Washington Community School District's

Crisis Plan When Death Occurs

The Washington Community School District has adopted procedures to manage events surrounding a death. The time following a death may be a period of turmoil and confusion for staff and students as a result of several variables. Please recognize that personal experiences for individuals help determine appropriate forms of intervention. The school will share factual information with students and staff, provide guidelines for staff, and offer support services.

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QUICK REVIEW OF
CRISIS RESPONSE PROCESS

1. In the case of the death of a student or staff person during the night, Crisis Management Team Phone Tree will be implemented at 6:00 a.m. the next morning.
   - Crisis Response Team will meet at 7:00 a.m. in principal's office.
   - Mandatory staff meeting at 7:45 a.m.
   - Principal will inform staff of all facts pertaining to death.
   - Remind staff of mandatory staff meeting at the end of the day.

2. A central location in your building will be designated for students to go if they need to process/grieve.

3. Sign in sheet for accurate attendance.

4. Initial contact for press information will be the building principal.

5. Please discourage any social media so students are not spreading inaccurate information.

6. Keep a list of high-risk students.

7. Emails will be sent to update staff throughout the day by principal, or designee. Principal or designee, will let staff know what information should be given to students.

8. Staff meeting at the end of day.

9. Parents coming to school will be directed to a designated area.

10. Ideas:
    - Basket for students to make a card to be given to family
    - Banner for students to leave messages/sign

11. Online Support: Coping with the Sudden Death of a Student
    http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/crisisbook.pdf

PRINCIPAL'S ROLE

When any school employee becomes aware of the death of an individual, it is his/her responsibility to immediately inform the principal of all the known facts regarding the death. It is important that the principal verify the facts concerning the death including who has died. The principal will quickly assess the involvement of the individual and the impact this death might have upon the school community. If additional help to the building Crisis Management Team is needed, the principal will make plans to notify the appropriate people. The principal will then activate this protocol. If the death occurs outside of school hours, the principal will notify members of the Crisis Management Team, activate the phone tree and notify the entire staff that a morning meeting will take place. If the principal is not available, the associate principal or the principal's designee will begin this process.

Principal's Procedures

Step 1

Prior to meeting with the entire staff, meet with the building Crisis Management Team to identify the agenda to be followed for the day. Decide with the Crisis Management Team what will be reviewed at the mandatory all-staff meeting. Remind staff to resume regular classroom activities. If staff identify a student who does not seem able to resume classes normally, send that student to the designated support center area.

Step 2

The principal or designee will coordinate the activities of all the helping persons (and students) over the next several days.

Step 3

Direct a staff member to immediately remove the contents from the deceased student's locker and/or desk and take articles to the principal. The deceased student's property will be given to the family.

Step 4

The principal will:
-Inform all schools within the district including Central Office

-Direct a staff member to pull the deceased student's cum folder to determine any other schools the student has attended outside our district and make necessary contacts.
-Assign responsibility to someone to update the Student Management System regarding mailings and school schedule.

Step 5

Identify a support center area in the building where students may come for support and counseling. Compose a letter to parents of all students regarding the death. ***(See sample in appendix on page 20.)***

Step 6

Prepare an initial announcement to be read to the students by principal or designee. Do not make any announcements until the information has been verified by a reliable source such as the family or police. This announcement should read over the intercom by this person or made in classrooms by this person.
NOTE: By the time the students reach school following the death, they may have heard many different versions of what happened so it is important for one accurate announcement be made by one person.

(See sample in appendix on Page 21.)

Step 7

Contact the family to express the schools' and your condolences. Determine with the parents who will be the family contact from the school. Provide family with pictures or other personal items from school.

Step 8

Direct a staff member to collect funeral arrangement information and to prepare details for student/staff attendance at the visitation and funeral. When details are final, an announcement will be prepared for staff and students.

Note: Best practice stipulates that funeral services are held off school grounds and memorials for the deceased are not located on school grounds. This is to keep the school grounds and academic environment where all students are comfortable.

Step 9

On the day following the funeral, the principal will make the following statement: May I have your attention please. I wish to thank all of the students and faculty for the support you have shown each other during the past few days. The example you have shown is positive and healthy and provides us the opportunity to work toward strengthening our relationships with each other. Your school counselor remains available if you should wish to talk with a counselor. (Include any additional comments from the family. In elementary schools the classroom teachers may be the designees to deliver this message of thanks. In secondary schools the principal will deliver this message.)

MANDATORY ALL STAFF MEETING

The Role of the Principal

Prior to the commencement of school following a death, the principal should have an all staff meeting. In addition to the meeting before school, it is important to hold a mandatory all staff meeting at the end of the day to discuss the events of the day.

Step 1

The principal will announce an immediate all-staff mandatory meeting.

Step 2

The principal will inform staff of what is expected of them, and review the accompanying handout materials: **(checklists/procedures)** All confirmed public facts regarding the student should be shared with staff.

Request that any staff member who, for whatever reason, does not believe he/she can read a prepared statement to their class, inform the principal. The principal will then assign a Crisis Team member to that classroom when a prepared statement has to be read.

Step 3

Inform staff of the prepared statement that will be announced to the students and when the announcement will be made. (If possible, provide the teachers with a typed copy of the prepared statement.) Follow grade appropriate protocol.

Step 4

Announce a staff meeting after school to review the day's events. This allows an opportunity to receive feedback from staff to answer questions and to review the next day's expectations. At this meeting identify students who are or may be at risk.

Step 5
Inform all staff members that any media presence or requests for information should be immediately directed to the principal. **Media will be directed to Central Office.**

Step 6
Address questions from the staff and/or requests staff have at this time.

PRINCIPAL'S CHECKLIST

☐ Arrange and meet with Crisis Management Team (CMT).

☐ Arrange for substitute to assist student's classroom teacher, if necessary.

☐ Designate a staff member to read prepared statement when requested by staff member.

☐ Remove locker contents from deceased student's locker.

☐ Designate a counseling support center in building.

☐ Meet with building staff, including support staff and substitutes in the morning.

☐ Request that staff inform Principal of students or staff in need of support throughout the day.

☐ Contact absent personnel and shared building employees about death.

☐ Notifiy other school principals of death.

☐ Inform students regarding the loss in an age appropriate manner using a prepared statement through email, intercom, or written communication.

☐ Write letter to parents of all students regarding the loss. (Refer to page____.)

☐ Contact family and gather funeral arrangement information.

☐ Inform students and/or staff of funeral arrangements.

☐ Update student management system.

☐ Hold mid-day meeting with CMT to assess response activities.

☐ Contact clergy who will be conducting funeral services.

☐ Hold after-school staff meeting and contact absent personnel.

- [ ] Meet with CMT at end of day to review day's activities, review list of high-risk students, and plan for next day's activities.

- [ ] Schedule a debriefing meeting for staff with CISM personnel after funeral.

COUNSELOR'S CHECKLIST

Counselors will assist the Principal in coordinating events in support of the crisis.
Counselors will communicate with staff about their roles and responsibilities.
Counselors will provide support to students and families.

Counselor will refer to the Crisis Plan on the district website.

☐ Distribute copies of staff roles.

☐ Assist in identifying students and adults who were absent.

☐ Maintain a list of individuals seen.

☐ Maintain a centralized list of high-risk staff members and students including date
and time of contacts and appropriate interventions.

_____Peer Support

_____Individual interviews

_____Group counseling

_____Classroom activities

_____Parent meetings

_____Support groups

_____Staff meetings

_____Referrals to community agencies

_____Community based meetings with those impacted by crises (i.e. clubs,
athletic teams, youth groups, etc.)

☐ Organize food and location for CMT.

☐ Identify a parent support center.

☐ Update Principal regarding centralized list.

- [ ] Attend the CMT meeting at the end of day.

TEACHER'S CHECKLIST

☐ Attend all staff meetings.

☐ All phone calls from news/media should be forwarded to the principal. The principal will forward to the superintendent. (Please see information below in case phone calls from media would affect students)

☐ Request assistance for duties as needed.

☐ Facilitate classroom discussion as necessary.

☐ If you are not able to lead the classroom discussion, please inform the principal.

☐ Allow students to go to the counseling support center (accompany as needed).

☐ Please be prompt with attendance throughout the day so secretaries can report updated attendance to the principal.

☐ Keep a list of students you believe are high risk and give names to principal throughout the day.

Advise students of the district's media procedure

Students are, perhaps, the least prepared to handle media questions about a crisis. Teachers or administrators should explain to students that reporters may be asking them questions and suggest that they not make any comment they would not want said about themselves. Students need to understand that they don't have to talk to reporters and should feel free to say "no" if that is their inclination. If they decide to speak to reporters, they should do so away from school. While on school grounds media questions will be addressed by the Principal or Superintendent.

TEACHER'S PROCEDURES

Supporting students in the classroom in times of grief.

Teachers play a vital role in helping students deal with their thoughts and feelings regarding a death. Following a death, students will grieve in a variety of ways. The information below is intended to provide a guide for you to use in assisting your students. Please also remember that sometimes teachers are extremely distraught over the loss. In these instances, the teacher should request assistance to cover their classes. It is okay for teachers to grieve and seek help with their assigned duties.

Strategies for helping students in the classroom while dealing with grief.

1. Maintain composure. Kids model behavior. They imitate emotional patterns, including grieving, of those around them.
2. Reassure students they are safe.
3. Continue normal routines. Children need a sense of stability.
4. Talk about the tragedy in an age appropriate manner. Be patient. It is common for students, especially younger ones, to ask the same questions about death and disaster over and over.
5. Help students express their feelings. Encourage the students to draw a picture or write a story about how they feel.
6. Listen. Ask questions. Share the facts, as you know them. Make sure they understand the facts and discuss what they've seen or heard, and what their friends and teachers are saying.
7. Your students may need extra attention from you at this time. Students are comforted to see their teachers, counselors, and principal outside of school. This is very important for the students when they are going to unfamiliar places such as a funeral home.
8. Give your students opportunities to express compassion and sympathy for each other.

For many of your students, this may be their first encounter with death. They will look to you for guidance and modeling. Let students know all feelings are normal. Reassure and encourage the students to be supportive of one another and to escort any friend who is upset to a teacher or to the central location where counselors are available. Reassure them that the adults in the building are available to help.

SUPPORT STAFF CHECKLIST

☐ Attend all staff meetings.

☐ All phone calls from news/media should be forwarded to the principal.

☐ Request assistance for duties, as needed.

☐ Allow students to go to the counseling support center (accompany as needed).

Keep a list of the students throughout the day who you think are high risk and give those names to the classroom teacher.

SECRETARY'S CHECKLIST

- [ ] Attend all staff meetings.
- [ ] All phone calls from news/media should be forwarded to the principal.
- [ ] If a parent or other community member calls the school to get information, secretaries may share only brief/factual/public information that has already been shared with other staff and students.
- [ ] If a parent comes to the building, please direct them to the identified parent center.
- [ ] Update Parent/Student information in PowerSchool if needed.
- [ ] Notify principal of students not in attendance throughout the day.
- [ ] Allow students to go to the counseling support center (accompany as needed).
- [ ] Counseling secretary please clear Counselors' schedules for the day, and for the next day if needed.
- [ ] Keep a list of students you believe are high risk and give names to principal throughout the day.