



Administrative Procedure 165 Traumatic Events Response Guide

Appendix B

Good Spirit School Division

Updated November 2021

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Introduction

The Good Spirit School Division strives to create a safe and supportive learning environment for students and staff. A safe school culture and proactive planning are instrumental in effectively assisting students, staff and administration through traumatic events when they occur.

A traumatic event is any situation that occurs either on-site or off-site, that may have a significant impact on students, their families, staff and/or school community. Examples of traumatic events which can have large scale effects on students and staff include: an accident involving students or staff members, a suicide or death of students or staff, and/or severe violence that results in critical injury or death of students or staff. Traumatic events may cause individuals to experience unusually strong emotional reactions and they have the potential to interfere with the ability to function when the incident occurs, or at a later stage.

Principals have responsibility for developing a School Action Plan for trauma response to assist with supporting students and the school community. Contingency plans should include defined obligations and responsibilities to protect students and staff. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network suggests that principals assess their school's level of preparedness by considering the following:

1. **Readiness:** the level at which the school is prepared to respond to a traumatic event if one were to occur today.
2. **Response:** the total ability of the school's resources and skills to take decisive and effective action when a traumatic event occurs.
3. **Recovery:** the process of restoring the social and emotional equilibrium of the school community following the traumatic event.

The purpose of this document is to provide a model and strategies to implement when responding to the occurrence of a critical incident that could cause trauma. Research demonstrates that when a trauma response team takes a proactive approach (one that is organized, planned and practiced) and responds to a crisis in a unified and collaborative manner, this can reduce the short and long term consequences of the crisis on students and staff members.

Traumatic Events Response

A traumatic event can seriously disrupt school routines, teaching and learning. There are usually high levels of emotional upset, the potential for disruptive behavior and/or a decline in student attendance unless efforts are made to reach out to students and staff through supports and services. Students exposed to violence or trauma have demonstrated decreased attendance, increased difficulties concentrating and learning, and an increase in reckless or aggressive behaviour.

Traumatic events are usually sudden and unexpected; and as such these incidents can create strong emotional responses in both students and staff which interrupts the normal flow of daily events. The involvement of the school is critical in supporting students through the challenges they may face following the event.

The goal of GSSD schools' traumatic events response plans are to provide needed supports to individuals, classrooms, and the entire school community so that all affected can cope and become strengthened in their ability to deal with difficult life circumstances.

Why Do We Need a Plan?

Strong emotion interferes with our ability to think and plan. A well-established plan to deal with a traumatic event can:

- Prevent a chaotic situation from escalating into a catastrophic one.
- Help those affected by the crisis return to pre-crisis functioning as quickly as possible.
- Ensure the impact of the incident does not lead to lasting trauma for students and staff.
- Reduce confusion.
- Ensure that decisions are reasonable and thorough.
- Speed up responses to students, their families, and staff members when timing is critical.
- Prevent further crisis reactions in the school community.
- Prevent harmful conflict among school personnel.
- Reassure the community that the school is competently managing the incident.

Who is Involved?

- **Division Level Response Team**
 - Director of Education
 - School Superintendent of Operations
 - School Counsellors (other GSSD school counsellors will be called in as needed)
- **School Level Response Team**
 - School Principal and Vice-Principal (if applicable)
 - School Counsellor
 - TERT (Traumatic Events Response Team)
 - Staff Members
- **Interagency and Community Partners**
 - Mental Health
 - RCMP/Victim Services
 - Tribal Council Personnel
 - Community Members (i.e. *pastors, first responders*)

Traumatic Events Readiness – TERT

Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) (Appendix 1 – Form 165-1 TERT List)

- Each school will select members for their TERT at the initial staff meeting for the school year.
- Membership must include the Principal, Vice-Principal and School Counsellor. It is also helpful to include acting principals and a few other teachers or staff members.

1. Responsibilities

- 1.1. Develop a school-level traumatic events response plan using the procedures and forms in this guide.
- 1.2. Activate the traumatic events response plan when required.
- 1.3. Every year:
 - The Principal will fill out and submit the TERT form to Good Spirit Education Complex.
 - The TERT will become familiar with your school's traumatic events response plan and ensure that each member understands their role.
 - The TERT will review the plan with the entire staff in the fall of each school year to ensure staff are familiar with this guide.
 - Develop a phone tree that includes all staff members. (**Appendix 2 – TERT Communication**).
 - Reference GSSD TERT Communication Flowchart

2. Division Traumatic Events Response Team

- When a traumatic event occurs, supports will be deployed to assist the school TERT with crisis response arrangements, and to arrange counselling and support for students and staff in distress.

Traumatic Events Readiness - Planning

1. Preparation – Expect the Unexpected

- Develop a comprehensive trauma response plan incorporating immediate and long-term responses to traumatic events.
- Establish relationships and contacts with local agencies and community-based organizations specializing in trauma:
 - First Responders
 - Victim Services
 - RCMP
 - Mental Health
 - Tribal Council
 - Hospitals
 - Churches
- Define the roles of your school staff and community partners for various types of traumatic events, and the phases of response and recovery.
- Ensure crisis response plans, practices, and materials to be used are inclusive and appropriately reflect the diversity of your school community.
- Ensure the school creates and maintains a ‘naturally open’, healthy, positive school climate. This facilitates the sharing of appropriate information among administration, staff, students, and community. Be mindful that repeating traumatizing information unnecessarily can cause emotional harm and sharing information with students and staff who are not directly impacted can elevate anxiety in individuals and at the system level.
- Annually review your school’s traumatic events response plans with community partners, and discuss lessons learned from past traumatic events.
- Work with your school counsellor to arrange staff development on selected topics:
 - Impact of traumatic events on children, adults, and the school climate
 - Early warning signs and risk behaviours associated with traumatic stress
 - Psychological first aid
 - Evidence-based interventions
 - Immediate and long-term recovery
 - Suicide prevention
 - Vicarious trauma and/or the effects of cumulative stress

2. Response – Are You Ready?

- Assess the level of student and staff exposure to the traumatic event and identify those most at risk for emotional distress or requiring support.
- Activate resources for immediate needs of the students, families, and staff.
- Identify the cues that serve as traumatic reminders of the event and monitor the range of trauma-related behaviours among students and staff.
- Implement a program of support and provide materials to students, staff, and parents to help support those affected.
- Develop messages during a crisis to disseminate trauma-related information and ways that parents can support the recovery of their children.
- Provide regular information updates and maintain open communication with teachers, other staff, and parents. Work with teachers to provide developmentally appropriate information to students.

- Monitor rumors and maintain timely, accurate information.
- Develop a system to identify and monitor psychologically vulnerable students and staff during the recovery period.
- Principal(s) and TERT need to model calmness to establish an environment that allows students and staff to return to school routines after an unsettling or traumatic event.

3. Recovery – Addressing Long-Term Needs

- Identify students and staff who may need long-term mental health support or intervention and activate school and community resources to provide these services.
- Monitor the effects of cumulative stress on caregivers such as office staff, teachers, educational assistants, and TERT members.
- Provide information on how to cope with cumulative stress and modify work roles/responsibilities if required, and/or add volunteer or support staff as needed.
- Make educational materials available to parents and staff on topics such as common symptoms and constructive ways to cope with grief and stress.
- Plan a response for critical periods or significant dates in advance, including a needs assessment to identify students at continued risk. Critical periods include two weeks post-incident, the month of December, the one-year anniversary of the tragedy, the victim's birthday, and special events in which the victim would have been involved such as graduation.

School Response to a Death – Steps at a Glance

School Emergency: Response to a Death

Death is a part of our life experience; it is inevitable that a school community will face this experience at some time. The death of a student or staff member can be a traumatic event, and an established response plan can be a support to affected students and staff.

When a death occurs, school personnel have the opportunity to demonstrate appropriate bereavement responses. The focus of a response to death should be:

- a demonstration of empathy
- appropriate bereavement responses
- the ability to cope with the death
- a demonstration that life will and must go on.

Social Media Considerations

While social media often plays an informal role in information sharing about injury and death, this does not negate our responsibility to maintain integrity in our communication with parents when a traumatic event has occurred. Information from social media should be confirmed by following the appropriate traumatic response processes before it is shared with staff or students. Students should be proactively educated regarding social media etiquette and appropriate sharing of information when a traumatic event or death occurs:

- Being respectful of the injured/deceased, their family, and their culture
- Being mindful that posting video or details of a traumatic event can be traumatizing to others and disrespectful to the family
- Beware that rumors travel fast through social media and can be inaccurate. When teachers become aware of these rumors, they should bring it forward to the Principal so they can address the validity of the rumor, inform staff, and guide them as to how to respond.

Step #1 – Gather facts and Support the Family

- Print **Appendices 3.1 to 3.5 (Response Checklists)** to follow and make notes as the TERT completes action item associated with these steps.
- The Principal will confirm the death and cause of death with an appropriate source of reliable information (RCMP/family). (You may use **Appendix 4 - Traumatic Event Summary of Facts** to record information).
- Utilize **Appendix 5 – Outside Agency Resources/Contacts** for relevant contact information.
- A preliminary announcement of death, once confirmed, can be made with the statement that further information will be shared as it is gathered and approved by family.
- Reference the **TERT Communication Response Flowchart** in **Appendix 2**.

Caution: Do not share information that comes from rumor. Do not speculate; simply reply “the information is not available at this time”.

- The Principal or Designate, in consultation with the family, will determine what specific information will be shared with the general population.
- The Principal extends sympathy to the family from the school community and asks parents to advise him/her when siblings (if applicable) will return to school (when this has been determined).
- Respect for the family’s wishes is at the core of the decision-making process. At this time, remember to consider cultural and religious beliefs of the family.

Note: If a staff member other than a Principal becomes aware of a traumatic event, the Principal should be advised immediately.

Step #2 – Contact Good Spirit Education Complex

- The Principal will phone their School Superintendent and/or the Director or designate, who will inform other senior administration, and the Board of Education.
- The Director or Designate will inform the Student Service Coordinators who will inform the GSSD School Counselor PLC.
- The Director or designate will assign additional School Counsellors to respond to the situation. Senior administration, in consultation with the Principal, will determine if additional teacher substitutes are needed to support teachers who may be impacted.
- The Director or designate will be the media contact person and will handle all media requests for information and arrange any press release information if necessary. The family’s decisions regarding privacy of information must be respected and possible legal implications related to privacy issues must be considered.

Sample Media Statement from the Director:

The staff and students are deeply saddened by the death of _____. He/she will be missed by the school community. Our sympathy and thoughts are with _____’s family at this time.

- If the Coroner or RCMP contacts school, refer to **Appendix 6 – RCMP and Coroner Investigations**

Step #3 – Activate the School’s Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT)

- The Principal convenes the school’s TERT to implement an appropriate plan of action. A sample meeting agenda for use at a response team meeting can be found in **Appendix 7 - Sample TERT Meeting Agenda**. At this initial meeting, the team should:
 - Prepare a statement for teachers to read to their class outlining only factual information and the supports available for students. Include the process for students to access supports and appropriate social media considerations. **(Appendices 8-10)**
 - Clarify each member’s tasks.
 - Ensure confidentiality is maintained until information is shared with the whole staff and family privacy issues are clarified.
- Given how quickly information travels through social media, the Principal and TERT should make personal phone contact with all staff members as soon as possible. If it is not possible to contact all staff personally, activate the phone tree **(Appendix 2)**. As a last resort, utilize SchoolMessenger® or your school communication platform to contact staff members. A scripted message can be used to call staff to a meeting before the next school day.
- Avoid leaving a voice mail message or a message with a child.

- Reassign calling responsibilities for people who may be most affected by the incident.
- Email or messaging apps may be used after initial phoning to ensure that communication lines stay in place.
- Designate a member of the TERT to communicate information about the incident to any incoming personnel who are not regular staff in the building (psychologist, SLP, OT, substitute teachers, bus drivers, facilities/maintenance personnel, etc.) This communication may be delegated to the Administrative Assistant.

Step #4 – Communication with Staff

If the traumatic event occurs outside of school hours:

- When possible, notify school staff of the event before they arrive at school. Staff should be given the opportunity to learn about the traumatic event in the security of their own home and should be given time to experience their own emotions before providing leadership within the classroom and school. If this is not possible, a staff meeting should occur before classes begin for the day to inform staff.
- Inform all staff of the event at an emergency staff meeting prior to the start of school if possible (**Appendix 12 – Sample School Staff Meeting Agenda** and **Appendix 3 - Section 3.3: Initial Staff Meeting Checklist**).
- Assure staff that the Trauma Response team’s plans are in place.
- Introduce support personnel from Good Spirit Education Complex or the community who are in attendance at the meeting and may be present in the school to provide support to staff or students.
- Advise staff to deal with students to a level of their comfort and refer to **Appendices 13-15** regarding **Stages of Grief** and **Reactions to Trauma**.
- Reassure staff that they will be supported in their efforts to comfort students and that additional help is available to any students or staff who need it.
- Communicate the location of the support room and procedures to access it for students and staff.
- When possible, inform parents of students who will be highly impacted by the event. It is preferable for students to hear information about a traumatic occurrence or loss in the security of their own home from the people they are closest to.
- Advise staff that the Director of Education or designate will handle all media inquiries. Remind staff to direct students to refrain from interviews with the media, and of social media etiquette regarding the traumatic event.
- Develop a plan for the day with the staff:
 - Ensure deceased student is not marked absent so that the family does not receive any automated messages regarding attendance.
 - Maintain a regular school schedule when/where appropriate.
 - Cancel special activities if necessary.
 - Carefully state the information that should be given to students during class discussion.
 - Every attempt should be made to contain rumors surrounding the death. Distribute the statement to be shared by teachers within classrooms.
 - Inform the staff of available counselling services for students and staff and share self-care ideas (**Appendices: 16 – Promoting Staff Self-Care, 5 – Outside Agency Contacts/Resources, and 15 – Reactions to Trauma and Positive Coping Skills**)
 - If substitutes are available, inform teachers how they can access them if they are experiencing difficulty while teaching or when requiring additional support in the

classroom.

- Identify students who are closest friends or relatives of the deceased or injured.
- Identify students at risk and make specific plans for each student.
- Ensure that staff members who are absent get the information.
- Plan to inform students who are absent. Phone parents of students who might be at risk immediately.
- Assign staff members who do not have immediate classroom responsibility to monitor the school entrance, hallways, and washrooms to provide extra recess supervision or classroom support.

If the traumatic event occurs during school hours:

- Follow procedures above that apply.
- When a tragic event occurs during school hours, a brief staff meeting should be called as soon as possible.
- Emphasize that students should be monitored in class and no student is to leave the school.
- If a student requests to leave school, the school should contact parents to arrange for the student to leave.
- A statement should be prepared to be read to the students by their teachers outlining the following:
 - Details regarding the event.
 - The location of the Support Room.
 - For students unable to continue with the regular program/classroom, the procedure for accessing the Support Room (students suffering great distress should be accompanied to the support room or the office by an adult).
 - In the event of a death, funeral arrangements if known.
- When it is anticipated that there will be a strong reaction within a classroom to news of the traumatic event, additional staff should join the classroom teacher when the statement is read.
- Consideration should be given to staff who may exhibit particular distress. Arrange support, as necessary.

If the traumatic event relates to a suicide or suicide attempt, refer to page 16 for additional information on how to proceed.

Step #5 – Set up the Support Room

- Plans for the designation of a Support Room for traumatic events response should be in place as part of protocol development. When an event occurs, there is not sufficient time to carefully discuss how this service will be organized and delivered. Specific rooms or areas of the school can be designated for dealing with a potentially large number of people who are grieving or experiencing high levels of stress following a traumatic event. **(Appendix 17 – Support Room Recommendations)**.
- Large groups of students should not be allowed to congregate alone. They should be encouraged to go to the support room or, if necessary, should be interacting with an adult who can guide discussion and activity.
- Students considered “at risk” for the impact of trauma should be carefully monitored when they leave the classroom. A classroom teacher or member of the TERT should contact the parents of students considered “at risk” to ensure they are aware of the incident.

- Documentation needs to be kept of students who visit the support room and may require further support and monitoring. This list should be shared with the Principal and School Counsellor and used for follow-up.

Step #6 – Talk with Students

- The statement of facts regarding the traumatic event should be given in small groups such as classrooms, rather than in large group format (e.g. an assembly). Every attempt should be made to contain rumors surrounding the traumatic event.
- A teacher should be in each classroom as the students come in for the day or the first class period. When it is anticipated there will be a strong reaction within a classroom, a staff member closest to those impacted (classroom teacher) and School Counsellor should join the classroom teacher when the announcement is made.
- Using the prepared statement from the Principal, give information on the traumatic event in a calm and factual manner.
- Give the students the opportunity to react; discuss and ask questions (**Appendices 18 – Suggested Classroom Discussion Format and 19 – Guidelines for Teachers Dealing with Death**).
 - Allow time for the students to express their feelings keeping in mind that reaction times may vary.
 - Give students permission to express their feelings; listen and be empathetic.
 - Consider using activities to help students process their grief such as art, creative journal writing, or poetry (**Appendix 15 – Positive Coping Skills**)
 - Give students information regarding in-school counselling services and the Support Room.
 - In consultation with School Counsellor, determine which classes/students should complete (**Appendix 26 – Student Resource Survey**)
 - Once the talk seems to be over, begin regular class routine with the flexibility to respond to more questions throughout the day.
- Teachers should be aware that it is okay to show some emotion while informing and discussing with students, but that they should remove themselves if they are not in control of their emotions.

Step #7 – Informing Parents by Letter and/or School Communication Platform

- The Principal will consider whether to send a letter/email to inform parents of the traumatic event and include information on how to support their child (in consultation with the Superintendent and TERT). (**Appendices 8 – Sample Letter Regarding a Tragic Event, 9 – Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians Regarding Death of a Student, 10 – Sample Letter for Death of A Staff Member, and 11 – Parent Guidelines for Crisis Response**)
- Information shared in the letter should be factual and carefully worded to ensure family privacy is respected. Remember that personal information should only be disclosed to the extent it is permitted under LAFOIP.
- Sensitivity is essential. The letter should express sympathy from the students and staff of the school.

Step #8 – Confirm Funeral Information

- Inform staff and students of funeral arrangements.
- Funeral attendance decision should be governed by the wishes of the family and school administration. Student and staff attendance at the funeral can provide support for the family if that is the family's choice. Students should be informed of the family's wishes

regarding attendance and/or participation at the funeral service.

- When appropriate, students and staff may have the opportunity to attend the funeral. The Principal should arrange permission from senior administration to dismiss students and staff to attend the funeral and ensure there is sufficient regular staff remaining in the building to adequately address the needs of students remaining in the school.
- Ensure that students who plan to attend the funeral are prepared by helping them anticipate what happens at funerals. It may be helpful for the Principal or Designate to connect with the family to understand their cultural or religious practices so they can be respected. Explain appropriate etiquette at the funeral or wake, and other topics as necessary (i.e. cremation, open caskets, burial, and specific cultural practices).

Step #9 – Traumatic Event Group Debrief

- Research indicates that a structured debriefing can mitigate ongoing emotional and psychological challenges that may follow a traumatic event. Traumatic Event Group Debriefing may be utilized to lessen the likelihood of participants experiencing symptoms of trauma and stress after an incident. This debriefing should occur during a critical time period (within 72 hours).
- Debriefing should be led by GSSD School Counsellors or Mental Health to allow for further education regarding traumatic events and their impact, to support those affected by the event to gain a sense of normalization, and for teams to reflect on those impacted and check in as to how they are doing. Personnel facilitating the debriefing should be those who have not been impacted by the traumatic event.

Step #10 – Memorialization

- Schools should strive to treat all student deaths in the same way regardless of cause of death (**if applicable, see Suicide Response section - page 15**). The school should be prepared to plan memorial events that are consistent regardless of cause of death. The school should bear in mind that once it plants a tree, puts up a plaque, installs a park bench to honour a student it should be prepared to do so for others, which can become difficult to sustain over time.
- Cultural/religious beliefs should be considered when planning any remembrance activities after a traumatic event which involved death of a student or staff member. If the family wishes to establish a scholarship fund they may do so, but this would not be initiated or funded by the school.
- In the immediate aftermath of a death, it is not unusual for students to create a spontaneous memorial by leaving flowers, cards, poems, pictures, stuffed animals or other items by a locker or desk, or at the site where the student died. This could be left until the funeral or memorial services or a natural break in the school week. This could be left until the funeral or memorial services or a natural break in the school week. This could vary for each situation. Consult TERT members for further direction.
- When a spontaneous memorial is created on school grounds, staff need to monitor it for messages that are inappropriate or for indications other students may be at risk.
- Staff should provide leadership to students wishing to establish an appropriate remembrance as judgment of peers may be impaired following the death of a classmate. (**refer to Appendix 21 – Suggested Activities for after a loss**).
- The school may wish to have a memory book or poster board available for students to gather and write messages. It is advisable to set this up in an area that can be avoided by those who do not wish to participate (eg. not at the front entrance). After a few days or up to the funeral date, the poster or memory book can be removed and given to the family (**refer to Appendix 21 – Suggested School Activities for after a Loss**).

- Students or staff may wish to express their grief and sympathy by contributing something in the name(s) of the deceased such as a shrub or tree, a bench, a school plaque, books for the library, or other appropriate means. If cost is an issue to fund a memory item such as a tree or shrub, the Principal should discuss with their School Superintendent for division coverage. (**refer to Appendix 21 – Suggested School Activities for after a Loss**).
- Schools should proactively meet with the student's close friends to give an opportunity for the students to feel heard and for the school to sensitively explain the rationale for permitting certain kinds of activities and not others.
- Any remembrance activities (such as the planting of a tree) should allow for optional attendance and be held outside of regular school hours. This prevents students who do not wish to attend from incurring unnecessary trauma.
- Any memorial activities and permanent memorials need to be discussed with the School Superintendent to be approved by the division and/or board.
- **School Flag – Do not lower the school flag unless directed to do so by the Director of Education.** The Canadian flag is only lowered when directed by provincial or national government officials.

Yearbook – In consultation with the family, the school may devote a yearbook memory page to recognize the deceased student or staff member. The Yearbook Committee should consult with the Principal, School Counsellor and School Superintendent before finalizing the memorial page.

Graduation – If planning a tribute or memorial for deceased students who would have graduated with the class, students who have died by suicide should likewise be included. Any planning of tributes or memorials should be done in consultation with the family. Decisions about what to include in the tribute should be made in consultation with the family, Principal, School Counsellor, and School Superintendent.

Step #11 – Follow Up

- Grief reactions can continue over a long period of time. Provisions should be made for ongoing support of both staff and students:
 - Identify students who require ongoing support and provide opportunities for individual or group emotional debriefing within a week of the incident.
 - The School Counsellor or Designate will collaborate with the TERT to identify staff who require a follow-up/check-in and offer ongoing support. See **Appendix 20**.
- Principals should confirm that student belongings can be released (pending RCMP or Coroner investigations – see **Appendix 6**) and then consult with family as to how they would like to gather the belongings. The school can deliver to the family or they may come to gather items outside of school hours. Ensure students are not present when belongings are removed from desk or locker.
 - It is advised that the student's desk and personal belongings remain until after the funeral or memorial service, or until a natural break in the school week calendar (a few days to one week is recommended).
- An empty locker or desk is a distressing symbol of death to peers and friends, so it is appropriate to prepare students when this is going to happen.
 - Document in CLEVR, Maplewood/SDS, and the student's cumulative file the date of their death.
 - Remove the deceased's name from class/attendance lists to prevent a substitute teacher from calling out the name during attendance checks.
 - The Principal may be the ongoing contact person(s) with the family or decide to select one or more staff members to take on this role. A home visit is most often appropriate

and appreciated by families.

- If cases of a student death is applicable, discuss with the deceased's parents the transition plans for the return of siblings to school if this has not yet occurred.
If death in student's family: discuss with student's parent/guardian, the transition plans for returning to school to ensure the return is as comfortable as possible (**Appendix 23 – When a Student Returns to School after a Family Death**)

Step #12 – Traumatic Event Response Team Review of Plan and Technical Debrief

- After using the school's Traumatic Event Response plan, the Principal and TERT should meet with staff to review the events and the response while they are still recent (within two weeks) to discuss and record feedback on **Appendix 22**.
 - What worked well to provide support to students and staff?
 - What did not work as planned?
 - What may have been more effective?

Suicide

Suicide is a devastating occurrence. Responses to suicide must be thoughtfully planned in order to support schools in a trauma informed manner. Suicide contagion is the process by which one suicide may contribute to another. While contagion is relatively rare, adolescents appear to be more susceptible to imitative suicide than adults because they may identify more readily with the behavior and qualities of their peers. In some cases, suicide can even follow the death of a student from other causes, such as an accident. To prevent contagion, TERT should take steps beyond basic crisis response, including increasing efforts to identify other students who may be at heightened risk of suicide, collaborating with community partners in a coordinated suicide prevention effort and possibly bringing in outside experts.

There are many simplistic links made in the media and social networks regarding bullying and suicide, however, research has demonstrated that bullying is amongst the least common factors contributing to teen suicide. A paper published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry (Sinyor, Schaffer & Cheung, 2014) noted that conveying that bullying alone causes suicide at best minimizes, and at worst ignores, the other factors that may contribute to death by suicide. School TERT should be aware of these simplistic links and work to ensure staff are aware of the complexities of suicide.

Depression is the leading cause of suicide in teenagers and is among the most treatable mood disorders. More than 75% of people with depression respond positively to treatment. The best way to prevent suicide is through early detections, diagnosis and vigorous treatment of depression and other mental health disorders, including addictions.

Suicide Warning Signs

These signs may mean someone is at risk for suicide. The risk is greater if a behavior is new or has recently increased in frequency or intensity, and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- Talk about wanting to die or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself, such as searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Giving away valued possessions
- Getting their things in order, taking care of unfinished business, making amends for past mistakes, patching up old quarrels
- Sudden happiness or contentedness despite a history of depressive feelings
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Self-harming behaviours
- Acting anxious or agitated, or behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Comments about wanting to join someone who is deceased
- Saying things like: "I can't take it anymore, the world would be better off without me, no one

cares about me, I don't need these things anymore, no one can help me, I can't do anything right, I wish I wasn't here anymore, sometimes I just want it to be over with, I won't be a problem for you much longer."

Self-Harm

At times self-harm can be a cry for help because an individual may be contemplating suicide, therefore, risk for suicide must be assessed. Self-harm may be a cry for help that does not include contemplating suicide, however, it is still a cry for help that requires an intervention plan. This should involve a case plan with the student's natural supports and outside agencies.

A cry for help is legitimate. It is not appropriate to make judgements about the causal factors related to self-harm. Statements such as "he/she is just trying to get attention" is unprofessional and may be harmful as it minimizes the need to intervene and does not support the need for a responsive intervention.

Suicide Risk Assessment

A fundamental responsibility of school staff is the safety of students. Staff have the responsibility to act on any information that indicates a student may be in danger. In the event that a staff member has reason to believe that a student may be suicidal, the following actions are to be taken:

- Take all comments about suicidal ideation seriously, especially if details of a suicide plan are shared. Staff should immediately report any concerns to the Administrator and School Counsellor to seek professional help for the student.
- Do not be afraid to ask the student whether he or she is considering suicide or has a plan or method in mind. This may be the most reliable way to find out if a person is really contemplating suicide.
- If the student indicates they have a plan or shares direct threats such as 'I'm going to kill myself' or 'I'm going to commit suicide', he/she requires immediate attention and **should not be left alone**.
- Listen, and be supportive and affirmative. Assure the student that everything possible will be done to help them.
- GSSD School Counsellors are trained to carry out ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) and will apply the principles of this training to intervene.
- Treat all information regarding a risk of suicide confidential and information is only to be shared on a need-to-know basis.
- Teachers and Principals should ensure all suicidal ideation behaviors and other warning signs are reported to the School Counsellor who will document this information within school counsellor tracking along with the counsellor/school response.

If a student is **suspected to be at high risk of suicide**, the following steps should be taken:

- Do not leave the student alone. Remain with them in a safe and visible place until help can be obtained, and remove any weapons/pills/etc.
- Contact the Principal and School Counsellor immediately, who will contact parents to arrange for immediate mental health services. If parents cannot be reached, the Principal or Counsellor will contact mental health and/or police while the student is in the school's care.
- If parents are unavailable to drive the student to the hospital, the Principal and School Counsellor can do so, or they can request assistance from the police.
- If it is determined that contacting parents may increase the student's risk or if parents are identified by the student as a contributing factor to the risk, the student should be

transported to the hospital and then the parent should be contacted. If it is a child protection issue, then social services must be contacted rather than the parents.

- The Principal or Counsellor will follow up with parents/guardians (and where applicable Mental Health) the following day to determine what actions have been taken and to identify the role of the school upon the student's return. They will also ensure that a safety plan has been developed with the student.
- All actions taken and requests for support from outside agencies should be documented.

Suicide Attempt at School

- Follow all procedures for an accident at school in dealing with the immediate safety and well-being of the student (**see AP165 Appendix: Severe Injury at School**). This may include calling 911 and/or transporting the student to the hospital.
- Ensure the following are contacted: parents/guardians and Mental Health (306-786-0558) and/or the community hospital if that is where the student is being transported.
- Inform the School Superintendent and Director or designate
- Convene the TERT to assess the needs of students and staff to ensure that the necessary supports are available.
- In the event of a death, follow **AP 165 Appendix: Death at School**.

Suicide Attempt Outside of School

- Schools can provide post-crisis support to students through the transition back to school, monitoring of the student and support in school-related matters.
- The Principal and School Counsellor will create a transition support plan in collaboration with involved agencies and ensure a safety plan has been created with the student.
- The Principal and School Counsellor will meet with the student and parents/guardians to communicate that school counsellor services are available and to identify with the student other personnel they would feel comfortable connecting with at the school. The student will be offered a daily check-in upon return with a staff member they identify and/or feel connected to.
- The Principal and School Counsellor will meet with the student's teachers to discuss ways to support the student on their return to school. Generally, returning to the typical schedule and academic expectations is best for the student.
- The Principal and School Counsellor will ensure the student's right to confidentiality is respected; however, relevant information will be shared to specific personnel where it is determined necessary to ensure student safety (safety should supersede privacy).
- Staff will monitor the student to identify any changes in behavior which might indicate increased risk. This will be communicated by the Principal or School Counsellor to the parents/guardians and involved mental health personnel.
- The School Counsellor and Principal will identify and provide support in cases where the school may be contributing negatively to readjustment/rehabilitation.
- Regular monitoring of the student should be undertaken with discretion to ensure this is not an added source of stress for the student.

School Response to Death by Suicide

In addition to the Traumatic Events Response recommendations and steps included in this guide, schools should implement the following:

- The Principal should connect with the family and/or police regarding cause of death and what can be communicated. If there is an ongoing investigation or the family does not want

the cause disclosed, it can be challenging for schools to determine how to proceed.

- **If cause of death has not been confirmed:**
 - Schools should state that the cause of death is still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming once confirmed.
 - Acknowledge that there are rumors (which may be inaccurate) and remind students that rumors can be deeply hurtful and unfair to the deceased person, their family, and their friends.
 - Students should be reminded to be mindful of how social media posts may impact friends and family of the deceased.
- **If the death has been declared a suicide, but the family does not want it disclosed:**
 - The Principal or Counsellor should make contact with the family to offer condolences, inquire as to what the school can do to assist, and explain that the students are talking about the death amongst themselves and that having adults in the school community talk to students about suicide and its causes can help keep students safe and prevent suicide contagion.
- **If the family still refuses to permit disclosure:**
- The school should state “The family has requested that information regarding the cause of death not be shared at this time”
 - The school should still use the opportunity to talk with students about the phenomenon of suicide. “We know there has been a lot of talk about whether this was a suicide death. Since the subject of suicide has been raised, we want to take this opportunity to give you accurate information about suicide in general, ways to prevent it, and how to get help if you or someone you know is feeling depressed or may be suicidal.”
- **Strive to treat all student deaths in the same way.** Having one approach for a student that dies by cancer (for example) and another for a student who dies by suicide reinforces the unfortunate stigma that still surrounds suicide and may be deeply and unfairly painful to the deceased student’s family and close friends.
- Notify students of the death in small groups such as classrooms; not through a school-wide assembly or announcement.
 - Be aware that adolescents are vulnerable to the risk of **suicide contagion**.
 - It is important not to inadvertently simplify, glamorize, romanticize, or condemn the deceased student or their actions.
 - Focus on the tragedy, the loss of life, the sadness that the deceased could see no other options, and the fact that there are many other options available for people in distress.
 - Talk about other ways of coping.
 - Share **Appendix 24 - Talking about Suicide** and **Appendix 25 - Facts about Suicide and Mental Disorders in Adolescents** with staff to aid teachers in addressing questions that may rise.
 - Discuss the feelings of guilt survivors often feel after a suicide. Talk about hindsight, emphasizing that no one is to blame for the death.
 - TERT will decide on use of **Appendix 26 – Student Resource Survey** with classes/students impacted by the death.
- Families often feel isolated or ostracized after a suicide. A visit from the Principal, Counsellor and/or other staff members will reassure the family of the school’s support. It is also a nice gesture to bring them something such as cards/letters from students and staff, food, flowers, a donation made in memory of the student, etc.

- The Principal needs confirmation from the RCMP regarding the release of the deceased student's belongings so as not to interfere with a possible investigation. The locker may need to be secured by padlock, so no one enters it.
- **Media** – All media inquiries should be directed to the Director of Education who can express a message on behalf of the division:
 - “We are heartbroken over the death of one of our students. Our hearts, thoughts, and prayers go out to _____’s family and friends, and the entire community. We will be offering grief counselling for students and staff. No reporters will be allowed in the school or on school grounds.”
- If contacted by media, the Director should encourage the media to adhere to the parameters set forth by the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention at: <http://suicideprevention.ca>
- **Social Media** – Remind students that if they see anything on social media that causes them to feel upset or concerned, please speak to an adult.
 - Schools can strategically use social media to promote safe messages that emphasize suicide prevention and minimize the risk of contagion, share grief support and mental health care, offer support to students who may be struggling to cope and identify and respond to students who may be at risk.
 - Students should be reassured that schools staff are only interested in supporting a healthy response to their peer’s death, not in thwarting communication.
 - Social media should be monitored for: rumors, information about upcoming or impromptu gatherings, derogatory messages about the deceased, messages that bully or victimize current students, and comments indicating students who may be at risk. Students should be encouraged to advise an adult in the case of discovering any social media posts that contain these types of messages.
- Identify other students at possible risk for suicide. Of special concern are students who:
 - Have underlying mental health disorders (example: depression, anxiety)
 - Have a history of suicide attempts or personal connections to suicide
 - Are dealing with stressful life events such as death or divorce in the family
 - Witnessed the death or found the deceased student
 - Communicated with the deceased in some fashion in the last hours before the suicide
 - Are expressing guilt about ‘messages’ they were given by the deceased that they did not act on or share with an adult
 - Are relatives, close friends, teammates, and/or classmates of the deceased
 - Received a phone call or social media communication from the deceased foretelling the suicide
 - Had disagreements with, fought with, or bullied the deceased
- **Memorialization** – Some schools resist any kind of memorialization for fear of glamorizing suicide and risking suicide contagion. Prohibiting all memorialization is problematic as it is deeply stigmatizing to the student’s family and friends and can generate intense negative reactions which can exacerbate an already difficult situation and undermine the school’s efforts to protect the student body’s emotional regulation. Refer to **Step #10** and **Appendix 21** for further information on memorialization.
- Discourage requests to create and distribute T-shirts or buttons bearing images of the deceased. Explain that while the items may be comforting to some students, they may be quite upsetting to others. If students come to school wearing such items without first seeking permission, it is recommended they be allowed to wear the items for that day only

and it should be explained to them that repeatedly bringing images of the deceased student into school can be disruptive and can glamorize suicide.

- Schools can play an important role in channeling the energy and passion of students (and greater community) in a positive direction, balancing the community's need to grieve with the impact that the proposed activity will likely have on students, particularly those closest to the student who died. Consider how to appropriately memorialize the student who died without risking suicide contagion or further trauma among surviving students. Appropriate examples include sponsoring a mental health awareness day, supporting classmates and friends to organize a suicide awareness event, purchasing books/resources on mental health and well-being for the school, or a walk in memory to raise funds for mental health related initiatives/services.
- For guidelines regarding yearbook or graduation, refer to **Step #10**.

Recommended Additional Resources for School Counsellors

School Wide Resources

Opalewski, D. & Robertson, J. (2007). *Confronting death in the school family*. National Centre for Youth Issues: Chattanooga, TN.

Grollman, E. A. (2011). *Talking about death*. Beacon Press.

Wolfelt, A. (2011). *A child's view of grief: A guide for parents, teachers, and counsellors*. Fort Collins, CO: Center for Loss and Life Transition.

Wolfelt, A. (2011). *Healing a child's grieving heart: 100 practical ideas for families, friends, and caregivers*. Fort Collins, CO: Center for Loss and Life Transition.

Elementary

Brown, L. K. & Brown, M. (2009). *When dinosaurs die: A guide to understanding death*. New York, NY: Little Brown.

Bunting, E., & Himler, R. (2004). *Rudi's pond*. New York: Clarion Books.

Penn, A. (2009). *Chester Raccoon and the acorn full of memories*. Terre Haute, IN: Tanglewood Publishing.

Thomas, P. (2001). *I miss you: A first look at death*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Services.

Middle Years

Hanson, W. (1997). *The next place*. Golden Valley, MN: Waldman House press.

MacGregor, C. (1999). *Why do people die?* Kensington: Citadel.

High School

Rosen, M. (2004). *Michael Rosen's sad book*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Workbooks

Gliko-Braden, M. (1992). *Grief comes to class*. Centering Corp.

Samuel-Traisman, E. (1992). *Fire in my heart, ice in my veins*. Centering Corp.

Wolfelt, A. (2011). *How I feel: A coloring book for grieving children*. Fort Collins, CO: Center for Loss and Life Transition.

Samuel-Traisman, E. (1994). *Remember... A child remembers*. Centering Corp.

Workbooks for Teens

Shavatt, D. & Shavatt, E. (2001). *My grieving journey book*. Mah Wah: Paulist Press.

Recommended Additional Resources

- Kusugak, M., & Krykorka, V. (1993). *Northern lights: The soccer trails*. Toronto, Ontario: Annick Press.
- Bahr, M., & Jerome, K. A. (2000). *If Nathan were here*. Cambridge: Eerdmans.
- Barron, T. A., & Soentpiet, C. K. (2001). *Where is Grandpa?* New York: Puffin Books.
- Bruchac, J., & Morin, P. (1997). *Fox song*. New York: Putnam & Grosset.
- Bunting, E., & Himler, R. (2004). *Rudi's pond*. New York: Clarion Books.
- DePaola, T. (2001). *Nana upstairs & Nana downstairs*. New York: Scholastic.
- Gootman, M. E. (2010). *When a friend dies: A book for teens about grieving & healing*. Free Spirit Publishing.
- Greenlee, S., & Drath, B. (1992). *When someone dies*. Atlanta: Peachtree.
- Hipp, E., & Hanson, L. K. (1995). *Help for the hard times: Getting through loss*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- Kinsey-Warnock, N., & Bowman, L. W. (1999). *The Canada geese quilt*. New York: Puffin Books.
- Mellonie, B & Ingpen, R. (2009). *Lifetimes: the beautiful way to explain death to children*. Bantam.
- Schwiebert, P., & DeKlyen, C. (1999). *Tear soup: A recipe for healing after loss*. Portland, OR: Grief Watch.
- Simon, N. (1986). *The saddest time*. Albert Whitman & Company.
- Stickney, D., & Henderson, R. (2004). *Water bugs & dragonflies: explaining death to young children*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press.
- Wilhelm, H. (1988). *I'll always love you*. New York: Dragonfly Books.

Appendix 1: Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) List

School: _____

School Year: _____

Division Trauma Response Team

Role	Name	Work Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone
School Superintendent of Operations				
Director or Deputy Director				

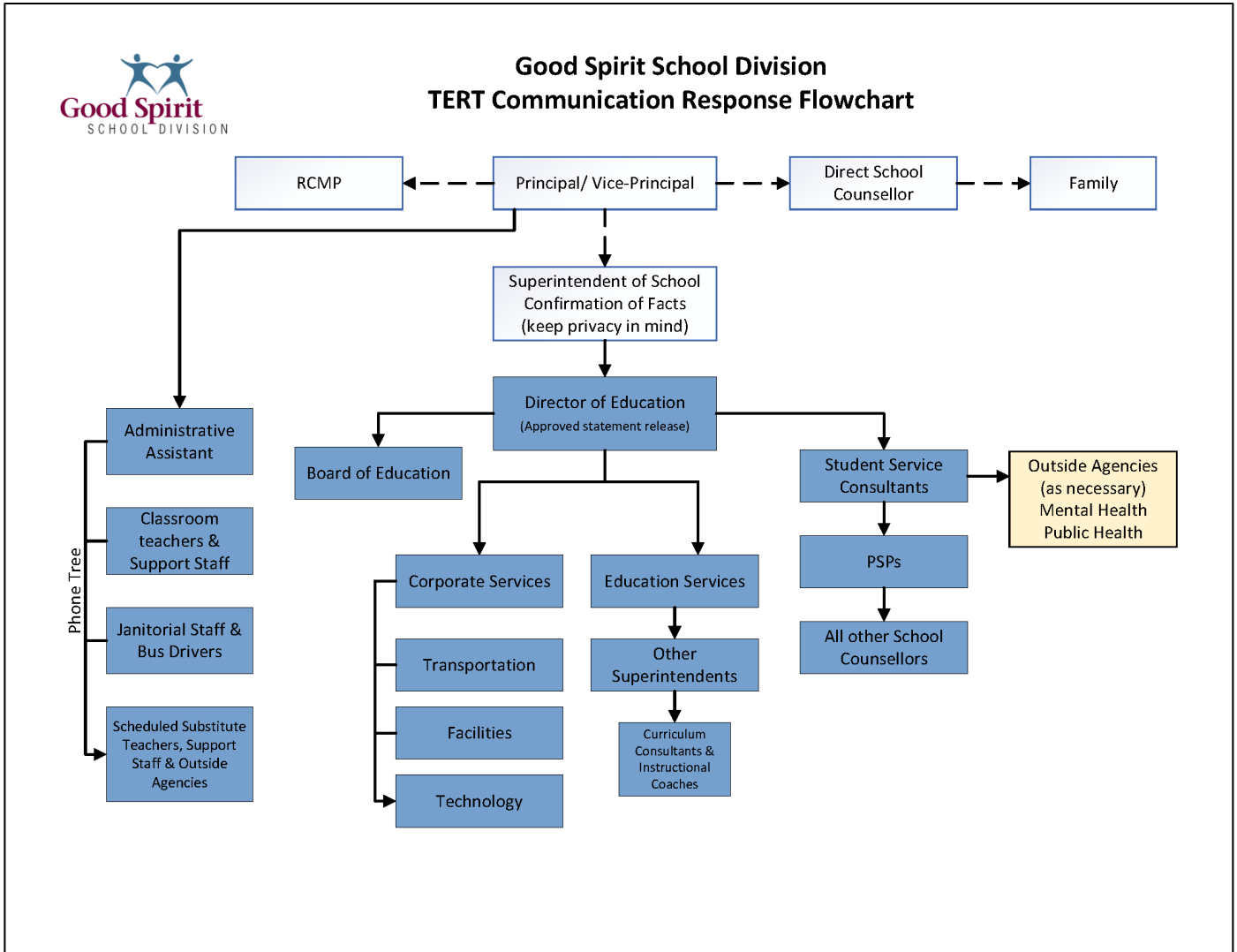
Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT)

Role	Name	Work Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone
Principal				
Vice-Principal				
School Counsellor				
Acting Principal				
Teacher(s)				
Emergency Counsellor Partner				
Other				

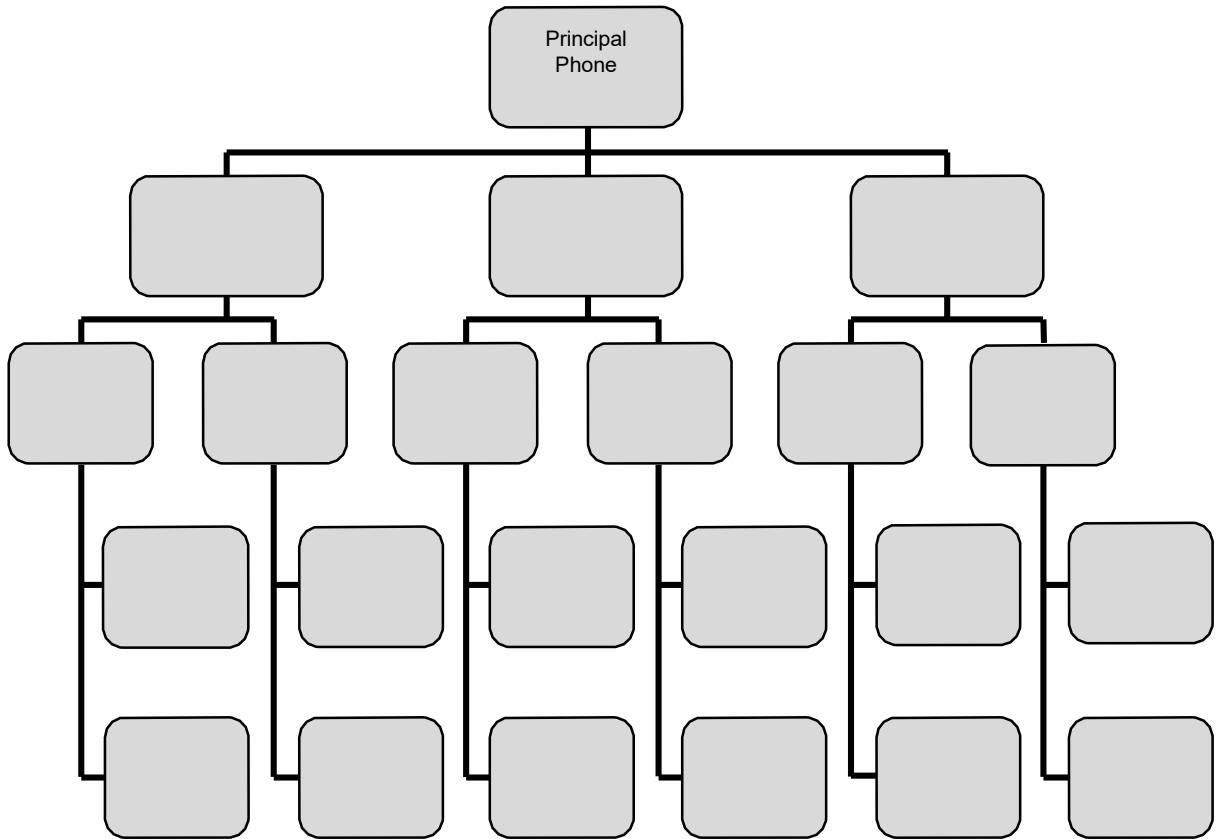
Other Resource People Available in/for your Community (Mental Health, RCMP, Fire Department, Religious Leaders, Funeral Directors, Hospitals, etc.)

Role	Name	Work Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone

Appendix 2: TERT Communication



In the event the Principal or TERT is not able to call everyone, a school phone tree should be utilized. The phone tree should be established early in the school year and updated as necessary as a means of sharing important information quickly during out-of-school hours. Include all school staff including PSPs, caretakers and affected bus drivers. Personal phone calls are recommended over digital communication platform (i.e. SchoolMessenger®) or group messages wherever possible. The regular communication method used by the school such as Group Text could be used to communicate an important staff meeting to be held in the morning.



If your number changes, please alert your Principal and the person ahead of you on the tree.

If the person you are calling is not available, phone the person(s) they would have called. Continue to try to reach the person who was not available.

The information to be passed on (must be confirmed by RCMP and Principal):

Who is involved: _____

What has occurred: _____

When the staff will meet: _____

Appendix 3 Response Checklist for a Traumatic Event

Section 3.1 - Process for Activating the Response Plan

To be completed by the Principal or designate when a student or staff member has died, or a traumatic event has occurred.

Action	Notes
Confirm information regarding the traumatic event or death with family or police.	
Determine wishes of the family with respect to sharing of information.	
Determine if other schools need to be notified (i.e., siblings/close friends)	
Contact the School Superintendent of Operations and/or Director or designate overseeing Traumatic Events Response, who will inform the Senior Administration, and provide additional school counsellor and teacher substitute support if required.	
Contact the School Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) members.	
Principal/TERT reference the TERT Communication Response Flowchart and contact staff members or activate the phone tree (Appendix 2) if occurring outside of school hours.	
Prior to the school's announcement of a death, inform close friends of the deceased in private (if possible).	

Appendix 3 Response Checklist for a Traumatic Event

Section 3.2 - TERT for Traumatic Event Planning Meeting

Action	Notes
Establish staff meeting time. If students will be in the school at the time of the meeting, arrange for supervision.	
Make arrangements for the Support Room. Order coffee, drinks, and food if possible (Superintendent can look after this for Principal).	
Prepare a statement for teachers to read to their class outlining the event and supports available for students. Include the process for students to access supports. (Appendices 8-11)	
Provide funeral arrangement details if applicable.	
Inform the school administrative assistant(s) as to how to respond to phone calls and visitors to the school. Provide a brief written statement that can be used to respond to incoming queries or media calls (direct to Director or designate).	
Decide if a letter/email to parents or digital communication platform (i.e. SchoolMessenger®) message is appropriate (Appendices 8-10) . Include Appendix 11 – Parent Guidelines for Traumatic Events .	
Arrange for substitute teacher(s) as necessary.	
If a traumatic event occurs during school hours, a brief staff meeting should be called as soon as possible. (Appendix 12)	
Prepare copies of resources on Stages of Grief, Helping Children Cope with Grief, etc. (Appendices 13-15) .	

Appendix 3 Response Checklist for a Traumatic Event

Section 3.3 - Initial Staff Meeting

Procedures	Notes
Share information regarding the traumatic event as approved by family. Confirm the facts for staff and inform them of what can be shared publicly.	
Review prepared statement/death announcement to be used to inform classes.	
Discuss procedures for sharing information with students. Consider the addition of resource people in classrooms where a strong reaction is expected.	
Introduce/identify resource personnel available to staff and students. Identify the Support Room and process for students accessing it (Appendix 17).	
Share a list of appropriate activities that may be conducted with classes (Appendices, 18, 19, 21). Advise staff to deal with students to a level of their comfort (refer to Appendices 13 – 15)	
Assign teachers who do not have immediate classroom responsibility to monitor entrances, hallways, and washrooms.	
Through discussion with staff, identify closest friends and students who may be <i>at a higher level of risk</i> due to the event, or because they have experienced a similar traumatic event or loss.	
In consultation with the School Counsellor, determine which classes/students should complete Appendix 26 – Student Resource	
Review procedure for communicating with the media. (Only Director to speak with media).	
Identify teachers who may need particular support due to connection to victim(s) or having experienced a similar traumatic event or loss.	
Provide opportunity for input from resource personnel and address staff reactions and	
Arrange the distribution of a letter to parents/guardians of students (if appropriate) (Appendices 8-10)	
Give time of afternoon staff meeting for debriefing.	
Identify any staff not present at school and ensure they are made aware of the tragic event.	

<p>Ensure any substitute teachers brought in for support receive all information that has been shared with staff regarding facts of the event, how to support students, and to avoid media contact.</p>	
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Appendix 3 Response Checklist for a Traumatic Event

Section 3.4 - Late Afternoon Staff Meeting

Procedures	Notes
Review the events of the day (Principal and TERT), including challenges and successes.	
Provide update on the traumatic event and funeral arrangements as applicable.	
Offer verbal appreciation of the staff in working together to support students and each other.	
Ask staff to identify students who may need careful monitoring to TERT.	
Arrange for notification of parents/guardians of students deemed at risk due to their reactions/behaviours and discuss plan for monitoring.	
Discuss plans for the next day including the role of resource personnel, Support Room, etc.	
Identify other resource personnel available to staff and students (STF counselling, CUPE, Mental Health Services, etc.). (Appendix 5: Outside Agency Resources)	
Provide opportunity for staff to debrief, share experiences, express concerns, ask questions, and express the need for help with any aspect for the upcoming day(s).	
Discuss importance of self-care for staff members and share handout on ways to promote self-care. (Appendix 16: Promoting Self-Care) Check in with staff to assess whether any of them need additional support and refer accordingly.	

Appendix 3 Response Checklist for a Traumatic Event

Section 3.5 - Follow Up

Procedures	Notes
Identify personnel who will follow up students considered <i>at risk</i> .	
Ensure a message of sympathy is sent to the family (e.g. card, flowers, food, etc.)	
Select representatives from the school to visit the home to offer formal condolences, if appropriate.	
Decide on formal or informal commemoration appropriate at the school level while ensuring all student deaths are treated in the same way regardless of the cause of death (#10 - Memorialization and Appendix 21)	
Evaluate the effectiveness of the school's Response Plan for a traumatic event and note any changes needed for a future event (Appendix 20).	
Develop a transition plan if a student is returning to school after close involvement in a tragedy (e.g. immediate family members and close friends). (Appendix 23)	
Review with Superintendent and School Counsellor the plan for Traumatic Event Group Debriefing (Appendix 20)	
Consider which students and staff may be impacted on significant dates (victims' birthday, graduation) or critical periods (two weeks post incident, month of December and one-year anniversary).	
Send thank you notes to external resource people/agencies who provided support to those affected by the trauma.	

Appendix 4: Traumatic Event Summary of Facts

Student Name		
Teacher	Grade	
Death/Injury Confirmed	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Family has given permission to reveal cause of death/injury	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
School announcement prepared by		
Room(s) designated for counselling		

Counsellor(s) or other personnel facilitating grief counselling:

Name	Room
Name	Room

Siblings:

Name	Grade	Teacher
Name	Grade	Teacher
Name	Grade	Teacher

Friends:

Name	Grade	Teacher
Name	Grade	Teacher
Name	Grade	Teacher

Funeral Arrangements:

Date	Time
Place	

School announcement (attached)	Date
--------------------------------	------

Prepared by _____

Appendix 5: Outside Agency Resources and Contacts

Counselling Services

Yorkton Mental Health	306-786-0558
STF Counselling Services (for teachers)	1-833-485-4245
CUPE Counselling Services (for unionized EAs)	1-866-644-0326
Out of Scope Services (for non-unionized EAs & PSPs)	1-866-644-0326
Bailey's Funeral Home, Yorkton	306-783-7552
Greystone Bereavement Centre, Regina	1-306-523-2780

Department of Social Services (Child Protection, Young Offender Program)

Social Services - Yorkton	306-786-1300
Provincial Intake Line	1-844-787-3760 (24 hrs)
Yorkton Tribal Council Child and Family Services (Keeseekoose, Key, Cote, Ochapowace, Cowessess, Sakimay, Kahkewistahaw, Pheasant Rump, Ocean Man, Whitebear, Little Black Bear, Starblanket, and Peepeekisis)	306-782-8838

Help Lines

SK Health Line – Emergency Mental Health Counselling	811 (24 hrs)
General info & Referral to Local Support Services	211 phone/text (24 hrs)
SIGN Sexual Assault Counsellor	306-783-9428
First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Helpline	1-855-242-3310 (24 hrs)
Kids Help Phone www.kidshelpphone.ca anonymous, confidential counselling and referral line for children and youth	1-800-668-6868 phone/text (24 hrs)
Suicide Prevention and Support	1-833-456-4566 (phone) (24 hrs) 45645 (text) (24 hrs)

Appendix 6: RCMP and Coroner Investigations

RCMP Investigations

Principals and teachers shall cooperate with police investigations and interviews of students in attendance at school upon request. It should be clear to Principals that their role in the absence of a parent in any police investigation is *in loco parentis*. We will comply with RCMP investigations but do not act as “agents of the police.” Where in-school investigations turn up evidence of illegal activity, the RCMP should be contacted and informed. If they come to investigate further, the Administrator then should act in the place of the parent/guardian. If needed, reference **AP 355 – Interviewing of Students at School by Police**.

It is the preference of the Division that interviews not be conducted by police officers at school when they are not directly related to school discipline. All requests by police officers for interviews with students shall be directed to the Principal, and in all cases, except by specific direction of the police to the contrary, the Principal shall notify in advance the parents/guardians of police interviews. The Principal shall arrange for interviews to be conducted in privacy.

If it is necessary for the police to take a student from school, the Principal may suggest that the officer contact the parents/guardians by telephoning from the Principal's office. In any event, the Principal shall advise the parents/guardians of this action as soon as possible.

The police will act as their duty directs. This may require the arrest of the student; in which case the police would remove the student from school without giving prior notice to the parents/guardians.

Coroner Investigations

The Coroner, with police assistance, conducts an investigation into all sudden, unexpected and unnatural deaths occurring in the province of Saskatchewan. The Coroner directs the investigation in order to determine the identity of the person, how, when, where and by what means the person died. In situations where foul play is suspected or apparent, the police will direct a criminal investigation and they will be assisted by the Coroner. The Coroner's investigation is fact finding and does not assign fault or blame.

These calls and any other communication from the Coroner should be directed immediately to the Director of Education. Any direct communication with the Coroner should only occur with the Director of Education.

Appendix 7: Sample TERT Meeting Agenda

The following sample agenda can be adapted to fit the protocol developed in a particular school.

1. Share information with the team regarding the facts of the traumatic event (use information recorded on **Appendix 4 – Traumatic Events Summary of Facts**)
2. Determine the impact of this particular incident on individual members of the school's Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) in order to ensure all members can function objectively.
3. Are there staff members who may require assistance in leading the classroom discussion?
4. Determine whether there are cultural or religious implications surrounding the incident. How should they be addressed?
5. Identify school resources and roles.
6. Determine whether additional professional support personnel (counsellors, teacher subs, etc.) are required to provide support to the team and work with students, and request support as needed.
7. Confirm the overall strategy and specific roles of response team members for this particular Crisis (action items – who will do what).

Appendix 8: Sample Letters/Notification Regarding Death of a Student

These samples may also be used to draft a notification to be read to students. You may decide that it is appropriate to send a letter to parents of other students informing them of the tragic event. The letter may be directed to all parents, parents of students at the deceased's grade level, or parents of classmates.

This letter should include:

- Expressions of sympathy to the parents/guardians of the deceased.
- Explanation of the brief facts surrounding the death, funeral arrangements, and how the school will be handling attendance at the funeral. Suggest that parents/guardians of students wishing to attend accompany their child to the funeral.
- Some details on the deceased person's background.
- Concluding comments which focus on support for the family.
- You may choose to attach **Appendix 11 - Parent Guidelines for Traumatic Events** to this letter

Sample Notification

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the death of a parent of a Grade ____ student in our school. _____ was killed in an accident yesterday. We wish to express our sincere condolences to _____'s family and friends, especially his daughter _____. Students and staff will have varied reactions to this death depending on their connection to this family and their own experiences with death. I encourage you to support each other and _____, our School Counsellor, as well as all of our staff are available to talk with you if need. Please don't hesitate to take the opportunity to talk with someone you feel comfortable if you need.

Sample Letter #1 (print on school letterhead)

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the death of a Grade ____ student in our school (OR) Today our school is mourning the loss of one of our students. _____ died from injuries suffered in a car accident which occurred last evening. We wish to express our sincere condolences to _____'s parents, family, and friends.

Students will have varied reactions to the death of a peer. A wide range of reactions is normal in the grief process and can vary from withdrawal, to crying and anger. I encourage you to openly discuss and listen to your child regarding their reactions and feelings regarding _____'s death.

Counsellors, teachers, and other support personnel have been and will continue to be available to students, teachers, and parents on an ongoing basis. If you think your child needs additional counselling support, please do not hesitate to contact the school office at _____.

Yours sincerely,
[Principal]

Sample Letter #2 (print on school letterhead)

Dear Parents/Guardians:

We have suffered a tragedy at our school. On December 12th, one of our students, _____, died suddenly and unexpectedly. We are grieving the loss of a member of our school community and we are sensitive to the impact this event has on our students and staff.

In response, the school has implemented a plan which allows students an opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings with trained professional staff. We expect that some will seek out this help, while other may not. Those who do will be given an opportunity to express their feelings and grief. This is not intended to take the place of outside professional counselling, or support from parents or other family members.

Anticipating that your child may have a reaction to this event, we have attached some information which may be helpful as you respond to your child's concerns. If you determine that your child needs further support or counselling, please feel free to contact the school for phone numbers of local agencies that are available to assist you.

Please do not hesitate to contact the school regarding your requests or concerns at _____.

Yours sincerely,
[Principal]

Sample Letter #3 (print on school letterhead)

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Today our school received news of the death of one of our students. _____, a student in Grade _____ and a member of our school community, died _____. Our students and staff were informed _____. Our deepest sympathy goes to the family and friends of _____.

As a response to this tragedy, our school has extra counsellors available to students who have felt the need to grieve either in private or as a group. We also have support and services from (Mental Health or other outside agency services). We will continue to support our students in any way we can in the days and weeks to come.

The funeral service will be held at _____ on _____. If there is any way we can provide additional support, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Our condolences to the family and friends of _____; we hope our thoughts of sympathy and understanding will comfort them in the days ahead.

Yours sincerely,
[Principal]

Appendix 9: Sample Letter to Parents/ Guardians Regarding Possible Suicide of a Student

For both options below, you may choose to attach **Appendix 11 - Parent Guidelines for Trauma Response** to this letter.

OPTION 1 - When the death has been ruled a suicide and the parents/guardians have approved of the cause of death being shared.

Dear Parents/Guardians: (to be printed on school letterhead)

I am very sad to inform you that one our students, _____, has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with their family and friends.

All of the students were given the news of the death by their teachers this morning.

The cause of death was suicide. We want to take this opportunity to remind our community that suicide is a very complicated act. It is usually caused by a mental health disorder such as depression, which can prevent a person from thinking clearly about his or her problems and how to solve them. Sometimes these disorders are not identified or noticed; other times, a person will show obvious symptoms or signs. I am including some information that may be helpful to you in discussing suicide with your child.

Members of our Trauma Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional support; we have a list of school and community mental health resources.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or our school counsellor with any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,
[Principal]

OPTION 2 - When the cause of death is unconfirmed

Dear Parents/Guardians: (print on school letterhead)

I am very sad to inform you that one our students, _____, has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with their family and friends.

All of the students were given the news of the death by their teacher this morning. I have included a copy of the announcement that was read to them.

The cause of death has not yet been determined by the authorities. We are aware that there has been some talk about the possibility that this was a suicide death. Rumors may begin to circulate and we have asked the students not to spread rumors since they may turn out to be inaccurate and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to _____ as well as (their) family and friends. We will do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us and is approved by the family.

Members of our Traumatic Events Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance; we have a list of school and community

mental health resources.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or our school counsellor with any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,
[Principal]

OPTION 3 - When the family has requested that the cause of death not be disclosed

Dear Parent or Guardian: (print on school letterhead)

I am very sad to inform you that one of our students, _____, has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with their family and friends.

Members of our Trauma Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance; we have a list of additional school and community mental health resources.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or our school counsellor with any questions of concerns.

Yours sincerely,
[Principal]

Appendix 10: Sample Letter for Death of School Staff Member

Dear Parents/Guardians:

It is with great sadness I share that our school community has suffered the loss of Mr. /Mrs. _____, a teacher at our school, due to (illness/accident). Our thoughts go out to _____'s family and friends at this time. This morning, a special announcement was made to all staff and students as we remembered _____'s many contributions to our school as a teacher and friend.

_____ served our school community for ____ years. (If you wish, provide personalized information regarding the staff member - interests, areas taught, hobbies, contributions.)

In response to this event, the school has requested professional support consisting of additional School Counsellors to allow students an opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings in relation to the death of _____. If you feel your child requires further outside support, please feel free to contact the school for phone numbers of local agencies that are available to assist you.

Please advise the school if your child will be away from school for any reason. In difficult times, our greatest support is each other.

Further details regarding funeral arrangements will be shared as they are made available.

Yours sincerely,
[Principal]

Appendix 11: Parent Guidelines for Traumatic Events

Tragic or traumatic occurrences can alter a person's sense of security. We know that children may be upset or have questions about what has taken place. The first and most important support for children and youth are their family. Below, is a list of ways that we can work together to create a safe environment for children and youth during this difficult time.

Tragic Types of behaviours parents can expect after a traumatic event:

Some **immediate** responses may include:

- Shock
- Denial
- Appearing dazed or apathetic
- Confusion
- Disorganization
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty making decisions

These are normal responses and, in most cases, should be short duration. Most children have a full recovery from such effects.

Longer term effects might include:

- Regression – revert to behaviours that are like much younger children. (e.g. thumb-sucking).
- Increased fear and anxiety - including separation anxiety and clinging to parents. Reluctance to attend school may emerge but allowing students to stay away from school generally increases the anxiety upon return to school.
- Decreased interest in school – the amount of mental energy used in dealing with the traumatic event makes for less concentration in school.
- Increased aggression – may have trouble controlling emotional responses. Oppositional and/or antisocial behaviours may be exhibited.
- Irritability, depression – Increased intensity of emotional responses can indicate symptoms of depression such as general sadness, changes in eating habits, difficulty sleeping, loss of interest in activities, and suicidal ideation.
- Denial – may deny the facts of a traumatic event and will need support to lead to eventual acceptance.

What you can do to Support your Child:

- **Be reassuring:** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Your reactions are most important. Recognize that some children may be concerned about something bad happening to themselves, family, or friends. Explain to them the safety measures in place and reassure them that you and other adults will take care of them.
- **Be a good listener and observer:** Let children guide you to learn how concerned they are or how much information they need. If they are not focused on the tragedy, do not dwell on it. However, be available to answer their questions to the best of your ability. Young children may not be able to express themselves verbally. Pay attention to changes in their behavior or social interactions. Allow your child a safe space to express sadness, anger, etc. to experience the stages of grief.
- **Monitor the news/social media:** Images of a disaster or crisis event can become overwhelming, especially if watched repetitively. Young children in particular may have difficulty understanding or internalizing this. Older children may choose to watch the news but be available to discuss what they see and to help put it into perspective.
- **Emphasize people's resiliency:** Help children understand the ability of people to come

through a tragic event and go on with their lives. Focus on children's own competencies in terms of how they coped in daily life during difficult times. In age-appropriate terms, identify other crises from which people, communities, or countries have recovered.

- **Highlight people's compassion and humanity:** Large scale tragedies often generate a tremendous outpouring of caring and support from around the country and world. Focus on the help and hopeful thoughts being offered to those affected by other people.
- **Maintain as much continuity and normalcy as possible:** Allowing children to deal with their reactions is important but so is providing a sense of normalcy. Routine family activities, classes, after school activities, and friends can help children feel more secure and better able to function.
- **Spend family time:** Being with family is always important in difficult or sad times. Even if your children are not significantly impacted by this tragedy, this may be a good opportunity to participate in and to appreciate family life. Doing things together reinforces children's sense of stability and connectedness.
- **Ask for help if you or your children need it:** Any tragedy can feel overwhelming for families directly affected, particularly those who have lost loved ones. Staying connected to your community can be extremely helpful. It may also be important to seek additional support from mental health services to cope with overwhelming feelings.
- **Communicate with your school:** Children directly impacted by the event may be under a great deal of stress that can be very disruptive to learning. Together, parents and teachers can determine what extra support or leniency students need and work with parents to develop a plan to help students.
- **Be aware of your own needs:** Do not ignore your own feelings of anxiety, grief, and anger. Talking to friends, family members, religious or cultural supports and mental health counsellors can help. It is important to let your children know that you are sad. You will be better able to support your children if you can express your own emotions in a productive manner. Get appropriate sleep, nutrition, and exercise.

When should your child receive professional help?

Most children will respond in time to supportive interventions. Some will need more help in the form of a more individualized professional intervention if symptoms persist. You may want to seek support if your child:

- Cannot adequately engage in home or school activities even after time has passed
- Continues to show high levels of emotional responsiveness
- Appears withdrawn or depressed
- Continues to do poorly at school and has low levels of concentration
- Expresses suicidal ideation or self-harming behaviours
- Loses a significant amount of weight in a short period of time
- Discontinues attending to their hygiene

GSSD School Counsellors can help your child deal with the effects of a traumatic event. Please contact your school or Sunrise Mental Health Services (306-786-0558) if you feel your child needs further support. For more information on supporting, refer to **Appendix 19**.

Appendix 12: Sample Staff Meeting Agenda

The following sample agenda can be adapted to a particular school.

1. Inform every one of the tragic event.
2. Distribute a written statement containing facts surrounding the tragic event (use samples in **Appendices 8-10** to compose). In consultation with the family will determine what information will be shared with the general population.
3. Introduce the school Trauma Response Team members as well as members of the senior administration team if present.
4. Briefly review the School Response Plan:
 - Prepare teachers to deal effectively with informing their students of the tragic event.
 - Encourage teachers to allow time for classroom discussion, through modeled behaviour.
 - Provide all staff with a copy of suggestions for classroom discussion and/or activities (**Appendices 18 and 19**).
 - Clarify procedures for handling students who want to leave the classroom.
 - Students who are highly emotional should be accompanied to the designated Support Room.
 - Students wishing to leave the school should be released to a parent or designate.
 - Inform teachers of counselling support plans:
 - Identify counselling staff who will run the Support Room and the appropriate procedure for sending students to the Support Room (**Appendix 17 – Support Room Recommendations**).
 - Clarify the process to obtain counselling assistance for staff members.
 - Inform staff that substitute teachers will be made available if necessary. Ensure that substitute teachers are informed of the incident, the plans for students, and their role with the media (no interviews).
 - Ask for staff to identify students who may be *at risk* or need extra support and remind them of the important role they play in identifying changes in behavior among students they know and see every day.
 - Determine which students/classes should complete **Appendix 26 - School Resource Survey**.
 - Discuss how to provide this support to particular students.
 - Remind staff that they are part of the team supporting students during traumatic occurrences and they can support this work by:
 - Modelling calmness
 - Following routines
 - Helping to identify at-risk students
 - Sharing factual information with students and answering questions to the best of their knowledge
 - Using correct terminology with students. For example, when a death has occurred, avoid euphemisms such as 'passed away' or 'just sleeping.'
5. Set date and time for the follow-up meeting:
 - Assure staff that they will be kept informed of any relevant information in the next meeting (refer to **Appendix 3.5: Section 5 - Follow-Up**).

Appendix 13: Developmental Stages/Descriptions

Preschool students may:

- Regress in behavior – may lose recently acquired developmental milestones and increase behaviors such as bed-wetting, loss of bladder control, thumb-sucking, whining, or regression to simpler speech.
- Express grief through behavior rather than words - increased irritability, temper tantrums, difficulty calming down.
- Separation difficulties - become clingier to parents and worry about their parents' safety and return.
- Become more irritable - temper tantrums and more difficulty calming.
- Show reverse behavior - becoming withdrawn, subdued, or mute after a traumatic event.
- Have difficulty falling asleep or have nightmares or bad dreams about the incident.
- Ask questions about death repeatedly.
- Take words literally such as 'sleeping', 'gone away' which may add confusion for them.
- Process the traumatic event through post-traumatic play - play is a natural medium of expression for children.

Elementary students may:

- Show signs of distress through somatic complaints such as stomach aches, headaches, and pains.
- Demonstrate changes in behaviour, such as increase irritability, aggression, and anger.
- Show increased fears and anxieties – become afraid of the dark, going to be alone, that something may happen to a loved one.
- Have a fear of personal harm.
- Show a change in school performance, have impaired attention and concentration and more school absences.
- Demonstrate decreased academic performance and difficulty concentrating.
- Demonstrate regressive behaviours (clinging, whining, bed wetting, etc.)
- Show increased irritability and/or depressive feelings – loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, social withdrawal, change in eating habits, fatigue, etc.
- Difficulty controlling anger and frustration
- Talk excessively and ask persistent questions about the incident.
- Feel self-conscious about their emotional responses to the incident.
- Act as if nothing has happened.
- Feel shame and guilt about the incident and may express fantasies about revenge and retribution.
- Suppress grief in an attempt to create stability in their home and not upset other family members.

Adolescent students may:

- Experience a radical shift in the way they think about the world.
- Experience physical ailments such as bowel problems.
- Engage in self-destruction or reckless behaviours.
- Experience anxiety and feelings of guilt.
- Exhibit an increase in oppositional behavior; refusing to comply with rules and regulations of school and home or meet their responsibilities.
- Shift their interpersonal relationships with family members, teachers, and classmates.
- Show a change in their school performance, attendance and behaviour.
- Show increased irritability and/or depressive feelings – loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, social withdrawal, numbness, change in eating habits, fatigue, etc.
- React in a highly dramatic, intense fashion with a reliance on personalized rituals, symbols, etc.
- Increase substance use or abuse

Adults may:

- Have various grief responses based on how previous losses have/have not been resolved and on the degree to which personal support systems are in place.
- Have the need to remain in control - suppression of feelings often causes adults to circumvent the natural grief process.
- Have long term reactions that include: denial, feelings of detachment, intrusive recollections, depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, withdrawal, eating disturbances, difficulty concentrating, low frustration tolerance, sleep difficulties, emotional and mental fatigue, depression, irritability, poor work performance, marital discord, and loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.

It is imperative that school staff members receive appropriate intervention and support as otherwise, they will be limited in their ability to meet the needs of their students. It is important they have a forum and means to discuss their own feelings and reactions to the crisis and receive support.

Appendix 14:

Stages in Grief Process

To help us cope with our own grief over a death and to assist students and colleagues, it is useful to understand the stages of the grieving process:

1. **Initial Shock**

- Shock is the first reaction to death. Initially a person may feel detached from the situation and may be unable to carry out daily activities. Although this detachment may be useful in coping with events following a death, it is important to become actively engaged with activities of one's life as soon as possible.
- Denial or inability to acknowledge the event has occurred.
- Dissociative behavior – dazed, apathetic, expresses feelings of unreality.
- Confusion, disorganization, and difficulty making decisions.

2. **Anger**

- The feeling of anger is often a part of the grieving process. Survivors frequently feel betrayed by the person who died – “How could you do this to me?”
- The anger of survivors is frequently directed at the helping professionals such as doctors, counsellors, and educators. It is important in moving through this stage of the grieving process to not deny your anger.
- Death by suicide often increase feelings of anger.

3. **Guilt**

- Death causes us to reflect intensely on our relationship with the deceased. During this process we may experience guilt through real or perceived problems in our relationship with the deceased – “If only I had spent more time with him”.
- Death by suicide often increases feelings of anger and guilt on the part of the survivor(s).

4. **Acceptance**

- As we move through the grieving process, we establish what the deceased meant to us and we move to an acceptance of their death.

Appendix 15: Reactions to Trauma and Positive Coping Skills

Reactions to Trauma

After a traumatic event, people may go through a wide range of normal responses. Such reactions may be experienced by individuals who experienced the trauma first-hand, who witnessed or heard about the trauma, or were involved with those immediately affected. Many reactions can be triggered by persons, places, or things associated with the trauma.

Here is a list of common physical and emotional reactions to trauma, and helpful coping strategies. These are NORMAL reactions to ABNORMAL events.

Physical Reactions

- Aches and pains like headaches, backaches, stomach aches
- Sudden sweating and/or heart palpitations (fluttering)
- Changes in sleep patterns and appetite
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Easily startled by noises or unexpected touch
- More susceptible to colds and illnesses
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs, and/or overeating

Emotional Reactions

- Shock and disbelief
- Fear and/or anxiety
- Grief, disorientation, denial
- Hyper-alertness or hypervigilance
- Irritability, restlessness, outbursts of anger or rage
- Emotional swings – like crying and then laughing
- Worrying – intrusive thoughts of the trauma
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks – feeling like the trauma is happening now
- Feelings of helplessness, panic, feeling out of control
- Increased need to control everyday experiences
- Minimizing the experience
- Tendency to isolate oneself
- Feelings of detachment
- Concern over burdening others with problems
- Emotional numbing
- Difficulty trusting and/or feelings of betrayal
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Feelings of self-blame and/or survivor guilt
- Shame
- Diminished interest in everyday activities or depression
- Unpleasant past memories resurfacing
- Suicidal thoughts
- Loss of a sense of order or fairness in the world; expectation of doom and fear of the future

Helpful Coping Strategies

- Mobilize a support system – reach out and connect with others, especially those who may have also experienced the stressful event
- Talk about the traumatic experience with empathic listeners
- Be with friends and grieving peers
- Making a list of people you can talk to or turn to for support
- Learning the language of feelings and how to express them cry
- Hard or rhythmic exercise like jogging, aerobics, bicycling, walking
- Relaxation exercise like yoga, stretching, massage, deep slow breathing
- Humor
- Prayer and/or meditation, listening to relaxing guided imagery, progressive deep muscle relaxation, mindfulness, picturing self in a favorite calm and relaxing place
- Hot baths
- Music and art
- Engaging in favorite activities or hobbies
- Maintain balanced diet and sleep cycle as much as possible
- Avoid over-using stimulants like caffeine, sugar, or nicotine
- Commitment to something personally meaningful and important every day
- Hug those you love, pets included
- Proactive responses toward personal and community safety – organize or do something socially active
- Write about your experience in detail, just for yourself or to share with others
- Thinking about how you have coped with difficulties in the past and reminding yourself you can use those same coping strategies now
- Start a gratitude journal to record a few things you are thankful for each day
- Write a list of things you are looking forward to
- To know that worries and regrets are inevitable
- To have help identifying individuals needs and how to have them met

People are usually surprised that reactions to trauma can last longer than they expected. It may take weeks, months, and in some cases, years to fully regain equilibrium. Many people will get through this period with the help and support of family and friends. But sometimes extra support is needed through outside agency support.

When to Refer a Student for more Individualized Assessment and Intervention:

With the passage of time and support from school personnel and their families, most students will recover from the effects of a crisis. However, some students, due to their psychological make-up and the severity and proximity of the precipitating event, will continue to experience difficulties that interfere with their functioning. Consider referring students for additional intervention who:

- Cannot engage adequately in classroom activities and assignments after a sufficient amount of time has passed and the majority of their peers are able to do so
- Continue to exhibit high levels of emotional responsiveness (crying, tearfulness) after the majority of peers have discontinued doing so
- Appear distressed, withdrawn, and non-communicative
- Isolate self from friends and family
- Exhibit decreased academic performance, attendance, and/or concentration
- Express suicidal or homicidal ideation, or are intentionally self-harming, cutting, etc.
- Have increased usage of alcohol or drugs
- Gain or lose a significant amount of weight in a short period of time
- Exhibit significant behavioral changes
- Begin to neglect hygiene and no longer care about personal appearance

1. Assess where you are emotionally and accept it.
2. Admit you are hurting and go with the pain.
3. Apply cold or heat to your body, whichever feels best.
4. Ask for and accept help
5. Talk to others.
6. Face the loss.
7. Stop asking “Why?” and ask, “What will I do now?”
8. Recognize that a bad day does not mean that all is lost.
9. Rest and get 7-8 hours of sleep nightly.
10. Exercise and/or keep active.
11. Keep to a routine.
12. Introduce pleasant changes into your life.
13. Know that you will survive.
14. Take care of something alive through weekends and holidays.
15. Schedule activities to help through weekends and holidays.
16. Find someone who needs your help.
17. Accept your feelings as part of the normal grief reaction.
18. Postpone major decisions whenever possible.
19. Do something you enjoy doing.
20. Spend time engaged in self-expression such as journal writing, poetry, art, or music.
21. Be around people.
22. Schedule time alone.
23. Pace yourself. Do not overdo.
24. Eat healthy and avoid alcohol.
25. Learn about grief.
26. Avoid trauma on television.
27. Use positive coping skills (read, play soothing music, drink herbal tea, etc.)
28. Do some form of exercise to promote relaxation or fitness.
29. Be patient with yourself. Do not compare yourself to others. Go through the mourning process at your own pace.
30. Call a friend and get together for a visit.
31. Go to a show or concert, or another enjoyable event.
32. Contact your local CUPE
33. Contact professional support.

Appendix 17: Support Room Recommendations

Setting up a temporary Support Room following a tragic event is an effective way to support students, particularly those considered *high-risk*. The following suggestions for planning this support have been used successfully by schools.

Guidelines for Setting up a Support Room

- Provide a Support Room all day the first day that news of a tragic event is shared.
- Ensure that more than one counsellor/facilitator is in the room at all times.

Suggestions for Staff in the Support Room

- Accept all responses from students and permit them to express their reactions in a way that is individually appropriate.
- Let the students express feelings about other personal losses such as deaths in their families or other traumatic events. A tragic event may bring up painful memories or unresolved emotions from the past.
- Listen to students express their feelings without making judgments
- Be empathetic and genuine.
- Do not try to convince students that you understand their feelings. Say, “I want to understand your feelings. Please tell me some more so that I can try to understand where you are coming from” or “Perhaps if you tell me again, I might understand.”
- Discuss facts regarding the tragic event and discourage rumors. Ensure confidentiality information is not compromised in discussions.
- If the incident was a **suicide** or if the students mentions suicide in response to another type of traumatic event, reinforce that suicide is an irreversible decision, without moralizing. Focus suggestions on other options for dealing with serious problems.
- Be attuned to any expression of **suicidal thoughts**. Ask the student for the name of an adult who can be called and contact that person. Seek mental health support if required.
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss feelings of guilt related to the tragedy and reassure them that they are not responsible.
- Help students who may become fearful for their own or others’ safety, but do not provide false assurances of safety. Remember that tragic events can spark the disclosure of abuse or other traumas.
- Be aware of your own reaction to the tragedy and to helping with students. If you are feeling anxious, distressed or uncomfortable, take time for yourself and seek support.
- Carefully monitor the students’ response to you. Seek immediate assistance from other staff if you are uncomfortable.
- For students who have difficulty describing their feelings, ask them what they have been thinking or what thoughts have been going through their mind.
- Encourage students to both seek and provide support, and to escort any friend who is upset to the Support Room. Help students identify their strengths and available resources. Reassure students that concerned adults are available to them.
- If needed, help students consider how they could say goodbye to the deceased in a way that feels right to them. Providing this choice can help them regain some of the sense of control they have lost after the death.
- Above all, model a calm attitude for students as they will pick up on your nervousness or discomfort.

Appendix 18: Suggested Class Discussion Format

School is a place where learning takes place, where it is safe to ask questions and obtain factual information. Adults frequently attempt to insulate children from the realities of death or other tragic events. A teacher's expression of sorrow in class conveys to students that strong emotions are natural, and that mourning does not have to be hidden. When students are allowed to grieve in a supervised setting, they can have the comfort and reassurance they need which will serve them well when they have to deal with subsequent trauma related situations in the future.

Advice for Teachers

The following general principles can be helpful when working with students of all ages:

- Accurately and honestly explain what happened to students in a manner they can understand taking into account their age and developmental level. Be simple and straightforward, providing facts regarding the tragic event in a concrete, clear, and accurate manner.
- It is important to acknowledge the reality of the tragic event and your willingness to talk.
- Model appropriate expression of feelings for students and give them permission to verbalize how they are feeling and what they are experiencing. Express your own feelings in an open, calm way which encourages students to express their grief or fear. Some students choose not to talk; the discussion of the event strikes them as a source of more pain or fear and some have a hard time verbalizing their feelings. These students should not be pressured to talk.
- Attempt to be in control of your own emotions when dealing with students as they tend to look toward adults to assess how to react in a situation. How you cope and behave will influence how your students cope and behave. Your students will be watching your verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Monitor conversations that students may hear.
- Be sensitive to possible cultural differences in manners of grieving.
- Project confidence and calmness and be encouraging and reassuring.
- Be patient; because of their need for reassurance, young children will often repeat the same questions. Repetition of this sort is part of the normal grieving process.
- Be prepared for any student who may feel the need to discuss unpleasant features of a relationship or anger directed toward the deceased as this is one of many normal responses to loss. Students who may have had recent conflict with the deceased may be particularly affected.
- Assess the meaning of the loss for each student. Pay close attention to students who have experienced other recent deaths or losses, or to those who have emotional problems.
- Communicate to students they have the right to express their grief when they feel like talking and have the right to grieve in their own way.
- Educate students to the likely responses to crisis and help them understand they will likely have a 'normal reaction to an abnormal situation'. Teachers may wish to share some of the age-appropriate reactions contained in this guide (**Appendix 13-Developmental Stages/Descriptions**) with students.
- Remind students that with time and assistance, things generally get better. If they do not, they should let a parent or teacher know.
- Many students and adults find it natural to show their empathy during grieving through physical contact such as hugging or touching on the arm.
- Avoid imposing your own theology and/or personal beliefs.
- Assess which students are in need of additional support and refer them to the Support Room

for individual assessment and counselling. Have someone accompany the student to the Support Room.

- Ensure students are supervised at all times. 'Pockets' of grieving students should be directed to the location of support personnel.
- While every attempt should be made to keep the classroom teacher with their students, if a teacher is unable to function adequately and meet the immediate needs of students, another teacher may need to replace the teacher temporarily to support students.
- It is imperative that students as a group be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings and reactions to the crisis situation as they need to know that their fears and reactions are shared by others.
- Remain vigilant to reactions for some time after the crisis as some students may not experience a reaction until days or weeks later.
- Help students set small 'doable' individual and/or collective goals and share these achievements as 'wins' with the student and/or collectively as a class to help them see progress after a tragedy.
- Tolerate some acting out behaviors if peers are not being harmed.

Responding

- After reading the statement prepared by TERT, acknowledge that a wide variety of feelings are normal. There is no one right way to react to a tragic event. Feelings will vary from student to student and will change over time.
- When students discuss their feelings, listen with empathy and support. Confirm their feelings are normal reactions to abnormal situations.
- Some possible responses include:
 - "Some of you feel angry that _____ died. What can you do with your angry feelings?"
 - "Because _____ died, you may be reminded of another person you cared about who died."
 - "It's ok that some of you are scared or angry after hearing about the fire at the high school and that some of you are only a little sad or scared."
 - "It's ok to cry – crying is a natural part of sadness and grieving."
- Discuss positive coping strategies: physical exercise, talking about feelings with family and friends, normal routine, participating in favorite activities, keeping busy, eating well, and getting plenty of rest.
- Convey the message that it is very important to continue with our daily lives as while we go through this week of thinking about the deceased and supporting each other.
- Acknowledge that you don't have all the answers. Often there is more comfort from an honest, "I don't know why", than from explanations that do not sound credible.
- Acknowledge the various cultural or religious beliefs that may be expressed.

Concluding

- Focus on the strengths and supports the students have to get the help they need:
 - The support that comes from sharing feelings of grief or fear with others.
 - The student's support network, such as family, significant adults, teachers.
 - The student's individual strengths which provide self-support.
- Talk about the natural healing process. "Over time the pain of missing _____ won't hurt so much. That is the way it should be. It doesn't mean that you love _____ any less."

- “Class is almost over, and it seems there’s more to talk about. We can set aside some time tomorrow.”
- Give information about the designated Support Room. “The Support Room is where you can go to talk about your feelings. The Support Room will be available for the next ____ days. You can use this support whenever you like. The people there want to help you. They will listen to your feelings and concerns.”
- It is helpful to channel the feelings of the class into appropriate expressions of concern. It may provide comfort for students to feel they have participated in some overt act to express their feelings and reach out to grieving families affected by the tragic event. Teachers will need to use careful judgment to guide the appropriateness of student activities, and activities should be cleared with the school Principal or Counsellor.

Statements to Avoid

- Avoid euphemisms for death such as passed away, gone, or sleeping which may confuse or frighten the child.
- Avoid general statements like, “If you need anything, tell me”. It is better to say, “Would it help if I ...”
- Avoid saying, “I know just how you feel.” It is more empathetic to say, “You must be having a lot of feelings right now...”
- Avoid blaming or judging.

Appendix 19: Guidelines for Teachers Dealing with Death

Do	Don't
<p>Feel comfortable asking for help. This experience need not be handled alone.</p>	<p>Don't feel you must handle this alone. Ask for help.</p>
<p>Develop an environment in which students feel safe to ask questions and feel confident they will receive an honest answer.</p> <p>Say "I don't know" when you don't know.</p> <p>Communicate that it is normal to feel sad, angry, and lonely when a death occurs.</p> <p>Acknowledge that grief is painful, but also that it is important to see how people can come together to cope and to heal after a tragic event occurs.</p>	<p>Don't force a child to participate in a discussion about death. Don't probe a student for more details than they are willing to share; respect a student's wishes to not share their thoughts or feelings. Forcing students to go over their experiences in too much detail, especially after the crisis, can re-traumatize the student and may cause more emotional and psychological distress to themselves and to others who may hear additional details about the event.</p>
<p>Use correct terminology related to death (i.e. avoid euphemisms – "passed away", etc.). Be mindful of the family's beliefs and the language they use.</p>	<p>Never link suffering, punishment, and sin.</p>
<p>Listen and empathize. Make sure you hear what is said and not what you think the students ought to have said.</p>	<p>Don't be judgmental or lecture. It's all too tempting to make a point or moralize.</p>
<p>Allow the students to express as much grief as they are able or willing to share with you. Let them know it is alright to cry openly and talk about the death. Acknowledge this is tragic and painful.</p>	<p>Don't say "I know how you feel". Do not insist on "looking on the bright side".</p>
<p>Let students know that you really want to understand what they are feeling or what they need. Give them time and encourage them to share their feelings.</p>	<p>Don't expect 'adult responses' from children and teenagers. Their grief responses may seem inappropriate to you.</p>
<p>Share your own feelings and memories of the student, but don't idealize the dead student.</p>	<p>Don't force others to say something positive about the deceased.</p>

<p>Recognize that classroom routine and management may be disrupted. This is natural – <i>be flexible</i>.</p>	<p>Don't force a "regular day" upon grieving students, but at the same time don't allow the class to be totally unstructured. Offer choices of activities, (i.e. letters, journals, and discussion).</p>
<p>Maintain a sympathetic attitude toward the students' age-appropriate responses (be prepared for a strong reaction). Model calm. It's okay to express your own feelings but stay in control of them. Take advantage of substitutes, take time off or remove yourself from classroom if you feel you need to cry, or are no longer in control of your emotions.</p>	<p>Don't assume that every student a certain age understands death in the same way and with the same feelings. Children have unique views of the world that is shaped by their different experiences.</p>
<p>If appropriate, organize activities that will allow students to tangibly express their grief (i.e. memorials, letters, etc.).</p>	<p>Don't assume that children always grieve in an orderly or predictable way; there is not one 'correct' way to move through the grieving process.</p>

Adapted from: Ogden E.H. and Germinaro, V. (1988). *The at-risk student: Answer for educators*. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing.

Appendix 20: Traumatic Event Group Debrief (72 Hours after event)

Research indicates that a structured debriefing can mitigate ongoing emotional and psychological challenges that may follow a traumatic event. Traumatic Event Group Debriefing may be utilized to lessen the likelihood of participants experiencing symptoms of trauma and stress after an incident. This debriefing should occur during a critical time period (within 72 hours).

Debriefing should be led by GSSD School Counsellors or Mental Health to allow for further education regarding traumatic events and their impact, to support those affected by the event to gain a sense of normalization, and for teams to reflect on those impacted and check in as to how they are doing. Personnel facilitating the debriefing should be those who have not been impacted by the traumatic event.

Preparing for a Group Emotional Debriefing

Points to consider prior to carrying out a group debriefing:

- **Environment:**
 - Is there trust?
 - Is it a safe environment?
 - Are there going to be authority figures present?
 - Where will the debriefing take place?
 - How many facilitators will be in the room? (Should be at least 2)
 - Refreshments can help anchor the group
- **Groupings:**
 - Size should be limited to 10-15 participants at the most
 - Members should be grouped according to level of trauma so that those less traumatized are not exposed to more stress through debriefing
 - Who is best suited to lead the debriefing? Should it be an outside person?
- **Time:**
 - Debriefing should happen in the 72 hours after the crisis, but not immediately after as most people will be in shock
 - The group should typically take between an hour and an hour and a half
- **Attendance:**
 - Will attendance be mandatory?
 - For those who choose not to attend, will there be follow-up?
 - Should some members be met with ahead of time?

Critical Incident Group Emotional Debriefing Procedures

The following outlines the steps which are taken in a group debriefing.

1. **Introduction:** (15 minutes)

- Go over the structure of the session
- Discuss the role of the facilitator
- Outline procedures around people leaving
- Let people know they will not be forced to share if they are not comfortable
- Discuss rationale - why it may be helpful to debrief (information, resources, a chance to discuss common reactions)
- Discuss guidelines of the session (confidentiality and limits, no cell phones, no judgement, respectful listening)

2. Exploration of Feelings/Thoughts: (40 min.)

- Give participants permission to express what they are feeling and that whatever their reaction is it is normal and will be validated.
- Facilitator's role will be to encourage open and respectful sharing and to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the chance to.
- It is a good idea to have some questions prepared to start off the conversation
- Types of questions you may ask - reactions and experiences of the individual, the meaning the event has had on them or their interpretation, and how they are now coping with what happened, what is the very worst thing about the event, how has this tragic experience shown up in their lives.

3. Teaching: (20 min.)

- Review normal symptoms of trauma and stress
- Review coping skills
- Offer support and resources for those who may need more support
- Provide handouts with information on coping with traumatic events

4. Follow-Up/Closure:

- Let participants know that more support is available if they need it - give them the information and encourage them to access it if they need it
- Summarize the discussion and the value of debriefing and provide some encouragement for the future
- If you identify someone who may need more intensive supports, approach them individually after the group

Appendix 21: Suggested School Activities for after a Loss

- A memory book or poster board can be made available for students to gather and write messages (this should be set up in an area that can be avoided by those who do not wish to participate). After a few days or up to the funeral date, the memory book can be removed and given to the family.
- Placing a memory box in class for notes to the family, cards, letters, special items, etc. to be removed from the class at the time of the funeral and given to the family.
- School staff/student attendance at the funeral. Discuss and prepare students for funeral (what to expect, people's reactions, cultural and/or religious considerations, what to do, what to say).
- A visit to the family of the deceased to give items noted above, and/or food, flowers, etc.
- Yearbook memory page recognition of the deceased student or staff member (based on family's wishes) – refer to **Step #10** for guidelines.
- It is important that the school should be prepared to plan memorial events that are consistent regardless of cause of death. The school should bear in mind that once it plants a tree, puts up a plaque, installs a park bench, for one student, it should be prepared to do this for others, which can become difficult to sustain over time. Any memorial event should be done in consultation with the family, the Principal, School Counsellor and Superintendent.
- The collection of funds toward a charity as chosen by the family in memory of the deceased.
- Starting a new school activity such as SADD unit if a student was killed by a drunk driver or other preventative initiatives.

Note: Do not lower the school flag unless directed to do so by the Director or designate. The Canadian flag is only lowered when directed by provincial or national government officials.

Adapted from: *School Crisis Survival Guide* by Luni Petersen and Ron Staub
(see **References**)

Appendix 22: Traumatic Events Technical Debrief (2 Weeks after traumatic event)

After experiencing a Traumatic Event and implementing the Traumatic Events Response Plan, the TERT will meet with staff within 2 weeks of the event to debrief on the process so that feedback can be collected to improve both the school and division level response for future events. A copy is to be provided to the School Superintendent and the Director or Designate overseeing Trauma Response.

School:

Date:

Principal and School Counsellor Completing the Report:

Brief Description of Traumatic Event:

1. What resources did your school receive that worked well to provide support to your school community as part of the traumatic event response?
2. What did not work as planned? What may have been more effective?
3. What procedures or information in the GSSD Trauma Response Guide are unclear, and/or what information is missing that should be added?
4. Did you have the necessary resources to respond to this incident effectively and in a timely manner? Explain.
5. Do you have any other recommendations for improving our school or division responses to traumatic events?

Appendix 23: When a Student Returns to School after a Family Death

When a student returns to school after experiencing the loss of a parent or sibling, it can be uncomfortable for both the student and the rest of the class. If possible, allow the student to get settled as usual. Prior to the student's return, the teacher should speak to the student privately, expressing concern, sharing any relevant experience, and letting the student know that he/she understands how painful life is right now. The teacher's body language is important. Make eye contact, keep a relaxed tone, and remember that returning to school is a very important step for that student. It is the sign of beginning to return to "normalcy" and perhaps returning to a place where the student can find the most stable environment in their life at that moment. Be genuine in your comments and avoid euphemisms.

Allow the opportunity for the student to talk about the death and discuss any concerns about getting behind in school work. Tell the student you are available for extra help if needed and then ensure you make yourself available if he/she would like that support. Accept the feelings, fears, and concerns of the student. Recognize that people vary in how much they wish to disclose their feelings.

Recognize the pain of a loss may persist over an extended period. The teacher may consult with appropriate resource personnel regarding students who have suffered a significant loss.

The teacher should have taken time previously to **discuss with the class** the return of the bereaved student. There is a tendency to avoid people who have experienced a death. A sense of isolation results partly from the deliberate withdrawal of the person who has experienced a death of a family member or friend, but it is also caused by others who avoid the bereaved. The teacher should encourage students to be open and supportive of the bereaved student upon their return without an excessive focus on the death. Gossip and inappropriate questions or comments should be cautioned against.

Support peers in knowing how to communicate condolences or comfort messages to the student when they return to school (e.g. "Steve, I am so sorry about your dad. I know you will miss him very much. Let me know if I can help you with your paper route") and what to expect. Help students anticipate changes in their classmate's behavior as they grieve; help them understand their grieving friend may withdraw for a while, or might seem angry or upset; but that does not mean a lasting change in their relationship. Explain to students that their friendship is an important source of support for their grieving classmate, and that activities such as inviting the friend over to play, going to the park, watching a movie, playing sports, or a trip to the mall may offer a much needed distraction and sense of connection and normalcy.

Appendix 24: Talking About Suicide in Classrooms

<p>1. GIVE ACCURATE INFORMATION ABOUT SUICIDE.</p> <p>-Suicide is a complicated behaviour. It is not caused by a single event such as bad grade, an argument with parents, or the breakup of a relationship.</p> <p>-In most cases, suicide is caused by an underlying mental disorder like depression or substance abuse. Mental health disorders affect the way people feel and prevent them from thinking clearly and rationally. Having a mental disorder is nothing to be ashamed of, and help is available.</p> <p>-Talking about suicide in a calm, straight forward manner does not put ideas into kid's minds.</p>	<p>BY SAYING... (Refer to Death Notification statement provided by principal to assist.)</p> <p>"The cause of _____'s death was suicide. Suicide is most often caused by serious mental disorders like depression, combined with other complications."</p> <p>"_____ may have been struggling with a mental health issue like depression or anxiety, even though it may not have been obvious to other people."</p> <p>"Since 90 % of people who die by suicide have a mental disorder at the time of their death, it is possible that _____ suffered from a mental disorder that affected their feelings, thoughts, and ability to think clearly and solve problems in a better way."</p> <p>"Mental disorders are not something to be ashamed of, and there are very good treatments to help the symptoms go away."</p>
<p>2. ADDRESS BLAMING AND SCAPEGOATING.</p> <p>-It is common to try to answer the question "WHY?" after a death by suicide. Sometimes this turns into blaming others for the death.</p>	<p>BY SAYING...</p> <p>"The reasons that someone dies by suicide are not simple, and are related to mental disorders that get in the way of the person thinking clearly. Blaming others or blaming the person who died does not acknowledge the reality that the person was battling a mental disorder."</p> <p>"There are almost always several complicating factors that lead to a death by suicide. Blaming any one is not helpful nor constructive."</p>
<p>3. DO NOT FOCUS ON THE METHOD OR GRAPHIC DETAILS.</p> <p>-Talking in graphic detail about the method may create images that are upsetting and may increase the risk of imitative behaviour.</p> <p>-If asked, it is okay to give basic facts about the method if the family has released this, but don't go into graphic detail or talk at length about it. The focus should be not on how someone died but rather on how to cope with feelings of loss, anger, etc.</p>	<p>BY SAYING...</p> <p>"It is tragic that he died by suicide. Let's talk about how _____'s death has affected you and ways for you to handle it."</p> <p>"How can we figure out the best ways to deal with our loss and grief?"</p> <p>"I think its best if we focus on who _____ was, and what he/she meant to you. How he/she was feeling and how you are feeling now, rather than focusing on the details of how he/she died."</p>

<p>4. ADDRESS FEELINGS OF ANGER or GUILT.</p> <p>-Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal.</p>	<p>BY SAYING...</p> <p>"It is okay to feel angry. These feelings are normal, and it doesn't mean that you didn't care about _____. You can be angry at someone's behaviour and still care deeply about that person."</p>
<p>5. ADDRESS FEELINGS OF RESPONSIBILITY.</p> <p>-Reassure those who feel responsible or think they could have done something to save the deceased.</p>	<p>BY SAYING...</p> <p>"This death is not your fault." "We can't always predict someone else's behaviour." "We can't control someone else's behaviour."</p>
<p>6. ENCOURAGE HELP-SEEKING.</p> <p>-Encourage students to seek help from a trusted adult or a professional if they or a friend are feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts.</p> <p>-It's appropriate to directly ask a student if they are having suicidal thoughts.</p>	<p>BY SAYING...</p> <p>"We are always here to help you through any problem, no matter what. Who are the people you would go to if you or a friend were feeling worried or depressed or had thoughts of suicide?"</p> <p>"There are effective treatments from professionals to help people who have mental disorders or substance abuse problems. Suicide is never an answer."</p> <p>"This is an important time for all in our (school, team, etc.) community to support and look out for one another. If you are concerned about a friend, you need to be sure you tell a trusted adult or a professional."</p> <p>"Are you having thoughts of suicide?"</p>

Appendix 25: Facts about Suicide and Mental Disorders in Adolescents

Suicide is not simply the result of stress or difficult life circumstances. The key suicide risk factor is an **undiagnosed, untreated, or ineffectively treated mental disorder**. Research shows that over 90 percent of people who die by suicide have a mental disorder at the time of their death.

- In youth, the **mental disorders** most closely linked to suicide risk are major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, substance use disorder and eating disorders. While in some cases these disorders may be the result of environmental stressors, they can also occur as a result of changes in brain chemistry.
- **Suicide is almost always complicated.** Beyond the factors above, suicide risk can be affected by personality factors such as impulsivity, aggression, and hopelessness. Suicide risk can also be exacerbated by stressful life circumstances such as: a history of childhood physical and/or sexual abuse; death; divorce; other family trauma; persistent serious family conflict; traumatic breakups of romantic relationships; trouble with the law; school failures or other major disappointments; bullying; and harassment or victimization by peers.
- It is important to remember that the vast majority of youth who experience even very stressful life events do not become suicidal. In some cases, such experiences can be a catalyst for suicidal behaviour in those who are already struggling with depression or other mental health problems. In others, traumatic experiences can trigger depression, anxiety, abuse of alcohol or drugs, or another mental disorder, which can increase suicide risk. Existing mental disorders may also make worse stressors such as family conflict, social isolation, relationship breakups or school failures, which may, in turn, exacerbate the underlying illness and increase suicide risk.

Warning Signs of Suicide

For the following signs, the risk is greater if a behaviour is new or has recently increased in frequency or intensity, and if it seems related to a painful event, loss or change.

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself (e.g., searching online or purchasing a gun)
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated, or behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings or changes in baseline behavior
- Sudden happiness or contentedness despite a history of depressive feelings

Appendix 26: Student Resource Survey

Name: _____

Friends I can count on:

Family members I feel comfortable sharing my feelings with:

Relatives (e.g., aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent) I can talk with:

Staff (e.g., teacher, counsellor, coach) I can go to for support:

Someone else I might be able to count on even though we are not always close:

What are the things/activities in my life that can help me cope? (school-related, sports, arts, crafts, music, church/groups/clubs, pets, pictures/special items)

On a scale of 1 – 10, with 1 being 'I am not coping very well' and 10 indicating 'I am coping very well', how would you rate your ability to cope with your struggles and challenges in your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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