



## ***Counselors/Psychologists – Crisis Team Procedures***

### ***11 Steps In Response to a Student/Faculty Crisis***

#### **1. Initial Actions by Site Crisis Team:**

- Make sure the appropriate Site Principal and Counselor are notified immediately followed by Lead Counselor and District Psychologist.
- Principal needs to contact District Supervisor and/or Communications Director.
- Determine the Degree of Trauma -
  - Ø **Low** – Site team can address the issue.
  - Ø **Medium** – Site can address the student/situation, but additional personnel are requested to assist with the possibility of higher than normal response from students.
  - Ø **High** – Site can not address the issue and or number of students in need and a large district response is required.
- Begin working the crisis by developing a plan based on the following criteria.

#### **2. Determine Additional Factors:**

- Who was the person?
- Who else may be involved?
- What happened?
- Where did the incident occur?
- What other tragedies and/or other relevant information has impacted the school recently?
- Are there siblings or parents in the district? If so, notify the principal and counselor/psychologist at that site(s).
- Is this a suicide or accident?

#### **3. Contacting the Family: (Principal or Designee)**

- *Make sure that you are talking to custodial parent or legal guardian.*
- Focus on expressing sympathy and, if appropriate, request names of close friends, groups/organizations they participate in, siblings, cousins, etc., within the district who may be emotionally affected.
- Discuss with the family which details about the incident can/should be shared.
- If the event involves a serious accident ask the family if there is visitation at the hospital or if the information is to be shared with students.
- **Follow up with contact - 24-48 hours.**
- Ask the parents how the school or the district can support them.
- Ask the parents if there are any personal items that need to be collected and how they would like those delivered.
- Ask if the family would like funeral arrangements to be made known to staff and

students who ask.

**4. Communication to Staff and/or Parents: (Principal and District Administration):**

- Talk with the principal about organizing a faculty meeting to address the staff about the day's events.
  - Ø If the meeting occurs the next morning, arrive early...things can quickly spiral out of control if a plan is not well organized.
- Provide up-to-date details about the situation...especially for site staff that could not be notified over the weekend.
- Discuss any funeral arrangements or hospital visitation, if known, as well as any family wishes.
- Based on the nature of the incident, is there a need for a school message?
- Do other sites/staff need to be notified?

**5. Site Phone Response for Receptionist – (Principal and/or District Administration)**

- Provide a script available to the phone receptionist and/or secretaries to use when responding to various parent inquiries.
  - Script should be basic in nature.
  - Do not speculate or provide any information that has not been released by the principal.
  - Tell parents that counselors/psychologists are available to assist students and will be all week or for several days.
  - Thank parents for offering, but assure them that no assistance is needed.
  - Assure parents distraught students can call their parent/guardian and be picked up if necessary.

**6. Create a Care Center and School Day Outline Plan:**

- Identify Care Center Location – counseling office or classroom, etc.
- Identify staff/support personnel to be utilized and materials necessary in the triage room.
- Identify counselors to triage students and determine who needs to be seen individually or a small group.
- Set a room(s) aside for small group and/or individual counseling sessions.
- How and/or will the death/accident, etc. be announced to the students?
  - If each teacher announces a death, serious accident, etc. in class, assist with providing an appropriate script to read. Identify faculty members who require assistance making the announcement be in the room when it is read.
  - ***Students should not be given news of any crisis---and particularly a suicide---in an assembly format, over the intercom or via social media.***
- Provide a sign-in/out sheet for students who are seen for follow up services.
- Ask faculty members for names of particular students or (faculty members depending on the nature of the event), who were particularly close to the student/faculty member.
  - Develop a plan for sending and receiving students to the Care Center.

- Depending on the setting and/or situation, consider having an adult “runners” escort students to and from the counseling office.
- Provide each student the opportunity to go back to class before the end of the class period if appropriate. Either have an adult escort (depending on circumstances) or provide a hall pass.
- If a student is extremely distraught, consider calling the parent/guardian before releasing them to go home. **DO NOT** let a student drive home who is extremely upset.

**7. Additional Site Services:**

- Do we need substitutes for any teachers who are distraught?
- Communicate where and how to contact counselors/psychologists.
- Does a counselor/psychologist need to sit in on each of the student’s class periods throughout the day OR in a faculty member’s class if it was a faculty death?
- Identify a private office or room just for staff members who may need to get away from things for a few minutes...if this is needed, determine a location and notify the staff.
- Let staff know who to contact if they need to request one-on-one time with a Counselor.
- Do we need to provide food and/or a location for people to go and receive these services?

**8. Suggestions for Teachers (during class) – Provide a Script (Principal / Lead Counselor)**

- If you are uncomfortable with discussing the events or situation with your students please notify your site counselor(s).
- Only provide accurate information...use discretion and don’t speculate on events. Tell students you don’t know...be honest.
- Provide information in a developmentally appropriate manner.
- Reassure students that their feelings are normal...everyone handles difficult or traumatic news differently.
- Dispel rumors.
- Answer questions without providing unnecessary details.
- Now is a good time to identify students who may need additional support.
- Consider any of the following short ice breakers...
  - “I’m having a lot of emotions and personal feelings about what happened...what are some of your thoughts and feelings?”
  - “There may be a whole range of emotions that some of you feel today depending on how well you knew\_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes, even if you don’t know a person well, you can still find yourself affected because it brings back memories of some other loss you have had in your life.”

**9. Counselor Resources Helpful Hints – (Crisis Team / Care Center):**

- Arrange care center in a way that is conducive to comfort and conversation.

- Introduce yourself
- Set ground rules
  - Confidentiality
  - No one has to talk if they don't want to
  - Identify yourself if you participate (if everyone is not already acquainted)
  - Purpose of the group
    - Time to vent and validate reactions
    - Predict and prepare for the future
- Discuss natural response to grief such as: Shock, Disbelief, Bargaining, Guilt, Anger, Acceptance, etc.
- Discussion Questions for Group - *Note: Remember to validate responses.*
  - "Where were you when you heard the news of this event?"
  - "What did you do?"
  - "How did you react?"
  - "Have you had to cope with similar situations in the past?"
  - "How do you see yourself coping with this in the days to come?"
  - "What gives you strength in tough times like this?"
  - "What gives you hope for the future as you look to get past this really tough time?"
  - "I can't imagine how upset you must have been or how difficult this has been for you."
  - "It is hard to comprehend anything as difficult as what has happened to you."

#### **10. DO'S AND DON'T REMINDERS**

- **DO** give facts to the students in an age appropriate manner. Tell the truth, but provide few details about the event.
- **DO** emphasize prevention and everyone's role.
- **DO** provide both individual and group counseling.
- **DO** emphasize that no one is to blame for the event, especially a suicide.
- **DO** emphasize that help is available and that there are alternatives to suicide.
- **DO** contact the family of the deceased.
- **DON'T** dismiss school.
- **DON'T** dedicate a memorial to the deceased.
- **DON'T** have a large school assembly.

#### **11. Debriefing – (Crisis Team Leaders)**

- This is a site option, but during a very traumatic event, it is a good idea to do.
- Summarize the day's events.
- Respond to staff concerns.
- Get names of any students/staff that may require follow up.
- Acknowledge the staff's efforts.
- Discuss staff concerns regarding support for the family.
- Review plan for the next day, if warranted.



## ***Counselors/Psychologists – Crisis Team Checklist***

### **First 24 Hours**

- o Review Crisis Plan
- o Determine Level of Crisis
- o Gather information About Crisis
- o Identify Staff and Review Specific Tasks
- o Consider Substitute Coverage for Certain Staff
- o Identify Care Center
- o Identify Potential Vulnerable Students
- o Contact Parents
- o Create Script for Receptionist & Faculty
- o Set Faculty Meeting Agenda
- o Implement Procedure to Respond to Students
- o Contact Other Sites/Staff
- o Debrief Team
- o Update Staff

### **Second 48 to 72 Hours**

- o Assess School Needs
- o Continue Care Center as Needed
- o Contact Absentees
- o Monitor Student Web/Social Media
- o Follow Up With Parents Request
- o Update Faculty
- o Review Student Identified for Follow Up
- o Prepare School – Funeral Notification
- o Debrief