

## **APPENDIX C TEACHER'S ROLE**

Teachers play a vital role in helping students deal with their feelings regarding the crisis. It is important for teachers to review the information contained in this Appendix.

STEP #1 – Attend all staff mandatory meeting and view the media packet.

STEP #2 – Principal will make an announcement to the students in their classrooms. Teachers will be in their classrooms during the announcement and will openly acknowledge and encourage students feelings of loss, anger, sadness, etc; explain the circumstances of the crisis, dispel rumors, and let students know that counseling is available. (See Appendix B, Staff Announcement).

NOTE: People have differing reactions to grief. One way for the teacher to encourage the students' expressions of grief is to acknowledge your own feelings immediately following the announcement of the crisis. If you are uncomfortable discussing grief, ask for assistance from the Crisis Team Leader.

STEP #3 – Teacher Response following the principal's announcement:

"I know it may be difficult for some of us to continue our work today, but our counselors have set aside a special time and place for discussion for those who are troubled by this loss.

Students who are feeling troubled by the death of \_\_\_\_\_ are encouraged to meet with the counseling staff at \_\_\_\_\_. (time and place)

Refer individual students who are obviously in need of immediate removal from class to the counselor's office (crying, obviously upset.) The teacher then continues to proceed with his/her usual routine for the day.

STEP #4 –Refer names and/or students themselves to the guidance office if they appear unusually upset or continue to appear upset as time passes. (See Appendix B).

STEP #5 – Attend the mandatory after school meeting to allow for expression of feelings and support, review the day's events, compile a list of "high risk" students and assess their individual needs. The Crisis Team members will be available to discuss concerns staff may have regarding any students.

STEP #6 – Sample staff response to visitors:

"We feel saddened by the sudden death of one of our (students) (staff members). We are concerned for our students and staff. Further questions are directed to the Superintendent's office. This handout (See Appendix A) will explain the parameters."

## **THE TEACHER'S ROLE**

### **Appendix C (cont.)**

Following the death of a student/staff member, those left behind grieve in a variety of ways. The following information is intended to be a guide for assisting the students through the next few days and weeks as they resolve their feelings related to a death.

Normal grief is generally characterized by progression from an initial state of shock and denial, to one of rage and anger, to one of disorganization and despair, and finally to state the acceptance and hope.

In this particular situation many students may arrive at school already "buzzing" with news. Rumors may have already started before school convened, but there will also be many students who arrive with no knowledge of the deceased student's/staff member's death. Students may express disbelief or denial.

In the event of a suicide, other students will quickly move to being angry. They may want to blame anyone and everyone with the death – other friends, parents, police, teachers, the medical personnel, and finally, themselves.

Guilt will be a feeling many students may experience and want to discuss. In the aftermath of an adolescent death, many students may digress and retrace their last encounter with the person who has died and often blow out of proportion small fights that may have occurred which adds to their guilt.

The most important thing a staff member can do is to allow some opportunity for students to acknowledge and discuss their feelings. By acknowledging the pain and grief they are experiencing, and reassuring them of the normalcy of their feelings, you help them through the grief process.

The most helpful intervention a teacher can use is to encourage and allow for the expression of feelings related to death. For many students, this may be their first encounter with death. They will look to the staff member for guidance and modeling. To share with your students your own feelings when you were told of the death – your shock, your sadness, your confusion – is valuable. To reminisce about your relationship with the deceased, if you knew him/her is important. Share with students what you will remember about him/her.

Discuss possible feelings of guilt or feelings of responsibility. Let students know these feelings are normal. Reassure them that they are not responsible for what happened.

Ask students to be supportive of one another and to escort any friend who is upset to a teacher or the guidance office. Reassure them that many adults in the building are

available to help them. Finally, encourage them to discuss their feelings with their parents.

An excellent way to help students through the grief process is to be an active listener. This technique encourages students to recognize the normalcy of their feelings. Another technique would be letting students write about their feelings and reaction to this event.