

Aftermath of a Suicide

Suicide is a tragedy that calls for a well-planned response from the school community. Even with a prevention program in place, suicide may occur. The following plan should help staff and students come to terms with the impact.

1. Any staff member who becomes aware of a suicide should immediately alert the building principal so that they may prepare to implement this plan. The principal in turn will notify the superintendent.
2. The superintendent and building principal will notify the crisis team and contact authorities to gather reliable information.
3. The principal will contact the bereaved family to extend sympathy and ask about their customs and wishes concerning the funeral/memorial.
4. The counseling team will meet with the building principal one half hour prior to the opening of school to review the plan and organize the day's efforts.
5. The principal will utilize the snow/emergency chain to inform the staff of the suicide. The principal will follow up with a before school meeting and formulate a statement to be issued by the homeroom teachers. This statement should reflect the need to maintain as routine a school day as possible and avoid sensationalizing the suicide. The statement should also validate feelings of loss and sadness. The principal and counseling team will implement a plan to provide support to students as needed.
6. If a staff member commits suicide, counseling team members will be available to that teacher's students.
7. One member of the counseling team will be available for teacher support.
8. Students who were close friends of the deceased or who seem upset should be monitored closely, as they may be at high risk.
9. During the first day, the principal will prepare and send parents an informational letter regarding the suicide. A statement encouraging parents to contact their child's counselor if they have any concerns should be included.
10. The principal will be responsible for dealing sensitively with the removal of the deceased's belongings.
11. The counseling team will meet with the principal at the end of the first through third days to review the school response and to organize ongoing plans to discuss any students who may be at risk.

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12. Representatives of the media should be kept off school grounds and inquiries should be referred to the Superintendent, who is the only official spokesperson to the community.

REF: School Crisis Staff Handbook

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