

**BRANDON VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT 49-2
CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM GUIDELINES**

GOAL

The following procedures and guidelines are intended to enable the Brandon Valley School District to better deal with the unforeseen tragedies that affect the ordinary functioning of the students, their families, and staff members in the event of crisis or tragic loss.

PURPOSE

To maintain the orderly operation of the school and to meet the needs of students, their families, and staff in the event of a crisis or tragic loss involving a student or staff member, as defined by the Crisis Management Team.

OBJECTIVES

1. To maintain a safe environment for students and staff.
2. To meet the special needs of individual students by working with parents, school staff, the community and/or specialists.
3. To communicate with staff, students, parents, and the general public through the most effective and practical methods.
4. To continue effective instruction and carry out established routines, rules and regulations.
5. To present a unified and predictable plan of action by the school in the event of a crisis.

CRISIS TEAM MEMBERS AND ROLES

- Superintendent: Coordinating the response of building principals and managing the school's response to the general public and media. (See Appendix A, Media Policy).
- Principals: Ensuring that crisis procedures are in operation in their building and initiating a "chain call" to other team members when necessary.
- Counselors: Working as a team to initiate strategies in the management of the crisis.
- Support Staff: School staff, specialists and appropriate community members designated by the Crisis Team during individual crises. Support staff may include teachers, school nurses, coaches, clergy, law enforcement, consultants, or other individuals deemed appropriate by the Crisis Team.

CRISIS INTERVENTION PROCEDURES

*******Crisis Team Members Must Wear Name Tag For Recognition
By Staff And Students*******

The following procedures may be used in full or in part as needed for each individual crisis event, and as determined by the Superintendent.

1. The Crisis Team will meet to determine the necessity of initiating any or all of the procedures. Local authorities or appropriate individuals may be called in to consult with the Team in this decision. Responsibility will be delegated to individual team members at this time. Appropriate team members will be chosen to make family contact. Staff should review procedures as described in appendixes A-F.
2. Individual building principals and crisis team members will meet with staff before school to relay facts and answer questions; to dispel rumors, initiate strategies to deal with student reactions; and identify "high risk" students who may be strongly affected.
3. Principals will meet with their staff to announce funeral arrangements, discuss staff attendance, school policy regarding student dismissal, share new information, and present the plans for the individual classroom meetings.
4. Immediate friends will be identified and provided counseling, if desired. Staff will be directed to heighten their sensitivity to those students.
5. Principal will make announcements to the students in their classrooms. Teachers will be in their classrooms during the announcements and will openly acknowledge student feelings, explain the circumstances of the event, dispel rumors, and let students know that counseling is available.
6. The principal, counselor and appropriate team members will meet with individual classes to help students better deal with their feelings, dispel rumors, offer reassurance, and encourage students to be supportive of their fellow classmates and friends.
7. Parents of students identified as "high risk" will be contacted and offered support from the school.
8. All building staff will assemble after school to allow for expression of feelings and support, review, and evaluate the events of the day, compile a list of "high risk" students and assess their individual needs.

9. The Crisis Management Team will meet to evaluate the events of the day. The team will discuss the appropriateness of meetings to support students and parents, review and plan classroom meetings for the next day, identify and assess the needs of "high risk" students and discuss school dismissal policy.

10. Continued crisis counseling will be offered to students, parents, and staff as needed.

11. The Principal and/or counselor will be responsible for returning the personal effects and appropriate records that are requested by the family.

12. The Crisis Management Team will meet to evaluate the effectiveness of the school and staff, and the effectiveness of the crisis procedures, following the conclusion of the event.

APPENDIX A
CRISIS SITUATION MEDIA PARAMETERS

The Superintendent is designated as the school district's media representative for crisis situations. This responsibility may be delegated as deemed appropriate by the Superintendent.

1. All media correspondence, and requests will be directed to the Superintendent's Office.
2. No students shall be interviewed within the school or the school premises.
3. No staff shall be interviewed except those who have been designated by the Superintendent.
4. No cameras will be allowed within a school building, except as permitted by the Superintendent.
5. All questions are to be directed to the Superintendent or designated representative, through the office of the Superintendent.
6. All official school district statements will be issued by the Superintendent or designated representative.
7. All members of the media are asked to show consideration for emotional welfare and educational interests of the students by complying with above listed procedures.

**APPENDIX B
PRINCIPAL'S ROLE
TEN STEP PLAN TO DEAL WITH CRISIS**

Following are TEN STEPS the building principal should follow in dealing with the sudden death of a student or staff member. These steps may be modified to reflect the circumstances of individual situations.

PRINCIPAL'S ROLE

STEP #1 – Prior to meeting with the entire staff, meet with the crisis management team for the purpose of identifying the agenda to be followed for the day. (Staff members may be notified if appropriate).

STEP #2 – Identify a team leader who will orchestrate the activities of the crisis support staff and students over the next several days. This person will be the “hub” of information and, in many instances, may be a counselor.

STEP #3 – Direct a staff member and police to immediately go to the deceased student's locker or to the deceased staff member's workspace, remove the contents, and bring the belongings to the principal. This shall be completed prior to the students arriving at school to prevent theft or unauthorized removal of the property.

STEP #4 – Direct a staff member to review the deceased student's cumulative folder to determine what other schools the deceased attended. The principal should call the other school(s) and inform them of the event that has occurred.

STEP #5 – Identify a support center area in the building where students and staff may come for support and counseling. This area should be close to the guidance office and/or the main office to facilitate communications between guidance and administrative staff.

STEP #6 – Decide with the crisis management team what will be reviewed at the mandatory all staff meeting.

STEP #7 – Prepare an announcement to be read over the P.A. System to the students or be presented by the classroom teacher.

NOTE: It is important to have a central spokesperson for all announcements to students. By the time students reach school following a sudden death; many will have heard differing versions about what happened. The presence of a strong, caring, and supportive authority figure (i.e., the principal) sharing information during this stressful time is important.

Two examples of an announcement are the following:

- a. I feel saddened by the sudden death of one of our (students) (staff members) _____. On behalf of the entire faculty and student body, I wish to express our school's deepest sympathy to relatives and friends who knew and loved _____.
- b. Students, may I have your attention please? Last night, (student/staff member name) from our (_____ class died). This morning, faculty met to develop a plan to help all of us cope with this sad event. Your teacher has been given some suggestions on how to proceed with classroom activities today. Additionally, there will be special counseling available for any student who feels the need for some extra support. Counselors will be available in (give location) all day. I would like all of us to reflect for a minute in memory of (student/staff member's first name). (PAUSE) Your teachers will now spend some time with you in discussion. Thank you for your attention.

STEP #8 – Direct a staff member to gather funeral arrangement information and to prepare details for student staff attendance at the visitation and funeral. When details are final, an announcement should be made to staff and students.

NOTE: It is important to have staff members present during the entire visitation period to assist the funeral director in comforting distraught children and teens. (See APPENDIX F).

Designate one secretary who will know how to reach the principal throughout the day, so that the principal can respond to any emergency/administrative situation that may develop.

STEP #9 – Call and/or visit the family as appropriate to express condolences. Visiting the family is encouraged, and the principal should take along a staff member who has been well acquainted with the student or staff member.

STEP #10 – Following the funeral, begin to bring closure by encouraging staff to resume regular activities as quickly as is appropriate.

On the day following the funeral, the principal should make the following closure statement to all students and staff (this is done the day following because many of the deceased's closest friends may not have returned to school the day of the funeral.):

"May I have your attention please? I wish to thank each of you, students and staff, for the support you have shown each other during the past few days. The example you have shown is a positive and healthy one and provides us the opportunity to work towards strengthening our relationships with each other. Guidance staff remains available if you should wish to talk with a counselor. (Any additional comments from the family that have been passed on to the principal might be shared at this point.) Thank you for your attention."

**MANDATORY ALL STAFF MEETING
(ROLE OF PRINCIPAL AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM)
Appendix B (cont.)**

Prior to the commencement of school, the principal should have an all-staff meeting. Generally, the principal will have approximately fifteen minutes to meet with staff. In addition to the “before school” meeting, it is important to hold an “after school” meeting to discuss the day’s events and to talk about any students the faculty has concerns about.

STEP #1 – Principal will announce an immediate all staff mandatory meeting.

STEP #2 – Principal identifies crisis management team leader. This person will assist the principal in directing staff activities.

STEP#3 – Principal and the crisis management team leader informs staff what is expected of them and reviews media procedures. (See APPENDIX A). Also, all known public facts regarding the event should be shared with the staff.

If death was by suicide, emphasize this tragedy as an “error in judgment”. Suicide is a permanent solution to temporary problems. Encourage students to talk about ways to cope with stress.

STEP #4 – Entertain questions from the staff and/or requests staff may have.

STEP #5 – Inform staff what announcement will be made to the students and when the announcement will be made.

STEP #6 – Principal announces a mandatory staff meeting after school to review the day’s events. This allows an opportunity to receive feedback from faculty, to answer questions, and to review the next day’s expectations.

STEP #7 – Principal informs all staff members that any media presence or requests for information should be immediately directed to the SUPERINTENDENT. (See APPENDIX A.)

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.

APPENDIX D GUIDANCE ROLE

The Guidance staff should take the responsibility of gathering information about student/staff reaction to the crisis and act as a “hub of information”.

STEP #1

- A. Identify school staff who were close to the deceased student or staff member and who may need extra support (e.g., a teacher who had a special helping relationship with student, had the student in class, or has a sibling in class).
- B. Start a listing of “high risk” students in need of extra support. These include: close friends of the deceased student, relatives, students in the same activities or clubs as the deceased student, neighbors of the deceased student, students with other stressors (e.g., troubled youth and those who are quiet and withdrawn), students identified by faculty, students identified by other students, “suicidal” students with unresolved grief or loss (e.g. family member has committed suicide, divorce situation, recent moves), and students with “guilt” feelings.

STEP #2 – Guidance staff should briefly meet with all identified “high risk” students and with any students who are referred by staff. Decide what, if any, intervention is appropriate. Options could include: (a) brief supportive counseling with guidance staff and (b) forming a grief group. The grief group should automatically be formed the first day, and it may run all day. The focus is on memories of the deceased student and grief work.

STEP #3 – Identify absent and non-enrolled students who may be “at risk” and inform their parents of your concern.

STEP #4 – For students who request to leave school because of their grief reaction:

- A. Release student to parent or adult designated by parent.
- B. Let the student know that you expect him/her to return to school the next day.
- C. Check to see if the students returns the next day and briefly check with them to see how he/she is doing. Offer your assistance to the parent and/or student.

STEP #5 – At the end of the first day, the crisis management team should meet to debrief and review the list of “high risk” students.

At the end of one week, review the status of “high risk” students on the list. Determine which students may need to be referred to community mental health services.

STEP #6 – Discuss the role the guidance staff will provide in the funeral and memorial service. Provide location for students to come following the funeral and/or memorial service.

After the funeral, assist the building staff in moving toward a “business as usual” atmosphere as soon as possible. (An announcement will be made by the principal regarding continued availability of guidance staff.)

STEP #7 – Carefully review with the principal and Crisis Management Team members the memorial requests for the deceased student.

APPENDIX E ROLE OF SECRETARIAL STAFF

All building personnel are affected during a crisis or grief event. Therefore, it is important to inform secretarial staff of their role in dealing with this crisis.

STEP #1 – A secretarial staff representative should attend the mandatory staff meeting to be informed of the crisis and the plans for the day.

STEP #2 – Secretarial staff should review procedures for handling requests or calls from parents, news media, and others.

RESPONSE:

“Hello, Brandon Valley School District. How may I help you? Questions concerning _____ are referred to the superintendent’s office at 582-2049. Brandon Valley School District thanks you for your concern.”

****Make sure you know to whom you are talking. If call is concerning Crisis refer caller to Superintendent. If you are not sure how to handle a call or caller, refer to the principal.*

STEP #3 – The guidance (or appropriate) secretary should free guidance staff schedules for the day. Some counselors may direct the secretary to clear their schedules for several days, so they can best respond to the situation.

STEP #4 – Secretarial support staff should refer any students they are concerned about to the crisis management team leader.

APPENDIX F HOW TO COMFORT THOSE WHO GRIEVE

1. *Be There:* attend the funeral, visit, and spend time with those grieving.
2. *Listen:* grieving people need to talk about this sudden vacuum in their lives.
3. *Send a note:* notes can share personal memories, short and simple.
4. *Give a gift:* a collection of poems, a book to the library in memory of the deceased.
5. *Extend an Invitation:* consider what the person likes to do. Eat out? Go to a play? Take a drive?

Bereaved people often decline invitations or cancel at the last minute.

Don't give up. Ask again.

GRIEF PROCESSING SUPPORT STRUCTURE Some Ideas/Suggestions

1. Establish a "Drop-in Center" all day the first day that news of a sudden death is disseminated.
2. More than one counselor/facilitator is may be needed in the group at one time; it's also a good idea to have others available for relief purposes.
3. Focus on:
 - a. Memories, positive experiences with person who died
 - b. Feelings about the loss
 - c. Stages of grieving (grief education); students may bring up spirituality
 - d. Funeral services – appropriate behaviors/concerns about experience
 - e. Future – what next?
 - f. Guilt work if needed/some need to focus on causation
 - g. Family and friend's response (kids often wonder, "What can I do? How can I help?")
 - h. Identifying others that the students are concerned about (provides them with an opportunity to help, gives them a purpose in crisis, allows them to be part of a larger supportive community response.)

4. Avoid focusing on:
 - a. Narcissistic focus on suicidal thoughts, feelings, experiences, if the death was by suicide.
 - b. Constant talk about the actual death (morbid focusing)
 - c. Blame
5. Bring group to some closure the second day – avoid adding new members (may need to meet others on a one-to-one basis); probably will focus more on funeral and services.
6. May need to reconvene after funeral for an hour to refocus on grief/loss – bring group to some closure again and offer various **resources for on-going support**.
7. Remember throughout the course of group process, facilitators need to identify students with chronic problems around the issue of suicide/self-destructive behavior (regardless of the cause of the death) and to assess whether or not these students need to be separated from the group. If the students in question are identified as “chronic manipulative attempters” they must be removed from the group.
8. The counseling staff may want to consider the possibility of a “neighborhood group” in the evening to reach youngsters at all age levels (checking in with parent(s) to see if there is a need.)
9. Finally, we suggest viewing group work as a possibility for the **whole** system, K-12; death impacts the whole educational community, not just one branch.

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