 **No. 224**

**SECTION: PUPILS**

**TITLE: DEATH OF A STUDENT OR STAFF**

**MEDICAL ACADEMY ADOPTED: 10/8/13**

**CHARTER SCHOOL REVISED:**

224. DEATH OF A STUDENT OR STAFF

**Procedural Guidelines**

**Preface**

The purpose of these guidelines is to specify actions that school personnel may take to respond to the needs of students and staff following the death of a student or staff. The goal of these guidelines is to provide a sense of calm and security for students and staff at a time when they may be experiencing many different feelings (e.g., fear, shock, sadness, anger).

Postvention Procedures

I. Notification

A. Administration

1. Anyone who hears about a suicide or other tragedy involving a student/employee

should contact administration immediately.

2. If the tragedy occurred in school, crisis intervention procedures should be followed.

3. If the tragedy occurred outside of school, the administrator will verify the information

and will contact all teachers and staff. A meeting will be set prior to the start of the

next school day.

4. Arrange for additional counselors to be available at the school.

B. Students

1. Call students that were especially close to the student that died and inform them

privately while the other students are notified.

2. Inform all other students by going from class to class during 1st period.

3. The following sample statements may be used in the notification of students:

**After a suicide** . . . "A tragedy has happened. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ committed suicide. Details of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_'s premature death will not

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be released to protect the privacy of his/her family. We will give you information about funeral arrangements as soon as we know them, if allowed by the family. This kind of tragedy does not need to happen. Lots of people think about hurting themselves, but there are many better options. There are always people who want to help. Sadly, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_didn't reach out for help. This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You will probably feel many feelings within the next few days. You may feel sad, angry, confused, numb, or depressed. In fact, you may think about hurting yourself too. We will have extra counselors here over the next few days whom you can come to talk. This kind of tragedy never needs to happen again in this school. We are a family, and need to be there for each other, let’s help one another to make sure this doesn't happen again."

**After a fatality** . . . "A tragedy has happened. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ was [killed in an accident] [died in the hospital] [fill in]. We will give you information about funeral arrangements as soon as we know them, if allowed by the family. This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You will probably feel many feelings within the next few days. You may feel sad, angry, confused, numb, or depressed. We will have extra counselors here over the next few days whom you can come to to talk. We are a family, and need to be there for each other."

**After a homicide** . . . "A tragedy has happened. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_was

killed. Details of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_'s premature death are not available to us as the police are investigating this crime. This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You will probably feel many feelings within the next few weeks. You may feel sad, angry, confused, numb, depressed, or even frightened. We will have extra counselors here over the next few days whom you can come to to talk. We are a family, and need to be there for each other."

4. Open up discussions with students, letting them know it is normal and okay to feel

upset, teach about normal grieving and answer questions about funerals and death.

C. Media/Parents

1. The Principal/CEO will be the media spokesperson. No one else is to speak to the

media.

2. Notify all parents of the tragedy, giving them suggestions on warning signs to look

for in their own child and how to support their child.

II. Services

A. Drop-In Centers

1. Any student who would like to talk about his/her feelings regarding the tragedy is

invited to use this service. Counselors and other professionals trained in crisis

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intervention will be available in the Drop-In Center throughout the school day. This

service will be available two to five days after the tragedy.

B. Identification of "At Risk" Students

1. Faculty and staff should submit names to the Guidance Counselor of any students

who they believe are especially vulnerable in the aftermath of suicide/other tragedy.

These include: Friends/relatives of the victim, students who seem to have emotional

problems or low self-esteem, and students who seem to be holding in their feelings.

Students who are visibly upset should be referred to the Drop-In Center immediately.

2. If appropriate, telephone parents of students who seem to be especially vulnerable in

the aftermath of a suicide or other tragedy. Offer suggestions on how parents may be

supportive at home and give information about community mental health resources.

3. Staff able to provide support should attend the funeral/burial. They should watch and

help any unattended high-risk students. They should also be available to support any

students or staff who might be having particular difficulty. If the funeral is held

during school hours, some team members need to remain in the building to help those

students who did not attend.

C. Discussion Groups for Teachers

1. This service will be available to interested teachers after school. The purpose of this

group is not to discuss specifics of the tragedy. Instead, members of the group will be

given the opportunity to vent their feelings regarding the recent loss.

III. Follow-Up

A. Condolences

1. The Principal/CEO will express condolences and offer help to the family of the

victim on behalf of the school.

B. Recognition of the Tragedy

1. It is vitally important for school personnel not to glamorize the suicide death of a

student. The school shall not conduct a special memorial service or dedication to the

memory of an individual who committed suicide.

2. Students who have parental permission will be excused from school to attend the

funeral or memorial service.

3. As much as possible the school policy will be "business as usual." Counseling

services will be available to all students, but classroom teachers should continue to

use class time for school work.

**Guidelines for Individuals Manning Drop-In Centers**

1. Allow the student to express his/her reactions in whatever way is appropriate for him/her.

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All responses are acceptable.

2. Talk about losses. Allow the student to express his/her feelings about this loss and other

losses he/she has experienced in life (e.g., death, divorce, break-ups).

3. Talk with the student about what has happened in his/her life recently. Allow the student to

express feelings without being judgmental or denying him/her the right to these feelings.

4. If you don't understand what the student is feeling, don't pretend that you do.

5. If asked, share the known facts of the tragedy (without releasing confidential information) to

dispel rumors.

6. Refer to a suicide as an unwise decision. Discuss other options for dealing with stress and

depression. DO NOT MORALIZE OR PREACH TO THE STUDENT. This may block

communication.

7. Discuss possible guilt or feelings of responsibility.

8. Discuss possible fears for his/her own safety and that of his/her siblings and peers.

9. Be aware of the student's response to you. If he/she seems accepting and there has been an

improvement in mood, continue present tactics. If you are feeling overwhelmed, remain

calm and seek assistance.

10. If you suspect a student has suicidal tendencies, confront the student with your thoughts and

feelings. Remember, you will not be placing the thought in the student's head. And, if the

student admits to self-destructive ideations, ask the student about his/her plan. A well

thought-out plan is a significant danger sign (but do not stop being concerned if they do not

share a plan).

11. Be aware of your personal reaction to the tragedy and to working with students. If you are

feeling anxious, distressed, or uncomfortable, take time for yourself and seek assistance.

After-school discussion groups will be available to help you work through your feelings.

12. Encourage the student to seek support from and to be supportive of other students and to

escort any friend who is upset to one of the counselors.

13. Encourage the student to discuss his/her feelings with his/her parents.

14. Help the student identify his/her strengths and available resources. Reassure the student that

concerned adults are available to him/her.

15. Above all, model calm for the student. He/she will pick up on your nervousness or

discomfort.

Unhealthy Explanations of Death

"*Johnny has gone on a long journey*": Unclear, magical; may lead the child to believe the deceased will return.

"*God took Jerry away because He loved him and wanted him in heaven*": May cause fear in the child.

"*Diane died because she was sick*": The child may interpret this as meaning all people die when they get sick.

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"*To die is to go to an eternal sleep*": Unclear, magical, may create a fear of sleep.

Healthy Explanations of Death

"*When someone dies, his body stops working - his heart stops beating*": Factorial explanation; straight forward; (gives the child the message that it is okay to talk about death; answers questions about physical aspect of death).

"*Toby has died and will not be alive anymore. We will miss him very much.*

*Little by little we will be able to remember him without feeling so sad. We will always have pleasant memories, and those will always be with us*": Complete; comforting; sensitive; encourages child to talk about tragedy; acknowledges pain, offers hope.