

TUMWATER SCHOOL DISTRICT



Critical Incident Response Guidelines

2022-2023

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CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE

Mission

Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) has developed materials so that staff members are better able to assist the students, parents, and personnel impacted by critical incidents in the district.

The **MISSION of the CIRT** is to minimize the impact of a critical incident by assisting in “normalizing” the educational process and reducing the “contagion” effect following a critical incident by:

1. Providing consultation to District personnel on Critical Incident Response Procedure.
2. Providing on-site response, support and direction.
3. Defusing the effects of contagion.
4. De-escalating the impact of rumors and misinformation with facts and information.
5. Debriefing the students, staff and parents.
6. Assisting students, staff and parents in gaining a healthy perspective on the incident.

The key element to remember while working with people involved in a critical incident is that they are experiencing normal reactions to abnormal events.

PRIOR TO ANY CRITICAL EVENT:

Every school should have in place a system for notifying all staff. Staff should have cell phone numbers for their administrators.

CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORTING DISTRICT CONTACT

Contact information to be updated or verified each school year

TO: Principals/Office Professionals
SUBJECT: CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORTING
FROM: Dr. Carole Meyer, Interim Superintendent
DATE:

It is essential that district office staff be informed when significant events occur at schools in order to coordinate district-level support.

Five types of incidents require immediate communication:

1. Any 911 call requiring police, fire or medical assistance.
2. School lockdowns.
3. Contact with law enforcement that involves the arrest or potential arrest of any student or staff member or has district implications such as victimization of any student or staff person.
4. **MANAGING MEDIA** (radio, television, newspaper or on-line service).
 1. **ONLY District Appointed District Leadership members should talk to the MEDIA.**
5. Any emotionally traumatic incident such as the death or serious injury of a student, employee or relative.

If the Critical Incident Response Team is needed, contact:

CRITICAL INCIDENT EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBER: (360) 709-7777

DURING DISTRICT OPERATING HOURS

_____ will activate the Notification System. This number is to be used **(XXX) XXX-XXXX**

When one of these events occurs **OUTSIDE OF DISTRICT OPERATING HOURS**, first call your **Chief Academic Officer**, continue calling until personal contact is made. **(A voice message is not acceptable)**. Please make additional copies of this memo for others at your location as appropriate.

Interim Superintendent:

Dr. Carole Meyer Wk: (360) 709-7001 Cell: (509) 342-0909

Assistant Superintendent:

Shawn Batstone Wk: (360) 709-7043 Cell: (360) 790-4130

Executive Director:

Superintendent Exec. Asst.:

Becky Parsons Wk: (360) 709-7007 Cell: (360) 701-7891

CRITICAL INCIDENT TASK CHECKLIST

Planning - Before an incident		
✓ when complete	Person Responsible (list name below)	TASK
<input type="checkbox"/>		Identify team members – onsite coordinator (will work with district CIRT coordinator), building administrator and secretary.
<input type="checkbox"/>		The Building (Principal/Counselor) Coordinator with the District Coordinator will determine the number of district responders needed. They will determine along with the administrators what roles people will take in the building; for example who will contact the family, who will write the fact sheet for the incident, and who will write the letter of incident to go home.
<input type="checkbox"/>		The Coordinators will also arrange and lead meetings for CIRT team and the staff before and after school. This person will collect notes from the day on students, staff and families. This person will determine any short and long term needs of the staff and building along with the administration.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Designate rooms to be used by CIRT staff and have packets ready for CIRT members to work. Packets should include; names and role of key people in the building, building maps, places available for counseling, name tags, paper, pencils and crayons.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Familiarize self with examples from CIRT manual (written statement of incident, summary incident and schools' response; resources available; typical grief response)

Immediate Tasks During a Crisis		
✓ when complete	Person Responsible (list name below)	TASK
<input type="checkbox"/>		Verify facts and wishes of family; get permission to release the name if deceased. Call 9-1-1 if danger, threat or injury.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Ensure that the superintendent's office has been notified and that any media inquiries are referred to district director of communications.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Building CIRT coordinator and administrators will evaluate the incident's impact on students and staff in determining the need for additional support.
<input type="checkbox"/>		In the event that additional support is needed, building CIRT coordinator and administrator will contact district CIRT coordinator. The district CIRT coordinator will contact appropriate additional staff to assist.
<input type="checkbox"/>		In the event that the incident occurs outside of the school day, activate the staff phone tree.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Contact feeder school(s) of siblings with situation information.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Contact transportation, child nutrition, and other staff who may have contact w/impacted student.
<input type="checkbox"/>		With the assistance of district CIRT coordinator; prepare a short statement of the facts surrounding the incident to be shared with staff and students (written and email form) * Example pages 7-9
<input type="checkbox"/>		Hold a meeting with staff. Provide facts regarding the incident. Distribute and email copies of statement to be read to students at a designated time. Remind staff not to speculate beyond the facts. Assess the need for substitutes and contact district office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example page 12

Immediate Tasks During a Crisis - (continued)

✓ when complete	Person Responsible (list name below)	TASK
<input type="checkbox"/>		With the assistance of the district CIRT coordinator, prepare a parent letter with the facts surrounding the incident and of support and resources available. * Example pages 10-11
<input type="checkbox"/>		Contact appropriate parents or guardians and offer support and linkage to resources. (School facility may be offered as site for services.)
<input type="checkbox"/>		Create a safe, quiet room with treats, drinks, Kleenex and paper for staff.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Have the office professional arrange for lunch for CIRT staff if needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Provide CIRT counseling services to students and staff in need of support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send students to office (escorted by student/staff member) • Students will be assigned to specific CIRT staff for intervention • CIRT staff will keep running logs for students seen and contact parents when appropriate (if student is significantly impacted) • If sending students home, make sure an adult is there to supervise.
<input type="checkbox"/>		In the event of death and/or suicide, have registrar and/or attendance clerk deactivate student enrollment records. Take student's name off of any pending school mailings.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Walk the school, access needs (cover crucial areas – hallways, bathrooms, lunchrooms, playground). Watch for cluster groups of students – escort them to CIRT staff.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Assist staff that need help processing or giving information to students in classroom.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Hold a mid-day meeting with CIRT members; review plan; assess needs.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Hold an after school meeting with staff to debrief. Share updated information; allow staff to share their concerns; assess needs for the next day. Inform staff of services available from the employee assistance program.

After a Crisis

✓ when complete	Person Responsible (list name below)	TASK
<input type="checkbox"/>		Remind staff to be alert to the potential of contagion and to watch for signs of students in distress. Provide support and/or referrals for individuals experiencing prolonged reactions.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Continue to check on the students/staff who were greatly impacted. Offer support and resources.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Get the student's belongings and return to parents. Offer parents copies of most recent school pictures and school yearbook.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Send written condolences to the family.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Thank you cards/calls to all involved.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Memorial service – alert staff and other interested persons of date, time, and place. Offer help if needed, or appropriate. Instruct interested parents to attend with their children.
<input type="checkbox"/>		CALENDAR THE FOLLOWING: Periodically and at the anniversary of critical incident, assess the need for further support and intervention. Family designee should check in with family periodically.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Memorial ideas: Scholarship, library book, donation to charity, letters, cards, pictures, plant or ree.

CRISIS DAY CHECKLIST

Goal: Protect the family's integrity in the process of meeting the students' needs

YES/NO	ACTIVITY PERSON	RESPONSIBLE
_____	Verify facts	_____
_____	Notify District Office staff	_____
_____	Consider need for legal counsel	_____
_____	Contact Mental Health Supervisor	_____
_____	Identify victims of trauma	_____
_____	Contact District CIRT Team Coordinator	_____
_____	Begin staff notification	_____
_____	Contact all department heads	_____
_____	Family (of the deceased) visit	_____
_____	Initial planning meeting	_____
_____	Identify needs for building security	_____
_____	Notify "feeder" schools, clubs, other	_____
_____	Hire substitutes	_____
_____	Mobilize media liaison	_____
_____	Designate family liaison	_____
_____	Building CIRT Team meeting	_____
_____	Purge computers of automatic notification	_____
_____	Write announcement to students	_____
_____	Write statement for phone inquiries	_____
_____	Organize / lead before-school staff meeting	_____
_____	Set up Safe Roms	_____
_____	Support for high-risk students	_____
_____	Initial planning for memory activity	_____
_____	Assemble list of local resources / agencies	_____
_____	Plan parent flyer and parent meeting	_____
_____	Support for groups deceased belonged to	_____
_____	Organize / lead after-school meeting	_____
_____	Determine / plan for follow-up needs	_____
_____	School staff & students	_____
_____	High risk students or groups	_____
_____	Plan for debriefings	_____
_____	School staff	_____
_____	District CIRT Team	_____
_____	Victims of Trauma	_____

CRISIS COMMUNICATION

The crisis you experience may vary significantly. For templates/sample letters, you may also review options here, or consult Laurie Wiedenmeyer for assistance refining your message.

 [Crisis Templates](#)

*[SAMPLE TEMPLATE 1]
Staff Briefing - to be shared
with Students*

Date:

TO:

From:

We regret to inform you that the school has experienced a tragedy of ____.

We are asking staff to discuss some general information about this incident with students during class time. Please keep any additional information confidential. You can expect a wide range of emotions and reactions from students. The family has asked to share only the following information:

Who:

What Happened:

When/Where:

Specific Facts to Share with the Class:

[SAMPLE TEMPLATE 2] ...
Staff Briefing-- to be shared
with Students

(Name) had cancer for several years. At times, (he/she) felt fine and could be at school, at other times they felt ill and needed to be home or in the hospital. Of late, (Name), has been in the hospital where (his/her) condition worsened.

Cancer is an illness, but unlike a cold or flu, you do not catch it from others. If you were around (Name) this year, you will not get cancer like you might get a cold.

(Name) has died (tell when).

(Name) has a sister/brother in (teacher's name) room.

When someone dies, it is a time of sadness; you may see students or staff at school today or the next few days who are very sad.

While we are sad, we can also be happy because we knew (Name) and were (his/her) friend.

If you feel you need to talk with someone or just feel you need a break from the classroom, let me know and I will help you find someone to talk to. You may notice some counselors you have not seen before. They are here to help us and you may talk to them if you wish.

We will be doing class work and activities today like on other days. If you have difficulty working, just let me know. We will try our best to continue our regular school activities while allowing flexibility.

In REVIEW, the main things are:

- ❖ Who (Name) was (our friend)
- ❖ How (he/she) died (been ill a long time)
- ❖ You are not in danger of catching cancer
- ❖ Help is here if you want to talk to someone Finally
- ❖ If a child seems to be having an especially difficult time, let the office know.

BEFORE SCHOOL MEETING

People to consider inviting:

- District and building administrator
- Support classified staff, including bus drivers, cooks, custodians, aides, etc.

Prepare the meeting site:

- Provide muffins, coffee, tea, lunch sandwiches, and tissues

Introduce the District CIRT Team:

- Review facts of the death or crisis and any unique circumstance
- Summarize the assignments and responsibilities of the team and the staff.
- Review “Right-to-Privacy” guidelines
- Go over specifics of Safe Room
- Designate staff gathering place; Crisis Support Team can staff rooms.

Talk about what teachers are expected to do:

- Share information with students or be in room when District CIRT Team member does
- Discuss, validate feelings and experiences
- Keep bell schedule but make accommodations
- Stress the need for a day as routine as possible, allowing flexibility. Allow for times to talk about the death and its impact when students need such a discussion.
- Send students to Safe Room as appropriate
- Expect confusion, crying, disruptive behavior, act compassionately
- Respect wishes and privacy of the family
- Discuss impact of the event (suspend regular curriculum for a bit)
- Be available as the situation demands
- DO NOT talk to the press
- Get coverage for a class if you want a break or are feeling overwhelmed
- If you need a break today to deal with your own situation, please call the office and we will provide coverage for you.

What teachers are not expected to do:

- Solve all problems; take the hurt away, become instant counselors
- Hide their tears/feelings

Other details:

- Anticipate and ask what staff needs
- Suggest possible beginning thoughts/phrases
- Tentative arrangements for memorial
- What can school and Crisis Response Team do to be greatest support
- Give Time / place of after school or next meeting
- At some point in the meeting, mention appreciation of staff efforts

*[SAMPLE TEMPLATE 3] ...
Letter for Parents RE: Staff
Member Death*

<School Letterhead>

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardians,

This is a very difficult letter for me to write. On Monday evening we received news that one of our staff members died. She was a Title I teacher.

Teachers gave their students this information and allowed them to ask questions and talk about their feelings. Following these activities, a regular schedule was resumed to the extent possible. Bethel's Critical Incident Response Team, composed of district social workers and counselors met individually with students who asked for support. Parents of these students will be notified and updated if needed.

As parents, you are an important role model and can be an invaluable source of support to your child during times of stress and loss. It is helpful to encourage your child to talk with you about any feelings she/he is having and answer her/his questions. It is okay to say "I don't know" or "I'll try to find out" to questions you are unable to answer. It's okay for children to see our sadness and share in our feelings. You may want to join your children if they are watching media coverage and discuss with them what has happened.

Whenever one is exposed to a stressful situation, it can trigger strong emotions. This type of situation can bring back memories of past losses and generate worries about one's own vulnerability and that of loved ones. Signs of grief include shock, disbelief, anger, sadness, anxiety, changes in eating and sleeping habits, nightmares, poor concentration, repeatedly talking about loss withdrawal, acting younger than usual, clinging and restlessness. Grieving people often feel regrets over past acts and children (and adults) often blame themselves for the loss and feel guilty.

Sometimes children prefer writing or drawing their feelings or reading a related story with you. If your child doesn't feel comfortable talking, do not pressure your child, but leave the door open by letting her/him know your offer to listen doesn't have an expiration date.

The building social worker/counselor has a list of helpful books on grief for children and adults. Handouts are available on:

- Grief
- Developmental stages and children's response to grief
- Understanding children and grief

Assistance is also available from the following agencies:

Crisis Line (24 hours)- 1-800-576-7764	Grant Integrated Services (509) 765-9239
Moses Lake Community Health (509) 765-0674	Confluence Health/Behavioral Health (509) 764-6400

If you have any questions about your child's reaction, feel free to call and ask the counselor or your child's teacher. We hope this is helpful information for you and welcome any questions.

Sincerely, Principal Name

*[SAMPLE TEMPLATE 4] ...
Letter for Parents RE:
Student Death*

<School Letterhead>

Date:

Dear Parents/Guardians:

This is a very difficult letter to write. We received news that one of our kindergarten students died in a tragic accident over the weekend.

Teachers gave their students this information and allowed them to ask questions and talk about their feelings. Following these activities, a regular schedule was resumed to the extent possible. Bethel's Critical Incident Response Team, comprised of district social workers and counselors met individually with students who asked for support. Parents of these students will be notified and updated if needed.

As parents, you are an important role model and can be an invaluable source of support to your child during times of stress and loss. It is helpful to encourage your child to talk with you about any feelings she/he is having and answer her/his questions. It is okay to say "I don't know" or "I'll try to find out" to questions you are unable to answer. It's okay for children to see our sadness and share in our feelings. You may want to join your children if they are watching media coverage and discuss with them what has happened.

Whenever one is exposed to a stressful situation, it can trigger strong emotions. This type of situation can bring back memories of past losses and generate worries about one's own vulnerability and that of loved ones. Signs of grief include shock, disbelief, anger, sadness, anxiety, changes in eating and sleeping habits, nightmares, poor concentration, repeatedly talking about loss withdrawal, acting younger than usual, clinging and restlessness. Grieving people often feel regrets over past acts and children (and adults) often blame themselves for the loss and feel guilty.

Sometimes children prefer writing or drawing their feelings or reading a related story with you. If your child doesn't feel comfortable talking, do not pressure your child, but leave the door open by letting her/him know your offer to listen doesn't have an expiration date.

The building social worker/counselor has a list of helpful books on grief for children and adults. Handouts are available on:

- Grief
- Developmental stages and children's response to grief
- Understanding children and grief

Assistance is also available from the following agencies:

Crisis Line (24 hours)- 1-800-852-2923	Grant Integrated Services (509) 765-9239
Moses Lake Community Health (509) 765-0674	Confluence Health/Behavioral Health (509) 764-6400

If you have any questions about your child's reaction, feel free to call and ask the counselor or your child's teacher. We hope this is helpful information for you and welcome any questions.

Sincerely, Principal Name

INITIAL STAFF NOTIFICATION

Staff can deal more effectively with a “crisis response day” if they've been notified of a death or crisis before they arrive at the building. As soon as the administrator in charge has made initial decisions relative to the need to organize adequate support and response, *all* school staff should be called. This includes classified as well as certified.

Things to keep in mind:

- As with all parts of crisis planning and response, school staff should all be inserviced on this aspect at the beginning of each school year. The goal of staff notification should be familiar to them.
- Notification is best done by one or a small group of individuals who read a script so the message doesn't change overtime. If you cannot arrange for this in this way, see page B 4 for further instructions on using a phone tree.
- The notification of the crisis and of the before-school meeting should be very brief. It should include primarily:
 - An initial statement that you have some sad (or tragic) news to relay.
 - Basic specifics about the event (who died, mode of death if known.)
 - Ask the person to get paper and pen to write down what is said.
- The cover:
 - That there will be a before-school meeting:
 - When
 - Where
 - Attendance is required
 - Details of the death or tragedy / crisis will be discussed further
 - Whether there will be District CIRT Team members coming to lend a hand
 - Remember to tell the next person to remind others that it is not helpful to speculate or say anything which might cause rumors to build over this process of notification - just pass on this essential information.

SELF CARE

All Staff Preparedness

We're often better at caring for the students than we are about caring for ourselves. But it is important to remember that, in general, students will only get as "well" as their parents and caregivers do. Students watch us. We are their models. And how well we cope affects the environment and their perceptions.

Students respect our nonverbal messages. They don't know what normal grief is, so they assume that whatever we're doing is what they should do. Sometimes students will act out in order to get our attention. And students are loyal. They try to interpret nonverbal messages. Allow yourself to be very real, and if you are grieving the loss of a student that died, it is OK for the surviving students to see that.

Sometimes children will put their grief on hold because a parent is so impacted that they feel they have to be the support to the parent. Often in these cases, the children fear that they let themselves "fall apart", no one would be there to help them put themselves back together.

Often families think that, if they can only afford counseling for one person in the family, they'll give it to the kids. Remember, though -- children look to us. They are loyal to what we portray. It might be most important to get counseling for the parent so the parent can provide an environment that allows the child to do their own grief work. Unless there is trauma or unusual circumstances around a death, what children need in order to cope and grieve is good support and a stable environment. Their recovery is very dependent on the stability of adults around them.

Self-care is crucial. Whether we look at school staff, close friends of one who dies or family members, there is greater illness during grieving. Emergency room visits go up following crises. Anxiety-related reactions are not unusual. All of this indicates the importance of taking good care of ourselves in times following the death of someone with whom we were close. If we don't take good care of ourselves, we won't be any good to anyone else!

Sometimes people hold grief in and wait a long time to start processing the loss. But when we do that, a big part of us is closed off. We might be less sensitive to others. We might avoid social gatherings or certain people. There are all kinds of ways that our own unresolved grief can be detrimental to our relationships with others. Certainly, our own unresolved grief interferes with how well we can support others in grief! So, one way to look at it is, if you need it, and if you won't do counseling for your own sake, do it for the sake of others!

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS ON CRISIS DAY

All Staff Preparedness

Days like this can seem daunting! Just remember -- you don't need to become an instant counselor. Your students already trust you. They just need you to be there for them. To help them talk through what has happened and make sense of it. For you to listen to them. Be their companion or to bear witness to their journey through grief. You don't have to take away the pain or "fix it" for them, even though we'd like to!

Keep structure and discipline, although perhaps with a soft touch. They actually feel safer if they know that the death or crisis hasn't unstrung the supports of structure.

It is OK to be moved to tears in front of your students. Modeling grief is perfectly acceptable. Just be real. It is important to speak the truth.

Read an announcement about the event, and lead a discussion with starters such as: "How did you first hear about this? "What have people done when someone died in your family that helped?"

Normalize children's reactions by validating their statements about how they're doing.

- "I bet other students are feeling the same way."
- "It isn't unusual for teenagers (or kids or whatever) to wonder about that."

It is important to acknowledge to students that it is frustrating when we don't have enough facts for things to add up. Sometimes with suicides we aren't telling them all we know. Reinforce respect for the family's need to grieve and cope, but validate that it is more difficult to come to terms with things when we don't have all of the information.

Students might struggle and need to know more than we can tell them. We can't take away their pain. The best we can do is to support them by validating their frustration.

We need to avoid making judgment and help students with that as well. Allow quiet time for students to draw pictures and make cards for the family.

Sometimes when student's questions are morbid and curious, it is important for us to be accepting and guide them into appropriate conversation.

Grief comes for youth in spurts. It is important for teachers to be able to move in and out of academics and processing grief as students' needs seem to dictate.

Encourage your students to participate in the planning of the Memory Event.

Watch for changes in academic performance, for students who sleep more or less, or for other signs of depression.

Take care of yourselves. If you don't take care of you, you won't be able to take care of them!

NEEDS OF STUDENTS

- An honest accounting of facts and relevant details.
- Some understanding of the biological aspects may be helpful.
- Understanding that the disease is not contagious; whether they are at risk.
- A sense of safety and security – stability of adults. Am I safe?
- Opportunity to verbally or actively process the event:
 - Talking, drawing pictures, listening to stories, hearing others talk.
 - To be actively involved in doing something helpful: cards for the family, planning a memorial activity for school, etc.
- Opportunity to ask questions. They deserve respectful and honest answers.
- Time for this to sink in.
- To address issues or rephrase the same question again (and again, and again).
- To know how the family is doing, whether there will be a funeral, etc.
- To be able to grieve, with others, in the context in which the deceased was known.
- To express their feelings, share memories and cry together.
- For adults to model their feelings.
- Lots of reassurance. Students need their feelings and experience validated.
- An opportunity to say "goodbye".
- Encouragement to realize that love goes on. (Gone but not forgotten.)
- Help understanding that pain eases over time as we process.
- Support from adults that going in and out of grief is fine ---- that the intermittent experiencing of grief allows helpful breaks for fun and reprieve.
- Support their thoughts and feelings, expectation of appropriate behavior.
- Continued structure; maintain disciplinary code with some flexibility.
- Stable environment, predictable schedule (exceptions announced ASAP)

REMEMBER

- Kids sense if something is wrong -- NOT addressing it leaves FAR more for them to deal with later. It's best to do all you can do now.
- It is better to be honest about what you observe ("I can see you are scared") than to be artificially cheerful.

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE **DAILY DEBRIEFING**

Facilitated by a non-crisis responding member

[Dependent on level of circumstances Ex: Grant county mental health, admin, etc.]

1. Assess (check-in) the impact of the critical incident on support personnel.
2. Identify immediate issues surrounding problems involving "safety" (threats of self harm) and "security" (threats made to the self, school, building, or staff etc.).
3. Allow for the ventilation of thoughts, emotions, and experiences associated with the event and provide "validation" of possible reactions.
4. Help identify possible positive experiences from the event and plan how to move forward the following day.
5. Provide specifics about students who need follow up, make contact with teachers or parents, assess the need to make community contacts/referrals.

POST INCIDENT ACTION

STAFF and ADMINISTRATION

- There will be before-school or after-school staff meetings for next few days to make adjustments to the crisis plan implementation and identify emerging needs among the student body.
- The safe room will remain open for multiple days and will be closed after discussing with staff and specifically the crisis team.
- Return to normal schedule as quickly as possible with accommodations for students who have been identified as at elevated risk.
- Removal of the deceased student's personal items will be done sensitively and in a timely fashion.
- It is not a safe practice to hold a candlelight vigil or erect a permanent memorial at the school.
- Longer term grief support services should be offered to students through school and/or community resources.

DEBRIEFING

We understand that debriefing after a crisis helps staff, student and crisis team members to reflect on the successes and challenges of the school's responses;

- Debriefing is critical to handling the next crisis better.
- Debriefing needs to be approached with humility and an emphasis on quality improvement rather than the assessment of blame.
- Consider additions and/or adjustments to PREVENTION plan
- Provide opportunity to identify contributing factors to student's death that school might alter to prevent future suicide.

After feedback is gathered from the crisis debrief, a task force consisting of members from the school's and district's crisis teams will convene to determine whether adjustments need to be made in our prevention plan and crisis response moving forward.

Remain mindful – well after the death – of anniversaries, such as the student's birthday, the date the student would have graduated and the anniversary of the death. Provide extra support for identified students.

- Skyward:** Skyward account needs to be **DEACTIVATED and coded for DECEASED**. Work with district level personnel so notifications via email are **DEACTIVATED too**.
- Cumulative Files/Folders:** Deceased student will be removed from any school information systems within five days of a death or funeral services.
- Assessment Records:** Assessment records that arrive after the student has died need to be given to the parents via the Critical Incident Parent Contact member.
- Google Accounts:** Email accounts need to be **DEACTIVATED**.

- ❑ **Classroom Seating:** It is appropriate and advisable to rearrange the seating arrangement five day after a death or following the funeral
- ❑ **Yearbook:** For the yearbook published following the death of a student or staff member there will be a section remembering the deceased reviewed by the **Critical Incident Response Team Member** to ensure consistency of formatting. No yearbook will be dedicated to an individual who has died.
- ❑ **Social Media and School Publications:** All news items regarding the student or staff death will be reviewed by a member of the emergency response team. If the death was a suicide, the school paper may run articles to educate students about suicide warning signs and available resources. The school should not create online memorials for deceased students or staff. However, we recognize that such venues can provide healthy outlets for grief as well as a platform to share information about the school's response and ways to help friends through this period of crisis. The response team will work collaboratively and proactively with students and family in regards to social media account(s).

FUNERALS

It is recommended that we not hold funerals or memorial services at the school and it is recommended that we not dismiss early or alter our schedule in order for students/staff to attend the funeral of a student. Students, with parental permission and staff will be permitted to attend on an individual basis. Students and staff shall provide their own transportation. Parents are encouraged to attend with their children. If a reception occurs on school grounds it will occur outside school hours.

FLAGS

Flags will not be flown at half-staff. Only the President or a governor has the authority to order flags to be flown at half-staff.

GRADUATION

We may choose to acknowledge the death of a classmate or sitting staff member at graduation but will do so toward the beginning of the ceremony and then move on. At the graduation ceremony, we will not confer honorary diplomas for those who have died. Our emergency response team will review the acknowledgement with the goal of not glamorizing the death or letting the acknowledgment overwhelm the event.

INCIDENT AWARENESS EVENTS

Dedications to students will not be allowed at school dances, extracurricular event or athletic events. Students will be encouraged to organize fundraisers for organizations like charities, or suicide prevention awareness.

MEMORIALS

While it is important to provide channels for our community to grieve the loss of a peer or students, we must do so in a way that is equitable to all families and circumstances. In the event of a student death, respond to the needs of the and in consultation with the family of the deceased. **Permanent memorials should not be permitted.**

Spontaneous memorials (such as collections of objects and notes around a locker or at other locations) should be not be encouraged and should be respectfully removed within a week or immediately following the funeral. School sanctioned temporary memorials may be created at the site designated by the emergency response team. In order to minimize potential distress of students who could be emotionally triggered, it is important that temporary memorials (such as posters, cards, letters) should be organized in an area student can easily choose to avoid (not the cafeteria, main entrance) and regularly monitored by the emergency response team. Once dismantled, and potentially, designated members of student leadership may give the contents of the memorial to the family of the deceased.

- Student clubs, organizations, athletic teams and other groups including staff are invited to present any ideas for a temporary memorial/tribute to the emergency response team. All temporary memorials/tributes must be approved by the emergency response team.
- Students and staff are discouraged from wearing t-shirts or buttons bearing images of or any other tribute of the deceased. If students come to school wearing such items, they will be allowed to wear the items for that day only.

ONGOING FOLLOW-UP / ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY:

The emergency response team will develop a postvention plan for the upcoming year to support students and staff who are particularly impacted by the loss. The plan may include reminding the staff to be aware that they, others staff and students may experience an emotional reaction. Postvention plan will also provide staff reminders on early warning signs of suicide and Bishop Protocols for how to respond to students at risk, remind staff of self-care and having grief counselors or mental health professionals on call. The emergency response team will meet prior to the anniversary or any other potentially triggering event, to identify those who may still be profoundly impacted or retriggered by this date. It is not recommended to organize an event or service at this time.

- (Calendar this) Periodically and at the anniversary of critical incident, assess the need for further support and intervention.
- (Calendar this) Family designee should check in with family periodically.

COMMUNITY COUNSELING RESOURCES

If you see a Doctor at one of the larger clinics, most of them now have a “Behavioral Health” team which includes a Counselor. This includes:

Behavioral Health Resources:

PRIVATE COUNSELING RESOURCES

DEATH OF A CLASSMATE OR TEACHER

Reprinted from a MADD publication, "Death at School"

The death of a classmate or teacher can be as devastating as the death of a family member and should be acknowledged as such. If the teacher has died, the principal or counselor should be available to assist transitioning the children. Staff should be aware of their own feelings and past experiences regarding loss.

1. **The child or teacher's desk should not be removed.** Leaving it as it was for several days will help acknowledge the death. Children may wish to discuss how the desk reminds them of the deceased. Some classrooms have voted to keep the desk through the remainder of the school year. The children may periodically leave items such as flowers or notes on the desk as memorials. NOTE: (1) Family members should be given personal items. (2) Remove items from student's locker to return to family.
2. **Verify facts/concerns** with family and ask their permission to share it with the class.
3. **Tell the truth, allow for ventilation, and affirm all expressions and allow time for questions.** Because the classmates knew the deceased classmate or teacher intimately, their initial focus may be on him/her rather than their own feelings. The principal, counselor or social worker, after explaining what happened, might talk about fond memories of the deceased and ask the children to do the same. Some children, however, will be too numb to reminisce because they are so preoccupied with the death. Some may focus more on their personal loss, such as the child who, after his teacher suddenly died, asked, "Why couldn't she wait until after the field trip?" Such statements are genuine expressions of loss. If the children won't talk, have them write a paragraph or draw a picture to express their memories. Some children are reluctant to talk about their feelings because they fear no one else feels the way they do. Death may trigger memories of previous losses.
4. **Allow a recess or break after this exercise.** Children grieve intermittently and will not be able to focus on their grieving for extended periods of time. Resume the regular classroom schedule after the break.
5. **The next day, focus on the feelings of the classmates themselves.** Ask for adjectives or phrases to describe how they feel. Affirm all as described above. Some guilt may be expressed for not always having treated the child or teacher kindly. Acknowledge these feelings, but gently encourage the children to think rationally about their guilt. Assure them that their bad feelings had nothing to do with the death.
6. **Discuss the idea of giving the memory pictures or paragraphs to the family** of the deceased child or teacher. Point out that many of these memories are unknown to the family because they happened at school. The family will treasure these memories. Those willing may put their name and date on the picture or note and may wish to title what they created. The class can decide who should deliver to the family.
7. **Watch for trouble signs among children** such as increased aggression, withdrawal, risk taking, clumsiness, and regression. After the death of the classmate, one boy began to fall down more frequently. He later explained that he fell to hide his crying because he was sure he was the only one still sad about the death of his classmates.

DEATH OF A STUDENT'S PARENT OR SIBLING

1. **Tell the truth.** Before telling the class, get as much information as possible from the family about how the parent or sibling died. Tell the class what happened in terms that appropriate to the children's own cognitive and developmental levels. For example, children may be concerned about whether the person was in pain or why someone did not stop the death. If the person died in surgery, it is important to discuss the rarity of this occurrence and that the surgery itself did not cause the death (if that is true). Accurate information is central to the child's ability to analyze events and draw personally relevant conclusions.
2. **Avoid giving unnecessary information** that would serve to distress or confuse kids. Avoid creating mental images of frightening or horrifying sights. Elementary children think very concretely so explain things in a concrete way. Hearing the truth stops rumors. Out of their own anxiety children will need to talk about the death. If they do not have accurate information, they will distort the truth.
3. **Allow for ventilation.** After telling the class, set aside at least 30 minutes of time and offer them the opportunity to share their feelings about it and ask questions. The statement, "I wonder what kind of feelings (bereaved child's name) is experiencing now," will likely draw responses like "sad" and "bad" from kindergarten through 3rd grade students. Older children will suggest more sophisticated adjectives. If they seem reluctant to talk, kids draw or write about how they think the bereaved child feels. (A death can trigger memories of previous losses.)
4. **Affirm all expressions.** Putting an adjective or phrase (feeling) on the board helps students feel their expressions are acceptable. If a student begins to cry, let him or her know that it is very normal to feel sad at a time like this. It may be helpful to sit or stand quietly by the child who is crying. Sometimes a writing activity can help the child express sadness. If a child has the need to leave the room, send the child, accompanied by another student, to the designated place where the crisis team is responding to individual student needs. When the child feels calmer, he or she can return to class. Let the child know that it is ok to be quiet for a time when he/she returns.
5. **Set aside time for written expressions for the bereaved child.** Notes, letters or pictures created for the bereaved child mean a lot. Before sending them, the school professional should ALWAYS screen these projects before delivery. Avoid sending cards with limericks, jokes or cruel comments.
6. **Plan for the return of the bereaved child.** Guide the class in deciding what to say and how to act when the bereaved child returns to school. The subject should not be ignored, yet not every student should expect the bereaved child to want to talk about it. It is important that the bereaved child is not abandoned by friends at school; thus experiencing another psychological loss. Classmates might say, "I'm glad you are back and I'm sorry your mother died" and then treat the child as they did before the death. Closer friends might say, "I feel so bad for you and would like for you to tell me about it when you feel up to it."
7. **Look for trouble signs when the bereaved child returns.** Some kids want to stay home following the death, possibly out of fear. "Will I die?" or "will someone else I love die?" are common fears. Staying home should be discouraged. Bereaved children are easily distracted, frequently confused and display angry outbursts. Stomachaches, headaches, loss of sleep or change in eating habits are common. Children need acceptance and support and need to feel they are loved in spite of their behavior. Kids need to tell their story. As Rabbi Earl Grollman says, "If it's mentionable, it's manageable." (Summary by Janice Harris Lord, ACSW-CSW/PLC for MADD)

WHEN DEATH IMPACTS YOUR SCHOOL

www.dougy.org

Death can send shockwaves through a school, affecting the entire student population in different ways. Following are some lessons to help you bring the children through this difficult period. These lessons are excerpted from the books *Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers* and *When Death Impacts Your School: A Guide for School Administrators*.

Dealing with Grieving Students in Your Class

The following steps help support the grieving students as well as prepare your class for making the grieving student feel comfortable and supported:

Talk with the bereaved student before he/she returns. Ask the student what he/she wants the class to know about the death, funeral arrangement, etc. If possible, call the family prior to the student's return to school you can let him/her know you are thinking of him/her and want to help make the return to school as supportive as possible.

Talk to your class about how grief affects people and encourage them to share how they feel. One way to do this is to discuss what other types of losses or deaths the students in your class have experienced, and what helped them cope.

Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to return to school, and how they may be of help. You can ask your class for ideas about how they would like others to treat them if they were returning to school after a death, pointing out differences in preferences. Some students might say that they want everyone to treat them the same way that they treated them before. As a rule, they don't like people being "extra nice." While students usually say they don't want to be in the spotlight, they also don't want people acting like nothing happened.

Provide a way for your class to reach out to the grieving and his or her family. One of the ways that students can reach out is by sending cards or pictures to the child and family, letting them know the class is thinking of them. If the students in your class knew the person who died, they could share some memories of the person.

Provide flexibility and support to your grieving student upon his or her return to class. Recognize that your student will have difficulty concentrating and focusing on schoolwork. Allow the bereaved student to leave the class when he/she needs some quiet or alone time. Make sure that the student has a person available to talk with, such as a school counselor or school social worker.

DO'S AND DON'TS WITH **GRIEVING STUDENTS**

DO listen. Grieving students need a safe, trusted adult who will listen to them.

DO follow routines. Routines provide a sense of safety, which is very comforting to the grieving student.

DO set limits. Just because students are grieving, doesn't mean that the rules do not apply. When grieving, students may experience lapses in concentration or exhibit risk-taking behavior. Setting clear limits provides a more secure and safe environment for everyone under these circumstances.

DO NOT suggest that the student has grieved long enough.

DO NOT indicate that the student should get over it and move on.

DO NOT say things like:

- "It could be worse. You still have one brother."
- "I know how you feel."
- "You'll be stronger because of it."

DO NOT expect the student to complete all assignments on a timely basis.

As a teacher, you have the opportunity to touch children's lives in a very special way. Your actions have a lifelong impact. When death influences the lives of your students, you and your school can make a life-long difference by creating an environment for healing and support.

These lessons have been excerpted from the book, *Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers*.

DEALING WITH LOSS, STAGES OF GRIEF

Dealing with loss is very difficult for most of us. When we hear about death, divorce, or other tragedies that occur in people's lives, it may trigger our own feelings about a personal loss we may have experienced in the past.

At times of loss it is important to reach out to each other at school, in our homes and in the community, to support each other's individual style of dealing with loss. All individuals are unique in the way they personally process through the stages of grief. The order, degree and rates may vary greatly.

Stages of Grief

1. Denial

"I don't want to talk about it!"
Laughing, giggling, partying
Sleeping a lot
Lack of emotion

2. Anger

"How could she do this?"
"The whole world is going rotten these days!"
Putting other people down for the way they're dealing with their grief
Acting out behavior

3. Guilt

"If only I'd talked to them and told them..."
"If only I'd known..."
"She wouldn't have died if I'd..."

4. Bargaining

"Why couldn't he have lived?"
"Why couldn't it have involved someone older who have lived a full life rather than someone younger who had so much life ahead of them?"
"Why did it have to happen in our school, our district, our community?"

5. Grief

Crying, sobbing, shaking, etc.
Silence
Nervous talking, hyper behavior

6. Acceptance

Talking about memories of those who died – both good and bad
Accepting others' grief, no matter how they express it
Listening to those around us and supporting them.

Loss is a complex, sad and frustrating issue to all of us, no matter what our age or experience. Yet, tragedy can bring growth and new hope as we realize anew how important it is to respond to each other with love and support.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF GRIEF

There are a variety of feelings and behaviors, which can be experienced in the grief process. Not everyone will respond to loss in the same way. It is helpful to know that the following characteristics can be a normal part of the grief experience.

Feelings

Shock, numbness, sense of unreality, anger, irritability, guilt, self reproach, sadness, depression, anxiety, fear, hysterical, helplessness, vulnerability, low self-esteem, loneliness, relief, feelings of being crazy, mood swings, intensity of all feelings.

Physical Sensations

Hollowness in the stomach, tightness in the chest and throat, dry mouth, oversensitivity to noise, dizziness, headaches, shortness of breath, weakness in the muscles, lack of energy, fatigue, excess of nervous energy, heart pounding, heavy or empty feeling in body and limbs, hot or cold flashes, skin sensitivity, stomach and intestinal upsets, increase in physical illnesses.

Thought Patterns

Disbelief, sense of unreality, preoccupation, confusion, lack of ability to concentrate, seeing, hearing, feeling the presence of the deceased, thoughts of self destruction, problems with decision making.

Behavior

Appetite and sleep disturbances, absent minded behavior, social withdrawal, avoiding reminders of the loss, dreams of the loss, searching for/calling out for the deceased, restlessness, sighing, crying, visiting places that are reminders of the loss, treasuring objects that belonged to the deceased, need for touch, hugs, contacts with others, increased sensitivity to positive and negative attention, picking up mannerisms of the deceased, exhibiting symptoms of deceased's illness.

Social Changes

Either an increased desire for support of close friends or a withdrawal from friends and family, increased dependency on others, a need for acting "normal" around others, a need for relationships apart from those related to grief, self absorbed (no energy for interest in others), role changes, role reversals, change in social patterns and status, hypersensitivity to topics of loss, need for rituals.

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATION REGARDING GRIEF/LOSS RESPONSES

AGE	DEVELOPMENTAL STATE/TASK	CONCEPT OF DEATH	GRIEF RESPONSE	SIGNS OF DISTRESS	POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS
2-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Egocentric * Believe world centers around them * Narcissistic * No cognitive understanding * Pre-conceptual – unable to grasp concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Death seen as abandonment * Death seen as reversible, not permanent. * Common Statements, “Did you know my Daddy died? When will he be home?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Intensive response but brief * Very present oriented. * Most are aware of altered patterns of care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Regression * Clinging * Increasing separation anxiety. * Eating and sleeping disorders. * Bedwetting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Short interactions * Frequent repetition * Comforting * Touching
4-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Gaining sense of autonomy * Exploring world outside of self. * Gaining language * Fantasy thinking/wishing * Initiative phase, sees self as initiator * Concerns of guilt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Death is still seen as reversible * Great personification of death * Feeling of responsibility because of wishes/thoughts. Common statements “It’s all my fault; I was mad at her and wished she’d die.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Verbalization * Great concern with process * How? * Why? * Repetitive questioning – wants consistent answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Regression * Nightmares * Sleeping and eating disturbances * Violent play * Attempts to take on role of person who died * May play the event over and over trying to make sense of it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Symbolic play * Drawing/stories * Allow/encourage expression of full range of emotions including feeling anger * Encourage active play * Talk about it.
7-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Concrete - operational * Industry vs. inferiority * Beginning of socialization * Development of cognitive ability * Beginning of logical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Death seen as punishment * Fear of bodily harm, mutilation * This is a difficult transition period – still want to see death as reversible but beginning to see it as final 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Specific questions * Desire for complete detail * Concerned with how others are responding * What is the right way? * How should they be responding? * Starting to have ability to mourn and understand mourning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regression - Problems in school, withdrawal from friends - Acting out - Sleeping and eating disturbances - Overwhelming concern with body - Suicidal thoughts, desire to join one who died 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Answer questions - Encourage expression of range of feelings - Encourage/allow control - Be available/but allow alone time - Symbolic play - Talk about it
11-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Formal, operational problem solving * Abstract thinking * Integration of one’s own personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * ADULT approach * Ability to understand abstract * Beginning to truly conceptualize death * Work at making sense of teachings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Depression * Denial * Repression * More often willing to talk to people outside of family * Traditional mourning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Depression * Anger towards parents * Non-compliance- Rejection of former teaching * Role confusion * Acting out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Encourage verbalization * Do not take control * Encourage self motivation * Listen * Be available * Do not attempt to take grief away

TOOLS FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

How to provide positive emotional support for your child when someone special dies

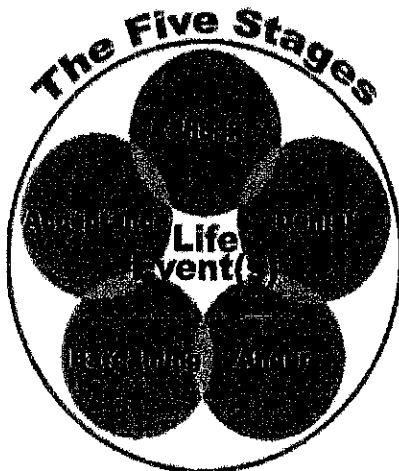
- **SET ASIDE SPECIAL TIMES TO BE WITH YOUR CHILD.** He or she may be feeling lonely and afraid. Listen to both verbal and body language. If your child doesn't seem to care, it may be because he or she is having a hard time handling the strong feelings of grief.
- **ALLOW ALL FEELINGS.** It is natural for your child to be upset and behave differently after the death of someone special. There are no "wrong" feelings but there is unacceptable behavior. Encourage talking, not acting out.
- **USE IDEAS AND WORDS THE CHILD CAN UNDERSTAND.** The child's concept of death may be very different from yours. The idea of a natural flow of life and death is hard for the preschooler.
- **LET YOUR CHILD BE A PART OF THE FAMILY GRIEVING PROCESS.** Don't try to "protect" the child by hiding the fact of physical death.
- **TALK HONESTLY.** Children are curious about death and want the truth. It is OK for children to see adults showing emotion. That gives them permission to express their own feelings.
- **EMPHASIZE THAT DEATH IS NOT LIKE SLEEP.** Children often worry that they will not wake up.
- **EMPHASIZE THAT PHYSICAL DEATH IS FINAL.** This may be difficult for your child to understand.
- **EMPHASIZE THAT DEATH IS NOT A PUNISHMENT.** Neither the child nor the deceased is being punished.
- **PROVIDE SECURITY.** Children often worry that another caregiver will also die. The child should know that there is someone to care for him or her.
- **ASSURE YOUR CHILD THAT SHE OR HE IS NOT THE CAUSE.** Your child may feel that he or she was the reason the person died.
- **GUARD AGAINST CARRYING THE IMPACT OF DEATH OVER INTO YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD.** Small problems often seem magnified.
- **ALLOW TIME FOR HEALING.** It takes time to process grief and each child will do that in his/her own way and time. Seek help for yourself. Adults often need as much or more support than children do.



Impact of Grief and Loss

Educators and other helping professionals often find themselves in the critical position of supporting kids struggling with significant life changes, personal losses or the death of a parent/loved one. The grief resulting from these experiences can be defined as "the internal anguish bereaved persons feel in reaction to a loss they have experienced." It's important to remember that kids grieve, too, and they may or may not "show it" outwardly to the rest of the world. What is most important is that we understand their varied responses and provide quality support to guide them through the process toward a healthy resolution.

Understanding the Grief and Loss Process



General youth reactions . . .

- ▶ Tend to go in and out of grief process
- ▶ Developmental stage will influence their reactions
- ▶ All cannot talk openly about their loss and feelings
- ▶ May not seem to be affected at all – external vs. internal responses or "survival mode"
- ▶ Play is one way kids make sense of changes in their world
- ▶ Not unusual for them to experience physical reactions
- ▶ Need to grieve significant loss/change/death at all developmental stages for healthy resolution

Responses of Grieving Child/Youth

Academic

- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Falling or declining grades
- Incomplete or poor quality of work
- Increased absence or reluctance to go to school
- Forgetful, memory loss
- Overachievement – trying to be perfect
- Underachievement – giving up
- Inattentiveness
- Excessive daydreaming

Emotional

- Insecurity, issues of abandonment, safety concerns
- Concern over being treated differently from others
- Fear, guilt, anger, regret, sadness, confusion
- "I don't care" attitude
- Depression, hopelessness, intense sadness
- Overly sensitive, frequently tearful, irritable
- Appears unaffected by change/loss/death
- Preoccupation with wanting details
- Recurring thoughts of suicide, death

Behavioral

- Disruptive behaviors, noisy outbursts
- Aggressive behaviors, frequent fighting
- Non-compliance to requests
- Increase in risk-taking or unsafe behaviors
- Isolation or withdrawal
- Regressive behaviors to time when things felt more safe and in control
- High need for attention
- A need to check in with parent/significant other

Social

- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Withdrawal from activities and sports
- Use of alcohol and drugs
- Changes in relationships with peers and teachers
- Changes in family roles
- Wanting to be physically close to a safe adult
- Sexual acting out
- Stealing, shoplifting
- Difficulty being in a group or crowd

continued . . .

Responses of Grieving Child/Youth (continued)

Physical

- Stomachaches, headaches, heartaches
- Frequent accidents or injuries
- Nightmares, dreams or sleep difficulties
- Loss of appetite or increased eating
- Low energy, weakness
- Nausea, upset stomach, hives, rash, etc.
- Increased illness, low resistance
- Rapid heartbeat

Spiritual

- Anger at God/Higher Power
- Questions of "Why me?" or "Why now?"
- Questions about meaning of life
- Confusion
- Feelings of being alone in the universe
- Doubting or questioning current beliefs
- Sense of meaninglessness about the future
- Changes in values, questioning what is important

How to Help . . .

Infants and Toddlers

Lots of holding, additional nurturing, and physical contact; Consistent routine, including regular meal and bed times; Rules and limits which are concrete and specific; Short, truthful statements about what happened; Making time for play, both physical and imaginative

Preschool Child

Use simple and honest answers; Be prepared to answer same questions over and over again; Include child in rituals around loss/death; Support child in his/her play; Allow anger and physical expression; Maintain consistent routines; Allow to act younger for awhile; Hold, nurture, and give lots of physical attention; Encourage/allow fun and happy times; Have books available; Model by sharing personal anecdotes as appropriate

Elementary School Child

Answer questions as clearly and accurately as possible; Provide creative outlets (art, music, journal, etc.); Help identify and use support systems; Work with student around academic workload; Encourage taking breaks and some time alone; Allow for expression of feelings and emotions; Maintain routines and structure but allow for flexibility; Give choices whenever possible; Share that you care and are thinking about them; Create "safe space" for child to go to as needed

Middle School Youth

Expect mood swings; Provide supportive environment where students can share, when needed; Anticipate physical concerns, illness, body aches and pains; Allow to choose with whom and how he/she gets support; Encourage participation in school-based educational support group; Allow flexibility in completing school work

High School Youth

Allow for regression and dependency; Encourage expression of feelings such as sorrow, anger, guilt, and regret; Understand and allow for variation in maturity level; Answer questions honestly and provide factual information; Model appropriate responses; Avoid power struggles and allow choices; Help understand and resolve feelings of helplessness; Assist in plans for completion of school assignments; Encourage participation in school-based educational support group

<http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/> - <http://www.guardfamilyyouth.org>

Written by Mona Johnson, MA, CDP, CPP - Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Information for this article adapted from *Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers*
by the Dougy Center: National Center for Grieving Children and Families



Tough Topics Series Learning and Teaching Support

Helping Kids Cope with Stress

While some stress in life is normal and even healthy, kids today seem to be confronted with a myriad of experiences that can create tension and make coping with life a challenge. Common examples of these stressors include: lack of basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter), divorce, death, illness, incarceration, foster care placement, family substance abuse, domestic violence, extended separation from a parent or loved one, or physical, sexual, emotional abuse.



- ▶ At the ordinary end of the spectrum are events which occur to most children in our society and for which there are fairly well-defined coping patterns.
- ▶ A short distance along the spectrum are the stresses which occur when children have only one parent in the home or when they live in multiple-parent, multiple dwelling households.
- ▶ Toward the severe end of the spectrum are stresses caused by extended separation of children from their parents or siblings.
- ▶ At the severe end of the spectrum are those stresses that are long lasting and require kids to make major behavioral, emotional, and/or personality adaptations in order to survive.

Signs of Stress

	Behavior	Thoughts	Emotional State	Relationship
Infants to 5 years	Fussiness; uncharacteristic crying; neediness; generalized fear; heightened arousal and confusion	Helplessness; passivity; avoidance of stress related reminders; exaggerated startle response; regressive symptoms; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares	Cognitive confusion; difficulty talking about stressors; lack of verbalization; trouble identifying feelings; unable to understand events; anxieties about change/loss	Clinging; separation fears; grief related to abandonment by caregivers
6-11 Years	Spacey; distracted; changes in behavior, moody, personality; regressive behavior; aggressive behavior; angry outbursts	Reminders trigger disturbing feelings; responsibility; guilt; safety concerns; preoccupation; obvious anxiety; general fearfulness; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares	Confusion and inadequate understanding of events; magical explanations to fill in gaps of understanding; withdrawn; quiet	Worry and concern for others; separation anxiety; repetitious traumatic play and retelling of events; loss of ability to concentrate; school avoidance; loss of interest in activities
12-18 Years	Self conscious; sadness; depression; stress driven risk-taking and acting out; recklessness; substance use/abuse	Efforts to distance from feelings; wish for revenge and action-oriented responses; life threatening re-enactment; decline in school performance; sleep and eating disturbances	Increased self-focus; social withdrawal; avoidance	Flight into driven activity/involvement with others OR retreat in order to manage inner turmoil; rebellion at home and school; abrupt shift in relationships

Age Specific Strategies to Help Kids Cope with Stress

Infant to 2 ½ Years

Maintain calm atmosphere; keep familiar routines; avoid unnecessary separations; minimize exposure to reminders of stress; expect temporary behavior regression; help give simple names to big feelings; talk briefly and openly about stressful event; provide soothing activities.

2 ½ to 5 Years

Maintain familiar routines; do not introduce new and challenging experiences; avoid nonessential separations; tolerate retelling of stressful events; help name strong feelings during brief conversations; respect fears; expect regressive behavior; protect from re-exposure to stressful events; provide opportunities and props for play; if nightmares, explain they aren't real to help subside.

6-11 Years

Listen and tolerate re-telling of events; respect fears; give time to cope; increase awareness and monitor play; set and enforce limits; permit to try new ideas to deal with fears and feel safe; reassure that all feelings are normal after stressful events.

12-18 Years

Encourage discussions with peers and trusted adults; reassure that strong feelings (guilt, shame, embarrassment, desire for revenge) are normal; provide healthy outlets for emotions; encourage spending time with supportive friends/peers; help find activities that offer opportunities to experience mastery, control, and self-esteem.

Educators are often faced with the challenge of supporting kids who are coping with stressful life circumstances. The guidance provided by an educator can make the difference in whether or not kids feel completely overwhelmed by their stressors or are able to develop healthy emotional, behavioral, and psychological coping skills. The following are helpful strategies to assist educators in supporting kids coping with stress:

Be a role model – Set an example and keep in mind that kids learn from watching the adults in their lives.

Connect with kids – Pay attention to their fears; respect their wish to not talk until ready; help them keep stressors in perspective.

Foster open communication – Speak in terms that are easy to understand; reassure and provide opportunities for them to express their thoughts and concerns in safe ways; answer questions as openly and honestly as possible.

Maintain consistency – Expect and respond to changes in behavior; maintain consistent academic and behavioral expectations.

Foster resilience – Help kids interpret what has happened and make sense of it; help them explore positive ways of coping with fears and anxieties.

Be alert to special needs – Spend extra time with kids if necessary; make referral to school or community counseling for additional support if needed.

Open lines of communication with parents and caregivers – Coordinate information between school and home; provide parents with helpful suggestions and information about available school and community resources.

For more information: <http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/>

Written by Mona Johnson, MA, CPP, CDP - Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Information for this article adapted from *Helping Children Cope with Stress* by Avis Brenner;
Operation: Military Kids Ready, Set, Go! Training Manual, 4-H Army Youth Development Project; and
SAMSHA National Mental Health Center, www.mentalhealth.samsha.gov

Additional Resources

Crisis Support Tools

SUPPORT TOTE IN THE EVENT OF A CRISIS

Suggested Items

File Folders for Visitors

- a. Map-shows safe room, counseling office, staff restrooms
- b. Master and Bell Schedule
- c. Safe Room Sign-In
- d. List of staff extensions
- e. Professional community resource list
- f. Signs that Child needs professional help

File Folders for Staff

- a. Map-shows safe room, counseling office, staff restrooms
- b. Signs that Child needs professional help
- c. Safe Room passes (?)
- d. Students Referred to Safe Room
- e. Guidelines/handouts for Students, Helping a Grieving Friend
- f. How to take Care of Yourself in Times of Loss
- g. Procedures for kids coming to Safe Room (adult escort, sign-in, pass, etc.)
- h. Stages of Grief
- i. Guidelines about death
- j. Typical questions
- k. Guidelines for teachers on crisis day

2. Support Tote

Student sign in sheet

½ sheets of index paper for cards

Copy paper for drawing

Play-doh, Fidgets, stress balls slime, stuffed animals, coloring

Coping Skills sheet, I Need Help From an Adult if...

Statements appropriate for making a sympathy card

Colored pencils, crayons, markers

Mandalas to color

Box of tissue

Mints, Water bottle, Snack

Emotions Uno Cards

Liquid Water Timers

Sensory Jars (Glitter/etc)

Slime

- **COMMUNICATION:** Our activity books and related workbooks contain powerful ideas and activities to open adult/child communication. These books have been used by both professionals and parents in working with hundreds of thousands of children and deserve your time and attention.
- **TIME:** Sets aside a special uninterrupted time to go over these materials with your child. Be aware of the child's limited attention span and only work when both you and your child are alert and in a positive mood. Short meetings of less than an hour are best. More than one meeting is necessary to cover the material in an activity book.
- **FLEXIBILITY:** It is not important that this material be finished by a certain time or even that it be completed at all. What is important is that your child expresses his or her feelings.
- **INVOLVEMENT:** These are not simple materials to be read in an evening. It is important that your child be involved in the story and exercises to the extent that she/he experiences his/her own emotions.
- **LISTEN CAREFULLY:** Although you may not want to hear them, all of your child's feelings are valid and need to be expressed. You don't have to agree, just let the child know that you hear them.
- **AGE-APPROPRIATE:** A five year old has very different ideas and vocabulary than does a teenager. Make sure you are using words and concepts that are right for the age and development of your child. You must go into their world they cannot come into yours. The resource materials listed below have been tested for age level.
- **PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT:** You are not alone. Professional support is available. It is OK not to have all the answers. Discuss your concerns with a counselor or social worker. He or she can provide valuable guidance. Whenever possible, attend parent training programs.

Bereavement Books By Boulden Publishing: When Death Happens

When Death Happens Bereavement Activity Book - Age 3-8 & 9-11

Saying Goodbye - Age 7-11

Saying Goodbye Spanish - Age 7-11

Last Goodbye - Age 11-14

Last Goodbye Spanish Language Edition - Age 11-14

Last Goodbye for Teens - Age 15+

Bereavement Parent Guide

Bereavement Parent Guide Spanish

Books for Adults

Bibliography

- Living, Loving and Learning, by Leo Buscaglia
- Widow, by Lynn Caine
- How to Survive the Loss of a Love, By Melba Colgrove
- A Grief Observed, by C.S. Lewis
- Learning to Say Goodbye, by Earl A. Grollman
- When Good Things Happen to Good People, by Harold Kushner
- When Your Loved One is Dying, by Earl A. Grollman
- What Helped Me When My Loved One Died, by Earl A. Grollman
- Good Grief, by Granger E. Westberg
- When Going to Pieces Holds You Together, by Ann Kaiser Sterns The Widower, by Jane Bergess Kohn and Willard K. Kohn Letting Go With Love: The Grieving Process, by Nancy O'Conner

Books for Parents

- Learning to Say Goodbye, by Eda Leshan
- The Bereaved Parent, by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff Explaining Death to Children, edited by Earl A. Grollman Talking About Death, by Earl A. Grollman
- On Children and Death, by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Books for Children

- Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss, by Claudia Jewett
- Death in the Family, By James Agree The Bereaved Parent, by Harriet Sarnoff The Big Red Barn, by Anne Eve Bunting
- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf, by Leo Buscaglia
- Grover, by Vern Cleaver
- How it Feels When a Parent Dies, by Jill Krementz
- Goodbye Grandpa, by Ron Koch
- The Tenth Good Thing About Barney, by Judith Viorst

Impacted Staff/Student List

Date _____

Person's name _____

Cause of death _____

When _____

Where _____

Witnesses _____

What did people

Hear _____

See _____

Touch _____

Smell _____

Anticipate the impact and who will be impacted

Witnesses _____

Siblings _____

Friends _____

Bus _____

Teachers _____

Support Staff _____

Groups (teams, dance, marimba) _____

Other special relationships _____

Friends of the perpetrator _____

Students that are at home or at NOVA that will be impacted? _____

Staff with recent grief and loss _____

Grief Sentence Completion

Right now, I feel... _____

I feel the saddest when... _____

Since the loss, things have been different because... _____

My family usually feels... _____

If I could ask the person I lost one thing, I would ask... _____

Something I liked about the person who I lost was... _____

One thing I learned from the person who I lost was... _____

Goodbye Letter

To: _____

I am saying goodbye because _____

Saying goodbye makes me feel _____

I remember a time when we _____

You taught me _____

Something I want you to know is _____

I will always remember _____

From: _____

CRITICAL INCIDENT DISTRICT RESPONSE TEAM

ADMINISTRATION

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LRE - Glenn Spinnie (360) 584-6563

MTS - Elliott Hedin (360) 556-9756

PGS - Kim Doughty (360) 870-7358

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Linda Moffitt (253) 312-8420

ELEMENTARY COUNSELORS

MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS

HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

Police Chief -

Fire Chief -



2. Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet

Educators, counselors, and other support staff who work with students exposed to trauma are at risk of being indirectly traumatized as a result of hearing about their students' experiences and witnessing the negative effects. In the first section of this packet, learn about secondary traumatic stress and related conditions; in the second section, use the tools and strategies provided to help you create individual and schoolwide plans to promote staff self-care and resilience.

Secondary Traumatic Stress and Related Conditions

Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the traumatic experiences of another individual. Distress may result from hearing someone's trauma stories, seeing high levels of distress in the aftermath of a traumatic event, needing to retell a student's story, and/or seeing photos or images related to the trauma. Common symptoms of STS include the following:

- Increased anxiety and concern about safety
- Intrusive, negative thoughts and images related to their students' traumatic stories
- Fatigue and physical complaints
- Feeling numb or detached from students
- Feeling powerless or hopeless about students and the work
- Diminished concentration and difficulty with decision making
- Desire to physically or emotionally withdraw from people or situations that trigger difficult thoughts and emotions

Several other terms capture elements of STS, but with some differences.

Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment. Although burnout also is work related, burnout develops as a result of general occupational stress; the term is not used specifically to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure.

Compassion fatigue is a less stigmatizing way to describe STS and is sometimes used interchangeably with the term STS.

Vicarious trauma refers to internal changes in teachers and staff members who engage empathetically with students affected by trauma. It is a theoretical term that describes the cumulative effects of secondary exposure to trauma.

Compassion satisfaction describes the positive feelings derived from competent performance as a professional working with trauma survivors. It is characterized by positive relationships with colleagues and the conviction that one's efforts contribute in a meaningful way to students, their families, and the community.

Risk Factors for STS and Related Conditions

Any professional who works directly with people exposed to trauma and hears them recount their traumatic experiences is at risk of STS. Additional risk factors associated with STS and related conditions for professionals include the following:

- Prior trauma exposure
- Female gender
- Inexperience in the field
- Dose of exposure
- Type of work
- Young age

Warning Signs of STS and Vicarious Trauma

Professionals affected by secondary traumatic stress and related conditions such as vicarious trauma experience a variety of symptoms that may affect all aspects of daily life, including negative changes in beliefs about themselves, others, and their work.

Warning Signs of STS and Vicarious Trauma	
Hypervigilance	Excessive alertness for potential threats or dangers at and outside of work. Always being “on” and “on the lookout”
Poor Boundaries	Lacking a balanced sense of your role so that you take on too much, step in and try to control events, have difficulty leaving work at work, or take the work too personally
Avoidance	Coping with stress by shutting down and disconnecting
Inability to Empathize/Numbing	Unable to remain emotionally connected to the work
Addictions	Attaching to distractions to check out from work, personal life, or both
Chronic Exhaustion/ Physical Ailments	Experiencing physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue or inexplicable aches and pains exceeding what you expect for an ordinary busy day or week
Minimizing	Trivializing a current experience by comparing it with another situation that we regard as more severe
Anger and Cynicism	Using cynicism or anger to cope other intense feelings that we may not understand or know how to manage
Feelings of Professional Inadequacy	Becoming increasingly unsure of yourself professionally, second-guessing yourself, feeling insecure about tasks that you once felt confident to perform

Tools for Staff Self-Care and Resilience

A number of individual and system-level strategies effectively promote staff self-care and resilience. This section includes the following tools for supporting individual and schoolwide strategies for addressing and minimizing the effects of STS and related conditions:

- **Shared Strategies for Staff Self-Care and Resilience** suggests individual and schoolwide strategies to support a culture of staff wellness.
- **Staff Self-Care Plan** begins with a personal inventory of warning signs, proceeds to an assessment of self-care practices, and concludes with making a commitment to specific practices.
- **School Self-Care Plan** offers a process similar to developing an individual self-care plan but for the entire school.
- Shared Strategies for Staff Self-Care and Resilience

Creating a healthy work environment is a shared process that includes individual and school-based strategies. Explore these ideas for what you can do and what your school can do to foster wellness for all.

What You Can Do	What Your School Can Do
Increase your knowledge and awareness of the effects of trauma and STS.	Educate staff about the effects of trauma, STS, and related conditions and provide regular opportunities for staff to address potential issues related to STS.
Assess your current level of burnout, STS, and vicarious trauma.	Identify and monitor STS and related conditions among staff. Here are two tools that may be helpful: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Compassion fatigue self-test http://www.ptsd-support.net/compassion_fatigue_self-test.html ■ Professional quality of life scale, ProQOL 5 http://www.proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html
Stay connected to other people and groups that are supportive and nourishing.	Encourage and develop formal strategies for peer support and mentorship.
Identify and incorporate specific self-care strategies for promoting resilience and maintaining a healthy work–life balance (e.g., exercise, good nutrition, supportive networks).	Create a culture that fosters staff resilience that includes: fair leave policies; adequate benefits; a physically safe and secure working environment; sufficient supervision, support and resources to do the work; and processes for shared decision making.

Staff Self-Care Plan

Use this worksheet to create your own self-care plan. You do not need to share your answers with anyone—this is simply for self-reflection. Check back regularly to see how things are going and assess whether you need to make any adjustments to your plan.

1. Recognize the warning signs.

Becoming aware of the effects your work has on you is essential to helping you take care of yourself. Think about the warning signs of STS and related conditions and consider how they may be present in your daily life. Even if you are not regularly exposed to student trauma, you may be struggling with issues of burnout or remnants of your own personal trauma experience. Feel free to add other signs that you are feeling overworked, overextended, or overwhelmed.

Warning Sign	Yes or No	If Yes, Describe the Effect on You
Increased anxiety or concern about safety	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Intrusive, negative thoughts and images related to your student's traumatic experiences	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Difficulty maintaining work-life boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Avoiding people, places, and activities that you used to find enjoyable	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Feeling emotionally numb, disconnected, or unable to empathize	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Warning Sign	Yes or No	If Yes, Describe the Effect on You
Experiencing feelings of chronic exhaustion and related physical ailments	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Regularly feeling angry and/or cynical about students, staff, and your work	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Feeling inadequate in your work and questioning whether what you do matters	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Other:		

2. Assess your self-care practice.

Many strategies are available to support self-care and reduce the signs and symptoms of STS and related conditions. Take some time to complete the self-care self-assessment below. This tool provides ideas about how to practice self-care across many areas of your life. Remember that no one strategy works for everyone.

How often do you do the following? (Rate, using the following scale):

5–Frequently 4–Sometimes 3–Rarely 2–Never 1–It never even occurred to me

Physical self-care

Eat regularly (e.g., breakfast and lunch)
 Eat healthfully
 Exercise or go to the gym
 Lift weights
 Practice martial arts
 Get regular medical care for prevention
 Get medical care when needed
 Take time off when you are sick
 Get massages or other body work

Do physical activity that is fun for you
 Take time to be sexual
 Get enough sleep
 Wear clothes you like
 Take vacations
 Take day trips or mini-vacations
 Take a break from technology, such as smartphones and other devices
 Other:

Psychological self-care

- Make time for self-reflection
- Go to see a psychotherapist or counselor for yourself
- Write in a journal
- Read literature unrelated to work
- Do something at which you are a beginner
- Take a step to decrease stress in your life
- Notice your inner experience—your dreams, thoughts, imagery, and feelings
- Let others know different aspects of you
- Engage your intelligence in a new area—go to an art museum, performance, sports event, exhibit, or other cultural event
- Practice receiving from others
- Be curious
- Say no sometimes to extra responsibilities
- Spend time outdoors
- Other:

Emotional self-care

- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in your life
- Treat yourself kindly (supportive inner dialogue or self-talk)
- Feel proud of yourself
- Reread favorite books, review favorite movies
- Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places
- Allow yourself to cry
- Find things that make you laugh
- Express your outrage in a constructive way
- Play with children
- Other:

Spiritual self-care

- Make time for prayer, meditation, and reflection
- Spend time in nature
- Participate in a spiritual gathering, community, or group
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish your optimism and hope
- Be aware of nontangible (nonmaterial) aspects of life
- Be open to mystery, to not knowing
- Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life
- Sing
- Express gratitude
- Celebrate milestones with rituals that are meaningful to you
- Remember and memorialize loved ones who have died
- Nurture others
- Have awe-filled experiences
- Contribute to or participate in causes you believe in
- Read inspirational literature
- Listen to inspiring music
- Other:

Workplace or professional self-care

- Take time to eat lunch
- Take time to chat with coworkers
- Make time to complete tasks
- Identify projects or tasks that are exciting, growth promoting, and rewarding for you
- Pursue regular learning and professional development
- Get support from colleagues
- Negotiate for your needs
- Have a peer support group
- Other:

Follow-up questions to consider

1. What was this process of filling out the checklist like for you?

2. Were you surprised by any of your responses? If so, which ones?

3. In what areas are you strongest? Weakest?

3. Adopt specific strategies.

Based on your responses to the self-care self-assessment, list 1–2 things in each area that you already do and 1–2 things that you would like to do to take care of yourself. Then choose 3–5 things from your list that you can make a commitment to doing in the next month.

Area	Already Do	Would Like to Do
Physical		
Relational		
Emotional		
Spiritual		
Professional		

Committed to doing:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

School Self-Care Plan

These checklists will help you recognize warning signs of STS at a school level and to choose schoolwide strategies to support self-care.

1. Recognize the warning signs.

A range of warning signs can indicate that your school as a whole may be affected by trauma. Check any signs you detect in your school.

School environment is often chaotic, disorganized, and unpredictable.

Staff members are often fearful of their own safety.

Staff members often use harsh and punitive discipline practices to regain control.

The school has a high rate of staff turnover.

The school has a high rate of staff absenteeism.

There is a lack of communication and/or frequent miscommunication among staff members.

Interpersonal conflicts are increasing among staff members in different roles or departments.

Work is often incomplete.

Work quality is often poor.

The school has a negative atmosphere.

People at the school feel a lack of emotional and/or physical safety.

Staff members have less energy or motivation to go the extra mile.

Staff members collectively tend to be cynical and negative about students.

Student and family complaints about the school have increased.

2. Assess your schoolwide self-care practices.

Check everything that your school currently does to support staff members in each domain.

Training and education

The school provides education to all employees on the signs of STS and related conditions such as vicarious trauma.

The school provides all employees with professional development related to stress management, self-care, and resilience-focused strategies.

The school provides all employees with training related to their job tasks.

Staff members are given opportunities to attend refresher trainings and trainings on new topics related to their roles.

Staff coverage is in place to support training.

The school provides education on steps necessary to advance employees in their roles.

Support and supervision

The school offers an employee assistance program.

Employee job descriptions and responsibilities are clearly defined.

All staff members have access to regular supervision or support by administrators or peers.

Staff members have access to ongoing support for managing workload and time needed to complete tasks.

Staff members are encouraged to understand their own stress reactions and take appropriate steps to develop their own self-care plans.

Staff members are regularly supported in practicing self-care strategies.

Staff members are welcome to discuss concerns about the school or their jobs with administrators without negative consequences (e.g., being treated differently, feeling like their jobs are in jeopardy, or having their concerns affect their positions on the team).

Staff members are encouraged to take breaks, including lunch and vacation time.

The school fosters team-based support and mentoring for staff.

Employee control and input

The school provides opportunities for staff members to give input into practices and policies.

The school reviews its policies on a regular basis to identify whether the policies are helpful or harmful to the health and well-being of its employees.

The school provides opportunities for staff members to identify their professional goals.

Staff members have formal channels for addressing problems and grievances.

Workplace issues, including grievance issues and interpersonal difficulties, are managed by individuals in the appropriate roles and are confidential.

Communication

Staff members attend regularly scheduled team meetings.

Topics related to self-care and stress management are addressed in team meetings.

Regular discussions of how people and departments are communicating and relaying information occur in team meetings.

The school has a way of assessing staff level of STS and related conditions.

The school has a way of evaluating staff satisfaction on a regular basis.

Work environment

The school environment is well lit.

The school environment is physically well maintained (e.g., clean, secure).

Information about self-care is posted in places that are visible.

Employee rights are posted in places that are visible.

The school provides opportunities for community building among employees.

The school has policies concerning acts of discrimination, harassment, disrespect, and bullying for staff.

The school responds promptly to any acts of discrimination, harassment, disrespect, and bullying among staff.

3. Adopt specific strategies that promote staff self-care and resilience.

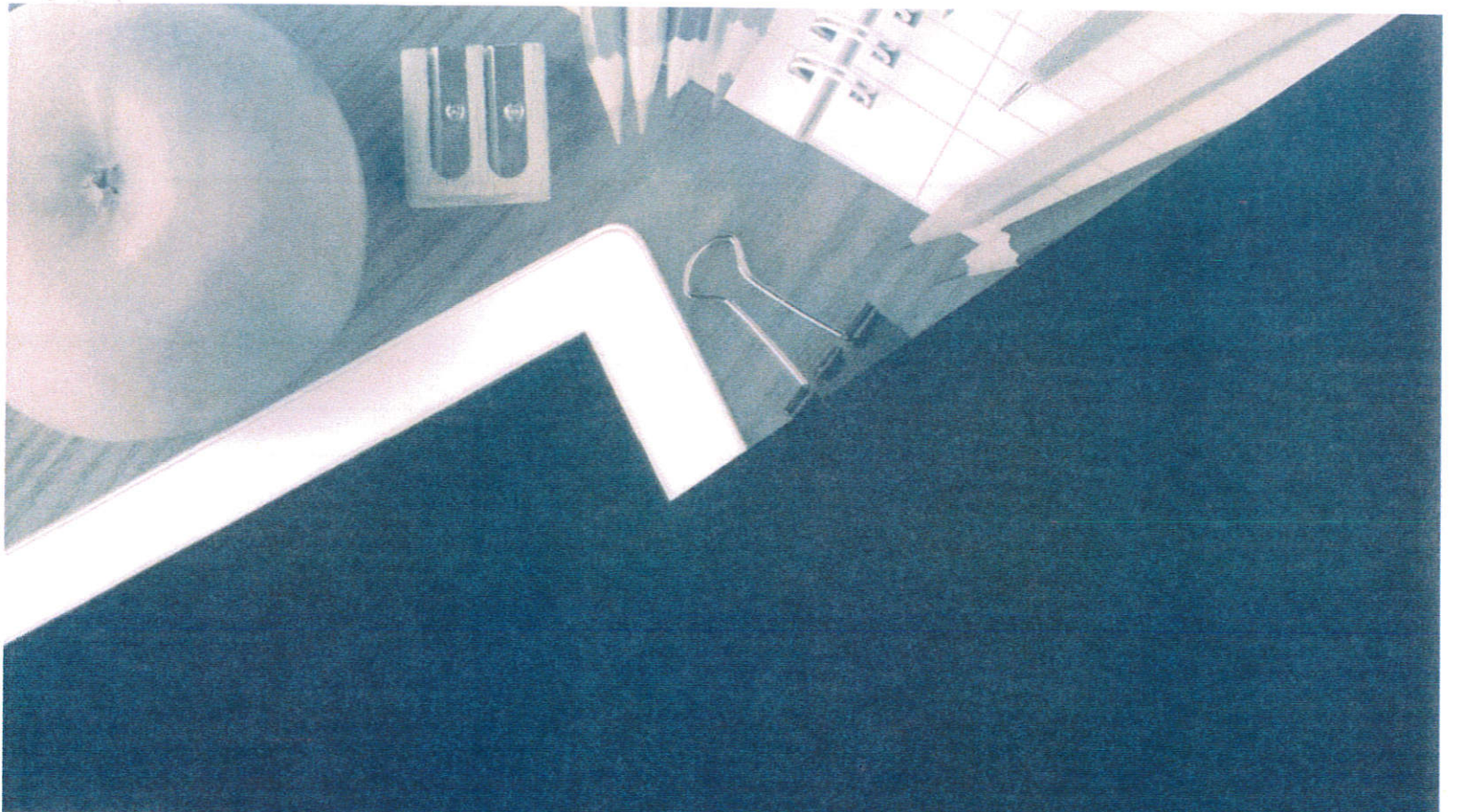
Based on your responses on the school self-care assessment, in the chart below, list 1–2 things in each area that your school already does to support staff and 1–2 things that you would like to see more of to promote staff wellness.

If you are in a leadership position, you may consider gathering staff opinions related to the school's current support for self-care and use the feedback to identify gaps and related action steps. If you are not in a position to implement some of these strategies, take this school self-care plan to your supervisors or directors for their consideration.

Area	Already Do	Would Like to Do
Training and Education		
Support and Supervision		
Employee Control and Input		
Communication		
Work Environment		

References

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BEST PRACTICES FOR ELEVATING STUDENT VOICE

June 2022

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INTRODUCTION

Districts strive to promote educational change that will lead to more positive student outcomes, but often lack a crucial component to achieving authentic and long-lasting results: the student voice. Student voice is “the way in which all students have opportunities to participate in and/or influence the education decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers.”¹ It is a key component in helping students feel invested in their own learning and leads to heightened feelings of self-worth and engagement. Increasing student voice is especially important for marginalized student populations such as African American students and students with disabilities, as it encourages underrepresented students to reclaim power through collective action.²

A Hanover Research (Hanover) member district is committed to expanding student voice in ways that increase student engagement and ensure historically underrepresented students have opportunities to advocate for themselves. To support these efforts, the district has partnered with Hanover to explore strategies for encouraging voice among all student groups and involving students in decision-making processes when possible. The following report includes two sections:

- **Section I: Strategies for Encouraging Student Voice and Self-Efficacy** describes methods for elevating student voice and encouraging student participation, as well as strategies for improving self-efficacy through uplifting student voice; and
- **Section II: Student Voice in Decision-Making** presents strategies for incorporating student voice into decision-making processes.

KEY FINDINGS





Schools that value student voice allow students to share their perspectives about their learning environment in meaningful ways. Schools engage with student voice on a spectrum of activities that help students feel heard and that involve influential student leadership. The spectrum highlights the relationship between collaboration with adults and student-led activities; higher levels of collaboration result in more active student engagement. Ideally, schools will engage with student voice intensively, building student leadership capacity for meaningful partnerships where students have the power to identify problems and implement solutions. Incorporating strategies that encourage student participation and voice at higher levels, reflect the diversity of the student body, and reaching as many students as possible will increase student voice and efficacy across the district.



Schools implement multiple strategies to reach the maximum number of students possible and ensure feedback reflects the diversity of the student body. Surveys, newspapers, student inclusion on administrative teams, and participatory action research provide avenues for students to express their concerns and share their voice with school and district leaders. To increase student participation in surveys, encourage student leaders to communicate the importance of responding to the surveys and how students’ opinions will be used to improve the school. Youth Participatory Action Research is an especially powerful tool for uplifting marginalized student voices as it requires critical reflection of the system, helping marginalized students develop the necessary tools for being active participants.




¹ “Consider Student Voices: Striving to Understand Student Experiences to Support Learning and Growth.” Indexes; Offices. Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL): Pacific, Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL): Pacific. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/blogs/blog19_consider-student-voices.asp

² “Elevating Student Voice in Education.” Center for American Progress, August 2019. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/elevating-student-voice-education/> [2] “Student Voice and School Leadership,” Op. cit., p. 14.

-  **When schools create environments that incorporate student voice in meaningful ways, student sense of belonging and self-efficacy increase, fostering a more engaged student body.** Giving students the space to express themselves, to participate in changing their school climate, and to witness how the process functions and how their opinions influence decisions encourage more positive interactions among students and teachers and higher academic achievement.
-  **Student voice committees, student advisory groups, and student seats on district boards of education provide crucial opportunities for districts to facilitate and incorporate student voice in important decision-making and policy implementation processes.** Elevating student government bodies to those with real authority, such as allowing them to lead initiatives that increase student engagement and improve school climate, empowers students to influence important decisions for their schools and their futures. Including students in administrative leadership teams opens opportunities for students to influence change as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover suggests that districts consider the following recommendations:

-  **Adopt a student bill of rights that voices students' perspectives on values to uphold in their learning environments.** Instituting a framework that incentivizes student voice, such as a student bill of rights, can be instrumental in communicating that student voice is welcome, valued, and prioritized. Hanover can support districts in conducting a student perception and satisfaction survey to identify priorities and inform next steps in developing a student bill of rights.
-  **Develop Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) initiatives that encourage students to research systemic issues within their school communities and identify solutions .** YPAR enables the students who are living the issues to become active participants in researching and identifying solutions. It further supports the development of inquiry and evaluation skills and promotes students' sociopolitical development and psychological empowerment that can lead to action. The research project should include a set a recommendations that students can present to decision-making leaders such as administrators and school boards.
-  **Form a student voice committee to encourage participation in decision making processes.** Participants in student voice committees engage in activities such as interviewing fellow students and teachers to identify ways to improve school culture and climate, conducting interviews with various stakeholders, and facilitating townhall discussions. Also, invite these students to participate in influential groups such as advisory boards and leadership teams to provide students with opportunities to share their opinions and encourage student engagement in affecting change in their schools.

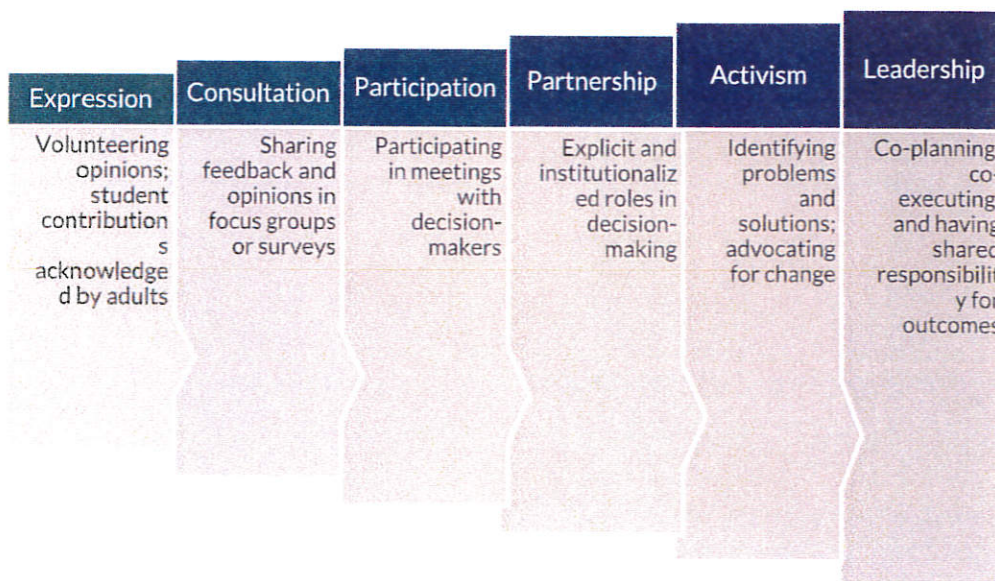
SECTION I: STRATEGIES FOR ENCOURAGING STUDENT VOICE

In this section, Hanover discusses methods for encouraging student voice, especially for marginalized students, and how student voice relates to student self-efficacy.

FACILITATING STUDENT VOICE

Creating an environment that emphasizes student voice allows students to develop civic habits essential to democracy, curricular improvements, stronger teacher-student relationships, and more resilient students.³ Schools that value student voice provide students with opportunities to share their perspectives about their learning environment with educators, allowing them to participate in and influence decisions that will affect themselves and their peers.⁴ The Center for American Progress presents levels of student engagement as a spectrum, from “being heard” to “leadership,” that incorporates the three-level guide, displayed in Figure 1.1 below. Within the “being heard” level, including student voice involves allowing students to share their opinions on school issues, whereas, at the intermediate level, students collaborate with adult educators to identify and address school problems and reforms.⁵ Ideally, schools will engage student voice at the “leadership” level, building capacity for student leadership and allowing students to take the lead in researching problems and implementing solutions.⁶ The spectrum highlights the relationship between collaboration with adults and student-led activities, showing that higher levels of collaboration result in more active student engagement.⁷

Figure 1.1: Levels of Student Voice



Source: Center for American Progress⁸

³ “Student Voice and School Leadership,” Op. cit., pp. 13–14.

⁴ Fernandez, M.-P., S. Doan, and E.D. Steiner. “Use, Capture, and Value of Student Voice in Schools: Findings from the 2021 Learn Together Surveys.” RAND Corporation, 2021. p. 1. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR827-4.html

⁵ “Student Voice and School Leadership,” Op. cit., p. 12.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Elevating Student Voice in Education,” Op. cit.

⁸ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid

Student Voice, a nonprofit dedicated to amplifying students' voices and advocating for student-driven solutions, developed a student bill of rights after soliciting opinions from students across the country.⁹ Instilling these rights can ensure students feel heard, respected, and valued by their school system. Figure 1.2 lists the nine rights students expect districts to guarantee to all students.

Figure 1.2: Student Bill of Rights

Access & Affordability	All students have the right to an affordable and equitable education.
Civic Participation	All students have the right to engage with their community and expect their schools to treat them with the rights of citizens.
Influence Decisions	All students have the right to shape decisions and institutions that will affect their future.
Deeper Learning	All students have the right to an education tailored to their individual needs and that prepares them for life beyond high school.
Diversity & Inclusivity	All students have the right to learn in an environment that doesn't discriminate against them and reflects the variety of backgrounds in the student body.
Due Process	All students have the right to understand existing rules in their school and the opportunity to address unfair treatment.
Free Expression	All students have the right to express themselves within an educational context.
Modern Technology	All students have the right to access modern technology to use for their education.
Positive School Climate	All students have the right to feel mentally, physically, and emotionally safe in school.

Source: Student Voice¹⁰

Supporting student voice allows students to become "agents of change in partnership with adults."¹¹ **Strategies for incorporating student ideas and opinions must engage students in different ways to reach as many students as possible and allow them to share their diverse opinions.**¹² Student surveys serve as a formative tool for teachers and administrators to gather various student perspectives on topics such as school climate, student behavior, and rigor of instruction.¹³ To improve student survey participation rates, teachers and administrations can encourage students to communicate with their peers on the importance of taking the survey and provide context for providing survey data.¹⁴ Figure 1.3 provides additional methods for collecting data and improving student response rates.

⁹ "Student Bill of Rights." Student Voice. <https://www.stuvoice.org/student-bill-of-rights>

¹⁰ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.




¹¹ "Elevate Student Voice." CASEL Schoolguide. <https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-3/school/elevate-student-voice/>

¹² "Elevating Student Voice In Education," Op. cit.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "School Climate Improvement Action Guide for Working with Students." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment. pp. 4–5.

Figure 1.3: Supporting the Collection and Use of Reliable Data

 <p>What are the keys to increasing survey participation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Consider asking a small group of students to review or test the student survey you plan to use. This input can provide a realistic estimate on how long the survey will take to complete and if there are questions that are difficult to answer or not appropriate for certain grade levels. Use the input from the student pilot test to refine the survey implementation process.▪ Ask your core group of students to communicate with their peers about the importance of taking the surveys seriously. They could go from classroom to classroom or present to the whole school in an assembly and share why the data are important, how they can help their school improve, and how to take the survey.▪ Allow students to conduct focus groups or interviews with peers and staff to provide context for interpreting survey data.▪ Include students on a team of people reviewing and reporting on the data. Students can have their own data team or be part of a larger team with adults, but they should be involved in some way in interpreting the data and sharing results with the school community.	
 <p>What does this look like when done successfully?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Piloting your survey instrument with students and using data from the pilot test to improve the survey process. You should be using a valid and reliable survey, so do not change the items. However, you can change the time allocated for the survey, the age group you give it to, and the logistics based on student input.▪ Having students communicate about the importance of data collection.▪ Having students assist in collecting data from peers and staff.▪ Including students in the process of reflecting on and using data for improvement. They may have critical insights to share about the data that can be useful in future planning.	 <p>What do you want to avoid?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Changing individual survey items based on student feedback, thus impacting the validity and reliability of the survey.▪ Asking students to share their answers on the pilot survey. They should remain anonymous and be used only for testing the process and comprehension, not gathering input on school climate.▪ Downplaying the importance of students in communicating with their peers about capturing good data on school climate.▪ Excluding students from the reflection and data use conversations.

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments¹⁵

Other ways to encourage student voice include student participation in journalism at school, such as contributing to school newspapers and magazines, and providing a platform to expose issues, interview sources, share stories, and express opinions.¹⁶ Figure 1.4 lists additional ways schools can foster a sense of identity, agency, community, and belonging that can elevate all students' voices.

¹⁵ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.

¹⁶ "Elevating Student Voice in Education," Op. cit.

Figure 1.4: Strategies for Elevating Student Voice

STRATEGIES	ADULT SUPPORT
<p>Gather Student Perspectives. Student surveys can help to better understand students' perspectives on schoolwide SEL implementation, school climate, academic engagement, adult-student relationships, and other important components of their school experiences. Continuing the conversation through focus groups or interviews can help staff to contextualize survey data and answer questions that emerge from survey data. Go further by involving young people themselves in the process of research and analysis, a strategy called youth participatory action research (YPAR).</p>	<p>Elevating student voice isn't just about hearing from young people. It is about sharing power and ownership and being transparent about the process as well as the results. Make it clear that you hear their feedback and share what you plan to do about it. Let students know how they can help or be part of the planning process. With your students, develop a survey (or adapt this sample) to better understand their perceptions of school climate, student support, and creating a sense of belonging.</p>
<p>Recruit student members for the SEL team and other leadership teams. Students need to have an authentic voice in decision-making about school events and policies that impact them, and adults need their voice in order to co-create equitable learning environments. Student representation on the school's SEL team, school improvement, or equity and diversity teams can be of great value to both the school and the students. While all voices are important, it is especially critical to hear from those who may feel disconnected from school, as their experiences can provide a critical perspective on how to continuously improve a learning environment that supports all students, not just those who are already thriving.</p>	<p>Listen to youth. For some, it may be a shift to listen actively while resisting the urge to show students the "right way." Prepare adult team members to receive student input in a way that is respectful and encouraging, particularly when student feedback is critical or delivered in unconventional ways. In addition, provide students with opportunities to practice leadership skills such as public speaking and meeting facilitation. See further guidance on supporting student team members in this tool.</p>
<p>Encourage student-led advocacy. Students can work with their peers around issues they care about. They can do this through clubs and activities such as a student voice committee, gay-straight alliance (GSA), peer jury, student council, or youth advisory committee. Students also need outlets to react to current events in their school, community, or country. Finding a productive way to exercise their voice (e.g., awareness campaigns, peaceful protests) is an ideal opportunity for them to develop new skills and have an impact.</p>	<p>Based on a clear understanding of their concerns, help students develop the skills they need to lead, including public speaking, planning meetings, and marketing to organize and engage their peers.</p>
<p>Build student-centered classrooms. Creating environments where students drive learning helps to develop problem-solving skills and prepares students for lifelong success. Schools can place students at the center of their learning by including them in decision-making about the why, what, and how of their learning experiences—shaping learning activities, making choices, and evaluating their own progress.</p>	<p>Support teachers to use strategies such as interactive pedagogy, classroom community building, and project-based learning to keep students at the center of learning. Establish classroom leadership roles on a rotating basis so all students have an opportunity to guide projects and classroom activities. Introduce narrative feedback as a way for students to assess their own performance and continue learning until they master a particular subject or skill.</p>
<p>Involve students in teaching about SEL. In some schools, students facilitate learning around SEL or related subjects based on their interests or the needs of the school. Students may partner with another student or teacher to co-teach their peers or other grade levels. Student-led SEL can include students leading activities such as mindfulness, advisory lessons, discussions, or community-building circles. Students may also want to use social</p>	<p>Prepare students to lead SEL activities by introducing them to the content, giving them options about what they want to present or facilitate, providing talking points, and engaging students in role playing or rehearsing how content will be delivered.</p>

STRATEGIES	ADULT SUPPORT
media as a mechanism to inform and educate their peers about SEL.	
Establish student-led conferences . The opportunity to prepare for and conduct their own conferences about academic, social, and emotional progress with their parents or guardians gives students a sense of ownership of the learning process and cultivates skills in communication and self-awareness (Berger et al, 2014).	Help students prepare to lead conferences by having them gather work samples to review, write a reflection on their strengths and challenges, and set goals for the next quarter. Support the student in this conference by shifting from a directive role (e.g., "do it this way") to a consulting role ("let's develop a plan for improvement together").

Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning¹⁷

YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) allows students to conduct in-depth analyses of oppressive issues in their school or community and develop solutions for addressing them.¹⁸ YPAR trains young people to conduct systemic research to improve their lives, communities, and institutions meant to serve them, such as schools.¹⁹ Students who conduct YPAR are participant researchers, meaning they have lived experiences with the topic they are researching, ensuring it is a topic they feel connected to.²⁰ YPAR allows students to experience collaborative research opportunities with other students, teachers, and community members to explore topics such as access to healthy food and the school-to-prison pipeline.²¹ As a youth-focused, community-based social justice research approach, YPAR is especially powerful at uplifting the voices of underrepresented students because it requires adults and students to reflect critically on systemic factors that create and maintain oppression, giving marginalized students the tools they need to challenge injustice in their lives.²² YPAR can²³

- **Redefine** who has the expertise to produce knowledge for our world — not just professional adult researchers but young people who are living the issues they are studying;
- **Provide** skills in inquiry, evidence, and presentation that are important to young people's development as students and agents of positive change in schools and communities;
- **Generate** findings that provide insights into issues faced by young people that they themselves experience, as well as the resources that matter in helping solve those issues;
- **Promote** young people's sociopolitical development and psychological empowerment such that they understand the root causes of problems facing their communities and have the skills and motivation to take action; and
- **Evaluate** programs, policies, and practices that affect young people.

¹⁷ Figure text, including links, taken verbatim with modifications from "Elevate Student Voice," Op. cit.

¹⁸ "Elevating Student Voice in Education," Op. cit.

¹⁹ "Learn About YPAR." YPAR Hub. <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/learn-about-ypar/>

²⁰ "Youth Participatory Action Research." Maine Youth Action Network. p. 2.

²¹ "Elevating Student Voice in Education," Op. cit.

²² "Learn About YPAR," Op. cit. [2] Griffin, C.B. "Youth Participatory Action Research as an Intervention to Promote a Pathway for Economic Mobility: Pilot Data from the YouthRISE Summer Program." *Center for the Study of Economic Mobility | Winston-Salem State University*. Spring 2021. p. 1. [2] Abraczinskas, M. et al. "Preventing Bullying and Improving School Climate Through Integrating Youth Participatory Action Research Into School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: An Illustration Using a Multiple Case Study Approach." *Journal of Prevention and Health Promotion*, June 2022. p. 3. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26320770221092148>

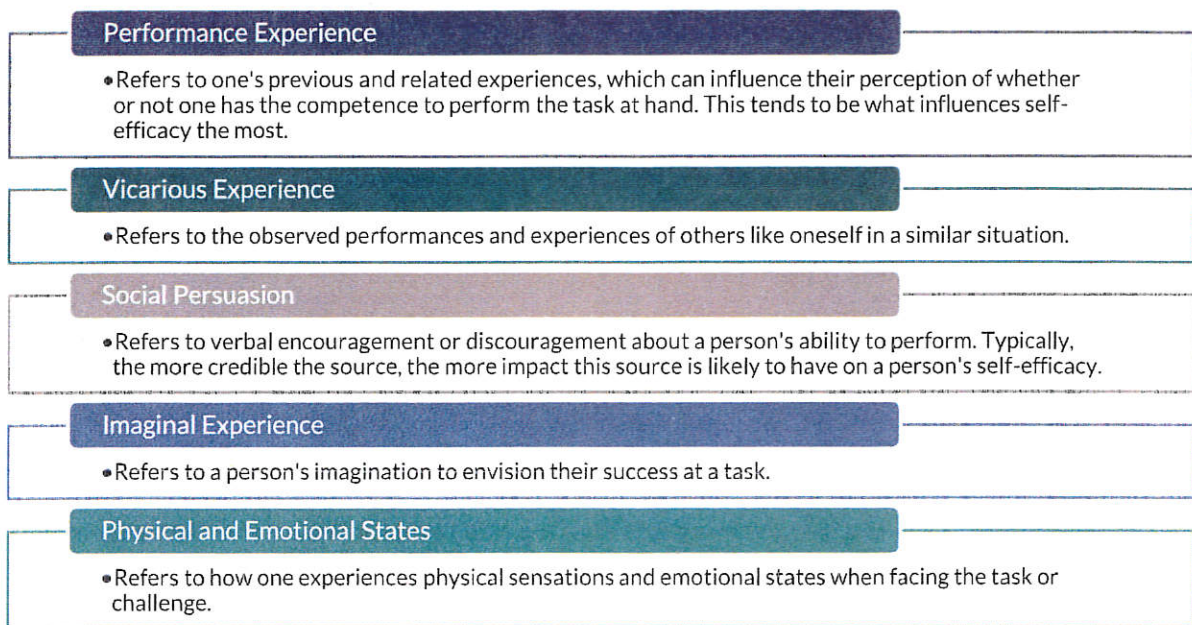
²³ Bulleted text taken verbatim with modifications from "Learn About YPAR," Op. cit.

Research projects can last from several months to a year.²⁴ At the end of the process, students develop recommendations for social change that they can present to decision-making bodies, such as school and district administrators or the school board.²⁵ For more information on YPAR, including lessons on team building and community support, please visit the YPAR Hub [here](#).

STUDENT VOICE AND SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy is the “belief that we can achieve a desired goal through our actions.”²⁶ **Students with a strong sense of self-efficacy recover quickly from setbacks and are more likely to take responsibility for failures, empowering students to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and set high goals.**²⁷ Encouraging self-efficacy requires focusing on students’ mastery of content but also depends on a student’s sense of identity, which can be influenced by students’ various experiences.²⁸ Figure 1.5 lists the five factors that influence self-efficacy.

Figure 1.5: Factors that Influence Self-Efficacy



Source: Transforming Education²⁹

Amplifying student voice in meaningful ways, such as giving students space to express their concerns or listening to their rationales about what they’re learning, improves students’ perceptions of their abilities and encourages higher self-efficacy.³⁰ Strategies, such as establishing specific, short-term goals that students view as both challenging and attainable and comparing students’ progress to the goals set for them

²⁴ “Elevating Student Voice in Education,” Op. cit.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Building a Culture of Self-Efficacy.” Harvard Graduate School of Education, September 2018. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/09/building-culture-self-efficacy>

²⁷ “Self-Efficacy: Helping Students Believe in Themselves.” Teach the Earth. <https://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/affective/efficacy.html>

²⁸ “Building a Culture of Self-Efficacy,” Op. cit.

²⁹ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from “Self-Efficacy Toolkit.” Transforming Education. <https://transformingeducation.org/resources/self-efficacy-toolkit/>

³⁰ “Deepening Student Voice and Empowerment.” ASCD, April 2018. <https://www.ascd.org/blogs/deepening-student-voice-and-empowerment>

rather than to other students, encourage more positive self-evaluations of one's capabilities and higher academic achievement.³¹ More efficacious students set higher goals and expectations for the future.³² Figure 1.6 lists additional strategies for promoting and improving self-efficacy in students.

Figure 1.6: Strategies for Building Self-Efficacy

Choose Task Difficulty Wisely	If tasks are too difficult or too dull, students may lose interest or avoid them for fear of failure. Moderately difficult tasks that are interesting and engaging are the ones that build self-confidence and increase attention in students
Use Peer Role Models	Sometimes, it is easier for students to relate to people of their age or close in age. Watching a friend work hard and come up with a solution may encourage them to try that themselves. But at the same time, teachers must remember not to make the comparisons so stark that they hurt the student or make them feel small.
Allow Freedom	Self-efficacy starts with autonomy. Students who are allowed to decide for themselves and choose their ways are more self-reliant and independent. It is always a good idea to let them choose their tasks so that they get to do what they want to and not lose interest in it.
Active Feedback from Students	Feedback is a powerful classroom tool for building efficacy. Strategies may include asking students to write their comments and feedback at the end of each learning session or dedicating the last few minutes of the class for students to ask questions and discuss their opinions. Vocalizing thoughts allows students to be aware of themselves and helps teachers to understand what areas to address.
Active Feedback from Teachers	Feedback must be mutual and benefit both the teacher and students in understanding themselves. It is an excellent idea to frequently give honest feedback to students about their performance and future possibilities. Teachers and educational guides must remember that the purpose of feedback is to enhance self-awareness, and not to discourage the kids, so choosing words wisely is a priority, whether giving positive or negative feedback.
Promote Efficacy in Teachers	Enhancing self-efficacy in teachers increases the probability of making the students more self-reliant. Teachers who are highly productive about themselves and their teaching skills have a better impact on students and can influence them easily. They can bounce back from their stress and have firm control of their teaching style, all of which contribute to making the students highly self-labile
Problem-Solving Opportunities	Daily problem-solving opportunities provide opportunities for students to face problems without fear and increase their chance of winning. It prepares them to meet challenging tasks and proceed from less severe to more difficult tasks. Besides, problem-solving also keeps their mind engaged and improves their decision-making abilities. Teachers can ask them to explain why they reached a particular solution for a specific problem and let them verbalize their thoughts.
Multiple Learning Media	Using a variety of learning sources can help students to sustain their interest in the task and engage more in it. For example, instead of the traditional chalk-talk or lecture methods, teachers can use more visual images, slide shows, online activities, and resources to impart knowledge to students. Such environments, also known as 'skilled navigation settings' make the class more exciting and invite creativity in the whole learning procedure. Needless to mention, they significantly aid in increasing self-efficacy and flexibility among students and teachers.

Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison³³

Building self-efficacy in students requires multiple strategies working together to create an environment that values and uplifts student voice. Interactive and collaborative environments that value student voice promote a strong sense of self-efficacy, resulting in students feeling rewarded, enjoying challenges, and engaging more deeply in school.³⁴

³¹ "Self-Efficacy: Helping Students Believe in Themselves," Op. cit.

³² "Deepening Student Voice and Empowerment," Op. cit.

³³ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from "Building Self-Efficacy in Students," Op. cit.

³⁴ "Building Self-Efficacy in Students." Center for Teacher, Learning, and Mentoring | University of Wisconsin-Madison. <https://kb.wisc.edu/instructional-resources/page.php?id=116545>

SECTION II: STUDENT VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING

In this section, Hanover reviews methods for elevating student voices in decision-making processes.

To ensure districts make decisions that benefit all students, leaders must elevate student voice and formally include student opinions in decision-making bodies and processes.³⁵ In many districts, empowering students to take on extracurricular roles, such as student government positions, is not enough to fully incorporate student voice in policy- and decision-making, as student governments are more likely to oversee student activities and plan school events than work with administrators to find solutions to school climate or social-emotional issues.³⁶ Student positions on state and district boards of education and student voice committees can facilitate student voice in meaningful ways that influence important decision-making processes.³⁷ In Chicago Public Schools (CPS), for example, student voice committees go beyond planning for school dances and events; instead, they interview fellow students and teachers to identify ways to improve their school.³⁸

Spotlight: Chicago Public Schools Student Voice Committees



When students at Mather High School noticed their peers did not feel comfortable attending school and weren't engaging in class, they decided to improve relationships between the school's 100 teachers and 1,500 students through a student voice committee.³⁹ The student voice committee conducts surveys, holds town halls, and interviews peers and teachers to figure out ways to make their school better.⁴⁰

To start, students created a presentation and shared it with educators at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year to teach them how students are feeling and how to improve student-teacher relationships.⁴¹ According to one senior, students are not looking to create familiar friendships with teachers nor keep relations strictly professional, but to find the "golden mean" between friendships and professional relationships.⁴² During the presentation, the student voice committee offered practical suggestions, such as holding doors open for students, checking in to see how they're doing, and leading activities such as "I wish my teacher knew," which allows students to write down information about their lives that teachers should be aware of.⁴³

In other schools, the student voice committee has taken on projects of an even larger scale; at Washington High School, for example, the committee worked with administrators to shift the school to an earlier schedule so students could participate in after-school activities before it got dark, increasing involvement at school.⁴⁴ Another school began including students in curriculum meetings and discussions involving social-emotional learning.⁴⁵ At all Chicago schools, the student voice committee is open to all students who wish to join and faculty advisers are encouraged to recruit students who may not normally participate in student leadership to ensure committees represent the student body.⁴⁶

³⁵ "5 Ways To Include Student Voice in Education Policymaking." Center for American Progress, February 2021. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/5-ways-include-student-voice-education-policymaking/>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Stringer, K. "Not Your Average Student Council: How Chicago's Student Voice Committees Are Giving Kids a Real Say in Their Schools." *The 74*, November 2018. <https://www.the74million.org/article/not-your-average-student-council-how-chicagos-student-voice-committees-are-giving-kids-a-real-say-in-their-schools/>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

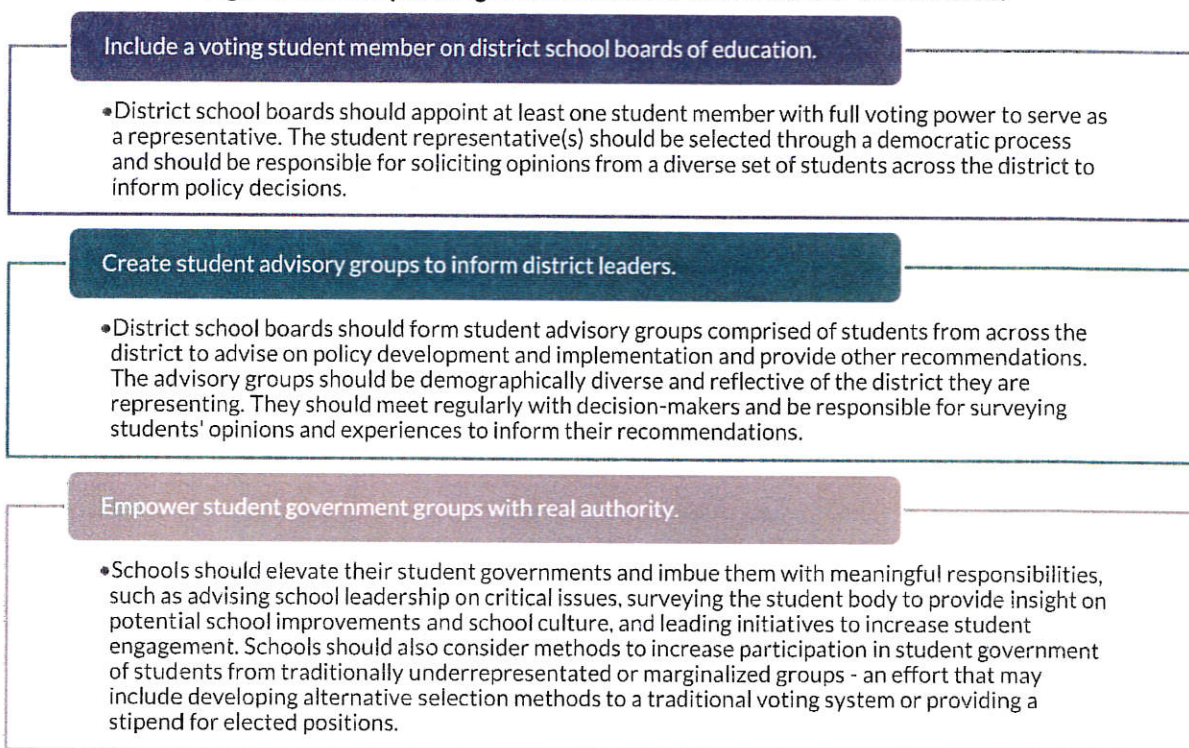
⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "5 Ways To Include Student Voice in Education Policymaking," Op. cit.

⁴⁶ Stringer, Op. cit.

Additional ways of ensuring student voice influences decision-making bodies at the school and district level include student advisory groups that inform district leadership and empowering student government bodies with real authority.⁴⁷ The Center for American Progress (CAP) partnered with Student Voice in late 2020 to hold community conversations with high school students across the country.⁴⁸ Students expressed how schools were not listening to them and discussed how they would like to be included in future decision-making in their schools, districts, and states.⁴⁹ Students identified advisory groups, school board seats, and real authority in student government as methods for incorporating student voice in decision and policy implementations.⁵⁰ Figure 2.1 expands upon these strategies.

Figure 2.1: Incorporating Student Voice at the School and District Level



Source: Center for American Progress⁵¹

Students can offer unique insights as part of leadership teams when schools are implementing changes, such as integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) systems into school culture.⁵² Adult members of leadership teams, such as SEL teams responsible for finding solutions to improving school climate, should ensure students are properly prepared for their roles and treated as full members of the team.⁵³ Figure 2.2 lists strategies for creating equitable space for students on leadership teams. *Note: While the guide refers to student members of SEL teams, these strategies can apply broadly to other school or district leadership teams.*

⁴⁷ "5 Ways To Include Student Voice in Education Policymaking," Op cit

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from Ibid.

⁵² "Supporting Student Members of the SEL Team." CASEL Schoolguide. <https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/supporting-student-members-of-the-sel-team/>

⁵³ Ibid., p. 1.

Figure 2.2: Guide for Adults in Supporting Student Team Members



Prepare students for their role. Meet with students prior to the first meeting to learn about their goals and motivation for joining the team and ensure that they understand the commitment. Ensure that they understand that participation is voluntary and that they do not feel pressure to join. Discuss the following:

- The goals of the SEL team and expectations of team members;
- Meeting routines, procedures, and relevant background;
- Their interests and comfort level regarding involvement in meetings, normalizing that they may feel less comfortable volunteering for tasks and speaking up initially, but may want to challenge themselves to participate more over time; and
- Any concerns or questions that the students have about participation on the team.



Prepare the team to receive student members. Prior to students joining the meeting, hold a team discussion regarding the following:

- How to welcome students and put them at ease;
- How to show students they are influential and not merely token members;
- How to encourage students to share their perspectives and be involved in informed decision-making;
- How to listen to and accept student input with an open mind; and
- Revisit meeting protocols to guide interactions and support students with understanding information that is discussed (e.g., add an item to the agenda for students to report out, ask questions, or lead an activity).



Structure opportunities around student strengths and interests to engage them as influential team members and increase responsibility over time. For example, students may:

- Facilitate a check-in, welcome/inclusion activity, or closing activity;
- Provide regular updates to the team regarding related activities taking place in student-led groups or teams (e.g., student council, student committees);
- Plan and facilitate activities such as summits, student conferences, and assemblies;
- Assist in delivering presentations or professional learning about schoolwide policy implementation for the school community;
- Participate in the assessment of SEL implementation or school climate by participating in walkthroughs, development student surveys, or facilitating interviews with peers or adults about SEL; and
- Communicate about SEL activities via social media.



Be an ally or mentor. Make connections with students that extend beyond meetings by:

- Discussing what students see as their strengths and areas in which they would like to grow as a leader;
- Scheduling a regular one-on-one check in with students to determine the degree to which they feel they have a voice on the team; and
- Asking about and affirming student interests and goals.



Build student leadership capacity. Adults can build students' leadership skills and provide them with learning experiences to support their role on the team. Adults may consider:

- Preparing youth to be facilitators and co-facilitators of meetings or presentations and giving students the opportunity to speak first;

- Teaching students how to collect and analyze data, and create opportunities for youth participatory action research, where students create their own research questions and use observations and feedback from peers to draw conclusions about what's going well and what can be improved; and
- Engaging in developmentally appropriate conversations about complex issues that impact education, such as racism, resource inequities, and opportunity gaps.

Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning⁵⁴

When adults create space for students to participate in policy initiatives and decision-making processes, students become more engaged in what's happening at their school and are more likely to take ownership of activities and initiatives at school.⁵⁵ Adults and students both benefit; students develop leadership skills while collaborating with adults on important school issues, increasing their sense of belonging, while adults have the opportunity to grow as educators and become better-informed school leaders after listening to and acting on student opinions that typically diverge from adult thinking.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Figure text taken verbatim with modifications from "Supporting Student Members of the SEL Team," Op. cit.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

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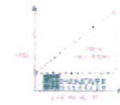
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