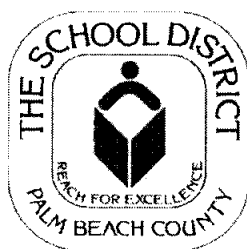


An Administrative Guide:
**Procedures for the Utilization of Psychological and
Guidance Services in the Aftermath of a School Crisis**
2011



The School District of Palm Beach County

The School Board of Palm Beach County, Florida

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Responsibility Guide: Roles in a Crisis	
Administrator in Charge.....	4
School Psychologist.....	7
Guidance Counselor.....	9
Teachers.....	11
Secretaries and Clerical Staff.....	12
Notification and Announcement Procedures.....	13
Death by Suicide.....	16
Death Notification.....	17
Handling the Media.....	18
Memorial Guidelines.....	19
Sample School Announcements.....	21
Sample Letter to Parent/Guardian.....	22
Memo to Faculty and Staff (Suicide).....	25
Principal Crisis Response Checklist.....	26
Resource References.....	28

INTRODUCTION

At some time all educators will deal with the death of a student, colleague, or parent of a student. It is essential that school personnel prepare *in advance* so that they can respond in a timely and supportive manner that leads to constructive resolution for all students and staff.

Children and adolescents encounter many variations of loss quite frequently in their lives. Good crisis plans may minimize trauma and assist to a degree with grief resolution. Consequently, schools who have developed a “Standard Operating Guide for Crisis Response” are likely to avoid confusion and disorganization when the crisis occurs. These policies should be considered malleable and subject to change as events unfold. However, they should be utilized as a guideline for standard operation.

When a school crisis occurs, it is important to have a well-defined plan for response that details in writing who will coordinate a response, what resources are available, and what responsibilities will be assumed by which individuals.

No longer can school districts say “It won’t happen here.” It is on this premise that we utilize the tools we have in an organized and efficient manner to assist our students, faculty, parents, and community to minimize the trauma.

The Crisis Response Plan requires a team which includes the following members: School Psychologists; Guidance Counselors; Guidance Program Planner (as needed); Area Supervisors (as needed); Team Leaders (as needed); Superintendent (as needed).

Crisis Planning:

Joanne Byron, S.S.P., NCSP, School Psychologist
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In support with Supplemental Educational Services & Best Practices Committee

Special Thanks:

Lynne McGee, Principal
Linda Terranova, Principal

RESPONSIBILITY GUIDE

ROLES IN A CRISIS

PRINCIPAL/ADMINISTRATOR IN CHARGE

As the chief officer of the building, you are responsible for the implementation of the Crisis Response Plan. The attitude you present about the importance of the plan and how sensitively it should be carried out will set the tone for how the entire school responds.

Responsibilities:

- *Receive notification of death
- *Verify information (facts)
- *Notify Team Leader so he/she may notify Crisis Response Team specific to School Psychologists
- *Notify Crisis Response Team which includes Guidance Counselors
- *Notify Area Supervisor *if necessary*
- *Notify Superintendent *if necessary*
- *Notify other principals *if necessary* regarding other affected siblings/friends
- *Schedule special staff meeting to adjust staff responsibilities in order to assist Crisis Team
- *Convene & plan with Crisis Team members prior to the commencement of counseling
- *Provide Crisis Team with required items necessary to provide counseling, etc.
- *Compose announcement to be read in class or over PA system (Examples included in manual)
- *Compose and send letter to parents *if necessary*
- *Condolence note to family
- *Grant release time for funeral attendance
- *Attend funeral if desired
- *Attend special staff meetings in order to plan for crisis & review implementation of plan
- *Convene with Crisis Team members at the end of day to debrief, assess the crisis, & determine if further counseling is required

I. PRINCIPAL/ADMINISTRATOR IN CHARGE

A. Determine the degree of trauma to anticipate emotional impact.

1. The person/victim
Who was the person and were they a long-time, popular member of the school?
2. What happened?
-Murder and suicide are unexpected and violent, and therefore more difficult to deal with than a death from a serious illness.
-Traumatic events that are sudden and accidents which result in severe injuries are also more challenging.
3. Where did the death occur?
A death on school grounds is more difficult to handle.
4. Any other tragedies?
Have other tragedies impacted the school recently? If so, the latest death will cause unresolved issue to surface for both staff and students.
5. Who was the perpetrator/individual(s) responsible?
If the person believed to be responsible for the death/accident/trauma is also a member of your school community, it adds to the emotionality.

B. Communicate with Area/District administration.

1. Notify as to the nature of the crisis.
2. Request a Crisis Team if deemed necessary (School Psychologist, Guidance Counselors).

C. Be visible, available, supportive, and empower staff.

1. Provide direction to teachers about how much to set aside the curriculum.
2. Tests should be postponed in some classes.
3. Assign duties as needed.
4. Provide substitute teachers as needed.
5. Provide designated area for adults with necessary refreshments.

D. Review and approve information releases to staff, students, and others.

E. Approve appropriate requests for additional resources (i.e., community, staff).

- F. Provide Crisis Team with necessary items which facilitate crisis counseling.
 - 1. Designated counseling room(s)
 - 2. Secretarial support staff
 - 3. Phone access
 - 4. Other items as deemed necessary
 - 5. Consult with Crisis Team as to the manner in which to provide counseling.
- G. Contact family of the deceased.
- H. Inform staff and students about funeral arrangements.
- I. Collaboration with school psychologist/guidance counselor may ensure that memorials are appropriate.

RESPONSIBILITY GUIDE

ROLES IN A CRISIS

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

In your position, you act as a primary in-school referral person. Your education and experience make you the staff person most qualified to assist the ADMINISTRATOR IN CHARGE, carry out or assist outside consultants with: in-school counseling of students and staff, providing information and assistance to school staff, completing assessment intervention forms when necessary and making referral to the proper resources for an at-risk student. You may also have a role in working with parents of at-risk students.

Responsibilities:

- *Cancel other activities
- *Work closely with administrator
- *In-school counseling of students
- *Staff consultation and education in collaboration with guidance counselors
- *Complete student assessments (i.e., level of crisis intervention)
- *Facilitate group counseling and/or individual sessions
- *Make referrals to appropriate community resources
- *Contact and work with parents *if needed*
- *Attend funeral as support to students *if needed*

II. SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

- A. Be available and coordinate with Guidance Counselors and community agencies (*if needed*) to activate Crisis Team.
- B. Cancel other activities.
- C. Work closely with administration.
- D. Implement a comprehensive communication plan for making available services known.
- E. Provide fact sheets (*if needed*) to be utilized by staff.
- F. Provide further information regarding crisis letters.
- G. Provide individual and group counseling.
 - 1. Establish and coordinate group and individual counseling opportunities for students, teachers, staff, and others.
 - 2. Locate counseling assistance.
Identify resources for teachers, parents, and others to help identify the natural progression and management of the grief and healing process.
- H. Prepare for memorial services and for long-term support for the anniversary dates of the crisis incidents *if necessary*.
- I. Assist staff with projects in which to assist the grieving process.
- J. Coordinate maintenance of adequate records of services provided with guidance counselors.
- K. Keep records of affected students and *if necessary* provide follow-up services.
- L. In collaboration with the Guidance Counselors, follow the schedule of the deceased and visit the classrooms of close friends if deemed necessary.
- M. Contact parents of affected students with suggestions for support or further referral *if necessary*.

RESPONSIBILITY GUIDE

ROLES IN A CRISIS

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS

You will be a key person in your school's crisis response as you probably have been able to talk with and possibly even develop a relationship with some of the students. The feeling of trust they have for you will make it easier for them to express feelings to you. Your professional experience will allow you to assess those students you see or who have been referred to you. If your professional opinion is that a student or students are at-risk, you should make a referral to the psychologist. Contacting the student's family to express concern is also advisable.

Responsibilities:

- *Cancel other activities as appropriate
- *Adjust schedule *as needed*
- *Operate crisis centers in collaboration with School Psychologists
- *Talk with students
- *Clarify misinformation & obtain factual information
- *Encourage students to express feelings
- *Give grief information
- *No judgment of grief
- *Give priority to students in need of immediate services
- *Support students & staff
- *Make referrals to psychologists *as necessary*
- *Follow class schedule
- *Contact parents, if necessary
- *Attend funeral to support students *if necessary*
- *Follow-up with students who are repeatedly absent after crisis if deemed necessary

III. GUIDANCE COUNSELORS

- A. Be available.
- B. Cancel other activities as appropriate.
- C. Adjust Schedule as needed.
- C. Implement a comprehensive communication plan with members of the Crisis Team in order to make available services known.
- D. Provide information of community resources (i.e., counseling).
- E. Coordinate maintenance of adequate records of services provided with psychologists (i.e., student sign-in sheets).
- F. Contact parents of affected students with suggestions for support or further referral.
- G. In collaboration with School Psychologists, follow the schedule of the deceased and visit the classroom of close friends if deemed necessary.
- H. Provide individual and group support counseling.
- I. Provide supportive services to staff as needed.

RESPONSIBILITY GUIDE

ROLES IN A CRISIS

IV. TEACHERS

- A. Implement directives as issued by Crisis Team and school administrator.
- B. Know how to report concerns and needs related to the crisis and know to whom to report them.
- C. Communicate clearly, concisely, and honestly to students before, during, and after the crisis.
- D. Provide accurate information to students.
- E. Lead classroom discussions that focus on helping students to cope with the loss, as appropriate.
- F. Dispel rumors.
- G. Answer questions without providing unnecessary details.
- H. Recognize and be sensitive to the varying religious beliefs held by students.
- I. Model an appropriate response.
- J. Be flexible and prepared to adapt curriculum and classroom activities in response to the crisis and, in particular, to help students process and manage their reactions to the crisis.
- K. Refer students to Crisis Team as directed by administrator.
- L. Teachers can also notify Crisis Team should they require support.
- M. Confer with Crisis Team regarding any physical alteration to classroom or removal of deceased's personal items.

RESPONSIBILITY GUIDE

ROLES IN A CRISIS

V. SECRETARIES AND CLERICAL STAFF

- A. Coordinate requests for additional copying, supplies, and other such items needed to manage the crisis.
- B. Utilize fact sheets prepared by Crisis Team or administrator for communication with parents and other callers.
- C. Refer media inquiries to the designated staff.
- D. Provide school maps and class rosters to visiting Crisis Team members.

NOTIFICATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT PROCEDURES

The goal is to allow people to become emotionally prepared and to prevent the beginning and spreading of any erroneous information. It is important to adhere to facts as details may innocently and easily become skewed.

**Procedures may vary depending on time of incident (i.e., within or outside of school hours).*

I. Notification and Announcement Procedures

A. Obtain the facts.

1. Verification by administrator through family or law enforcement prior to providing counseling.
 - a. It is *very important* to have a second or third verification of the death/accident/traumatic event.
2. Share facts provided as quickly as possible in order to dispel rumors.

B. Establish a calling tree.

1. Used to notify personnel of the death/accident/traumatic event.
2. Used for notification that a faculty meeting will be held before/after school to outline crisis plans.
3. If the death/accident/traumatic event occurs during non-school hours or during vacation, this process allows staff members to work through their own issues before they assist their students.
4. Calling tree procedure should be established and reviewed with all staff at the beginning of each school year.

C. Using a Crisis Telephone Tree.

1. Once you receive a call about a school crisis, relay the information to the next person on your list.
2. If the person on your list does not answer, call others on your list.
3. Continue calling anyone who does not answer until connection is made. Do not leave a message regarding the incident but rather request a return call.

- D. Suggestions for making the call.
1. Begin with a statement such as, "I am sorry to have to call you with bad news."
 2. Ask the person to get paper and pencil to write specifics if they will be calling another person.
 3. Give the specifics of the event as you know them.
 4. Give details of the before-school required meeting: where, when, and that further details regarding the incident will be available.
 5. Remind them not to speculate – just pass on essential information.
- E. Death/accident/traumatic event occurs when school is in session
1. Have Crisis Team prepared and ready to assist.
 2. Hand-deliver a memorandum or personally speak to all teachers.
 - a. A Crisis Team member can give all teachers facts about the tragedy and instructions to share the information with their students, as well as suggestions for assisting students and directives on how to share information.
 - b. Memo can invite all staff to a faculty meeting after school.
 - c. Majority of students should stay in their classroom.
 - d. Only those closest to the victim or those with tragic life situations of their own should be sent to the school's support personnel.
 - e. A memorandum read to the students by the teacher is preferable than an intercom announcement or in select cases school staff may go to classes to make the announcement.
- F. Use of the public announcement system for other information *not* related to the actual death notification (i.e., moment of silence).
1. Collaboration with the school psychologist/guidance counselor may be helpful in the development of the announcement.
 2. The administrator is urged to carefully plan and rehearse what he/she will say.
 3. Choice of words, voice tone and inflection are very important and set the tone for management of the crisis.

G. Parent notification

1. Important to inform the parents of students at the school affected by the death/accident/traumatic event that this has occurred.
2. Provide balance between enough information to dispel rumors and protecting the privacy of the deceased/victims.
3. Collaborate with the Crisis Team to compose a fact sheet or letter to be sent home to parents, either by mail or via students.
4. This letter, in most cases, *would not* contain the name of the deceased/victims, especially when it involves a student.

DEATH BY SUICIDE

Suicide is a reality in schools with crisis procedures designed to assist schools respond to the aftermath. Although it is necessary to acknowledge the deceased, it is imperative that the deceased or the act is not glamorized.

I. Death by Suicide.

A. Task of crisis aftermath

1. Reduce chance of anyone else committing suicide by avoiding glamorization of the deceased.
2. Assist staff and students with grieving process.

B. Crisis management with Crisis Team.

1. Do give the facts to the students.
2. Do provide individual and group counseling.
3. Do contact the family of the deceased.
4. Do not encourage funeral attendance during school hours.
5. Do not dedicate a memorial to the deceased.
6. Do not have a large school assembly.

DEATH NOTIFICATION

With the death notification, the reactionary process begins for those left behind. It is critical that this be done as well as possible because it is the most critical point of trauma for the loved ones. Properly done, it can begin the healing process.

- I. General Guidelines in Death Notification.
 - A. Administration may wish to consult with school psychologist/guidance counselor and ask for their presence, as well as expertise in the notification process.
 - B. Before notification
 1. Obtain as much information as possible.
 - a. What happened, when did it happen, how did it happen?
 - b. Ensure that the appropriate *closest* relative receives notification first.
 - C. Notification should always be performed compassionately, quickly, and with as much accuracy as possible.
 - D. Parameters of notification
 1. Notification in person, if possible.
 2. Make notification in pairs.
 3. Confer with the Crisis Team prior to removing personal items of the deceased.

HANDLING THE MEDIA

****ALWAYS FOLLOW SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PALM BEACH COUNTY GUIDELINES****

*Go to: www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us
Public Affairs
Working with the Media
Media Tips*

Educators must be aware that someone representing their school must communicate with the media immediately. If not, the media will move on to other sources who may be less familiar with crisis. Therefore, it is necessary to follow the suggested media response guidelines.

I. Handling the Media

- A. Adhere to media policy/tips (see above directions).
- B. Talking with the media affords schools the opportunity to position themselves as being in charge and in control of the situation.
- C. Provides the vehicle for school officials to reach their audiences with timely and important messages/information.
- D. Develop key messages, adhere to them, and ensure that you work with the legal department (if needed).

II. Rights with the Media

Adapted from Slover, C. & Tasci, D. (1999) Trauma Recovery Handbook

- A. A right to grieve and recover in private.
- B. The right to say 'no' to an interview.
- C. The right to request a specific reporter.
- D. The right to refuse an interview with a specific reporter.
- E. The right to speak to only one reporter at a time.
- F. The right to refrain from answering any questions that makes the interviewee uncomfortable.
- G. The right to ask to review quotations prior to publication.
- H. The right to demand a retraction when inaccurate information is reported.
- I. The right to ask that offensive photographs or visuals be omitted from airing or publication.

MEMORIAL GUIDELINES

School memorials, ceremonies or memory activities following a traumatic experience serve an important function in the healing process for both students and staff. Such activities provide the opportunity to express emotions through a variety of different ways besides talking. Further, a school memorial assists in providing closure to a period of grieving and serves as a point from which to move on with regular school activities.

I. Guidelines for Planning Memorial Activities

- A. Request the assistance of school psychologist/guidance counselor to assist with the specifics of the activity.
- B. Proceed slowly and involve students, staff, and families.
- C. Initial activity should take place within one week of death/incident.
- D. Developmental considerations appropriate to age of students.

II. Suggested Memorial Activities

- A. Temporary memorial site can be established at a designated location at school, such as flowers, notes, poems, ribbons, stuffed animals, pictures, and other objects.
- B. Activities and projects that will make a difference and may prevent similar tragedies.
- C. Writing Activities
 1. Helpful to all students of all ages.
 2. Notes/letters of condolence to the family.

III. Memorial Activities for Suicide.

- A. Do:
 1. Do something to prevent other suicides from happening.
 2. Do develop living memorials.
 3. Do allow any student, with parental permission, to attend the funeral.

B. Do Not:

1. Do not fly the flag at half staff.
2. Do not have a moment of silence in all-school assemblies.
3. Do not have mass assemblies focusing on the suicide victim.
4. Do not make special arrangements to send all students from school to the funeral.
5. Do not stop classes for a funeral.
6. Do not put up plaques in memory of the suicide victim.
7. Do not dedicate a yearbook, songs, or sporting events to the person who committed suicide.

Note: See Crisis Team members for additional sample announcements if needed.

It is suggested that the Crisis Team collaborate in the development of the announcements.

SAMPLE SCHOOL ANNOUNCEMENTS

I have some very sad news to share with you. _____ (name) _____ died on _____ (date) _____. We at _____ (school) _____ will greatly miss _____ (name) _____. _____ (name of teacher) _____ will be teaching _____ (name of teacher) _____ class for today. You may feel like taking some time now to talk to your teacher and classmates about this sad news.

In classroom: (Individual loss)

John will not be in school today. His mother was killed in an automobile crash last night. Her car was struck on I-95. John will be very sad for a long time. Let us discuss some ways John might be feeling and how we can help him.

In classroom: (School-wide loss)

We have something very sad to tell you today. John was driving home in the rain last night. His car swerved into an oncoming lane, he was struck by a car and went off the road. John died as a result of the injuries he sustained in the accident. At this time, we will observe a moment of silence.

**Direct students to planned activities.*

Over P.A.: (School-wide loss)

Our school has suffered a great, great loss. M _____, the science teacher, has been ill with cancer for many months now. We just received word that his/her suffering has come to an end and M _____ has died. We will be commemorating (remembering) M _____'s contribution to our school community. Some time today, I'd like each class to discuss ways they would like to commemorate (remember) the life of M _____.

Note: See Crisis Team members for additional sample letters if needed.

It is suggested that the Crisis Team collaborate in the development of letters.

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENT/CAREGIVER:

ADULT DEATH

(school letterhead)

Date

Dear Parent/Caregiver:

This has been a difficult day for all of us at (school). (name), a (grade) teacher died (time). He/She will be missed by the children, parents, and staff at (school) as he/she has touched many lives in a special way. Your child may want to share memories of (name) or ask questions regarding this matter. It is natural and healthy for him/her to want to discuss this. A team of professionals is available at school to assist students and staff in coping with this difficult situation.

Arrangements have not been completed at this time. Thank you for your support and kindness.

Sincerely,

Principal

Note: See Crisis Team members for additional sample letters if needed.

It is suggested that the Crisis Team collaborate in the development of letters.

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENT/CAREGIVER:

STUDENT'S DEATH

(school letterhead)

Date

Dear Parent/Caregiver:

This has been a difficult day for all of us at (school). (student's name), a (grade) student died (time). He/She will be missed by the children, parents, and staff at (school) as he/she has touched many lives in a special way. Your child may want to share memories of (name) or ask questions regarding this matter. It is natural and healthy for him/her to want to discuss this. A team of professionals is available at school to assist students and staff in coping with this difficult situation.

Arrangements have not been completed at this time. Thank you for your support and kindness.

Sincerely,

Principal

Note: See Crisis Team members for additional sample letters if needed.

It is suggested that the Crisis Team collaborate in the development of letters.

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENT/CAREGIVER:

ACCIDENTAL DEATH

(school letterhead)

Date

Dear Parent/Caregiver:

This has been a difficult day for all of us at (school). (student's name), a (grade) student was killed in an accident (time). He/She will be missed by the children, parents, and staff at (school) as he/she has touched many lives in a special way. Your child may want to share memories of (name) or ask questions regarding this matter. It is natural and healthy for him/her to want to discuss this. A team of professionals

Arrangements have not been completed at this time. Thank you for your support and kindness.

Sincerely,

Principal

MEMO TO ALL FACULTY AND STAFF REGARDING SUICIDE

1. Points to keep in mind during the week ahead:
 - A. Suicide is not the result of normal adolescent stressors nor is it the result of one single event. It is the product of a complex interaction of many factors in the life of an adolescent who is at risk.
 - B. Avoid discussion with students that speculate on the causes or attribute blame for the death.
 - C. Victims of suicide should not be glamorized or memorialized in a "heroic sense".
 - D. Students are experiencing a loss and consequently must grieve the death of their classmate or faculty member.
 - E. Students will experience a wide range of emotions; there is no "right way" to feel; each person has a unique response to crisis.
 - F. While talking about feelings in open discussions is an appropriate way of expressing grief, this should only be done with crisis team members.
 - G. Life will return to normal. However, it will take time and vary from individual to individual.
 - H. Please engage with students in a calm, low-key manner – as difficult as it may be.
2. If you feel a student needs to see a crisis team member or guidance counselor, send the student to the designated area. Please keep a sign-out list for each period of the day and deliver to Guidance Counselor at the end of the day.
3. If you need to talk to someone or ask a question, a member of the Crisis Team will be available.
4. Teachers can also notify Crisis Team should they require support.

PRINCIPAL CRISIS RESPONSE CHECKLIST

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

<u>Assigned To</u>		<u>Completed</u>
_____	Notify Area Superintendent	_____
_____	Notify Area Team Leader	_____
_____	Convene Crisis Team	_____
_____	Verify and establish facts of the crisis. Make copies of any newspaper articles for team members.	_____
_____	Designate media representative and refer to Media information and contact Public Affairs <i>if needed</i> .	_____
_____	Implement plan of action for crowd control and/or disruptive behavior <i>if necessary</i> .	_____
_____	Determine whether any other schools will be affected by the crisis and consult with personnel.	_____
_____	Designate staff to provided Crisis Team with location, supplies, etc.	_____

COUNSELING ACTIVITIES

_____	Designate personnel providing counseling.	_____
_____	Set aside space for group and individual counseling.	_____
_____	Inform staff of procedure for accessing counseling services.	_____
_____	Determine need for classroom counseling.	_____
_____	Designate person to take incoming calls from parents.	_____
_____	Coordinate and distribute supplies such as tissues, paper, markers for making cards, etc.	_____
_____	Convene a faculty/staff meeting for debriefing.	_____
_____	Convene Crisis Team members at the end of each day to assess situation and prepare for the following day.	_____

PRINCIPAL CRISIS RESPONSE CHECKLIST
(CONTINUED)

COMMUNICATION

Assigned To

Completed

_____	Notify staff via communication system previously established.	_____
_____	Prepare immediate information to be shared with students and decide method for communication.	_____
_____	Prepare information to be sent home to parents <i>if necessary</i> .	_____
_____	Prepare fact sheet with information to be shared with the general public, media, etc. Clarify procedures for communication with media.	_____
_____	Contact grieving family to express condolences and provide support (i.e., Phone call, visit, letter, card) Communicate actions taken by school.	_____
_____	Update information (funeral arrangements, food collections etc.) to staff, students, and parents as appropriate.	_____
_____	Select and distribute appropriate handouts to staff.	_____
_____	Designate staff to take incoming calls from parents.	_____
_____	Contact community resources previously identified in crisis plan if additional support is needed.	_____
_____	Convene a faculty/staff meeting for debriefing.	_____
_____	Convene Crisis Team members at the end of each day to assess situation and prepare for the following day.	_____
_____	Consider a home visit to grieving family.	_____

RESOURCE REFERENCES

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