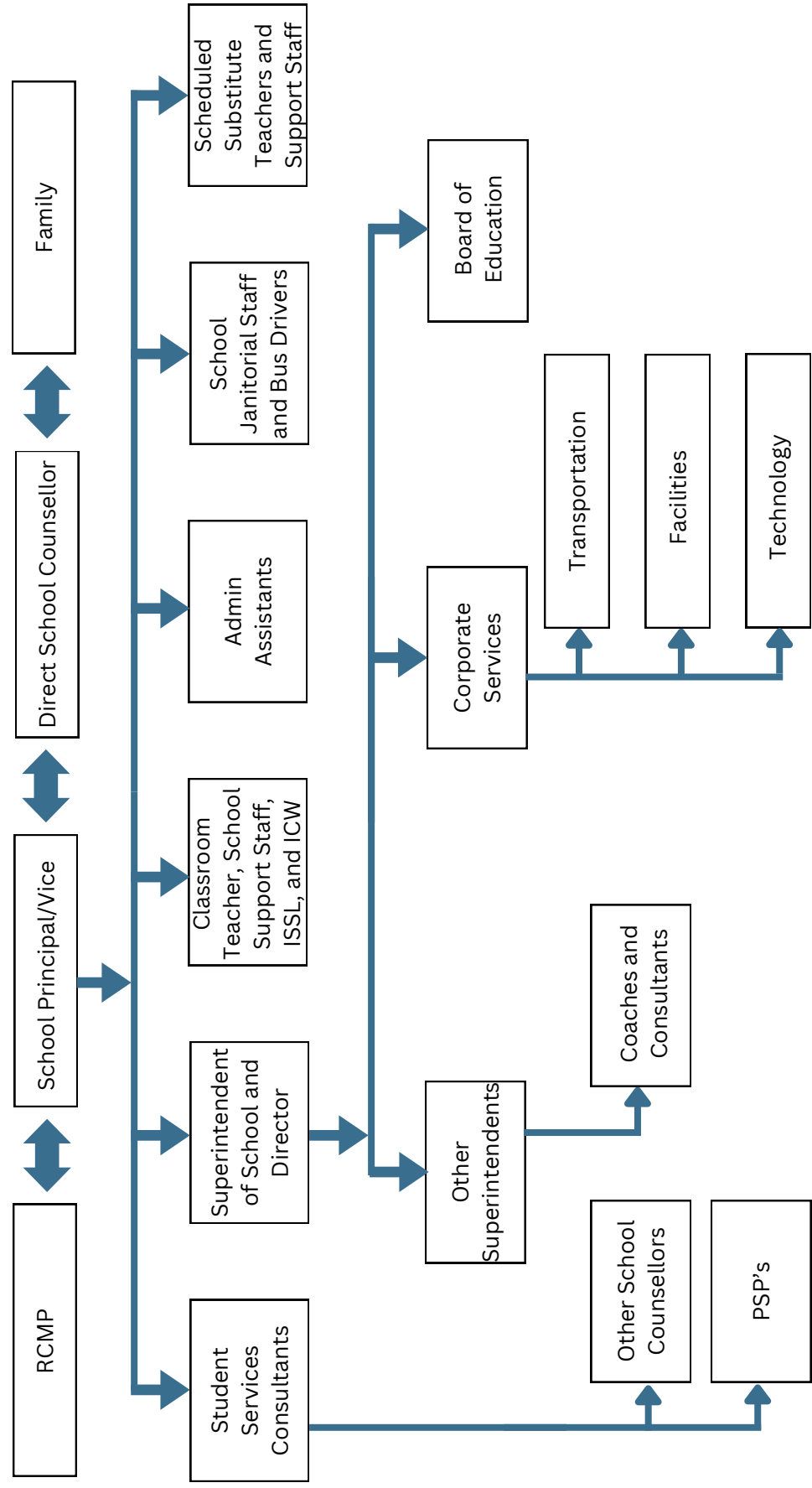
You've just found out about a traumatic event.  
What now? Follow the steps below.

## **Traumatic Events Readiness – TERT**

### **Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) (Appendix 1 – Form 165-1 TERT List)**

- Each school will select members for their TERT at the initial staff meeting for the school year.
- Membership must include the Principal, Vice-Principal and School Counsellor. It may also be helpful to include acting principals, ICWs, SSTs and a few other teachers or staff members
- Develop a school-level traumatic events response plan using the procedures and forms in this guide.
- Activate the traumatic events response plan when required.
- Every year:
  - The principal will fill out and submit the TERT form and upload to the “School Information” folder in Microsoft Teams (Appendix 1)
  - The TERT will become familiar with their school’s traumatic events response plan and ensure that each member understands their role.
  - The TERT will review the plan with the entire staff in the fall of each school year to ensure staff are familiar with this guide.
  - Reference GSSD TERT Communication Flowchart.





Flowchart Notes: Student Services Consultants

- Ideally, the Principal/Vice Principal directly contacts all school staff. If needed, TERT can assist.
- To ensure the proper dissemination of information, it is essential that direct school-based staff are notified before any other division staff. This means that Coordinators, Superintendents, Corporate Services, and the Board should make certain that school-based staff have been informed prior to sharing the information with their respective teams.

Director	Superintendent	SCC	Administrator Team	School Admin Assistant	School Counsellor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media inquiries</li> <li>Coroner</li> <li>Link to Ministry of Education, Board of Education, and division level staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support TERT</li> <li>Be present at school during TERT response and staff meetings</li> <li>Consider carrying out day-to-day admin duties, e.g. discipline, etc. so Admin. can dedicate themselves to responding to the traumatic event, supporting staff and students, etc.</li> <li>Provide support for Admin. during funeral etc. and support subs for all roles to attend funeral as needed</li> <li>Consider participating in technical debrief</li> <li>Supply snacks for staff meeting and/or support room</li> <li>Compile technical debriefs and provide to SC TERT committee to support ongoing updates of the TERT guide</li> <li>Notify substitute teachers and EAs, bus drivers, facilities/maintenance personnel about the incident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notify other PSPs AFTER school staff has been notified</li> <li>Notify all SCCs</li> <li>Arrange for emergency SC coverage</li> <li>Consider being at school during TERT response, staff meetings, etc.</li> <li>Consider participating in technical debrief</li> <li>Consider supplying snacks for staff meeting and/or support room</li> <li>Ensure SCCs, other admin teams know they are occupied dealing with a traumatic event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assemble TERT</li> <li>Contact family or RCMP</li> <li>Personal contact with all staff</li> <li>Arrange for subs if needed</li> <li>Prepare written statement with SC</li> <li>Follow steps in TERT Guide</li> <li>Ensure staff not at school are notified of TERT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure deceased student is not marked absent so that the family does not receive any automated messages regarding attendance</li> <li>Documentation in Edsby/CUME file/MSS</li> <li>Remove the deceased's name from class/attendance lists to prevent a substitute teacher from calling out the name during attendance checks</li> <li>Ensure any staff not at school are notified of TERT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support Admin in identifying areas of greatest impact, staff &amp; students</li> <li>Support admin in carrying out TERT Guide steps</li> <li>Provide info &amp; support to CTs and EAs in initial staff meeting – provide guidance and resources in dealing with children after a traumatic event</li> <li>Arrange for technical debrief</li> <li>Provide support in support room</li> <li>Support Admin in decision making (e.g. communication to parents, memorialization, etc.)</li> <li>Liase with SHA and community partners as needed for support for staff/students/community</li> <li>Work with emergency support counsellor</li> </ul>

# School Response to a Death - A Traumatic Event

## Social Media Considerations

Staff need to demonstrate caution in their use of social media at the time of a traumatic event and shall refrain from posting about the event.

- Staff need to be mindful that unless they have express permission from the family, regarding their post, they may be breaching confidentiality and AP 143 Use of Social Media
- If a post must be made, ensure it is respectful of the injured/deceased, their family, and their culture.
- Although staff may feel a death is confirmed, TERT must still follow procedure and seek confirmation from police or family.
- Be mindful that posting video or details of a traumatic event can be traumatizing to others and disrespectful to the family.
- Advise TERT of any potentially distressing posts.

## Steps:



## STEP #1 - Convene TERT & Confirm Facts

A TERT member will confirm the death and cause of death with family and/or RCMP. The TERT will extend sympathy and ask for family's wishes about the information to be shared.

TERT member in contact with family \_\_\_\_\_

Family member spoken to \_\_\_\_\_

Date of conversation phone/home visit \_\_\_\_\_

Information family agrees to share regarding cause of death/traumatic event:

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Special notes, ex. Things not to share: \_\_\_\_\_

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- TERT will consider the family's wishes as well as cultural and religious beliefs of the family when making decisions regarding the sharing of information.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## STEP #2 - Communicate with Senior Administration

Contact Division staff, follow Flowchart. Administration, SCCs and School Counsellors will determine needs for extra School Counsellor and any other necessary supports.

Consider involvement with Division Indigenous leadership and supports. Outside consultation may be necessary to meet cultural needs.

## STEP #3 - Devise Statement & Share

Devise written statement of facts to be shared. [Example in Appendix #?](#)

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- TERT members should make direct phone contact with all staff members. Advise staff to monitor email or school messaging for information about initial staff meeting. Identify if specific staff will be significantly impacted, ensure coverage is available; avoid leaving a voice mail message or a message with a child.
  - Let staff know that further information will be shared as it is gathered and approved by family.
  - Advise staff that the information given now is confidential and are to refrain from posting, commenting or sharing online.
  - Determine if other schools need to be notified- relatives impacted, close friends, teammates, feeder schools and so on.
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- Prior to announcement of the death, close friends of the deceased should be notified.

Once regular school staff have been notified, Superintendents and/or Student Services Consultants to communicate information about the incident to any incoming personnel who are not regular staff in the building (PSPs, substitute teachers, bus drivers, facilities/maintenance personnel, etc.)

Adapt the statement of fact for teachers to read to their class outlining only factual information and the supports available for students. Include the process for students to access supports and appropriate social media considerations.

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## STEP #3 - Devise Statement & Share

Email or messaging apps may be used after initial phoning to ensure that communication lines stay in place.

The Director or Designate will be the media contact person and will handle all media requests.

All calls from the coroner should be directed immediately to the Director of Education. Any direct communication with the coroner should happen only in the presence of the Director.

Ensure staff members who are absent get the information

Plan to inform students who are absent. Phone parents of students who might be at risk immediately.

In consultation with Senior Administration, TERT will determine whether to communicate news of the traumatic event, and to which to parents/guardians. The letter should include information on how to support their child. Communication can occur via Edsby, email or letter. **Schools must refrain from posting news of the traumatic event on their school social media.**

**Caution:** Do not share information that comes from rumors. Do not speculate; simply reply “the information is not available at this time”.

When possible, inform parents of students who will be highly impacted by the event. It is preferable for students to hear information about a traumatic occurrence or loss in the security of their own home from the people they are closest to.

## STEP #4 - Determine Supports



Senior Administration, in consultation with the principal, will determine if additional substitutes are needed to support staff who may be affected.

# STEP #5 - Initial Staff Meeting

## 1. Information for Staff

- Share information regarding the traumatic event as approved by family. Confirm the facts for staff and inform them of what can be shared publicly.
- Inform teachers of counselling support plans.
- Ask for staff to identify students who may be at risk or need extra support and remind them of the important role they play in identifying changes in behavior among students they know and see every day, and TERT will develop a plan as needed.
- Identify any staff not present at school and ensure they are made aware of the traumatic event.
- Caution: Do not share information that comes from rumors. Do not speculate; simply reply “the information is not available at this time”, “that is all the family would like shared at this time”.



## 2. Information on Informing students

- Review prepared statement/death announcement to be used to inform classes. Using the prepared statement for students, prepare teachers to deal effectively with informing their students of the traumatic event. (Consider as an idea- having more team members attend schools where traumatic events are more frequent). Using the prepared statement from the TERT, give information on the traumatic event in a calm and factual manner.
- Remember - while it is appropriate to express emotion, it is best practice to remain in control of emotion. If staff cannot contain strong emotions, they should rely on school counsellors or substitutes for support.
- Discuss procedures for sharing information with students. Consider the addition of resource people in classrooms where a strong reaction is expected.
- Advise staff to deal with students to the level of their comfort. School Counsellor to give direction and model how students should be told.
- Every attempt should be made to contain rumors surrounding the death
- Clarify procedures for handling students who want to leave the classroom.
- Students who are highly emotional should be accompanied to the designated Support Room.



# STEP #5 - Initial Staff Meeting

- Remind staff that they can support students by:
  - Modelling calmness
  - Following routines, with flexibility and compassion
  - Helping to identify at-risk students
  - Sharing factual information with students and answering questions to the best of their knowledge
  - Using correct terminology with students. For example, when a death has occurred, avoid euphemisms such as 'passed away' or 'just sleeping.'
- If substitutes are available inform teachers how they can access them if they are experiencing difficulty while teaching or when requiring additional support in the class
- The statement of facts regarding the traumatic event should be given in small groups such as classrooms, rather than in a large group format (e.g. an assembly). strive for normalcy with flexibility as much as possible, staying to regular daily routines as much as possible
- Give the students the opportunity to react; discuss and ask questions (Appendices 7 – Suggested Classroom Discussion Format and 8 – Guidelines for Teachers Dealing with Death in the Classroom).
- Allow time for the students to express their feelings keeping in mind not to inflict trauma on other students, and that reaction times may vary.
- Once the talk seems to be over, begin a regular class routine with the flexibility to respond to more questions throughout the day.

## 3. Support and Support Room Planning

- Setting up a temporary Support Room following a traumatic event is an effective way to support students, particularly those considered high-risk. See school counsellor for support or recommendations.
- Introduce/identify resource personnel available to staff and students. Communicate the location of the support room and procedures to access it for students and staff.
- Discuss how to provide this support to particular students.

## 4. Plans for the Day

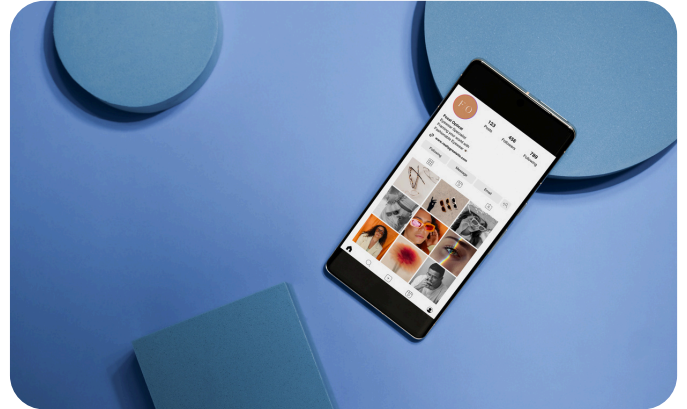
- Inform staff that substitute teachers will be made available if necessary. Ensure that substitute teachers are informed of the incident, the plans for students, and their role with the media (no interviews).
- Teachers should be aware that it is okay to show some emotion while informing and discussing with students, but that they should remove themselves if they are not in control of their emotions.
- School Counsellor to determine if any students/classes should complete survey for more support (refer to School Counsellor Resources section).
- Assign teachers who do not have immediate classroom responsibility to monitor entrances, hallways, and washrooms.
- Maintain a regular school schedule where appropriate and with flexibility.
- Consider postponing special events that are scheduled that day or in the near future.



# STEP #5 - Initial Staff Meeting

## 5. Media/Social Media Information

- **Remind staff to refrain from social media use or consult with TERT before posting.**
- Advise staff that the Director of Education or Designate will handle all media inquiries. Remind staff to direct students to refrain from interviews with the media, and of social media etiquette regarding the traumatic event.
- Encourage youth to advise staff if there are any concerning posts on social media to ensure safety of students.



## 6. Next Meeting

- Advise staff of time of afternoon staff meeting for updating
- Assure staff that they will be kept informed of any relevant information in the next meeting.
- Review the events of the day (Principal and TERT), including challenges and successes.
- Provide update on the traumatic event and funeral arrangements as applicable.
- Offer verbal appreciation of the staff in working together to support students and each other.
- Ask staff to identify students who may need careful monitoring to TERT.
- Arrange for notification of parents/guardians of students deemed at risk due to their reactions/behaviours and discuss plan for monitoring.
- Discuss plans for the next day including the role of resource personnel, Support Room, etc.

## 7. Care and Support

- Identify school staff who may need particular support due to connection to victim(s) or having experienced a similar traumatic event or loss.
- Inform the staff of available counselling services for students and staff and share self-care ideas (Appendices: 6 – Promoting Staff Self-Care, 3 – Outside Agency Resources and Contacts, and 5 – Reactions to Trauma and Positive Coping Skills) \*\*\*USE THIS FOR SECOND STAFF MEETING NOT INITIAL ONE
- Provide opportunity for staff to discuss the day, express concerns, ask questions, and express the need for help with any aspect for the upcoming day(s).
- Discuss the importance of self-care for staff members and share handouts on ways to promote self-care. (Appendix 6: Promoting Self-Care) Refer to and provide information about more help and resources (STF/LINC/ counselling).
- Check in with staff to assess whether any of them need additional support and refer accordingly.
- TERT-admin/SC/direct people-will have significant impact and are expected to lead through difficult situations-please take care of yourself and role model getting help and taking care of yourself and others.

## STEP #6 - Informing Parents by Letter and/or School Communication Platform

TERT will consider whether to send a letter/Edsby to inform parents of the traumatic event and include information on how to support their child (in consultation with the Superintendent). (Appendix 2)

Information shared in the letter should be factual and carefully worded to ensure family privacy is respected. Remember that personal information should only be disclosed to the extent it is permitted under LAFOIP. Refrain from sharing any other information or pictures. Be sure to have family/TERT approval prior to sharing. (Appendix 2)



## STEP #7 - Confirm Funeral Information

Inform staff of funeral arrangements.

For the death of a staff member or student, administration is strongly encouraged to attend the funeral.

When appropriate, students and staff may have the opportunity to attend the funeral. The principal should arrange permission from senior administration to dismiss students and staff to attend the funeral and ensure there is sufficient regular staff remaining in the building to adequately address the needs of students remaining in the school.

Ensure that students who plan to attend the funeral are prepared by helping them anticipate what happens at funerals. It may be helpful for the TERT to connect with the family to understand their cultural or religious practices so they can be respected. Explain appropriate etiquette at the funeral or wake, and other topics as necessary (i.e. cremation, open caskets, burial, and specific cultural practices).

## STEP #8 - TERT Technical Debrief (Appendix 10)

After experiencing a Traumatic Event and implementing the Traumatic Events Response Plan, the TERT will meet within 2 weeks of the event to debrief on the process so that feedback can be collected to improve both the school and division level response for future events. A copy is to be provided to the School Superintendent and the Director or Designate overseeing Trauma Response as well as the school counsellor TERT guide subcommittee. The subcommittee will review annually and make adjustments to the guide as needed.

After using the school's Traumatic Event Response plan, TERT should consider emailing staff to review the events and the response while they are still recent (within two weeks) to provide an opportunity for feedback:

- What worked well to provide support to students and staff?
- What did not work as planned?
- What may have been more effective?



Emailing provides staff with time to think and reflect and decide whether they want to respond.

**\*Please Note\* emotional group debriefs should not be conducted.**

Research on the benefits of group debriefing processes is inconclusive. A number of organizations, including the American Psychological Association (APA) and World Health Organization (WHO) do not recommend the use of traumatic event group debriefing: “Psychological debriefing should not be used for people exposed recently to a traumatic event as an intervention to reduce the risk of posttraumatic stress, anxiety or depressive symptoms.” (WHO, 2017).

Given this recommendation, psychological group debriefing practices should not take place in the school - however, group technical debriefing for the purpose of going through processes as well as the sharing supportive information and resources should take place. For those who are needing more intensive support, the American Psychological Association strongly recommend the use of Prolonged Exposure, Cognitive Processing Therapy and trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. School Counsellors can assist staff and students in connecting with the outside resources that can deliver these interventions.

# STEP #9 - Ongoing Considerations

## Student Belongings, lockers and desks

- Principals should confirm that student belongings can be released (pending RCMP or coroner investigations). The school can deliver to the family. Ensure students are not present when belongings are removed from desk or locker.
- It is advised that the student's desk and personal belongings remain until after the funeral or memorial service, or until a natural break in the school week calendar (a few days to one week is recommended).
- An empty locker or desk can be a distressing symbol of death to peers and friends. TERT should consider if it is appropriate to prepare students when this is going to happen.
- Document in CLEVR, Edsby, MSS, and the student's cumulative file the date of their death.
- Remove the deceased's name from class/attendance lists to prevent a substitute teacher from calling out the name during attendance checks.
- A TERT Member may be the ongoing contact person(s) with the family or decide to select one or more staff members to take on this role. A home visit is most often appropriate and appreciated by families.
- In cases where a student death is applicable, discuss with the deceased's parents the transition plans for the return of siblings to school if this has not yet occurred.
- If death is in student's family: discuss with student's parent/guardian, the transition plans for returning to school to ensure the return is as comfortable as possible.





## STEP #9 - Ongoing Considerations



- Grief reactions can continue over a long period of time. Provisions should be made for ongoing support of both staff and students:
  - Identify students who require ongoing support and provide opportunities to support as well as a staff member who will be responsible for ensuring this is addressed
  - TERT will collaborate to identify staff who require follow-up/check-in and offer ongoing support.
- Ensure a message of sympathy is sent to the family (e.g. card, flowers, food, etc.) and select a representative from the school to visit the home to offer formal condolences, if appropriate.
- Develop a transition plan if a student is returning to school after close involvement in a tragedy.
- Consider noting the date on a TERT members calendar and reminders set on calendars to follow up on significant dates (victims' birthday, graduation) or critical periods (two weeks post incident, month of December and one-year anniversary).
- Send thank you notes to external resource people/agencies who provided support to those affected by the trauma.



## STEP #10 - Memorialization

TERT will consult with the family before planning any memorialization events.

- Any memorial activities and permanent memorials need to be discussed with the School Superintendent to be approved by the division and/or board.
- **School Flag – Do not lower the school flag unless directed to do so by the Director of Education.** The Canadian flag is only lowered when directed by provincial or national government officials.
- Schools should treat all student deaths with equal respect, regardless of cause, and plan consistent memorial events. They should be mindful that once memorials like trees, plaques, or benches are established for one student, they may need to continue doing so for others, which can be difficult to maintain over time.
- Cultural and religious beliefs should be considered when planning any remembrance activities after a traumatic event.
- If the family wishes to establish a scholarship fund, they may do so, but this would not be initiated or funded by the school.
- After a death, students may create spontaneous memorials with flowers, cards, photos, or other items at a locker, desk, or the site of the death. Staff should oversee this process, and as needed explain the rationale. These can remain until the funeral or a natural break in the school week. (see Appendix 9)
- When a spontaneous memorial is created on school grounds, TERT and staff need to monitor it for messages that are inappropriate or for indications other students who may be at risk.
- The school may wish to have a memory book or poster board available for students to gather and write messages. It is advisable to set this up in an area that can be avoided by those who do not wish to participate (e.g. not at the front entrance). After a few days or up to the funeral date, the poster or memory book can be removed and given to the family.
- Some appropriate memorialization ideas may be:
  - The collection of funds toward charity as chosen by the family in memory of the deceased.
  - Staff may contribute to a gift card/for the family



## STEP #10 - Memorialization

- Any remembrance activities (such as the planting of a tree) should allow for optional attendance and be held outside of regular school hours. This prevents students who do not wish to attend from incurring unnecessary trauma.
- **Yearbook** – In consultation with the family, the school may devote a yearbook memory page to recognize the deceased student or staff member. The Yearbook Committee consult with TERT before finalizing the memorial page.
- **Graduation** – When planning tributes or memorials for deceased students who would have graduated, all memorial planning should be done in consultation with the family and TERT. Treat all students consistently regardless of cause of death.
- Some schools avoid memorials for fear of glamorizing suicide but banning them can stigmatize the family and worsen the situation. Students should have an opportunity to express condolences.
- Avoid creating or distributing a likeness of the deceased without explicit permission from the family and TERT.
- Schools can play an important role in channeling the energy and passion of students (and greater community) in a positive direction, balancing the community's need to grieve with the impact that the proposed activity will likely have on students, particularly those closest to the student who died. Consider how to appropriately memorialize the student who died without risking suicide contagion or further trauma among surviving students.
- Appropriate examples include:
  - Sponsoring a mental health awareness day
  - Supporting classmates and friends to organize a suicide awareness event
  - Purchasing books/resources on mental health and well-being for the school
  - A walk in memory to raise funds for mental health related initiatives/services or establishing a SADD chapter.
  - Refer to [AP 542 Names for Special Locations](#)



# Suicide

**Suicide** is a devastating occurrence.

Responses to suicide must be thoughtfully planned in order to support schools in a trauma-informed manner. Suicide contagion is the process by which one suicide may contribute to another. While contagion is relatively rare, adolescents appear to be more susceptible to imitative suicide than adults because they may identify more readily with the behavior and qualities of their peers. In some cases, suicide can even follow the death of a student from other causes, such as an accident. To prevent contagion, TERT should take steps beyond basic crisis response, including increasing efforts to identify other students who may be at heightened risk of suicide, collaborating with community partners in a coordinated suicide prevention effort and possibly bringing in outside experts.

## Suicide Warning Signs

These signs may mean someone is at risk of suicide. The risk is greater if a behavior is new or has recently increased in frequency or intensity, and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

**Major warning signs of suicide spell:**

**IS PATH WARM**

**I** – Ideation: thinking about suicide, wanting to escape.

**S** – Substance use: problems with drugs or alcohol.

**P** – Purposelessness: feeling like there is no purpose in life or reason for living.

**A** – Anxiety: feeling out of control, intense anxiety or feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope.

Sensations (such as hearing voices) that aren't real. Strange beliefs that can't possibly be true.

**T** – Trapped: feeling trapped or feeling like there is no way out of a situation.

**H** – Hopelessness or Helplessness: feeling no hope for the future, feeling like things will never get better.

**W** – Withdrawal: avoiding family, friends, or activities. Changes in eating, weight, or sleeping patterns.

**A** – Anger: feeling unreasonable anger, excessive irritability.

**R** – Recklessness: engaging in risky or harmful activities normally avoided. Self-injury.

**M** – Mood change: a significant change in mood, specifically low mood that lasts for a long time or frequent tearfulness. An unusually high mood. Difficulties remembering information or making decisions.



# Suicide: Self-Harm, Suicide Risk Assessment

## Self-Harm

At times self-harm can be a cry for help because an individual may be contemplating suicide, therefore, the risk of suicide must be assessed. Self-harm may be an unhealthy coping mechanism, and not a sign of contemplating suicide, however, this still requires intervention.

A cry for help is legitimate. It is not appropriate to make judgements about the causal factors related to self-harm. Statements such as “they are just trying to get attention” is unprofessional and harmful as it minimizes the need to intervene and does not support the need for a responsive intervention.

## Suicide Risk Assessment

A fundamental responsibility of school staff is the safety of students. Staff have the responsibility to act on any information that indicates a student may be in danger. In the event that a staff member has reason to believe that a student may be suicidal, the following actions are to be taken:

- Take all comments about suicidal ideation seriously, especially if details of a suicide plan are shared. Staff should immediately report any concerns to the Administrator and School Counsellor to seek professional help for the student.
- Do not be afraid to ask the student whether he or she is considering suicide or has a plan or method in mind. This may be the most reliable way to find out if a person is really contemplating suicide.
- If the student indicates they have a plan or shares direct threats such as ‘I’m going to kill myself’ or ‘I’m going to commit suicide,’ they require immediate attention and should not be left alone.
- Listen, and be supportive and affirmative. Assure the student that everything possible will be done to help them.
- GSSD School Counsellors are trained to carry out ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) and will apply the principles of this training to intervene.
- Treat all information regarding a risk of suicide confidential and information is only to be shared on a need-to-know basis.
- Teachers and Administrators should ensure all suicidal ideation behaviors and other warning signs are reported to the School Counsellor who will document this information within school counsellor tracking along with the counsellor/school response.

# Suicide: High Risk

If a student is **suspected to be at high risk of suicide**, the following steps should be taken:

- Do not leave the student alone. Remain with them in a safe and visible place until help can be obtained, and remove any weapons/pills/etc.
- Contact the Principal and School Counsellor immediately, who will contact parents to arrange for immediate mental health services. If parents cannot be reached, the Principal or Counsellor will contact mental health and/or police while the student is in the school's care.
- If parents are unavailable to drive the student to the hospital, the Principal and School Counsellor can do so, or they can request assistance from the police.
- If it is determined that contacting parents may increase the student's risk or if parents are identified by the student as a contributing factor to the risk, the student should be transported to the hospital and then the parent should be contacted. If it is a child protection issue, then social services must be contacted rather than the parents.
- The Principal or Counsellor will follow up with parents/guardians (and where applicable Mental Health) the following day to determine what actions have been taken and to identify the role of the school upon the student's return. They will also ensure that a safety plan has been developed with the student.
- All actions taken and requests for support from outside agencies should be documented.



# Suicide: In School & Outside of School

## Suicide Attempt at School

- Follow all procedures for an accident at school in dealing with the immediate safety and well-being of the student (see [AP165 Appendix A: Severe Injury at School](#)). This may include calling 911 and/or transporting the student to the hospital.
- Ensure the following are contacted: parents/guardians and Mental Health (306-786-0558) and/or the community hospital if that is where the student is being transported.
- Inform the School Superintendent and Director or Designate.
- Convene the TERT to assess the needs of students and staff to ensure that the necessary supports are available.
- In the event of a death, follow [AP165 Appendix A: Death at School](#).

## Suicide Attempt Outside of School

- If the family/student or outside agency notifies the school of suicide attempt outside of school, the school can provide support. The family/student have the right to privacy and may not inform the school of a suicide attempt. If it becomes known that a student has made a suicide attempt outside of school the Administrator or School Counsellor will connect with the student and/or family to discuss and offer supports. If the family/student agree to support, the following supports can be offered:
- The school can provide post-crisis support to students through the transition back to school, monitoring of the student and support in school-related matters.
- The Principal and School Counsellor will create a transition support plan in collaboration with involved agencies and ensure a safety plan has been created with the student.
- The Principal and School Counsellor will meet with the student and parents/guardians to communicate that school counsellor services are available and to identify with the student other personnel they would feel comfortable connecting with at the school. The student will be offered a daily check-in upon return with a staff member they identify and/or feel connected to.
- The Principal and School Counsellor will meet with the student's teachers to discuss ways to support the student on their return to school. Generally, returning to the typical schedule and academic expectations is best for the student.
- The Principal and School Counsellor will ensure the student's right to confidentiality is respected; however, relevant information will be shared to specific personnel where it is determined necessary to ensure student safety (safety should supersede privacy).
- Staff will monitor the student to identify any changes in behavior which might indicate increased risk. This will be communicated by the Principal or School Counsellor to the parents/guardians and involved mental health personnel.
- The School Counsellor and Principal will identify and provide support in cases where the school may be contributing negatively to readjustment/rehabilitation.
- Regular monitoring of the student should be undertaken with discretion to ensure this is not an added source of stress for the student.

# Suicide: School Response to Death by Suicide

## School Response to Death by Suicide

In addition to the Traumatic Events Response recommendations and steps included in this guide, schools should implement the following:

- The principal/and or counselor will connect with the family and/or police regarding cause of death and what can be communicated. If there is an ongoing investigation or the family does not want the cause disclosed, it can be challenging for schools to determine how to proceed.
- **If cause of death has not been confirmed:**
  - Schools may state that the cause of death is still being determined and that additional information may be forthcoming once confirmed.
  - Acknowledge that there are rumors (which may be inaccurate) and remind students that rumors can be deeply hurtful and unfair to the deceased person, their family, and their friends.
  - Students will be educated to be mindful of how social media posts may impact friends and family of the deceased.
- **If death by suicide has been confirmed, but the family does not want it disclosed:**
  - The principal and/or Counsellor will make contact with the family to offer condolences and inquire as to what supports are wanted by the family.
  - The school will communicate “The family has requested that information regarding the cause of death will not be shared.”
  - The school will take the opportunity to talk with students and offer support. In the case that a student brings up the topic of suicide, this will be addressed individually. If multiple students are discussing suicide the principal and/or counselor will use their discretion to speak with the students in a group setting to share accurate information about suicide in general without confirming.
- **Strive to treat all student deaths in the same way.** Have one approach for addressing student deaths to eliminate the stigma of suicide, this also includes memorialization.
- If death by suicide is confirmed, notify students of the death in small groups such as classrooms; not through a school-wide assembly or announcement.
  - Be aware that adolescents are impulsive and vulnerable when at a heightened emotional state of mind.
  - It is important not to inadvertently simplify, glamorize, romanticize, or condemn the deceased student or their actions.
  - Focus on the tragedy, the loss of life, the sadness that the deceased could see no other options, and the fact that there are many other options available for people in mental distress.
  - Talk about other ways of coping.
  - Share Appendix 12 – Tips for Talking about Suicide with teachers in addressing questions that may come up.
  - School Counselor will consult with Mental Health on appropriate strategies for screenings and assessment.



# Suicide: School Response

- Families often feel isolated or ostracized after a suicide. A visit from the Principal, Counsellor and/or other staff members will reassure the family of the school's support.
- The principal will lock the student's locker until a decision is made as to what to do with the student's belongings. The principal and/or counselor will communicate with the RCMP and the family to get direction.
- **Media** – All media inquiries should be directed to the Director of Education who can express a message on behalf of the division.
- **Social media** – Remind students that if they see anything on social media that causes them to feel upset or concerned, please speak to an adult.
  - Students should be reassured that schools staff are only interested in supporting a healthy response to their peer's death.
  - Social media should be monitored for: rumors, information about upcoming or impromptu gatherings, derogatory messages about the deceased, messages that bully or victimize current students, and comments indicating students who may be at risk. Students should be encouraged to advise an adult in the case of discovering any social media posts that contain these types of messages.
  - School Counselor and/or admin to monitor social media pages of family and or deceased for multiple expressions of emotional distress and offer support to the student.



- Identify other students at possible risk for suicide. Of special concern are students who:
  - Have underlying mental health disorders (example: depression, anxiety)
  - Have a history of suicide attempts or personal connections to suicide.
  - Are dealing with stressful life events such as death or divorce in the family.
  - Witnessed the death or found the deceased student.
  - Communicated with the deceased in some fashion in the last hours before the suicide.
  - Are expressing guilt about 'messages' they were given by the deceased that they did not act on or share with an adult.
  - Are relatives, close friends, teammates, and/or classmates of the deceased?
  - Received a phone call or social media communication from the deceased foretelling the suicide.
  - Had disagreements with, fought with, or bullied the deceased.

# Indigenous Ways of Knowing Regarding Grief

## Anishinaabek Grief and Loss Healing Tool



### Kübler-Ross Change Curve Model

**Shock:** The loss, trauma, immobilization, paralysis at hearing the bad news. Disconnection from 'self'.

**Denial:** Disbelief, refusal to believe the facts, the truth. Trying to avoid the inevitable, refusing to accept the change that is beyond our control. Looking for evidence that it is not true.

**Frustration / Anger:** Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion. Recognition that things are different. Emotional low point, unaware of the emotions or needs of others. Sometimes angry.

### Seven Grandfather Teachings Process and Relationship Building on each value / teaching

**Humility / Dibaadendiziwin:** A foundation of humility, to see ourselves not alone in life, in our trauma / loss. With humility, connections to the truth move us towards acceptance.

**Truth / Debiwewin:** Being truthful is speaking from the heart. Building on each value / teaching accepting the truth opens us to healing with love.

**Love / Zaagidiwin:** Love is mutual, it is a balancing element and brings peace between you and others. When love is in our every action, we are better prepared to process strong emotions that can consume us.

# Indigenous Ways of Knowing Regarding Grief

## Kübler-Ross Change Curve Model

**Depression:** Low mood, lack of energy. Final realization of the inevitable. Emotional low point, potential for relapse to previous stages.

**Experiment / Testing:** Initial engagement with new situations, seeking realistic solutions.

**Decision:** Learning how to work in a new situation, feeling more positive.

**Acceptance:** Changes integrated, a renewed individual.

## Seven Grandfather Teachings Process and Relationship Building on each value / teaching

**Respect / Mnaadendimowin:** With both “heart” and “mutual benefit”, when we respect / re-see others, the situation, the loss, we begin seeing our relationship to others of the loss but not defined by it. In helping to benefit others we grow out of depression.

**Strength / Courage / Aaki-ade’-ewin:** With strength from the earth, connected through our heart we can face change / loss / foes / ourselves. This also takes time, moving through the four seasons, to face the loss, forgive it, let it go and give it back.

**Honesty / Gwekwaadiziwin:** Being truthful to ourselves is honouring us and others. By honouring and accepting our path in life, we are better prepared to make the decision to move forward.

**Wisdom / Nbwaakaawin:** Finally finding the way forward. To know humility, love, honesty, truth, respect and courage from the heart, where there is mutual benefit with others is when wisdom is achieved.

The wisdom of life is in living ‘Life’ - “*Bimaadiziwin*”. The “bi” is a word marker of movement, which is in the word for ‘water’ = “*n’bi*”, where life is always moving, flowing. Wisdom comes from the living of life, accepting life, moving with it, within it, contributing to it and receiving from it.

# Indigenous Ways of Knowing Regarding Grief

## Metis Culture: Metis Death Rituals and Ceremonies

**Church Bell:** In Metis communities, the church bell was rung to signal a death; nine times if a man, seven times if a woman had died.

**Coffins:** In southern communities, Metis made coffins from one-inch boards. They would wrap them with black material for older people and white material for younger children. There were usually four pallbearers. In northern Metis communities, there was a coffin maker. The coffin was painted in white and blue with Aboriginal markings.

**Feasts:** It is a Metis custom that during the large holiday meals an extra plate would always be set at the table with the best of everything—foods, cutlery and dinnerware. After the meal, the food was put into the fire for “those who went before us.”

**Mourning Period:** For the death of a spouse, the mourning period was a year and one half. It was one year for a sibling. During the mourning period there was no dancing, no listening to music, and family or close relatives wore black. Some Metis people cut their hair as a sacrifice in honour of the one who has died.

- Metis ceremonies have a basis in Roman Catholic and Anglican practices. Some Metis people strictly adhere to Aboriginal practices.
- Some Metis combine Christian with Aboriginal practices.
- Church bells are tolled nine times for a man’s death and seven times for the death of a woman.
- A four day wake is common, tobacco is put out beside the body; the family may also place tobacco with the body at burial.
- The wake is an occasion for Elders to tell stories.
- Someone is always with the body over the four days; they say payers (Hail Mary) and sing hymns regularly during the wake.
- Some build a sacred fire at home of deceased or where the wake is held (the fire is allowed to die by itself after four days).
- Some Metis women collect all their hair from their hairbrushes over their lifetime and this is buried or burned during the funeral rites.
- The pallbearers wear a black ribbon tied with a bow on their free arm; these are placed in the grave after the coffin is lowered.



# Indigenous Ways of Knowing Regarding Grief

- Upon leaving the place of burial one does not look back. This shows that they have accepted the person's death. Otherwise the person's spirit will not move on.
- Northern lights are said to be the souls of the dead who have come out to dance; never whistle at the northern lights.
- Some Metis do a give-away of personal effects to friends and relatives.
- The spouse used to wear a black arm-band for the year mourning period.
- Feasts for the dead are held on the fourth day following death or immediately after burial, and on the anniversary of the death.
- Some people put out food for the deceased and set a place at table for them on feasts such as thanksgiving.
- For those practicing Aboriginal spirituality, dances are held for the dead; really it is to pray for the healing of the living – commonly, the Tea Dance or the Chicken Dance.

## References:

Barkwell, L.J., L.M. Dorion and A. Hourie. Metis Legacy, Volume Two: *Michif Culture, Heritage and Folkways*. Saskatoon, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2007.

Grace Ledoux-Zoldy, translator. Li Livr Oche Michif Ayamiiawina – *The Book of Michif Prayers*. Camperville, Manitoba: Camperville Michif Cree Ritual Language Project, 2003.

Adapted from Lawrence Barkwell, Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research - Louis Riel Institute

# APPENDIX 1: Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) List

School: \_\_\_\_\_

School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

## Division Trauma Response Team

Role	Name	Work Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone
School Superintendent				
Director or Deputy Director				

## Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT)

Role	Name	Work Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone
Principal				
Vice-Principal				
School Counsellor				
Acting Principal				
Emergency Counsellor Partner				
Indigenous Community Worker				

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

This death notification statement is to be sent by the most efficient and effective method(s) for the school, including e-mail, text, Edsby, printed copy sent home with students, or regular mail. It can also be posted on the school's website and social media accounts. You may share this death notification statement with students in small groups, such as homerooms or advisories, not in assemblies or over loudspeakers.

You may decide that it is appropriate to send a notification to parents/guardians of other students informing them of the traumatic event. The notification may be directed to all parents/guardians, parents/guardians of students at the deceased's grade level, or parents/guardians of classmates.

If there is a resource about talking to students and children about trauma or suicide, it should be shared. It should be translated for parents who may know little or no English.

*(Sample Letters listed below can be found on subsequent pages).*

### **Sample Death Notification for Traumatic Event**

- Option 1
- Option 2
- Option 3

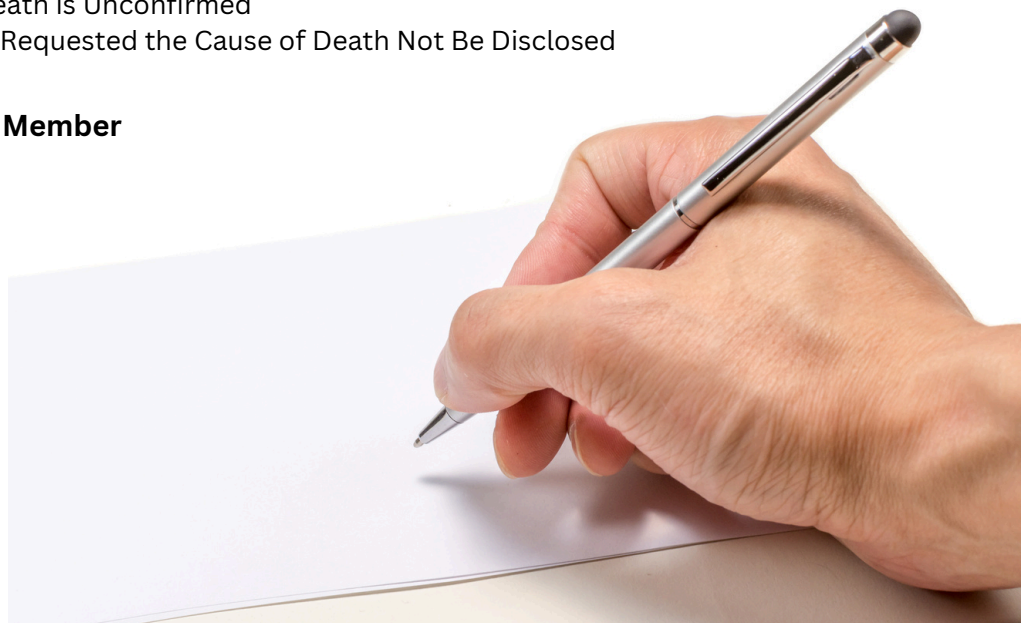
### **Sample Death Notification Statement for Students**

- Option 1 - When the Death Has Been Ruled a Suicide
- Option 2 - When the Cause of Death is Unconfirmed
- Option 3 - When the Family Has Requested the Cause of Death Not Be Disclosed

### **Sample Death Notification Statement for Parents**

- Option 1 - When the Death Has Been Ruled a Suicide
- Option 2 - When the Cause of Death is Unconfirmed
- Option 3 - When the Family Has Requested the Cause of Death Not Be Disclosed

### **Letter for Death of School Staff Member**



## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification for Traumatic Event

#### Sample Letters to parents/caregivers

##### OPTION 1

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the death of a [Grade 2] student in our school.

(OR)

Today our school is mourning the loss of one of our students.

[NAME] died from injuries suffered in a car accident which occurred last evening. We wish to express our sincere condolences to [NAME]'s parents, family, and friends.

Students will have varied reactions to the death of a peer. A wide range of reactions is normal in the grief process and can vary from withdrawal to crying and anger. I encourage you to openly discuss and listen to your child regarding their reactions and feelings regarding [NAME]'s death.

Counsellors, teachers, and other support personnel have been and will continue to be available to students, teachers, and parents on an ongoing basis. If you think your child needs additional counselling support, please do not hesitate to contact the school office at [SCHOOL NUMBER].

Yours sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL]

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification for Traumatic Event

#### Sample Letters to parents/caregivers

##### OPTION 2

Dear Parents/Guardians:

We have suffered a tragedy at our school. On December 12th, one of our students, [NAME], died suddenly and unexpectedly. We are grieving the loss of a member of our school community, and we are sensitive to the impact this event has on our students and staff.

In response, the school has implemented a plan which allows students an opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings with trained professional staff. We expect that some will seek out this help, while others may not. Those who do will be given an opportunity to express their feelings and grief. This is not intended to take the place of outside professional counselling, or support from parents or other family members.

Anticipating that your child may have a reaction to this event, we have attached some information which may be helpful as you respond to your child's concerns. (School-see School counsellor for information). If you determine that your child needs further support or counselling, please feel free to contact the school for phone numbers of local agencies that are available to assist you.

Please do not hesitate to contact the school regarding your requests or concerns at [SCHOOL NUMBER].

Yours sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL]

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification for Traumatic Event

#### Sample Letters to parents/caregivers

##### OPTION 3

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Today our school received news of the death of one of our students., a student in [GRADE] and a member of our school community, died [WAY OF DEATH]. Our students and staff were informed on [DATE/TIME]. Our deepest sympathy goes to the family and friends of [NAME].

As a response to this tragedy, our school has extra counsellors available to students who have felt the need to grieve either in private or as a group. We also have support and services from (Mental Health or other outside agency service). We will continue to support our students in any way we can in the days and weeks to come.

The funeral service will be held at [LOCATION] on [DATE/TIME]. If there is any way we can provide additional support, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Our condolences to the family and friends of [NAME]; we hope our thoughts of sympathy and understanding will comfort them in the days ahead.

Yours sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL]

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification Statement for Students

#### Option 1 – When the Death Has Been Ruled a Suicide

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. I'm also very sad to tell you that the cause of death was suicide. Many of you may also feel very sad. Others may feel other emotions such as anger or confusion. It's okay to feel whatever emotions you might be feeling. When someone takes their own life, it leads to a lot of questions, some of which may never be completely answered.

While we may never know why [NAME] ended [HIS/HER] life, we do know that suicide has many causes. In many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you're not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option. Rumors may come out about what happened, but please don't spread them. They may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends.

Each of us will react to 's death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Some of us may have known [NAME] well, and some of us may not. But either way, we may have strong feelings. You might find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork for a little while. On the other hand, you might find that focusing on school helps take your mind off what has happened. Either is okay. I want you to know that your teachers and I are here for you. We also have counselors here to help us all cope with what happened. If you'd like to talk to one of them, just let me or one of your teachers know or look for the counselors in [NOTE SPECIFIC LOCATION] between classes or during lunch. We are all here for you. We are all in this together, and the school staff will do whatever we can to help you get through this.

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification Statement for Students

#### Option 2 – When the Cause of Death Is Unconfirmed

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. The cause of death has not yet been determined. We are aware that there has been some talk that this might have been a death by suicide. Rumors may begin to come out, but please don't spread them. They may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends.

Since the subject has been raised, I do want to take this chance to remind you that suicide, when it does occur, is very complicated. No one single thing causes it. But in many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you're not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option. Each of us will react to [NAME]'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Right now, I'm feeling very sad, and many of you may feel sad too. Others may feel anger or confusion. It's okay to feel whatever emotions you might be feeling. Some of us may have known [NAME] well, and some of us may not. But either way, we may have strong feelings. You might find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork for a little while. On the other hand, you might find that focusing on school helps take your mind off what has happened. Either is okay.

I want you to know that your teachers and I are here for you. We also have counselors here to help us all understand what happened. If you'd like to talk to one of them, just let me or one of your teachers know, or you can seek out the counselors in [NOTE SPECIFIC LOCATION] between classes or during your lunch. We are all here for you. We are all in this together, and the school staff will do whatever we can to help you get through this.

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]



## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification Statement for Students

#### Option 3 – When the Family Has Requested the Cause of Death Not Be Disclosed

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. The family has requested that information about the cause of death not be shared at this time. We are aware that there has been some talk that this might have been a suicide death. Rumors may begin to come out, but please don't spread them. They may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends. Since the subject has been raised, I do want to take this chance to remind you that suicide, when it does occur, is very complicated. No one single thing causes it. But in many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you're not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option.

Each of us will react to [NAME]'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Right now, I'm feeling very sad, and many of you [NAME] may feel sad too. Others may feel anger or confusion. It's okay to feel whatever emotions you might be feeling. Some of us may have known [NAME] well, and some of us may not. But either way, we may have strong feelings. You might find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork for a little while. On the other hand, you might find that focusing on school helps take your mind off what has happened. Either is okay. I want you to know that your teachers and I are here for you.

We also have counselors here to help us all understand what happened. If you'd like to talk to one of them, just let me or one of your teachers know, or you can seek out the counselors in [NOTE SPECIFIC LOCATION] between classes or during your lunch. We are all here for you. We are all in this together, and the school staff will do whatever we can to help you get through this.

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification Statement for Parents

#### Option 1 – When the Death Has Been Ruled a Suicide

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with [HIS/HER] family and friends. All of the students were given the news of the death by their teacher in [ADVISORY/HOMEROOM] this morning. I have included a copy of the announcement that was read to them. The cause of death was suicide. Suicide is a very complicated act. Although we may never know why [NAME] ended [HIS/HER] life, we do know that suicide has multiple causes. In many cases, a mental health condition is part of it. But these conditions are treatable.

It's really important if you or your child are not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option. I am including some information that may be helpful to you in discussing suicide with your child. Members of our Crisis Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance. Note that children who are already vulnerable may be at greater risk due to exposure to the suicide of a peer.

If you or your child needs help right away, call the Suicide Crisis Helpline 9-8-8, call 911, or take your child to the nearest crisis center or emergency department. Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school. The school will be hosting a meeting for parents and others in the community at [DATE/TIME/LOCATION]. Members of our Crisis Response Team [OR NAME SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS] will be present to provide information about common reactions following a suicide and how adults can help youth cope. They will also provide information about suicide and mental illness in adolescents, including risk factors and warning signs of suicide, and will address attendees' questions and concerns.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or one of the school mental health professionals. We can be reached by calling [PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION].

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification Statement for Parents

#### Option 2 – When the Cause of Death Is Unconfirmed

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with [HIS/HER] family and friends. All of the students were given the news of the death by their teacher in [ADVISORY/HOMEROOM] this morning. I have included a copy of the announcement that was read to them. The cause of death has not yet been determined by the authorities. We are aware there has been some talk that this might have been a suicide death. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we have asked the students not to spread them since they may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends. We will do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us.

Members of our Crisis Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today, as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance. If you or your child needs help right away, call the Suicide Crisis Helpline 9-8-8, call 911, or take your child to the nearest crisis center or emergency department.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or one of the school mental health professionals. We can be reached by calling [PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION].

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Sample Death Notification Statement for Parents

#### Option 3 – When the Family Has Requested the Cause of Death Not Be Disclosed

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with [HIS/HER] family and friends. All of the students were given the news of the death by their teacher in [ADVISORY/HOMEROOM] this morning. I have included a copy of the announcement that was read to them. The family has requested that information about the cause of death not be shared at this time. We are aware there have been rumors that this was a suicide death. Since the subject has been raised, we want to take this opportunity to remind our community that suicide, when it does occur, is a very complicated act. No one single thing causes it. But in many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable.

It's really important if you or your child is not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option. I am including some information that may be helpful to you in discussing suicide with your child. Members of our Crisis Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today, as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance. Note that children who are already vulnerable may be at greater risk due to exposure to the death of a peer. If you or your child needs help right away, call the Suicide Crisis Helpline 9-8-8, call 911, or take your child to the nearest crisis center or emergency department.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or the school mental health professionals. We can be reached by calling [PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION].

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

## APPENDIX 2: Sample Notification Letters

### Letter for Death of School Staff Member

Dear Parents/Guardians:

It is with great sadness I share that our school community has suffered the loss of [Mr./Mrs./Ms. NAME], a teacher at our school, due to [illness/accident]. Our thoughts go out to [NAME]'s family and friends at this time. This morning, a special announcement was made to all staff and students as we remembered 's many contributions to our school as a teacher and friend.

[NAME] served our school community for [NUMBER] years. (If you wish, provide personalized information regarding the staff member - interests, areas taught, hobbies, contributions.)

In response to this event, the school has requested professional support consisting of additional School Counsellors to allow students an opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings in relation to the death of [NAME]. If you feel your child requires further outside support, please feel free to contact the school for phone numbers of local agencies that are available to assist you.

Please advise the school if your child will be away from school for any reason. In difficult times, our greatest support is each other.

Further details regarding funeral arrangements will be shared as they are made available.

Yours sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL]

# APPENDIX 3: Outside Agency Resources & Contacts

## Counselling Services

Yorkton Mental Health & Addictions Services	1-306-786-0558 1-888-989-8444
STF Counselling Services (for teachers)	1-833-485-4245
CUPE Counselling Services (for unionized EAs)	1-866-644-0326
Out of Scope Services (for non-unionized EAs & PSPs)	1-866-644-0326
Bailey's Funeral Home, Yorkton	1-306-783-7552
Greystone Bereavement Centre, Regina	1-306-523-2780

## Department of Social Services (Child Protection, Young Offender Program)

Social Services - Yorkton	1-306-786-1300
Provincial Intake Line	1-844-787-3760 (24 hrs)
Yellow Thunderbird Lodge Child & Family Services (Keeseekoose, Key, Cote, Ochapowace, Cowsessess, Sakimay, Kahkewistahaw, Pheasant Rump, Ocean Man, Whitebear, Little Black Bear, Starblanket, and Peepeekisis)	1-306-782-8838

## Help Lines

SK Health Line - Emergency Mental Health Counselling	811 (24 hrs)
General Info & Referral to Local Support Services	211 phone/text (24 hrs)
SIGN Sexual Assault Counsellor	1-306-783-9428
First Nations & Inuit Hope for Wellness Helpline	1-855-242-3310 (24 hrs)
Kids Help Phone <a href="http://www.kidshelpphone.ca">www.kidshelpphone.ca</a> anonymous, confidential counselling and referral line for children and youth	1-800-668-6868 phone/text (24 hrs)
Suicide Prevention and Support	9-8-8 1-833-456-4566 phone (24 hrs) 45645 text (24 hrs)



## APPENDIX 4: Stages in the Grief Process

To help us cope with our own grief over a death and to assist students and colleagues, it is useful to understand the stages of the grieving process. It is important to note the order people experience these stages may vary and is not linear. You may bounce around this process from one stage to another and then back again.

- **Denial** involves a conscious or unconscious process of refusing to accept that the loss has occurred or is about to occur.
- **Anger** is the externalization of grief. People may be angry at the lost loved one for abandoning them (if he had taken better care of his health, he would not have died). The anger can also be directed at people who might have saved the person, such as the health care team, at the self for not doing more to help, or at random others who are not involved in the loss at all but are perceived as not fully appreciating the extent of the loss.
- **Bargaining** is typically thought to occur in the anticipation of death whereby a person bargains with God. (I will become a better person if this death does not occur.)

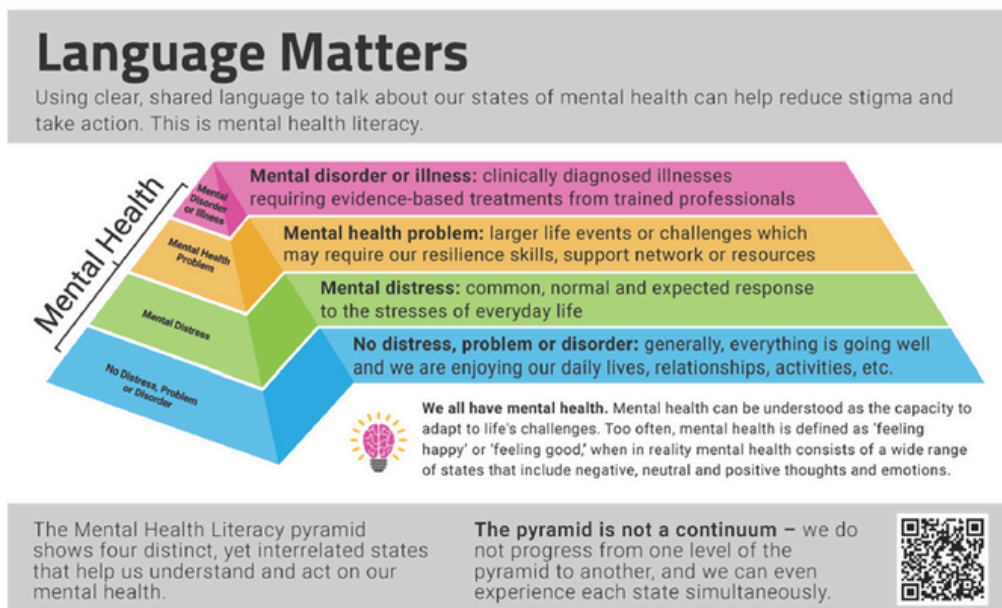


- **Depression** occurs when the extent of the loss is fully realized by the person.
- **Acceptance** is the time when the person is able to move forward with other life tasks despite the loss (Kübler-Ross, 1969).
- **Acute grief** occurs in the first six to eight weeks following death. This stage is characterized by numbness, frequently yearning for the deceased, and denial of the reality of the loss (Humphrey & Zimpfer, 1996; Worden, 1991).
- **Disorganization** is a sense of despair and functional impairment lasting several months (Schuter & Zisook, 1993).
- **Reorganization** happens when the intensity of emotion begins to subside and the bereaved individual learns to function in an environment without the deceased and to come to a new sense of the lost relationship (Bowlby, 1980; Worden, 1991).

# APPENDIX 4: Stages in the Grief Process

Please note that grief is individual and potentially transition into a “Persistent Complex Bereavement” disorder was included in DSM-5 as a condition for further study. This proposed diagnosis has five central elements:

- (1) the death of a significant other;
- (2) persistent longing, intense sorrow, preoccupation with the deceased, or preoccupation with the circumstance of death for at least 12 months after the death;
- (3) marked and persistent symptoms that include efforts to avoid reminders of the deceased; feelings of purposelessness and futility about the future; a sense of numbness or detachment resulting from the loss; feeling shocked, stunned, or dazed by the loss; disbelief; feeling that life is empty and unfulfilling and meaningless; and a shattered world view;
- (4) resultant impairment in social, occupational, or other important functioning; and
- (5) the reaction is out of proportion with cultural, religious, or age-appropriate norms (apa, 2013).



# APPENDIX 5: Reactions to Trauma & Positive Coping Skills

## Reactions to Trauma

After a traumatic event, people may go through a wide range of normal responses. Such reactions may be experienced felt by individuals who experienced the trauma first-hand, who witnessed or heard about the trauma, or were involved with those immediately affected. Many reactions can be triggered by persons, places, or things associated with the trauma, particularly through the senses (ex. Smells or noises). For mental health, grief and trauma are mental health problems that are larger life events or challenges which may require support networks and resources.

Here is a list of common physical and emotional reactions to trauma, and helpful coping strategies. These are EXPECTED reactions to ABNORMAL events.

### Physical Reactions

- Aches and pains like headaches, backaches, stomach aches
- Sudden sweating and/or heart palpitations (fluttering)
- Changes in sleep patterns and appetite
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Easily startled by noises, smells or unexpected touch
- More susceptible to colds and illnesses
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs, and/or overeating



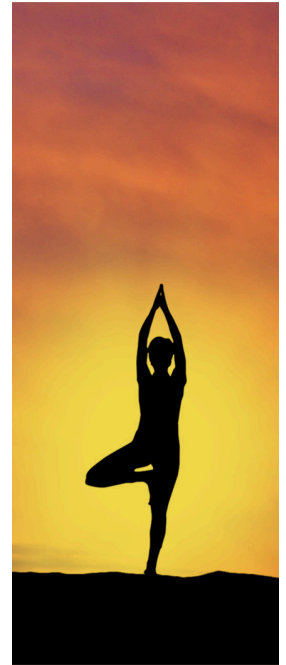
**Emotional Reactions** - Everyone is unique and may react differently; knowing baseline is important

- Shock and disbelief, fear and/or anxiety
- Grief, disorientation, denial
- Hyper-alertness or hypervigilance
- Irritability, restlessness, outbursts of anger or rage
- Emotional swings – like crying and then laughing
- Worrying – intrusive thoughts of the trauma
- Nightmares or Flashbacks – feeling like the trauma is happening now
- Feelings of helplessness, panic, feeling out of control
- Increased need to control everyday experiences
- Feelings of detachment
- Concern about burdening others with problems
- Difficulty trusting and/or feelings of betrayal
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Feelings of self-blame and/or survivor guilt or shame
- Diminished interest in everyday activities or depression and possible suicidal thoughts
- Loss of a sense of order or fairness in the world; expectation of doom and fear of the future

# APPENDIX 5: Reactions to Trauma & Positive Coping Skills

## Helpful Coping Strategies

- Mobilize a support system – reach out and connect with others
- Be with friends
- Making a list of people you can talk to or turn to for support
- Have a list of professional resources they would connect with
- Learning the language of feelings and how to express them
- Hard or rhythmic exercise like jogging, aerobics, bicycling, and walking
- Talking while walking with a trusted person
- Relaxation exercise like yoga, stretching, massage, deep slow breathing
- Humor
- Prayer
- Meditation, listening to relaxing guided imagery, progressive deep muscle relaxation, mindfulness, picturing self in a favorite calm and relaxing place
- Music and art or engaging in other favorite activities or hobbies
- Maintain balanced diet and sleep cycle as much as possible
- Avoid over-using stimulants like caffeine, sugar, or nicotine
- Start a gratitude journal to record a few things you are thankful for each day



People are usually surprised that reactions to trauma can last longer than they expected. It may take weeks, months, and in some cases, years to fully regain equilibrium. Sometimes extra support is needed through outside agencies.

## When to Refer a Student for more Individualized Assessment and Intervention:

Some students will continue to experience difficulties that interfere with their functioning. Consider referring students for additional intervention who:

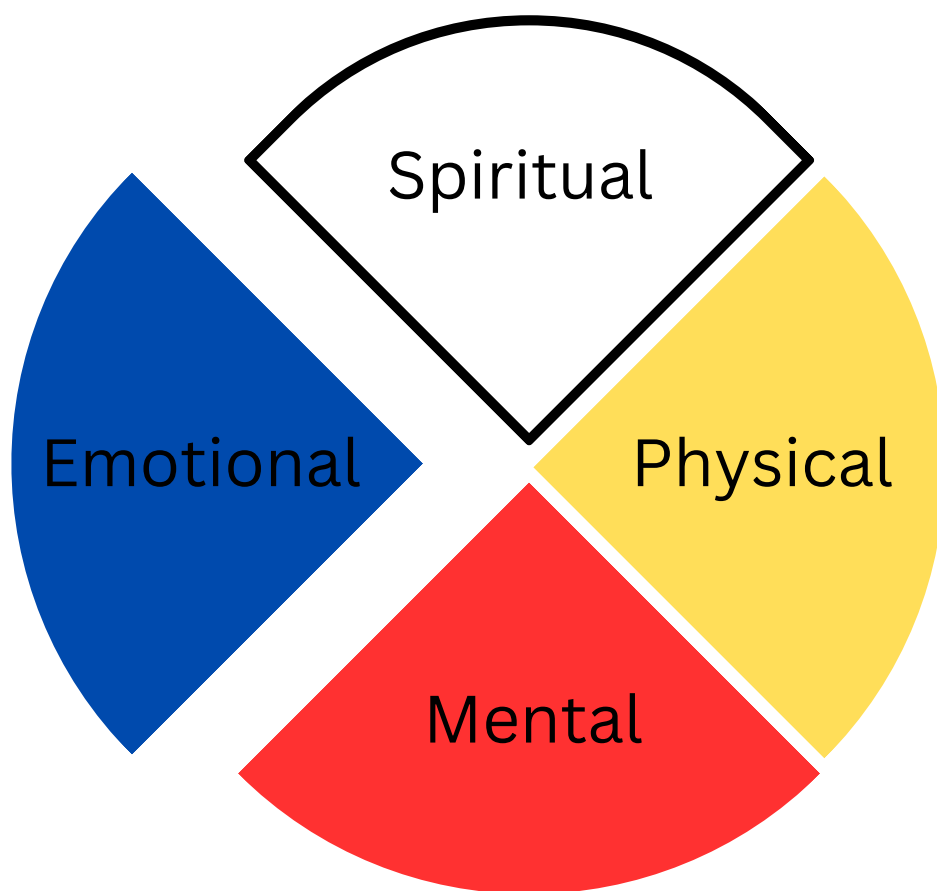
- Having persistent difficulty engaging in classroom activities and assignments
- Continue to exhibit high levels of emotional distress responsiveness (crying, tearfulness) after the majority of peers have discontinued doing so
- Appear distressed, Withdrawn, and non-communicative, and isolate self from friends and family
- Express suicidal or homicidal ideation, or are intentionally self-harming, cutting, etc.
- Have increased usage of alcohol or drugs
- Gain or lose a significant amount of weight in a short period of time
- Exhibit significant behavioral changes
- Begin to neglect hygiene and no longer care about personal appearance

## APPENDIX 6: Promoting Staff Self-Care

### Blue = Emotional

Emotional well-being is about healing and understanding our feelings. Activities that foster emotional balance may include:

- Journaling or Expressive Writing: Reflecting on your emotions and writing down thoughts helps process feelings and release emotional tension.
- Therapeutic Art: Engaging in creative activities like painting, drawing, or music can help express emotions that are difficult to articulate with words.
- Breathing Exercises or Meditation: Techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness meditation, or guided visualization help calm the emotional body and promote emotional resilience.
- Talking Circles or Group Therapy: Sharing your feelings in a supportive environment can be incredibly healing, especially in a community of people who understand and validate your experiences.

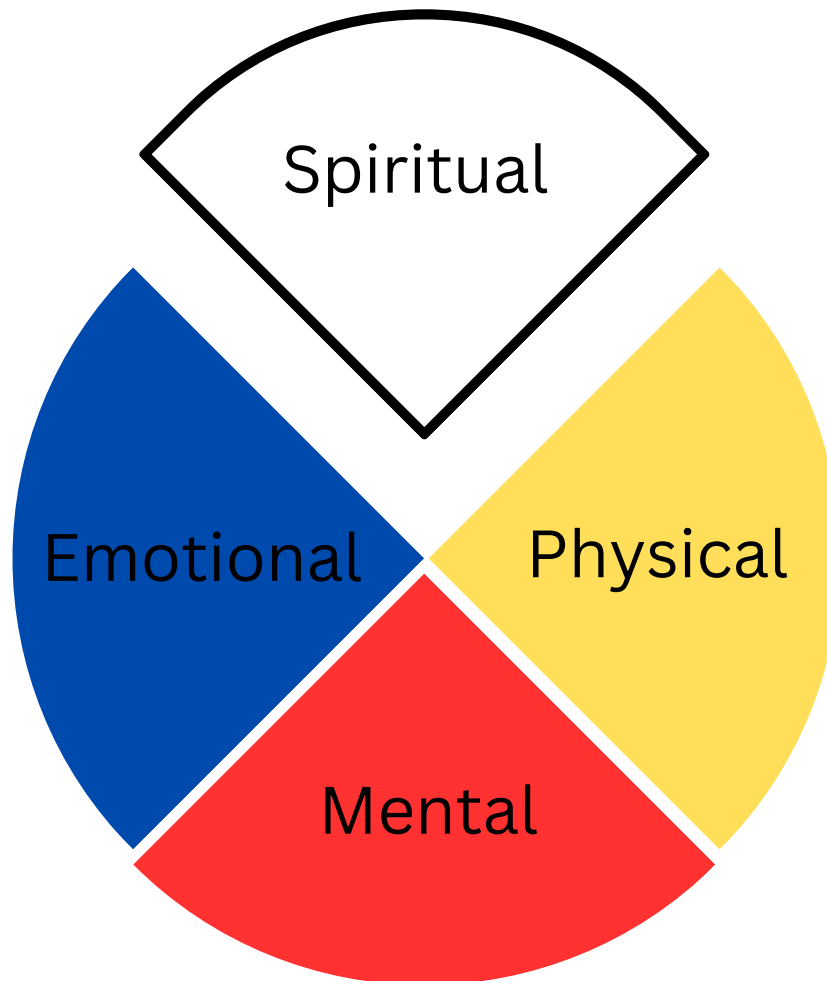


## APPENDIX 6: Promoting Staff Self-Care

### White = Spiritual

Spiritual activities focus on connection, purpose, and a sense of inner peace.

- Nature Walks: Spending time outdoors, whether in forests, by lakes, or in gardens, helps foster a sense of spiritual connection to the Earth.
- Prayer or Mantra Chanting: Engaging in daily prayers or chanting affirmations can center the spirit and connect to a higher power or the universe.
- Sacred Ceremony: Participate in or create your own ritual or ceremony, such as lighting candles, using sacred objects, or offering gratitude.
- Mindful Meditation: A practice of stillness that allows the individual to connect with their inner self and the world around them.



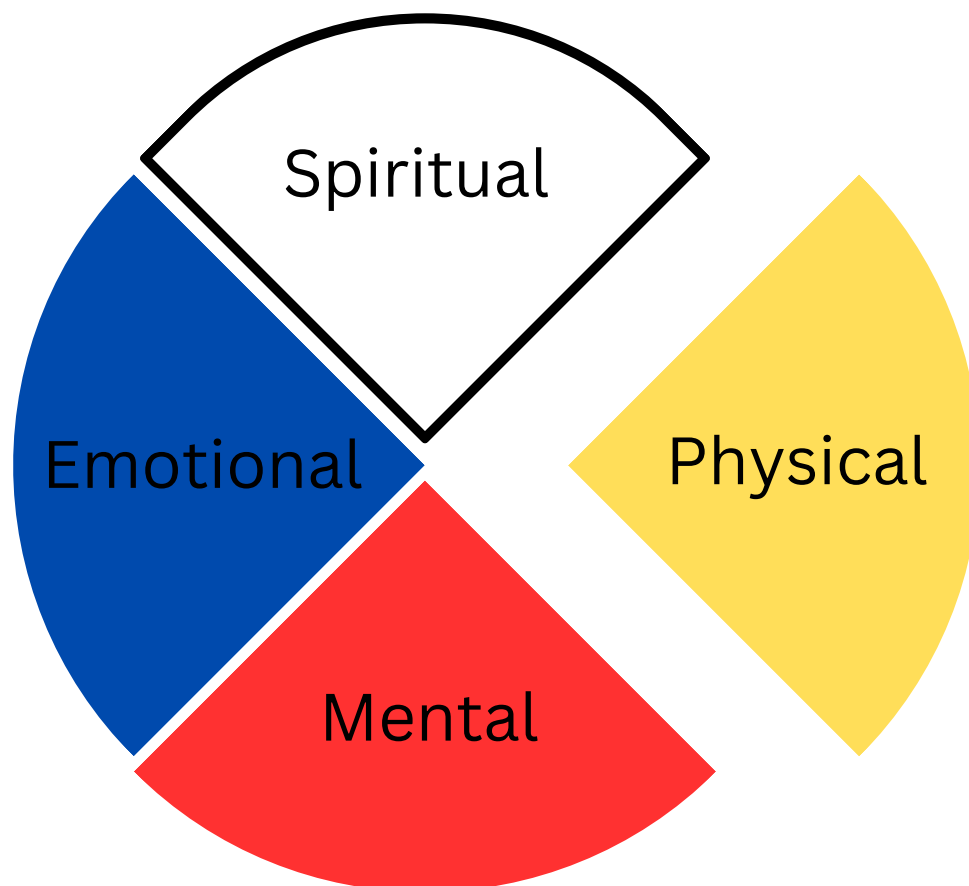


## APPENDIX 6: Promoting Staff Self-Care

### Yellow = Physical

Physical health relates to the body and maintaining vitality. Activities to nurture physical well-being can include:

- Yoga or Stretching: Regular practice of yoga or stretching helps keep the body flexible, strong, and balanced.
- Exercise or Sports: Physical activities such as running, swimming, hiking, or team sports are great for building strength, endurance, and coordination.
- Dance or Movement: Dance, whether structured or freeform, is an excellent way to connect with your body and release pent-up energy.
- Healthy Eating & Hydration: Maintaining a balanced diet with nourishing foods and plenty of water supports your body's physical health.
- Rest and Sleep: Prioritizing rest and sleep is as vital as exercise and nutrition in maintaining physical well-being.

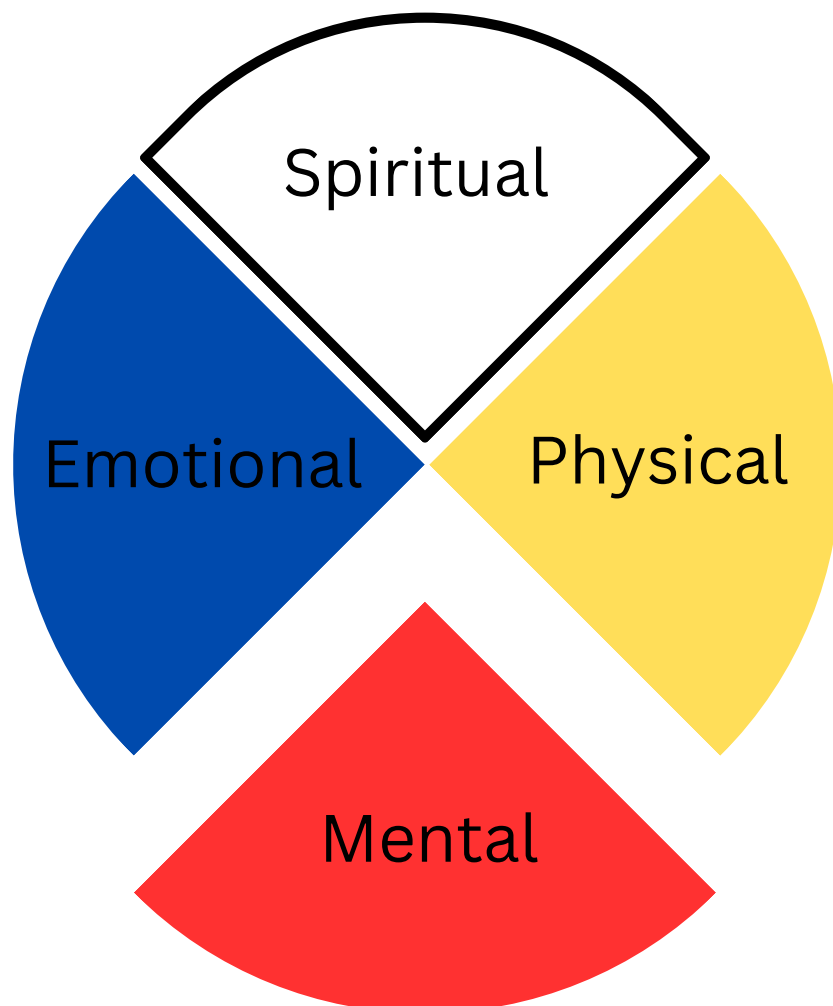


## APPENDIX 6: Promoting Staff Self-Care

### Red = Mental

The mental aspect pertains to intellect, clarity, and understanding. Activities for mental health focus on cognitive engagement and growth.

- Reading or Learning: Engage in activities that challenge your mind, such as reading books, solving puzzles, or learning a new skill.
- Problem-Solving Activities: Try activities like puzzles, chess, or strategy games that sharpen your decision-making and critical thinking.
- Self-Reflection: Engage in deep thought or reflection through activities like meditation or philosophical discussions.
- Creative Writing or Brainstorming: Writing stories, poetry, or engaging in creative thought exercises stimulates the brain and keeps it active.



## APPENDIX 7: Suggested Class Discussion Format

School should be a place where it is safe to ask questions and obtain factual information. When students are allowed to grieve in a supervised setting, they can have the comfort and reassurance they need which will serve them well when they have to deal with subsequent trauma related situations in the future.



### Advice for Teachers

The following general principles can be helpful when working with students of all ages:

- Read the factual statement prepared by TERT. Be simple and straightforward, providing facts regarding the traumatic event in a concrete, clear, and accurate manner.
- It is important to acknowledge the reality of the traumatic event and your willingness to talk, without obliging students to participate in a conversation they may not want to participate in.
- Model appropriate expression of feelings for students and give them permission to verbalize how they are feeling and what they are experiencing. Express your own feelings in an open, calm way which encourages students to express their grief or fear.
- How you cope and behave will influence how your students cope and behave. Your students will be watching your verbal and non-verbal cues. If you recognize you cannot remain in control of your emotions during the class discussion, which can be a normal response, make sure to utilize your school counsellor or members of TERT to support the conversation.
- Monitor conversations that students may hear.
- Be sensitive to possible cultural differences in manners of grieving.

## APPENDIX 7: Suggested Class Discussion Format

- Be patient; because of their need for reassurance, young children will often repeat the same questions. Repetition of this sort is part of the normal grieving process.
- Be prepared for any student who may feel the need to discuss unpleasant features of a relationship or anger directed toward the deceased as this is one of many normal responses to loss. Students who may have had recent conflict with the deceased may be particularly affected.
- Pay close attention to vulnerable, or highly sensitive students or those who have experienced other recent deaths or losses. Be mindful, we won't always have this information.
- Communicate to students they have the right to express their grief when they feel like talking and have the right to grieve in their own way. Make sure students know where and how they can access support.
- Educate students to the likely responses to crisis and help them understand they will likely have a 'normal reaction to an abnormal situation'. Teachers may wish to share some of the age-appropriate reactions contained in this guide with students. (refer to School Counsellor Resources section)
- Remind students that with time and assistance, things generally get better. If they do not, they should let a parent or teacher know.
- Avoid imposing your own theology and/or personal beliefs.
- Assess which students are in need of additional support and refer them to the Support Room for individual assessment and counselling. Have someone accompany the student to the Support Room.
- Ensure students are supervised at all times. 'Pockets' of grieving students should be directed to the location of support personnel.
- While every attempt should be made to keep the classroom teacher with their students, if a teacher is unable to function adequately and meet the immediate needs of students, another teacher may need to replace the teacher temporarily to support students.



## APPENDIX 7: Suggested Class Discussion Format

- It is imperative that students as a group be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings and reactions to the crisis situation as they need to know that their fears and reactions are shared by others.
- Remain vigilant to reactions for some time after the traumatic event as some students may not experience a reaction until days or weeks later.
- Help students set small 'doable' individual and/or collective goals and share these achievements as 'wins' with the student and/or collectively as a class to help them see progress after a tragedy.
- Tolerate some acting out behaviors if peers are not being harmed.

### Responding

- When students discuss their feelings, listen with empathy and support. Confirm their feelings are normal reactions to abnormal situations.
- Some possible responses include:
  - "Some of you feel angry that \_\_\_\_ died. What can you do with your angry feelings?"
  - "Because \_\_\_\_ died, you may be reminded of another person you cared about who died."
  - "It's ok that some of you are scared or angry after hearing about the fire at the high school and that some of you are only a little sad or scared."
  - "It's ok to cry – crying is a natural part of sadness and grieving."



- Discuss positive coping strategies: physical exercise, talking about feelings with family and friends, normal routine, participating in favorite activities, keeping busy, eating well, and getting plenty of rest.
- Convey the message that it is very important to continue with our daily lives as we go through this week of thinking about the deceased and supporting each other.
- Acknowledge that you don't have all the answers. Often there is more comfort from an honest, "I don't know why", than from explanations that do not sound credible.
- Acknowledge the various cultural or religious beliefs that may be expressed.



# APPENDIX 7: Suggested Class Discussion Format

## Concluding

- Focus on the strengths and supports the students have to get the help they need:
  - The support that comes from sharing feelings of grief or fear with others.
  - The student's support network, such as family, significant adults, teachers.
  - The student's individual strengths which provide self-support.
- Talk about the natural healing process. "Over time the pain of missing \_\_\_\_ won't hurt so much. It doesn't mean that you love \_\_\_\_ any less."
- "Class is almost over, and it seems there's more to talk about. We can set aside some time tomorrow."

## Statements to Avoid

- Avoid euphemisms for death such as passed away, gone, or sleeping which may confuse or frighten the child.
- Avoid general statements like, "If you need anything, tell me". It is better to say, "Would it help if I ..."
- Avoid saying, "I know just how you feel." It is more empathetic to say, "You must be having a lot of feelings right now..."
- Avoid blaming or judging.





## APPENDIX 8: Guidelines for Teachers Dealing with Death in the Classroom

Do	Don't
Recognize that classroom routine and management may be disrupted. This is natural - <i>be flexible</i> . Routines are comforting.	Force a “regular day” upon grieving students, but at the same time don't allow the class to be totally unstructured. Offer choices of activities, (i.e. letters, journals, and discussion).
Maintain a sympathetic attitude toward the students' age-appropriate responses (be prepared for a strong reaction). Model calm. It's okay to express your own feelings but stay in control of them. Take advantage of substitutes, take time off or remove yourself from the classroom if you feel you need to cry, or are no longer in control of your emotions.	Assume that children always grieve in an orderly or predictable way; there is not one 'correct' way to move through the grieving process.
Feel comfortable asking for School Counsellor help. This experience need not be handled alone.	Feel you must handle this alone. Ask for help.
<p>Develop an environment in which students feel safe to ask questions and feel confident they will receive an honest answer.</p> <p>Say “I don't know” when you don't know.</p> <p>Communicate that it is normal to feel sad, angry, and lonely when a death occurs.</p> <p>Acknowledge that grief is painful, but also that it is important to see how people can come together to cope and to heal after a traumatic event occurs.</p> <p>Respect a student's wishes to not share their thoughts or feelings.</p>	<p>Force a child to participate in a discussion about death.</p> <p>Probe a student for more details than they are willing to share.</p> <p>Force students to go over their experiences in too much detail, especially after the crisis, as this can cause more emotional and psychological distress to themselves and to others who may hear additional details about the event.</p>

## APPENDIX 8: Guidelines for Teachers Dealing with Death in the Classroom

Do	Don't
Use correct terminology related to death. Be mindful of the family's beliefs and the language they use.	Use euphemisms - "passed away", etc.  Link suffering, punishment, and sin to the death.
Listen and empathize. Make sure you hear what is said and not what you think the students ought to have said.	Be judgmental or lecture. It's all too tempting to make a point or moralize.
Let students know it is alright to express their feelings and talk about the death. Acknowledge this is traumatic and painful.	Say "I know how you feel".  Insist on "looking on the bright side".  Expect 'adult responses' from children and teenagers. Their grief responses may seem inappropriate to you.

*Adapted from: Ogden E.H. and Germinaro, V. (1988). The at-risk student: Answer for educators. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing.*

## APPENDIX 9: Traumatic Events Technical Debrief

To be Conducted by School Counsellors from other GSSD schools within two weeks of traumatic event.

After experiencing a Traumatic Event and implementing the Traumatic Events Response Plan, the TERT will meet with staff within two weeks of the event to debrief on the process so that feedback can be collected to improve both the school and division level response for future events.

A copy is to be provided to the School Superintendent and the Director or Designate overseeing Trauma Response.

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal and School Counsellor Completing the Report:

Brief Description of Traumatic Event:

1. What resources did your school receive that worked well to provide support to your school community as part of the traumatic event response?
2. What did not work as planned? What may have been more effective?
3. What procedures or information in the GSSD Trauma Response Guide are unclear, and/or what information is missing that should be added?
4. Did you have the necessary resources to respond to this incident effectively and in a timely manner? Explain.
5. Do you have any other recommendations for improving our school or division responses to traumatic events?

## APPENDIX 10: When a Student Returns to School After a Family Death

When a student returns to school after experiencing the loss of a parent or sibling, it can be uncomfortable for both the student and the rest of the class. If possible, allow the student to get settled as usual. Prior to the student's return, the teacher, TERT, or closest staff member(s) should speak to the student privately, expressing concern, sharing any relevant experience, and letting the student know that he/she understands how painful life is right now. The teacher's body language is important. Make eye contact, keep a relaxed tone, and remember that returning to school is a very important step for that student. It is the sign of beginning to return to "normalcy" and perhaps returning to a place where the student can find the most stable environment in their life at that moment. Be genuine in your comments and avoid euphemisms.



**Allow the opportunity for the student to talk** about the death and discuss any concerns about getting behind in schoolwork. Tell the student you are available for extra help if needed and then ensure you make yourself available if he/she would like that support. Accept the feelings, fears, and concerns of the student. Recognize that people vary in how much they wish to disclose their feelings.

**Recognize** the pain of a loss may persist over an extended period. The teacher may consult with appropriate resource personnel regarding students who have suffered a significant loss.

With school counsellor support, the teacher should have taken time previously to **discuss with the class** the return of the bereaved student. There is a tendency to avoid people who have experienced a death. A sense of isolation results partly from the deliberate withdrawal of the person who has experienced a death of a family member or friend, but it is also caused by others who avoid the bereaved. The teacher should encourage students to be open and supportive of the bereaved student upon their return without an excessive focus on the death. Gossip and inappropriate questions or comments should be cautioned against.

**Support peers** in knowing how to communicate condolences or comfort messages to the student when they return to school (e.g. "Steve, I am so sorry about your dad. I know you will miss him very much. Let me know if I can help you with your paper route") and what to expect. Help students anticipate changes in their classmate's behavior as they grieve; help them understand their grieving friend may withdraw for a while or might seem angry or upset; but that does not mean a lasting change in their relationship. Explain to students that their friendship is an important source of support for their grieving classmate, and that activities such as inviting the friend over to play, going to the park, watching a movie, playing sports, or a trip to the mall may offer a much-needed distraction and sense of connection and normalcy.

# APPENDIX 11: Tips for Talking About Suicide

Suicide is a difficult topic for most people to talk about. This tool suggests ways to talk about key issues that may come up when someone dies by suicide.

## Tips for Talking about Suicide

Suicide is a difficult topic for most people to talk about. This tool suggests ways to talk about key issues that may come up when someone dies by suicide.

Give accurate information about suicide.	By saying....
<p>Suicide is a complicated behavior. It is not caused by a single event.</p> <p>In many cases, mental health conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD, or psychosis, or a substance use disorder are present leading up to a suicide. Mental health conditions affect how people feel and prevent them from thinking clearly. Having a mental health problem is actually common and nothing to be ashamed of. Help is available.</p> <p>Talking about suicide in a calm, straightforward way does not put the idea into people's minds.</p>	<p>"The cause of [NAME]'s death was suicide. Suicide is not caused by a single event. In many cases, the person has a mental health or substance use disorder and then other life issues occur at the same time leading to overwhelming mental and/or physical pain, distress, and hopelessness."</p> <p>"There are effective treatments to help people with mental health or substance abuse problems or who are having suicidal thoughts."</p> <p>"Mental health problems are not something to be ashamed of. They are a type of health issue."</p>
Address blaming and scapegoating.	By saying....
<p>It is common to try to answer the question "why?" after a suicide death. Sometimes this turns into blaming others for the death.</p>	<p>"Blaming others or the person who died does not consider the fact that the person was experiencing a lot of distress and pain. Blaming is not fair and can hurt another person deeply."</p>
Do not focus on the method.	By saying....
<p>Talking in detail about the method can create images that are upsetting and can increase the risk of imitative behavior by vulnerable individuals.</p> <p>The focus should not be on how someone killed themselves but rather on how to cope with feelings of sadness, loss, anger, etc.</p>	<p>"Let's talk about how [NAME]'s death has affected you and ways you can handle it."</p> <p>"How can you deal with your loss and grief?"</p>
Address anger.	By saying....
<p>Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal.</p>	<p>"It is okay to feel angry. These feelings are normal, and it doesn't mean that you didn't care about [NAME]. You can be angry at someone's behavior and still care deeply about that person."</p>

# Information / Resources for School Counsellors

## **Guidelines for Setting up a Support Room:**

- Provide a Support Room all day the first day that news of a traumatic event is shared.
- Ensure that more than one counsellor/facilitator is in the room at all times.
- Accept all responses from students and permit them to express their reactions in a way that is individually appropriate.
- Let the students express feelings about other personal losses such as deaths in their families or other traumatic events. A traumatic event may bring up painful memories or unresolved emotions from the past.
- Listen to students express their feelings without making judgments.
- Do not try to convince students that you understand their feelings. Say, “I want to understand your feelings. Please tell me some more so that I can try to understand where you are coming from” or “Perhaps if you tell me again, I might understand.”
- Discuss facts regarding the traumatic event and discourage rumors. Ensure confidential information is not compromised in discussions.
- If the incident was a suicide or if the students mention suicide in response to another type of traumatic event, reinforce that suicide is an irreversible decision, without moralizing. Focus suggestions on other options for dealing with serious problems.
- Be attuned to any expression of suicidal thoughts. Ask the student for the name of an adult who can be called and contact that person. Seek mental health support if required.
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss feelings of guilt related to the tragedy and reassure them that they are not responsible.
- Help students who may become fearful for their own or others’ safety, but do not provide false assurances of safety. Remember that traumatic events can spark the disclosure of abuse or other traumas.
- Be aware of your own reaction to the tragedy and to helping with students. If you are feeling anxious, distressed or uncomfortable, take time for yourself and seek support.
- Carefully monitor the students’ response to you. Seek immediate assistance from other staff if you are uncomfortable.



# Information / Resources for School Counsellors

- For students who have difficulty describing their feelings, ask them what they have been thinking or what thoughts have been going through their mind.
- Encourage students to both seek and provide support, and to escort any friend who is upset to the Support Room. Help students identify their strengths and available resources. Reassure students that concerned adults are available to them.
- If needed, help students consider how they could say goodbye to the deceased in a way that feels right to them. Providing this choice can help them regain some of the sense of control they have lost after the death.
- Above all, model a calm attitude for students as they will pick up on your nervousness or discomfort.

## Parent Guidelines for Traumatic Events

Traumatic or traumatic occurrences can alter a person's sense of security. We know that children may be upset or have questions about what has taken place. The first and most important support for children and youth are their family. Below is a list of ways that we can work together to create a safe environment for children and youth during this difficult time.



Traumatic Types of behaviour parents can expect after a traumatic event:

Some **immediate** responses may include:

- Shock
- Denial
- Appearing dazed or apathetic
- Confusion
- Disorganization
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty making decisions

These are normal responses and, in most cases, should be short duration. Most children have a full recovery from such effects.

# Information / Resources for School Counsellors

## Longer term effects might include:

- Regression – revert to behaviours that are like much younger children. (e.g. thumb-sucking).
- Increased fear and anxiety - including separation anxiety and clinging to parents. Reluctance to attend school may emerge but allowing students to stay away from school generally increases the anxiety upon return to school.
- Decreased interest in school – the amount of mental energy used in dealing with the traumatic event makes for less concentration in school.
- Increased aggression – may have trouble controlling emotional responses. Oppositional and/or antisocial behaviours may be exhibited.
- Irritability, depression – Increased intensity of emotional responses can indicate symptoms of depression such as general sadness, changes in eating habits, difficulty sleeping, loss of interest in activities, and suicidal ideation.
- Denial – may deny the facts of a traumatic event and will need support to lead to eventual acceptance.



## What you can do to Support your Child:

- **Be reassuring:** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Your reactions are most important. Recognize that some children may be concerned about something bad happening to themselves, family, or friends. Explain to them the safety measures in place and reassure them that you and other adults will take care of them.
- **Be a good listener and observer:** Let children guide you to learn how concerned they are or how much information they need. If they are not focused on the tragedy, do not dwell on it. However, be available to answer their questions to the best of your ability. Young children may not be able to express themselves verbally. Pay attention to changes in their behavior or social interactions. Allow your child a safe space to express sadness, anger, etc., to experience the stages of grief.
- **Monitor the news/social media:** Images of a disaster or crisis event can become overwhelming, especially if watched repetitively. Older children may choose to watch the news but be available to discuss what they see and to help put it into perspective.

# Information / Resources for School Counsellors

- **Emphasize people's resiliency:** Help children understand the ability of people to come through a traumatic event and go on with their lives. Focus on children's own competencies in terms of how they cope in daily life during difficult times. In age-appropriate terms, identify other crises from which people, communities, or countries have recovered.
- **Highlight people's compassion and humanity:** Large scale tragedies often generate a tremendous outpouring of caring and support from around the country and world. Focus on the help and hopeful thoughts being offered to those affected by other people.
- **Maintain as much continuity and normalcy as possible:** Allowing children to deal with their reactions is important but so is providing a sense of normalcy. Routine family activities, classes, after school activities, and friends can help children feel more secure and better able to function.
- **Spend family time:** Being with family is always important in difficult or sad times. Even if your children are not significantly impacted by this tragedy, this may be a good opportunity to participate in and to appreciate family life. Doing things together reinforces children's sense of stability and connectedness.
- **Ask for help if you or your children need it:** Any tragedy can feel overwhelming for families directly affected, particularly those who have lost loved ones. Staying connected to your community can be extremely helpful. It may also be important to seek additional support from mental health services to cope with overwhelming feelings. (306-786-0558)



- **Communicate with your school:** Children directly impacted by the event may be under a great deal of stress that can be very disruptive to learning. Together, parents and teachers can determine what extra support or leniency students need and work with parents to develop a plan to help students.
- **Be aware of your own needs:** Do not ignore your own feelings of anxiety, grief, and anger. Talking to friends, family members, religious or cultural supports and mental health counsellors can help. It is important to let your children know that you are sad. You will be better able to support your children if you can express your own emotions in a productive manner. Get appropriate sleep, nutrition, and exercise.

# Information / Resources for School Counsellors

## When should your child receive professional help?

Most children will respond in time to supportive interventions. Some will need more help in the form of a more individualized professional intervention if symptoms persist. You may want to seek support if your child:

- Cannot adequately engage in home or school activities even after time has passed
- Continues to show high levels of emotional responsiveness
- Appears withdrawn or depressed
- Continues to do poorly at school and has low levels of concentration
- Expresses suicidal ideation or self-harming behaviours
- Loses a significant amount of weight in a short period of time
- Discontinues attending to their hygiene

GSSD School Counsellors can help your child deal with the effects of a traumatic event. Please contact your school or Sunrise Mental Health Services (306-786-0558) if you feel your child needs further support.





## Developmental Stages/Descriptions

### Preschool students may:

- Regress in behavior – may lose recently acquired developmental milestones and increase behaviors such as bed-wetting, loss of bladder control, thumb-sucking, whining, or regression to simpler speech.
- Express grief through behavior rather than words - increased irritability, temper tantrums, difficulty calming down.
- Separation difficulties - become clingier to parents and worry about their parents' safety and return.
- Become more irritable - temper tantrums and more difficulty calming.
- Show reverse behavior - becoming withdrawn, subdued, or mute after a traumatic event.
- Have difficulty falling asleep or have nightmares or bad dreams about the incident.
- Ask questions about death repeatedly.
- Take words literally such as 'sleeping', 'gone away' which may add confusion for them.
- Process the traumatic event through post-traumatic play - play is a natural medium of expression for children.

### Elementary students may:

- Show signs of distress through somatic complaints such as stomach aches, headaches, and pains.
- Demonstrate changes in behaviour, such as increased irritability, aggression, and anger.
- Show increased fears and anxieties – become afraid of the dark, going to be alone, that something may happen to a loved one.
- Have a fear of personal harm.
- Show a change in school performance, have impaired attention and concentration and more school absences.
- Demonstrate decreased academic performance and difficulty concentrating.
- Demonstrate regressive behaviours (clinging, whining, bed wetting, etc.)
- Show increased irritability and/or depressive feelings – loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, social withdrawal, change in eating or sleeping habits, fatigue, personal hygiene etc.
- Difficulty controlling anger and frustration
- Talk excessively and ask persistent questions about the incident.
- Feel self-conscious about their emotional responses to the incident.
- Act as if nothing has happened.
- Feel shame and guilt about the incident and may express fantasies about revenge and retribution.
- Suppress grief to create stability in their home and not upset other family members.

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## **Adolescent students may:**

- Experience a radical shift in the way they think about the world.
- Experience physical ailments such as bowel problems.
- Engage in self-destruction or reckless behaviours.
- Risk of suicidal ideations or behaviours.
- Experience anxiety and feelings of guilt.
- Exhibit an increase in oppositional behavior; refusing to comply with rules and regulations of school and home or meet their responsibilities.
- Shift their interpersonal relationships with family members, teachers, and classmates.
- Show a change in their school performance, attendance and behaviour.
- Show increased irritability and/or depressive feelings – loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, social withdrawal, numbness, change in eating habits, fatigue, etc.
- React in a highly dramatic, intense fashion with a reliance on personalized rituals, symbols, etc.
- Increase substance use or abuse.

## **Adults may:**

- Have various grief responses based on how previous losses have/have not been resolved and on the degree to which personal support systems are in place.
- Have the need to remain in control - suppression of feelings often causes adults to circumvent the natural grief process.
- Risk of suicidal ideations or behaviours.
- Have long term reactions that include denial, feelings of detachment, intrusive recollections, depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, withdrawal, eating disturbances, difficulty concentrating, low frustration tolerance, sleep difficulties, emotional and mental fatigue, depression, irritability, poor work performance, marital discord, and loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.

It is imperative that school staff members receive appropriate intervention and support as otherwise, they will be limited in their ability to meet the needs of their students. It is important they have a forum and means to discuss their own feelings and reactions to the crisis and receive support.

# Information / Resources for School Counsellors

## Student Resource Survey

*(SC along with admin to determine if it should be used and by whom)*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Friends I can count on:

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Family members I feel comfortable sharing my feelings with:

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Relatives (e.g., aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent) I can talk with:

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Staff (e.g., teacher, counsellor, coach) I can go to for support:

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Someone else I might be able to count on even though we are not always close:

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What are the things/activities in my life that can help me cope? (school-related, sports, arts, crafts, music, church/groups/clubs, pets, pictures/special items)

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On a scale of 1 – 10, with 1 being 'I am not coping very well' and 10 indicating 'I am coping very well', how would you rate your ability to cope with your struggles and challenges in your life?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

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# References

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