

**THE PROTESTANT SEPARATE SCHOOL BOARD  
OF THE TOWN OF PENETANGUISHENE**

**POLICY MANUAL**

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**POLICY TITLE:**

**SECTION/CODE:**

**Tragic Event Preparedness and Response**

**School Operations D-30**

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**APPROVAL DATE:**

**SUPERSEDES:**

**NUMBER OF PAGES:**

**February 11, 2019**

**New**

**Page 1 of 2**

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**POLICY STATEMENT**

This policy has been developed to support administrators and school teams when responding to a tragic event. Tragic events are a reality that a school may face. Tragic events impact student performance and life in school and thus an appropriate response by the administration and school team can significantly improve student and staff wellbeing.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Tragic Event:** A tragic event is virtually anything out of the ordinary, something unexpected that disrupts the emotional wellbeing of students and staff members. Within this broad umbrella are crises and traumatic events, which may require somewhat different responses.

**Tragic Event Response Team:** Burkevale has a School-Based Tragic Event Response Team and protocols developed to guide supportive response (please see the Tragic Events Handbook for further details). Office secretarial staff are key during a tragic event as they are often dealing with communication (telephone inquiries, letters home, etc.).

**Tragic Event Response Team:** When a tragic event occurs, the Principal shall contact the Mental Health Lead and Supervisory Officer. Each event is unique and requires a concise assessment; this assessment may change as time and events unfold.

**1.0 CLARIFYING FACTS / NOTIFICATION**

**1.1** When a Principal receives information that a tragic event has occurred, the Principal shall clarify and confirm the information with a reliable source (e.g., police, family members) and obtain permission to communicate and personal information related to the event.

**1.2** Based on the information gathered, the Principal will consult with the Mental Health Lead and Supervisory Officer to engage the Tragic Event Response Team.

**2.0 ACTIVATION OF TRAGIC EVENT RESPONSE TEAM AND COMMUNICATION**

The Mental Health Lead will liaise with the school Principal, and the Supervisory Officer regarding communication and planned response at the school.

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### **3.0 NOTIFICATION OF SCHOOL STAFF**

After consultation with the Supervisory Officer the Principal will engage the emergency phone tree system to notify staff and arrange for a stand up staff meeting at the earliest opportunity.

### **4.0 TRAGIC EVENT RESPONSE**

**4.1** The Principal and Mental Health Lead will engage the Tragic Event Response Team, and will develop a plan that addresses the needs of staff and students that is specific to each individual event or situation.

**4.2** The Tragic Event Handbook will provide the foundation for decision making and the planned response.

### **5.0 MEMORIALS**

Principals should reference Tragic Event Response Handbook re: Memorials and consult with the Mental Health Lead and Supervisory Officer as necessary.

**TRAGIC EVENT RESPONSE  
HANDBOOK**

**FOR THE PROTESTANT  
SEPARATE SCHOOL BOARD  
OF THE TOWN OF  
PENETANGUISHENE**

**DECEMBER 2018**

**BURKEVALE's Tragic Event Response Team 2018/2019**

**Christy Hamill: Tragic Event Response Team Lead  
705-715-6775**

**Sean Turner: Manager of Finance and Treasurer  
705-238-8903**

**June Merkle: Supervisory Officer 705-717-8410**

**Deb Cummings: Early Years Lead 705-427-6861**

**Julia McLaren: Principal 705-549-9207, 705-427-4465**

**Wilson Cowan: Vice Principal 705-528-4765, 705-527-0088**

**Jeff McIvor/Gil Knapp: School Custodial Staff 705-527-9244,  
705-533-0963**

**Marg Dupuis/Sue McIvor:  
School Administration Staff 705-549-3369**

**Pastor Jon Limmer: Covenant Christian Community Church  
705-543-0040**

**Rev. Eileen Steele: All Saints Anglican Church 705-984-1337**

**Seasons Centre for Grieving Children: (if the event includes a  
death) Joan Kennedy 705-721-5437**

**Dr. Patrick Carney, 705-722-3559 ext 271, 705-791-4416**

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***“ Never underestimate  
the value of  
a calm presence”***

*Ross Spearn*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This handbook has been produced as a resource to help manage tragic events. Thank you to the numerous individuals from the leadership team at PSSBP who contributed to the handbook. By sharing their expertise, they have had a profound impact in supporting staff, students and families of The Protestant Separate School Board of the Town of Penetanguishene (PSSBP).

Appreciation is extended to the Simcoe County District School Board for sharing their handbook with PSSBP.

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## INTRODUCTION

When a tragic event occurs, the school community plays a critical role in responding to students and staff. This handbook is designed as a resource to support The Protestant Separate School Board of the Town of Penetanguishene in managing tragic events. Please see contact list for PSSBP's Tragic Event Response Team.

This document is intended to provide administrators with a quick reference which highlight the main considerations to take into account following a tragic event. It is not intended to be a comprehensive manual dealing with all of the issues surrounding tragic/traumatic situations.

The goals of this document are to help a school in a crisis situation to:

- Maintain a reasonable routine
- Allow for appropriate expression of grief or loss
- Identify staff/children/students who may be at risk
- Identify and quickly access available resources within the Board and community

### What is a Tragic Event?

Any incident or event that may, in the moment, overwhelm the natural capacity to cope such as but not limited to:

- death of a student, or staff member
- serious injury or illness of student, or staff member
- death of a parent, particularly if there is an established relationship in the school community (e.g. regular volunteer)
- death of student's sibling
- exposure to a violent event within school or community
- natural disaster within school or community (e.g. weather disaster)
- significant world tragedy
- any event that the school principal or superintendent believes is a crisis warranting a coordinated response
- death of a recent graduate

### Common reactions to tragic events may include:

- shock
- terror/fear/anxiety
- change in how person sees themselves
- guilt, feelings of "it was my fault, it should have been me..."
- nightmares
- difficulty speaking
- overwhelming helplessness, loss of safety
- startle reactions, hyper-vigilance, flashbacks

**Grief Reactions** to death or loss, accompany tragic reactions but are different. Grief commonly has reactions such as:

- sadness
- talking can be a relief
- pain acknowledges loss
- some guilt but different expressions such as "I wish I would/would not have..."
- dreams of deceased not of reliving trauma for example
- grief healed through emotional release
- grief naturally changes, diminishes over time but does not end

## TRAGIC EVENT RESPONSE OVERVIEW

Our intervention is based on these beliefs:

### GRIEF

- Grief is a normal and inevitable life experience. We experience it in response to each loss in our lives, no matter what the loss.
- Grief is healthy. It can be supported positively through talking or through play working out our grief reactions.
- Grief may be a lengthy process. The intensity of the pain varies greatly from moment to moment and from person to person. It is often physically, emotionally and intellectually exhausting.
- Grieving allows students and staff to recover, to heal, to learn and to grow.
- The school leaders are the primary facilitators of a positive grief process in the school. This occurs through modeling and attention to a healing process.

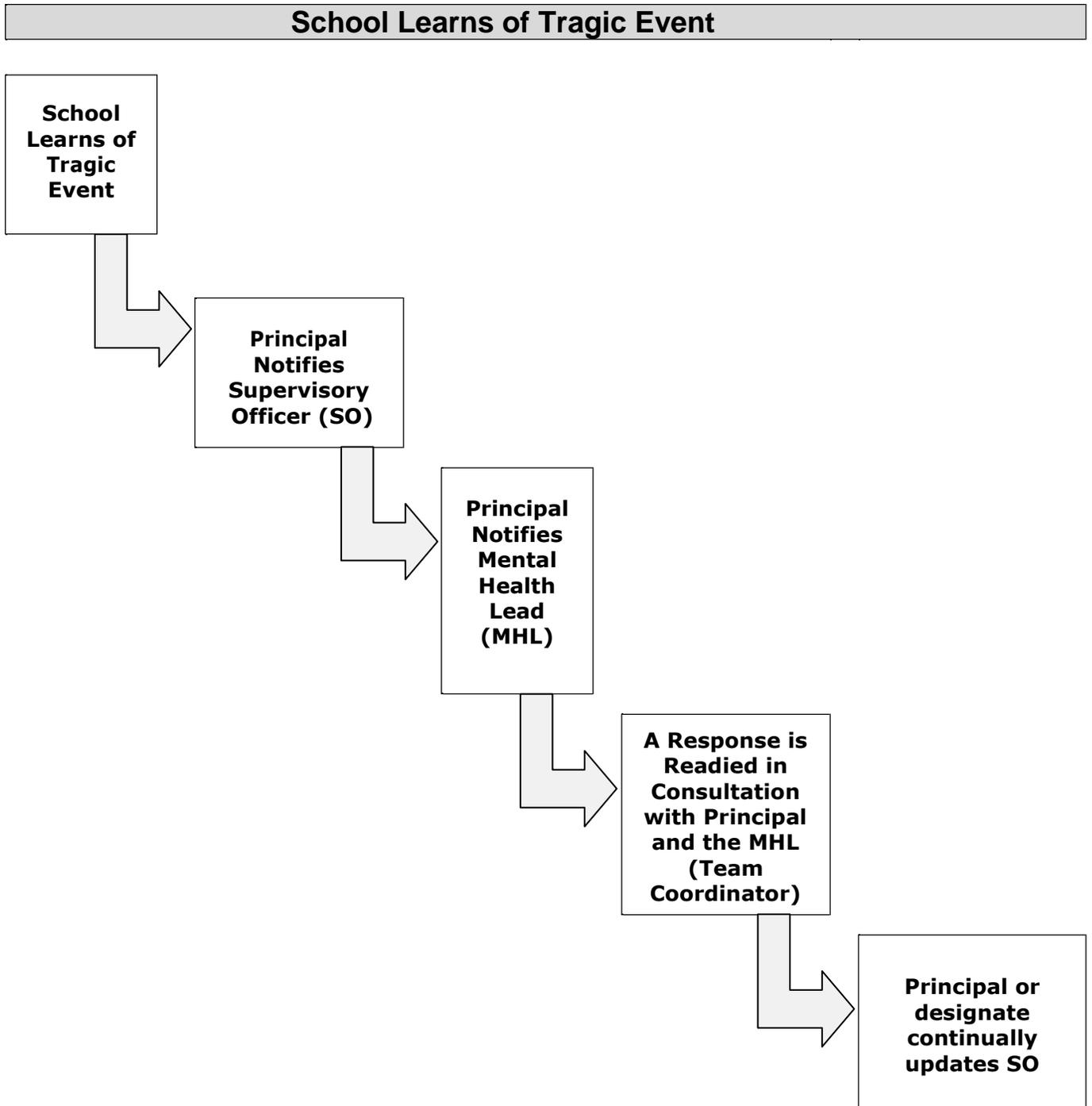
### TRAUMA FOLLOWING TRAGIC EVENTS:

- Trauma is different from grief, grief always occurs following trauma. Trauma does not always occur when there is a loss, or grief.
- Trauma occurs when someone's normal abilities to cope are overwhelmed, leaving them altered, disconnected from body, mind or spirit in some way.
- A person who has experienced a tragic event may have a difficult time with self confidence, and see themselves differently requiring additional support to regain confidence.
- Experiencing a tragic event does not always mean there will be tragic symptoms.
- We all need consistent, patient support to recover from tragic events.
- In tragic reactions talking can be difficult or impossible
- In tragic experiences there is generally a reaction of terror, which shuts down the normal coping mechanisms a person has.
- Trauma symptoms if they are not dealt with may worsen over time and develop health problems.
- A persons ability to access resources to support them will impact their recovery, having support systems in place that readily offer accessible help and support are essential to recovery.

The handbook provides an overview for tragic event response and includes checklists, and sample documents. The goal of this process is to establish a positive trauma recovery and grief process in the school.

***Some of the information on trauma comes from the book "Trauma-Proofing Your Kids; A Parents' Guide for Instilling Confidence, Joy and Resilience", by Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline, 2008, North Atlantic Books Berkley California***

## TRAGIC EVENT RESPONSE FLOW CHART



## TRAGIC EVENT RESPONSE MANAGEMENT - ACTION SUMMARY CHECKLIST FOR ADMINISTRATORS

#	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ACTION
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clarify facts from family or spokesperson and discuss the wishes of the family regarding the details of the tragic event to be shared by the school with staff, students and the media.
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that the Supervisory Officer is informed.
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contact Mental Health Lead who will act as Tragic Event Response Team Coordinator.
4.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inform staff, including support staff (secretarial, custodial, educational assistants, regular supplies, volunteers) of the tragic event and arrange for staff meeting (offer end of day debriefing as well).
5.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure absent staff are informed of tragic event (bus drivers, before and after school program staff, part time staff, lunch supervisors, regular supplies, volunteers – <b>see staff list and telephone calling tree</b> )
6.	<input type="checkbox"/>	If death of a student's sibling, ensure the sibling is supported (e.g. has meaningful adult contact in the school).
7.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify at-risk students (e.g. relatives, close friends, teammates, students with similar experiences) and staff.
8.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Notify other community school sites that may be involved/affected as a result of the event (siblings of student, staff member).
9.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Designate a school staff member to be the official contact with family.
10.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Arrange coverage for staff if required.
11.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider what communication is relayed to school community. Contact Supervisory Officer for support. <i>(see sample letters - APPENDICES).</i>
12.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Review upcoming events that may need to be cancelled (e.g. open house, assembly).
13.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prepare quiet room for students to access support (e.g. have drinks, snacks, facial tissues available in library/maker space areas).
14.	<input type="checkbox"/>	If death of staff member or student, consider appropriate means of acknowledging staff member/student death (e.g. memory table, signing book, picture).
15.	<input type="checkbox"/>	If death of staff member or student, <i>put flag at half mast.</i>
16.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide information regarding external agency for continued follow-up support as required for staff or students (e.g. Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Seasons Centre, Mental Health Crisis Line, Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Service (VCARS) (see pages 23/24 for resource information

## CONSIDERATIONS WHEN MANAGING A TRAGIC EVENT

Tragic events can occur suddenly or evolve over time. The following is a more thorough summary of Tragic Event Response Management.

### **STEP ONE: Assess the Problem**

**Clarify Facts** from reliable sources (police, family if appropriate). Separate fact from rumour.  
**Reflect** on your own state of mind and reactions as they may impact your decision making.

**Inform Supervisory Officer.** Call Mental Health Lead/Tragic Event Response Team Coordinator (see Tragic Event Response Flow Chart for more information (*page 3*)).

**Contact the Family to Discuss the Following Considerations Depending on the Nature of the Tragic Event:** (Sample wording to start the conversation with family: “We’ve heard sad news about... if this is true we are so sorry for your loss. Is there someone available that we may speak with?”)

- This provides the family an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the information related to the event. Consult with the family to determine their wishes and seek consent regarding specific details to be shared with staff, students and/or media. Consent may be verbal or in writing as appropriate in the circumstances. Verbal consent shall be documented by the principal.
- In the event of a death, determine family’s wishes as to what to do with staff member’s/ student’s possessions (e.g. who cleans out the desk, locker, etc.).
- In the event of a death, discuss funeral arrangements, and attendance at funeral by staff and students.
- Review written announcements – to school and school community, with family.
- Inform family that the Tragic Incident Response Team is supporting students/staff at school.

### **Step Two: Notifications/Action**

**Arrange Meeting with All School Staff (including office support staff and custodial staff):**

- Hold a staff meeting as early as possible after learning of the tragic incident.
- Provide staff with information about the situation and continue to provide updated information as well as debriefing (e.g. at a later recess/end of day). Outline the family’s wishes about the specific details they would like shared with staff, students and/or the media.
- Ensure staff has information about how to support students (*APPENDICES A and B*).
- Discuss how to communicate the tragic incident with parents of the school (e.g. provide consistent information, share any letters/communication sent out).
- Tell staff that it’s possible media will gather outside the school and all questions are to be directed to school board for response. (*media checklist on pg. 9*).
- If death of a student’s sibling, ensure sibling is supported (e.g. has meaningful adult contact in the school).
- Identify at-risk students (e.g. relatives, close friends, teammates, students with similar experiences) and staff.
- Discuss ways the school community can support those impacted, a calm present presence can provide a lot of support.

### **Immediate Administrative Activities:**

- Fly the flag at half-mast for current staff and students (one day minimum up to x days to be determined based on funeral/celebration of life arrangements).
- Leave the student's desk intact.
- Determine if there are siblings in different schools, and manage appropriately.
- Contact absent staff, re: notification of the tragic incident and school's involvement.
- Review upcoming events that may need to be cancelled.
- Consider observing a moment of silence, in the event of a death

### School Communication to School Community

As a courtesy, make families of those affected aware through a written letter to be sent home with students. It is important that facts be shared with the school community to prevent speculation and rumours:

- Advise family that communication will be sent to school community, consult with family about content (e.g. letter).
- The letter should be specific and concise.
- Express sympathy/support to family affected by the tragic event.
- See sample letters (*APPENDICES C to G*).

**How to Respond to Media If Necessary** (*see pg. 9*).

#### Provide Direction to Custodial Staff:

- In the event of a death, lower the flag to half-mast at principal's request.
- Be alert for distressed students in places like washrooms or schoolyard, and alert administration or designated staff.
- Direct custodial staff to be prepared to assist administration.

#### Provide Direction to Office Support Staff:

- Be alert for distressed students in places like washrooms or schoolyard, and alert administration or designated staff.
- Refer all information requests to administration, Supervisory Officer (or designate) to respond to all communication with community/media. (e.g. from media, community members). Response for all staff can be **"School staff will not be communicating directly with community members and/or media, all communication will be through the board."**
- Be alert to school activities, which might have to be re-scheduled (e.g. trips, guests, assemblies, etc.).
- Provide office support staff with contact information for external supports e.g. counselling agency phone number (list available in Appendix G)

#### Consider Student Needs:

- Staff members and students benefit from having access to a quiet area. Students who need extra support can be supported in the Quiet Room through discussion, creating letters, cards and/or artwork. The Quiet Room is available to students at the discretion of school staff (e.g. teacher identifies students who may benefit from the Quiet Room). Provide facial tissue, drinks and snacks.
- Quiet Room will be organized in the Library/Maker Space. Maker Space and Library will be closed to regular school activities during that time.
- The Tragic Incident Response Team members are available to provide emotional support and direction to staff and students.

#### Minimize Disruption:

Tragic events are best managed with routine, familiarity and predictability. Recognize that classroom routines and management will be disrupted. This is natural. Be flexible. Recognize that some students may have behavioural or emotional responses e.g. making disruptive comments. Be aware that students may be impacted by such an event. Make efforts to return to routine and structure within a reasonable time period.

### Death by Suicide:

**PLEASE REFER TO THE LIFE PROMOTION AND SUICIDE INTERVENTION PROTOCOL FOR FURTHER GUIDANCE**

In the event of a death by suicide, we do not necessarily share this with students. Discussion with students is focused on the fact that the student/staff member died. We stress that how the student/staff member died is not the issue but instead what is important is demonstrating respect and caring for the family.

If students are aware that the death is a suicide and wish to discuss how the student/staff member died, it is important for discussion to be based on suicide in general and not the student/staff member.

**There are guidelines to support these discussions in class and mental health supports available to support these discussions, such as Mental Health Lead.**

### Follow-Up:

It will be beneficial to have students supported by staff they feel most comfortable with. If possible having at least 2 staff whom the student is close with to check in with the student regularly. Be prepared to provide emotional support to staff and students on future significant days (e.g. holidays, birthdays, anniversary of the incident).

### Death by Homicide:

Homicide is an extremely frightening event, it is also relatively infrequent. We can help by providing supportive environments that are open to discussions on emotions and ways to cope, validating the range of reactions that individuals may experience. It is important to remember that staff may experience reactions similar to those of students because of the violence inherent in homicide. There is typically shock and emotional distress, anxiety/concern for personal safety, anger, prolonging of grief may occur related to legal investigation and media coverage, which may also make it more difficult to process the loss. Providing students with the structure and routine within the school schedule can decrease anxiety.

## **GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING THE MEDIA IN A TRAGIC EVENT**

As painful as it is, the occurrence of a school tragedy is news. Journalists often report not only the facts of the events but also observations about the family and opinions of friends. Often they will look for an explanation of the tragedy.

In tragic situations, it can be stressful dealing with the media. Generally, the stress is based on the conflict between protecting the privacy of the student/staff member and providing information to the public. Those affected by the tragic event need to be asked for permission to release personal information. Consent may be verbal or in writing as appropriate in the circumstances. Verbal consent shall be documented by the principal.

Administrators will follow Supervisory Officer's (or designates) direction, in dealing with the media. Administrators are responsible for managing and limiting media access as their presence may contribute to the stress of vulnerable staff and students.

### **MEDIA CHECKLIST: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' GUIDE**

- ✓ **CONTACT SUPERVISORY OFFICER**
- ✓ **COMMUNICATE WITH THE SUPERVISORY OFFICER REGARDING REQUESTS FROM MEDIA FOR INFORMATION**
- ✓ **General Statement for all staff to respond to media requests:  
"The school will not be communicating directly with the media; all communication will be through the Board."**
- ✓ **Remind Staff to defer all contact with the media to the board.**
- ✓ **Remind Staff NOT to bring media coverage into the classroom**

## **GUIDELINES FOR TALKING WITH STAFF ABOUT A TRAGIC EVENT**

The following framework is suggested in discussions with your school community around a tragic event.

1. Administration with support from the Tragic Event Response Team will lead a staff meeting to ensure factual information is shared and emotional support provided.

### **Condolences:**

“Hello Everyone.”

“I first want to say that I am very sorry for your loss. Today is a very sad day and I can imagine that you are all feeling a mix of emotions including maybe shock, sadness, anger and anxiety. These are anticipated and expected reactions. I want you to know that there is a plan for how to proceed with the day. I want to talk with you for a few minutes to help you feel more prepared for the day.”

### **Facts:**

- “I just want to update you with what has happened.”
- “A grade x student named Johnny Jones was killed in a car accident. All details are not known but police are investigating.”

### **Family:**

- “The parents/guardians have been contacted. They know that the Tragic Event Response Team is here today to speak to and support the students. We will be sending flowers and a card on behalf of all the staff.”
- “Johnny’s sister Susie is home today with her family and will be for the rest of the week.”

### **Flag:**

- “You will notice that the flag is at half-mast. We will leave it like that for x days (to be determined). We do this to respect and acknowledge the loss.”
- “We will know more about the funeral arrangements at the end of the day and will let you know.”

### **Letter Home:**

- “A letter will be sent home with the students to give to their parents/guardians, notifying them of the tragic event and also informing them that the Tragic Event Response Team was at the school.”

### **Suggested Administrators' Script to Support Staff When a Student/Staff Member Has Died**

- Some of you may be comfortable sharing this information with your class. If you are uncomfortable doing it on your own, one of the Tragic Event Response Team Members is available to support you in speaking to your class.
- We have a handout for teachers that will provide guidelines for talking with the students who have experienced a death of a student/staff member (*APPENDIX A*).
- I know this is extremely upsetting for you. It is okay to show some emotion. It gives the students permission to grieve and shows them that you care. Tell them there has been a sad event that has happened. Give them an opportunity to talk about their feelings.
- There will be a lot of variability in speaking to classes about the death depending on the relationship the students had with the deceased, as well as the age and life experiences of the students.

### **Things to Keep in Mind When You Are Speaking with Students:**

- The event may trigger emotions for some students from things that may have happened in their own personal lives. Watch for those students who may be vulnerable or at-risk (e.g. students who have had parents recently divorce, a family pet die, or who have a very ill relative).
- You can normalize the grief they are experiencing, by saying, "Whatever you are feeling that's ok, sad, numb, angry...."
- It is important to realize that everyone copes differently. Some students may get very emotional and cry, some may act silly and giggle, some may get very quiet and withdrawn.

### **Quiet Room: The Library and Maker space will be closed to regular activities and opened for (including office within the space) use as the Quiet Room to support staff and students.**

A member of the Tragic Event Response Team will be in there to listen and support students who are having a difficult time coping.

Please watch for the students who are extremely emotional and unable to get back into regular classroom routine. Please direct these students to the quiet room for additional support

### **Routine:**

It is OK to get back to routine. It is not being disrespectful. Routine brings comfort and security to students.

### **Rumour Control:**

Watch for rumours/gossip. Talk to students about confidentiality and that staff are respecting the family wishes by only sharing information that they have requested be shared. Stress that it's about caring, dignity and respect for the family. Ask students to imagine how they would feel in the person's shoes.

"Our need to satisfy curiosity should never supersede the family's right to respect and dignity."

## MEMORIAL

When a student or staff member has died, there is typically an intense build-up of emotion.

**A memorial is optional, and should only take place with family consent, coordinated with administration and Tragic Event Response Team.** A memorial may include the entire school, one or two classes or a small group of students with the focus/intent to remember the student/staff member by fellow students, staff, and parents. Family members are invited. The memorial is arranged at a later time following a death.

### **Memorial Activities Could Include:**

- Sharing memories and stories about the person.
- Create a poem or story of hope; or read a particular passage of poetry.
- Commemorate the person with a tree planting, plaque, scholarship, book(s) for the library, playground equipment, etc. ( please seek support in this decision when death was a result of suicide, refer to Life Promotion & Suicide Intervention Protocol)
- Have the school choir sing, or the band perform.
- Include additional recognition in the school's newsletter, yearbook, and graduation ceremonies.
- Observe a moment of silence.

### **If a Remembrance Activity is Being Considered:**

- Schools are cautioned against holding a large assembly to honour the deceased because of the potential of group hysteria and/or glorifying death. (please see Life Promotion & Suicide Intervention Protocol as needed to reduce contagion impact on school community)
- Large assemblies are not recommended for acute grief situations.
- After a remembrance activity, some students may be upset and sufficient time must be given for them to regain emotional composure. For this reason, consideration may be given to holding the tribute in the morning or early afternoon, not immediately before dismissal.
- Members of the Tragic Event Response Team may be involved as school support e.g. Jon Limmer / Eileen Steele may be requested to provide spiritual support and prayers. Seasons Centre for Grieving Children can offer support to schools in the process of memorials and supporting students.

## TIPS FOR TEACHERS WHEN TALKING WITH STUDENTS ABOUT TRAGIC EVENTS

1. **Take care of yourself.** Be aware of and reflect on your own response regarding the event. Monitor your stress level and don't ignore feelings that come up for you. Talk to your support people, seek additional support as needed. It's ok if students know you are sad, upset, confused by what has happened. You are better able to support students if you can express your own emotions in a productive manner.
2. **Model calm.** Children take their cues from the significant adults in their lives. Non verbal cues from you are what children interpret as safety and trust.
3. **Be aware that some may need extra support.** Observe your students behavior, ask for help for yourself and your students.
4. **Listen and acknowledge the feelings.** Questions and concerns of students – choosing language that is developmentally appropriate. Don't assume children are worrying about the same things that adults are, or that they will react the same way.
5. **Answer students' questions honestly and with accurate information.** Be willing to say, "I don't know" and to share your own experiences with death and loss. Graphic details do not need to be shared with students or other staff. Please see support section for further information on low impact debriefing.
6. **Reassure children that they are safe.** Discuss how the school is safe and review tips for personal safety. Develop and maintain an environment in which people feel safe asking questions, and confident that they will receive an honest answer. Avoid expressing your own fear or anxieties with children, keep these to adult conversations.
7. **Stay in touch with parents.** Allow people to express, in their own way, as much emotion as they are able or willing to share with you.
8. **Resume regular routines and class expectations** as much as possible with supports for social emotional well being. Be flexible enough to not force a 'regular day' onto students who cannot manage that.
9. **Respond to risk.** In circumstances where there has been a death by suicide, be especially attentive to vulnerable students and bring them immediately to the attention to your administrator. Be mindful of potential contagion effects. More information is available in the Life Promotion and Suicide Intervention Protocol.
10. **AVOID:** Lecturing, judging, moralizing, forcing participation in discussion, forcing looking for positives, avoid saying "I know how you feel", avoid statements that begin with "at least..."

**Common Reactions After Exposure to Tragic Events**

<p><b>Age 2-5</b></p> <p><b>Preschool Children</b></p>	<p><b>AGES 5-11 YRS</b></p> <p><b>Elementary School Children</b></p>	<p><b>AGES 12+ years</b></p> <p><b>Middle and High School Children</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel helpless and uncertain</li> <li>• Fear of being separated from their parent/caregiver</li> <li>• Cry and/or scream a lot</li> <li>• Eat poorly and lose weight</li> <li>• Return to bedwetting</li> <li>• Return to using baby talk</li> <li>• Develop new fears</li> <li>• Have nightmares</li> <li>• Recreate the trauma through play</li> <li>• Are not developing to the next growth stage</li> <li>• Have changes in behavior</li> <li>• Ask questions about death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become anxious and fearful</li> <li>• Worry about their own or others' safety</li> <li>• Become clingy with a teacher or a parent</li> <li>• Feel guilt or shame</li> <li>• Tell others about the traumatic event again and again</li> <li>• Become upset if they get a small bump or bruise</li> <li>• Have a hard time concentrating</li> <li>• Experience numbness</li> <li>• Have fears that the event will happen again</li> <li>• Have difficulties sleeping</li> <li>• Show changes in school performance</li> <li>• Become easily startled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel depressed and alone</li> <li>• Discuss the traumatic events in detail</li> <li>• Develop eating disorders and self-harming behaviors such as cutting</li> <li>• Start using or abusing alcohol or drugs</li> <li>• Become sexually active</li> <li>• Feel like they're going crazy</li> <li>• Feel different from everyone else</li> <li>• Take too many risks</li> <li>• Have sleep disturbances</li> <li>• Don't want to go places that remind them of the event</li> <li>• Say they have no feeling about the event</li> <li>• Show changes in behavior</li> </ul>

**Chart from website:**

**<https://cctasi.northwestern.edu/family/child-trauma/>**

## GRIEF PROCESS

Grief is a **PROCESS**, not an event. Understanding the grief process can contextualize student responses.

Elder and Martin (1991) define grief as “the emotional, physical, intellectual, behavioural and spiritual process of adjusting to the loss of someone or something of personal value.” When our world that “should be” differs from our world that “is” we grieve, and each person is unique in this journey.

The following outlines Psycho-Social Development in grief, based on age.

### **CHILDREN’S BEREAVEMENT RESPONSES AT DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENT STAGES**

(Adapted from McKissock, 2004 and Liana Lowenstein, 2012)

AGE	CONCEPT OF DEATH	GRIEF RESPONSE	SIGNS OF DISTRESS	SUGGESTIONS
2-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Death as abandonment, sleep, temporary, reversible, contagious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intense, brief response</li> <li>Present oriented</li> <li>React to change in routine and care</li> <li>Ask repeated questions</li> <li>Anxious about basic needs being met</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regression (lapses in toilet training, returning to security blanket or old toys)</li> <li>Anxiety at bedtime</li> <li>Fear abandonment</li> <li>Seek physical contact</li> <li>Irritable, tantrums</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple, honest explanation of death with familiar examples</li> <li>Physical comfort</li> <li>Consistent routine</li> </ul>
4-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Death will be seen as temporary, reversible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feel responsible for death due to magical thinking, e.g. <i>“I was mad at her and wished she’d die, I made it happen.”</i></li> <li>Repetitive questioning: How? Why?</li> <li>May act as though nothing happened</li> <li>Feel distressed and confused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overt signs of grief such as sadness, anger</li> <li>Feelings of abandonment and rejection</li> <li>Changes in eating and sleeping</li> <li>Nightmares</li> <li>Violent play</li> <li>Behavioural problems</li> <li>Attempt to take on role of person who died</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple, honest explanation of death, avoid euphemisms, (e.g. sleep, gone away, lost)</li> <li>Check to see if understand explanation</li> <li>Expect repeated questions</li> <li>Opportunities to express feelings, learn ongoing strategies</li> <li>Reassurance that they are not responsible for the death</li> </ul>
7-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May still see death as reversible but beginning to see it as final</li> <li>Death as punishment for bad behaviour, bad thoughts</li> <li>Fear of bodily harm and mutilation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May feel angry or responsible for the death</li> <li>Desire for details about the death, specific questioning</li> <li>Concerned with how others are responding and whether they are reacting the right way</li> <li>Starting to have ability to mourn and understand mourning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overt sign of grief such as sadness, anger</li> <li>Physical complaints</li> <li>Overactive to avoid thinking about death</li> <li>Feel ashamed, different from other children</li> <li>Problems in school, withdraw from friends, acting out</li> <li>Concern with body</li> <li>Suicidal thoughts (desire to join the deceased)</li> <li>Role confusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open, honest explanation of death</li> <li>Answer questions</li> <li>Opportunities to express range of feelings</li> <li>Learn skills to cope with anger, provide physical outlets</li> <li>Reassurance not responsible for the death</li> </ul>
11-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Death as inevitable, universal, irreversible</li> <li>Abstract thinking</li> <li>Truly conceptualize death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depression, denial, repression</li> <li>More apt to talk to people outside the family</li> <li>May feel embarrassed</li> <li>Place peer needs ahead of family</li> <li>Traditional mourning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depression, anger, non-compliance</li> <li>Difficulty concentrating</li> <li>Withdrawal from family</li> <li>Engaging in high-risk behaviours (sexual promiscuity, drug and alcohol use)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct, open dialogue about the death</li> <li>Encourage verbalization</li> <li>Listen</li> <li>Consistent limits balanced with more freedom and choices</li> <li>Do not minimize or try to take grief away</li> </ul>

## **APPENDIX A - GUIDELINES FOR TALKING WITH STUDENTS ABOUT DEATH OF A STUDENT/STAFF MEMBER**

If a student/staff member has died, it is important to personally convey the information to those who need to know. Students will react differently depending on their relationship with the deceased, their age, and life experience (e.g. older students who have a limited relationship to the deceased will not require much discussion; younger students will require only a simple explanation).

Rumours and exaggerations of a stressful event will happen very quickly, making a difficult situation even worse. Give students accurate information. Tell students only limited facts are available and remind students to show compassion for the family and to respect their right to privacy.

**It is essential that students be informed of the death through discussion and not by an announcement over the PA System.**

While it is generally preferred that a teacher or administrator lead that classroom discussion, Tragic Incident Response Team members are available to provide support in class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS:**

“Unfortunately, today, we have some sad news:”

- “A student/staff member died last night.” (Discuss details briefly; for example, “Student died due to an illness/accident,” “Staff member received the best medical care and was with family when he/ she died”)
- “It is very unusual for a student/staff member to die (If death of student by way of illness, reassure students it doesn’t happen often for a child to die from an illness).”
- “This is difficult news to hear. One of the ways we can help each other is to be kind and caring.”
- “When we learn that someone we know has died, we can feel many different emotions.”

### **Sharing Feelings:**

Encourage students to share their feelings and thoughts through specific questions as well as more open-ended questions:

- “Let’s share some of our feelings”.
- “How many here are feeling sad?...scared?...angry?...confused”?
- Reassure students all these feelings are normal and talking about them can help us feel better (encourage mutual support).
- Encourage students to talk to parents/friends about negative feelings they are having about the death.
- Discuss age appropriate coping strategies (e.g. writing about thoughts, listening to music, relaxation techniques, more ideas can be found in mental health section of team drive on Google).
- Adapt discussions with students according to age.

### **What Can We Do To Show Caring to the Family?**

- Encourage students to talk about memories. Suggest making memory book/cards/pictures for the family. Provide students with language to use in their cards (e.g. “I am sorry for your loss”; “I am thinking of you.” Cards are reviewed by a staff member and given to the family by a staff member.
- Encourage students to refrain from gossiping/spreading rumours about the situation. Instead the focus should be about respect and caring for the family.
- Attend funeral. Encourage students who wish to attend a service, to attend with a supportive adult and not with a group of friends. Groups of students who attend services without a supportive adult present may have difficulty coping, which may create challenges for both the students and the family of the deceased.

### **Quiet Room: Will be organized in the library, and maker space (including office area) area.**

Students benefit from having access to a quiet area, either alone or in small groups. The Quiet Room will be available to students at the discretion of the teacher (e.g. no announcement.)

Kids respond to this kind of news in different ways. Don't be shocked or concerned if you see giggles, tears, silence, discussion of relatives, pets, etc. who also died, or other reactions.

The Tragic Event Response Team members are available in the Quiet Room to provide emotional support and direction to staff and students for the management of the incident. Jon Limmer can provide spiritual support during this time.

## **APPENDIX B - GUIDELINES FOR TALKING WITH STUDENTS ABOUT DEATH OF CLASSMATE'S PARENT/SIBLING**

If a classmate's parent/sibling has died, it is important to personally convey the information to the students in the class. There will be variability in student's reactions depending on their relationship with the classmate whose parent/sibling died, their age, and life experience (e.g. older students who have a limited relationship to the deceased will not require much discussion; younger students will require only a simple explanation).

Give students accurate information because rumours and exaggerations of a stressful event will happen very quickly, making a difficult situation even worse. Such information might include acknowledging that only limited facts are available and reminding students to show compassion for the family and to respect their right to privacy.

**It is essential that students be informed of the death through discussion and not by an announcement over the PA system.**

While it is generally preferred that a teacher or administrator lead that classroom discussion, Tragic Incident Response Team members are available to provide support in class discussions.

"Unfortunately, today, we have some sad news:"

- "\_\_\_\_\_’s father/mother/sibling died" (e.g. a tragic illness/accident/event - discuss details briefly). If it was a medical issue you can state, "Parent/Sibling received the best medical care."
- "It is very unusual for a parent/sibling to die so young."
- "This is difficult news to hear. One of the ways we can help each other is to be kind and caring."
- "When we learn that someone we know has died, we can feel many different emotions."

### **Sharing Feelings:**

Encourage students to share their feelings and thoughts through specific questions as well as more open-ended questions:

- "Let's share some of our feelings."
- "How many here are feeling sad...scared...angry...confused?"
- Reassure students all these feelings are normal and talking about them can help us feel better (encourage mutual support).
- Encourage students to talk to parents/friends about negative feelings they are having about the death.
- Discuss coping strategies (e.g. writing about thoughts, listening to music, relaxation techniques).
- Adapt discussions with students according to age.

### What Can We Do To Show Caring to Classmate?

- Suggest that student's make cards for their classmate. Provide students with language to use in their cards (e.g. "I am sorry for your loss"; "I am thinking of you." Cards are reviewed by a staff member and given to the classmate by a staff member.
- Encourage the students from gossiping/spreading rumours about the situation. Instead the focus should be about respect and caring for the family.
- Encourage students to treat their classmate "normal" upon his/her return to school.
- Encourage classmates to let you know if they believe their classmate is particularly upset and requires support from you.
- Attend funeral. It is important to encourage students who wish to attend a service, to do so with a supportive adult and not with a group of friends. Groups of students who attend services without a supportive adult present may have difficulty coping, which may create challenges for both the students and the family of the deceased.

### Develop A Coping Plan for Student Whose Parent/Sibling Died

When the student returns to school following the death of their parent/sibling, a staff member should meet with the student to develop a coping plan:

- Share with student how sorry you are for his/her loss.
- Let student know that you have spoken to his classmates to let them know that his/her parent/sibling died and also to make sure that they treat student "normal" upon his/her return. Encourage student to let you know if any of his/her classmates are not respectful and caring toward him/her.
- Anticipate the need for the student to have extended time for assignments/tests and encourage student to talk to you about this if they need further support in this regard.
- Encourage student to let you know if he/she is feeling particularly emotional so that you can arrange for student to have some support (e.g. meet with staff member, call parent). Let student know that you understand that he/she may experience emotional times in the following weeks or even months, and encourage student to let you know when he/she is feeling particularly emotional.
- Check in on student in a couple of weeks. Also, check in with student on holidays or special occasions (e.g. Mother's Day) to let them know you understand how these occasions may be difficult for them.
- Let parent know if you believe student is experiencing any signs of distress in subsequent weeks/months.
- Share coping plan with student's parent.

**APPENDIX C - SAMPLE LETTER: STUDENT DEATH**  
(Template found on staff website under Tragic Event Response Team)

[Date]

Dear [Insert school name] Families:

It is with great sadness that I write this letter to inform you of the death of one of our grade x students, [Insert student's first and last name]. [He/she] died on [insert date] [IF PERMITTED BY THE FAMILY INSERT THE CIRCUMSTANCES RELATED TO THE DEATH, IE: after a lengthy hospital stay/ as the result of a fatal motor vehicle accident Sunday night]. We know that you will join us in extending our deepest sympathy to the [insert last name] family.

The Tragic Event Response Team has been at the school today offering support, reassurance and specific suggestions for staff and students. If you feel your child/teen needs additional support, you may consider contacting your family doctor, family support services (e.g. Kinark, New Path) or faith-based support.

Students' reactions to a death will vary and may be delayed. Even students who did not personally know [insert name] may be affected by this loss. It's important to reassure them, spend extra time with them and be available to them when they want to talk about their feelings. When grieving begins, children and youth need to know that their feelings are normal and acceptable. Here are some ways you can help your child deal with feelings of grief and sadness:

- Acknowledge the loss and the emotional upset.
- Be available to your child/teen. If you don't know the right thing to say, just listen. Acknowledge that we don't always have answers to why these things happen.
- Provide a reassuring environment in which your child feels comfortable expressing his or her thoughts and feelings.
- Encourage your child/teen to experience the loss in the way that's most comfortable for him or her. Some children/youth are open about their feelings, while others prefer not to talk about them or may only want to talk to their peers.
- Share an experience you might have had with bereavement and what helped you cope.
- Help your child/teen understand that it's not helpful to engage in speculation and rumours.
- Encourage your child/teen to follow normal routines as much as possible. Offer him or her practical support—like helping with homework and catching up on assignments.
- Acknowledge that there's no time limit on grieving.

IF THE FAMILY CONSENTS, Either:

- A) The details regarding funeral arrangements are not available at this time. If you would like details or if you require additional support, please contact me at the school at [number.] If your child would like to attend either a visitation or the funeral, please remember that this can be emotionally overwhelming and they should be accompanied by an adult for support.

Or:

- B) The funeral will be held at [insert time and date at insert location.] Visitations will be held at [insert time and date at insert location.] If your child would like to attend either a visitation or the funeral, please remember that this can be emotionally overwhelming and they should be accompanied by an adult for support.

If you have any questions or require additional support, please contact me at the school. Thank you, as always, for your understanding during this difficult time.

[Insert Principal's name]

**APPENDIX D - SAMPLE LETTER: STAFF DEATH**  
(Template found on staff website under Tragic Event Response Team)

**Date**

Dear [school name] Families,

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the death of [Staff member's full name], one of our [staff member's position] at the school. We know that you will join us in extending our deepest sympathy to the [insert last name if sharing] family.

The Tragic Event Response Team has been at the school today offering support, reassurance and specific suggestions for staff and students. If you feel your child needs additional support, you may consider contacting your family doctor, family support services (e.g. Kinark, New Path) or faith-based support.

Students' reactions to a death will vary and may be delayed. It's important to reassure them, spend extra time with them and be available to them when they want to talk about their feelings. When grieving begins, children and youth need to know that their feelings are normal and acceptable. Here are some ways you can help your child deal with feelings of grief and sadness:

- Acknowledge the loss and the emotional upset.
- Be available to your child. If you don't know the right thing to say, just listen. Acknowledge that we don't always have answers to why these things happen.
- Provide a reassuring environment in which your child feels comfortable expressing his or her thoughts and feelings.
- Encourage your child to experience the loss in the way that's most comfortable for him or her. Some children are open about their feelings, while others prefer not to talk about them or may only want to talk to their peers.
- Share an experience you might have had with bereavement and what helped you cope.
- Help your child understand that it's not helpful to engage in speculation and rumours.
- Encourage your child to follow normal routines as much as possible. Offer him or her practical support—like helping with homework and catching up on assignments.
- Acknowledge that there's no time limit on grieving.

If the family is in agreement:

The details regarding funeral arrangements are not available at this time. If you would like details or require additional support, please contact me at the school at [number.] If your child would like to attend either a visitation or the funeral, please remember that this can be emotionally overwhelming and they should be accompanied by an adult for support.

Or:

The funeral will be held at [insert time and date at insert location.] Visitations will be held at [insert time and date at insert location.] If your child would like to attend either a visitation or the funeral, please remember that this can be emotionally overwhelming and they should be accompanied by an adult for support.

If you have any questions or require additional support, please contact me at the school. Thank you, as always, for your understanding during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

[Insert name]

Principal

## APPENDIX E - SAMPLE LETTER: PARENT/GUARDIAN DEATH

(Template found on staff website under Tragic Event Response Team)

### Date

Dear [school name] Families,

It is with great sadness that we inform you that the [mother/father/sibling] of [one] of our students, [Insert students' full names if sharing] died [insert timing and the reason based on information family would like to share]. We know that you will join us in extending our deepest sympathy to the [insert last name if sharing] family.

The Tragic Event Response Team has been at the school today offering support, reassurance and specific suggestions for staff and students. If you feel your child needs additional support, you may consider contacting your family doctor, family support services (e.g. Kinark, New Path) or faith-based support.

Students' reactions to a death will vary and may be delayed. It's important to reassure them, spend extra time with them and be available to them when they want to talk about their feelings. When grieving begins, children and youth need to know that their feelings are normal and acceptable. Here are some ways you can help your child deal with feelings of grief and sadness:

- Acknowledge the loss and the emotional upset.
- Be available to your child. If you don't know the right thing to say, just listen. Acknowledge that we don't always have answers to why these things happen.
- Provide a reassuring environment in which your child feels comfortable expressing his or her thoughts and feelings.
- Encourage your child to experience the loss in the way that's most comfortable for him or her. Some children are open about their feelings, while others prefer not to talk about them or may only want to talk to their peers.
- Share an experience you might have had with bereavement and what helped you cope.
- Help your child understand that it's not helpful to engage in speculation and rumours.
- Encourage your child to follow normal routines as much as possible. Offer him or her practical support—like helping with homework and catching up on assignments.
- Acknowledge that there's no time limit on grieving.

If you have any questions or require additional support, please contact me at the school. Thank you, as always, for your understanding during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

[Insert name]  
Principal

**APPENDIX F - SAMPLE LETTER: STUDENT ACCIDENT**  
(Template found on staff website under Tragic Event Response Team)

[Date]

Dear [Insert school name] Families:

As you may have learned over the last few hours, e.g. one of our students in our Grade x class was struck by a car while crossing the highway last evening. Emergency response personnel attended to the accident immediately and eventually the student was air-lifted to Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto.

We are all saddened by this serious accident. A number of people at the school have been affected by this accident and the Tragic Incident Response Team has been at the school today offering support, reassurance and specific suggestions for staff and students. If you feel your child/teen needs additional support, you may consider contacting your family doctor, family support services (e.g. Kinark, New Path) or faith-based support.

Students' reactions will vary and may be delayed. Even students who did not personally know the student(s) may be affected. It's important to reassure them, spend extra time with them and be available to them when they want to talk about their feelings. Here are some ways you can help your child deal with his/her feelings:

- Acknowledge the emotional upset.
- Be available to your child/teen. If you don't know the right thing to say, just listen. Acknowledge that we don't always have answers to why these things happen.
- Provide a reassuring environment in which your child feels comfortable expressing his or her thoughts and feelings.
- Encourage your child/teen to experience the situation in the way that's most comfortable for him or her. Some children/youth are open about their feelings, while others prefer not to talk about them or may only want to talk to their peers.
- Share experiences that you might have had in similar situations and what helped you cope.
- Help your child/teen understand that it's not helpful to engage in speculation and rumours.
- Encourage your child/teen to follow normal routines as much as possible. Offer him or her practical support—like helping with homework and catching up on assignments.

If you have any questions or require additional support, please contact me at the school. Thank you, as always, for your understanding during this difficult time.

[Insert Principal's name]

**APPENDIX G - SAMPLE LETTER: STUDENT SUICIDE  
(WITH PARENTAL APPROVAL)**

(Template found on staff website under Tragic Event Response Team)

**THIS SAMPLE LETTER IS ONLY TO BE USED IF THE FAMILY IS AGREEABLE TO SHARING THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE STUDENT'S DEATH, IE: SUICIDE. ALSO CAREFUL CONSIDERATION MUST BE MADE AND CONSULTATION WITH TRAGIC INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM PRIOR TO SENDING**

Date

Dear [school name] Families,

It is with great sadness that I write this letter to inform you of the sudden death of [full name], a grade x student at our school. As you may already have heard from your son or daughter, [name] died by suicide yesterday. We know that you will join us in extending our deepest sympathy to the [insert last name] family.

The Tragic Event Response Team has been at the school today offering support, reassurance and specific suggestions for staff and students. If you feel your child/teen needs additional support, you may consider contacting your family doctor, family support services (e.g. Kinark, New Path) or faith-based support.

Students' reactions to a death will vary and may be delayed. Even students who did not personally know [insert name] may be affected by this loss. It's important to reassure them, spend extra time with them and be available to them when they want to talk about their feelings. When grieving begins, children and youth need to know that their feelings are normal and acceptable.

Suicide is a difficult issue, and presents us with added challenges in understanding and accepting [name]'s death. We may find ourselves searching for explanations for what happened; there are always many reasons and causes of suicide that may be difficult to understand or accept. Rumours may surface as we try to understand [name]'s death, and as you know from your own experience, rumours are not helpful and often do not reflect the whole situation. Sadly, there are no explanations that will change what has happened.

Here are some ways you can help your son/daughter deal with the grief and shock:

- Acknowledge the loss and the emotional upset.
- Be available to your child/teen. If you don't know the right thing to say, just listen. Acknowledge that we don't always have answers to why these things happen.
- Provide a reassuring environment in which your child/teen feels comfortable expressing his or her thoughts and feelings.
- Encourage your child/teen to experience the loss in the way that's most comfortable for him or her. Some teens are open about their feelings, while others prefer not to talk about them or may only want to talk to their peers.
- Share an experience you might have had with bereavement and how you handled it.
- Encourage your child/teen to follow normal routines as much as possible. Offer them practical support—like helping with homework and catching up on assignments.
- Some children/teens react with hostility and anger. Try not to take any outbursts personally. Help your child/teen channel any anger.
- Acknowledge that there's no time limit on grieving.

IF THE FAMILY CONSENTS, Either:

The details regarding funeral arrangements are not available at this time. If you would like details or require additional support, please contact me at the school at [number.] If your child would like to attend either a visitation or the funeral, please remember that this can be emotionally overwhelming and they should be accompanied by an adult for support.

Or

The funeral will be held at [insert time and date at insert location.] Visitations will be held at [insert time and date at insert location.] If your child would like to attend either a visitation or the funeral, please remember that this can be emotionally overwhelming and they should be accompanied by an adult for support.

Sincerely,  
[Principal's name]

## **APPENDIX I - COMMUNITY RESOURCES/SUPPORTS**

### **CRISIS SERVICES:**

#### **Crisis Services with Kinark**

Call to find support for youth in crisis, including suicidal ideation and self harm

- Midland, Collingwood, Orillia, Barrie **705-728-5044**

### **GEORGIAN BAY GENERAL HOSPITAL – EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT**

1112 St. Andrew's Drive, MIDLAND

Phone: 705-526-1300

Fax: 705-526-4491

### **SAME DAY SERVICES AVAILABLE:**

**North Simcoe Mental Health Walk-In Clinic** is located at CSC Chigamik CHC.

WHERE: **845 King St. Midland, 705-527-4154.**

**Age 12 and UP - Tuesday from 12:00 to 5:00pm Walk in Clinic to anyone (over 12) in the North Simcoe Community.** No appointment is necessary.

**Age 12 and Under – available Tues 10:30-4:30 - Walk in Clinic 845 King St. Midland, Individual or Family Session available.** Pilot Project with New Path and Catholic Family Services

This service may be helpful if you are experiencing issues such as: family conflict, stress, depression, anxiety, relationship issues, addictions, or abuse. You will usually be seen in order of arrival, although some exceptions are made depending on the presenting issue. You will be provided a one-hour session with a counsellor to help you develop a plan. Sessions are meant to be a one-time meeting, however, you can make use of this service in the future. \*Sessions are available on a first come, first serve basis.

This service is a collaborative partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association Simcoe County, Catholic Family Services of Simcoe County, CSC Chigamik CHC, Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care and Wendat.

### **ONLINE 24 HOUR SERVICE:**

**Kids Help Phone:** 1-800-668-6868 <https://kidshelpphone.ca>

Support also available via text: [Text “CONNECT” to 686868 – we are always here to help](#)

## **VICTIMS SERVICES:**

VCARS (Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Service)

- Barrie and area, 705-725-7025 ext. 2120 Mon-Fri
- **Midland – 705-527-8778 staffed Tues/Thurs/Fri** messages collected daily
- Need family's consent to refer (referral can be supported through police, school, outside agency)
- Immediate emotional support to mitigate potential long-term effect of trauma (domestic violence, assault, death in family)
- Help family connect with support agencies

## **COMMUNITY YOUTH COUNSELLING SERVICES:**

### **Kinark Child and Family Services:**

(Central Intake 1-800-230-8529) Midland location, 788 Yonge St. Unit 3. Youth and Family Counseling available for more information: <https://www.kinark.on.ca>

### **Catholic Family Services Simcoe AGE 12+:**

354 Midland Ave, Midland, ON L4R 3K7

**Phone:** (705) 526-9397, <https://cfssc.ca>

### **New Path Youth and Family Counseling:** (Central Intake 705-725-7656, 1-866-566-7656)

<https://newpath.ca>

### **North Simcoe Family Health Team:** (need to be a member see physician list;

<http://nsfht.ca/our-physicians/>)

<http://nsfht.ca/programs-services/childrens-mental-health/>

### **Services include:**

- Individual and family therapy
- Group work as available, for example Adolescent Skill Building Groups are offered regularly
- Referrals for psychiatric evaluation can be accessed through the Hospital for Sick Children, Sunnybrook Hospital and Waypoint's Transitional Age Youth (TAY) Program as appropriate.
- Collaboration with community partners including schools, CAS or children's mental agencies.

**Chigamik:** 705-527-4154, 845 King St. Unit 10, Midland (Need to be a registered client – see below)

<http://www.chigamik.ca/your-health/mental-health-and-addictions-counselors/>

Individual, couple and family counselling is available to registered clients of CSC CHIGAMIK CHC who are **12 years or older**. The purpose of counselling is to provide individuals with a confidential opportunity to explore personal, psychological, relational, and/or addiction-related issues. Clients are provided up to 10 sessions at a time. These sessions may occur weekly or bi-weekly and are one-hour in length.

**Counselling is available to registered clients of CSC CHIGAMIK CHC.** To access services, ask your family physician or nurse practitioner at CSC CHIGAMIK CHC to send a counselling referral on your behalf or **call Marie-Claude Lavoie, Mental Health – Intake Coordinator, to schedule you an appointment at: 705.527.4154 x253.**

**Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre:** <https://www.gbnfc.com>  
175 Yonge St., Midland, 705-526-5589. Many child and family services available see website)

**La Cle:** 63 Main St. Penetanguishene, 705-549-3116, [www.lacle.ca](http://www.lacle.ca)

Programs & Services for Francophones include:

- \* Mental Health Services
- \* Social Services
- \* Child care and before & after school services
- \* Summer Camps
- \* Early Years Services
- \* Employment and Training Services
- \* Cultural Services

### **GROUP/PEER SUPPORT:**

**Rainbows Canada** (705-726-7407) Angie Bidwell trained in Rainbows Program  
Support for children who have experienced a loss (e.g. death or divorce within the family)

**Seasons Centre for Grieving/Traumatized Children** (Barrie 705-721-5487)  
Offer supports to schools, peer and parent support programs, summer camps

**Supports for STAFF:** Local counseling supports are available to use. Family doctor and family health team often have counselling services available. Private counseling also covered under some benefit packages.

### **BOOKS:**

Lighthouse, R. Munsch, Markham: Scholastic Canada Ltd, 2003

What is Suicide Anyways?, Season's Centre for Grieving Children, Barrie: Gibson Digital, 2010

When Dinosaurs Die, L. Krasny Brown, M. Brown, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998

Trauma-Proofing Your Kids; A Parents' Guide for Instilling Confidence, Joy and Resilience,

Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline, North Atlantic Books Berkley California, 2008

### **ONLINE RESOURCES:**

Helping children cope after a tragic event – with information on trauma reactions by age group:

<https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-traumatic-event/>

<http://childmind.org/wp-content/uploads/Child-Mind-Intitute-Parents-Guide-Traumatic-Event.pdf>

Resources to support understanding how trauma impacts development and learning, with information on each developmental stage/age

<https://www.secasa.com.au/pages/child-development-and-trauma-guide/>

## APPENDIX I - AFTER EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA, SUPPORTING YOUR WELL BEING

The impact of tragic events on yourself and others can be lessened through seeking help and support, engaging in self care and careful and considerate sharing of information. Even those who were not directly involved or did not witness the tragic events can be impacted by them, in order to lessen the negative impact of this we can share information with others in ways that Francoise Mathieu calls '**Low Impact Debriefing**' outlined in "The Compassion Fatigue Workbook" p. 41-46, 2012.

*"Sharing graphic details of trauma stories can actually spread vicarious trauma to other helpers and perpetuate a climate of cynicism and hopelessness in the workplace." (The Compassion Fatigue Workbook, Francoise Mathieu, p. 43)*

You may need to debrief with someone if you have been impacted by a tragic event. This is a more formal process than just talking about the event, it can be done with someone who is trained in doing this and should support your well being and recovery from what you have witnessed or are experiencing distress from learning about. Low Impact Debriefing

When we go through something or learn about something that is distressing we generally want to share this with others, our co-workers, friends, family. We can get the support from others that we need without sharing all of the details that have distressed us.

**Before you share information with others consider:** (adapted from p. 45, The Compassion Fatigue Workbook, Francoise Mathieu)

Is this a conversation or a debriefing? Who am I sharing with? Is this the right person to share it with? Why am I sharing? Have I given fair warning about the tragic content of what I want to share? Have I asked for their consent to share this information with them? Am I sharing with someone who needs to know this? What impact will this information have on them? Is this too much information to share? What do I need to share, what can I leave out?

### **TAKING CARE OF YOU:**

Take time to check in with yourself. What are your usual signs of too much stress, tight shoulders and neck, disruption of sleep or eating...how stressed are you now?

What helps you de-stress? Music, hobbies, friends, exercise, connecting with loved ones....

Make sure you make time for yourself.

Maintain as much of your normal routine as possible to support your well being.

Avoid using alcohol or drugs to cope.

Be kind and gentle with yourself, your reactions are normal and you may need to ask for support from others.

It is normal for adults exposed to tragic events to experience distress themselves. It is good to check in with your family doctor or counseling supports if you are experiencing ongoing signs of distress such as:

Inability to stop thinking about the crisis, victims or crisis intervention;

Personal Identification with crisis victims and their families;

Difficulty making decisions or expressing yourself;

Sleep disturbances;

Physical Ailments – headaches, gastrointestinal issues, aches, pains;

Emotional lability – changes in emotional state, feeling out of control

Alcohol and substance abuse;

Withdrawal from contact with co-workers, friends, family;

Impulsive behaviours (adapted from [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org))

### APPENDIX J - TIP SHEET FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

It's often difficult to know how to support ourselves and the children we care for following a tragic event. These are some general guidelines to support families impacted by a tragic event or loss.

- 1) **Help create a safe haven for your child and family.** Children come home seeking safety. They will look for connection with you, comfort from you and a sense that they are safe and going to be ok. Your non-verbal cues, body language says more to children than your words do, so be aware of what your body is saying and take care of yourself so that you can give calm messages as often as possible.
- 2) **Model calm** as much as possible so those around you can also feel calm. Children from infancy are able to respond to the emotional states of those around them. Expressing emotions in healthy ways is a good way to model safe expression to the children around you.
- 3) **LISTEN well**, remember you need to be calm and focused to truly listen and put aside your own thoughts and worries. Listening allows you to attune to what your child is experiencing and to let them know that you understand them and are there to support them.
- 4) **Keeping regular routines** as much as possible helps to create safety and a sense of security for everyone.
- 5) **Talk and play** with your child creating opportunities emotional expression. Talk is often difficult following trauma and sharing graphic details can be harmful, seek support as needed from helping professionals.
- 6) **Have fun** and create enjoyable activities for the family, let your kids know its still ok to enjoy themselves, that having some joyful experiences is a way of coping while adjusting to loss or trauma.
- 7) **Understand that children cope in different ways** than adults do, they are often less verbal and need to play things out. If they seem to be struggling with sleep, eating, regular activities seek assistance as early and as often as needed.
- 8) **Prevent and/or limit exposure to media coverage** of the tragic event. This can be tragic for those who were not involved and for those who were part of the event can be overwhelming and can trigger further tragic response, or reliving of the event.
- 9) **It's ok to say "I don't know"**, it can be uncomfortable for caring adults to not be able to have all the answers but its ok. Being honest is a good way to continue to ensure emotional safety and let children know you will tell them the truth.
- 10) **Take care of yourself.** Monitor your stress levels, practice self care, do things that support your well being and above all reach out for help for yourself and for your family as needed.