

Suicide or Other Traumatic Loss of Life

Notification

Building principal

Anyone who hears about a suicide or other traumatic loss of life involving a district student or employee should contact the principal immediately.

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

If the tragedy occurred outside of school, the principal will attempt to verify the information by calling the local police station or coroner and/or the family of the deceased. The principal will identify him or herself as principal of the school and maintain a log of all communications. The principal will inform the superintendent who will communicate appropriate information to staff and Board members as quickly as possible. The information shall be handled with great care.

District employees

Appropriate school personnel will meet as soon as possible to discuss the specifics of the situation. An emergency telephone chain (established in each school building) will be used to notify employees of the tragedy if the tragedy occurred outside of school hours. If possible, an emergency mandatory meeting of teachers at the affected building will be called to review the situation and procedures.

Students

Designated school personnel will be relieved of normal duties in order to notify students in individual classroom groupings.

Media

The Director of School/Community Relations or the building principal will be designated by the superintendent as spokesperson to answer the questions of the press and community. Staff members should not talk to the media about the tragedy in order to protect the privacy of the victim's family and ensure accuracy of information.

The spokesperson shall not release confidential information; however, the following statement may be made to the media:

"A tragedy has occurred. On _____, a ___th grade student, died. Details* of _____'s premature death will not be released to protect the privacy of his/her family. The school district is providing counseling and referral services to help our students and staff work through this tragedy."

* Note: Do not refer to a death as a suicide. If the cause of death is unclear, refer the media to the proper authorities.

Services

Drop-in centers

Any student who would like to talk about his or her feelings regarding the tragedy is invited to use this service. The locations of the drop-in centers will be posted in every classroom and office. Counselors and other professionals trained in crisis intervention will be available in the drop-in centers throughout the school day. This service will be available for as many days after the tragedy as needed.

Identification of "at risk" students

Students and staff should discuss with the building principal any students whom they believe are especially vulnerable in the aftermath of the suicide/other tragedy. These include friends/relatives of the victim, students who seem to be experiencing emotional problems and students who seem to be holding in their feelings. Students who are visibly upset will be referred to the drop-in center immediately.

Discussion groups for staff

The principal will be available to interested staff members after school. Staff members will have the opportunity to express their feelings regarding the recent loss and to explore ways of understanding and meeting the unique support needs of students and staff.

Follow-up

Condolences

The principal or designee will express condolences and offer help to the family of the deceased on behalf of the school district.

Recognition of the tragedy

In order to prevent additional tragedy, it is important for school personnel not to glamorize the suicide death of a student. The school will not conduct a special memorial service or dedication to the memory of an individual who committed suicide. Students who have parental permission will be excused from school to attend any funeral or memorial service. 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 schoolwork.

At the principal's discretion, a memorial service or dedication shall be considered for death other than suicide.

Approved: November 27, 2007

Garfield School District No. Re-2, Rifle, Colorado