Sample Parent/Guardian Information Letter

Sending written communication home with students or having this information posted on your school's website is an important piece of the school's postvention strategy. If you remember that communication with parents or guardians should convey the control, support, and structure that are guiding the school's response to the student body, your messaging should be effective. Here are a few additional guidelines to help you structure the content of these communications:

- Remember the "need to know." Your role is not to provide all available details about what has happened. Parents want you to tell them how the school is addressing the needs of their children in the aftermath of this tragic death.
- Acknowledge the shock and sadness that are undoubtedly present throughout the larger school community. Include an expression of condolence and sympathy to the family of the deceased and to the other community members who may be personally affected by the loss.
- Remind parents and guardians that you have a protocol in place to assist the school community in managing reactions to events like this. Knowing that the school proactively structured a response strategy sends the message to parents and guardians that while the death may have been uncontrollable, the school is in control of the way its aftermath will be managed for their children.
- Outline the resources in the school and through the school's community partners that are available to provide support to the students and their families.
- Give parents and guardians a measure of control by alerting them to reactions their children may experience as a result of the death. In addition, provide suggestions for talking to their children about what happened.
- If the death has been ruled a suicide, alert parents and guardians to concerns about imitation and encourage them to be on the lookout for changes in their child that might be related to the death. Urge them to contact resource staff to discuss their concerns.
- Remind parents and guardians that misinformation and rumors will probably be circulating for days, about the death as well as about the school's response or lack thereof. Caution them to check out what they hear from reliable sources. Invite them to call the school personally if they have any questions or concerns about the way the school is responding to the needs of their children.

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With these guidelines in mind, let's look at a sample letter that demonstrates how to convey this information succinctly and accurately.

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Our school learned this morning that *(name)*, one of our seventh-grade students, died tragically over the weekend. I know that many of us in the school community have been greatly affected by this death. I know you join me in sending kind thoughts and condolences to *(name's)* family, as well as to the other members of our school family who will be affected by *(name's)* death.

Our school has had a crisis plan in place for quite some time to prepare us for meeting the needs of the school community at difficult times like this. Our staff have been trained in the most developmentally appropriate ways to be supportive to your children, and we will structure both group and individualized opportunities to provide your children with the help they need.

In addition to the resources here at the school, a variety of community resources are available for you and your children, especially over the next several days. Tonight several drop-in centers will be open from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. at local churches. *(Local religious/community organizations)* have graciously donated space in their halls so trained resource staff can meet with any community members who would like their support. If you would like to talk to a mental health professional in a more private setting, I have attached a list of local practitioners with whom you can set up an appointment.

While we certainly intend to provide support to your children during the school day, we know you will want to do the same at home. We have resources to help you in this process. If you would like to talk with us about concerns you have about your child, please do not hesitate to contact our resource staff at the school's main phone number.

The next few days will be challenging. You may be confused by the rumors that will invariably surface to fill in the gaps of information about what happened. You might even hear stories about what is or is not being done at the school. We can assure you that we are prepared to address your children's needs, and we are open to talking with you about any of your concerns.

I know that we, as a competent and compassionate school community, are joined in sadness about this loss. I am hopeful we can also join in healing.

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OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION - OLYMPIA, WA

SPANISH SAMPLE LETTER

Estimado padre/tutor,

Nuestra escuela supo esta mañana que *(nombre)*, uno de nuestros estudiantes de séptimo grado, murió trágicamente en el fin de semana. Yo sé que muchos de nosotros en la colectividad escolar hemos sido muy afectados por esta muerte. Estoy seguro que se unirán a mí para enviar nuestro más sentido pésame a la familia de *(nombre)*, así como a otros miembros de nuestra familia escolar que se verán afectados por la muerte de *(nombre)*.

Desde hace un tiempo nuestra escuela ha tenido un plan en casos de crisis para prepararnos a satisfacer las necesidades de la colectividad escolar en momentos difíciles como éste. Nuestro personal ha sido capacitado en las formas más apropiadas de desarrollo para ofrecer apoyo a nuestros niños, y estructuraremos al grupo y oportunidades individualizadas para brindar la ayuda que sus hijos necesitan.

Además de los recursos aquí en la escuela, existe una variedad de recursos en la comunidad para usted y sus hijos, sobre todo en los próximos días. Esta noche varios centros estarán abierto de 6 p.m. a 11 p.m. en las iglesias locales. (*Organizaciones religiosas/comunitarias locales)* han ofrecido espacio cortésmente en sus vestíbulos para que el personal capacitado pueda reunirse con miembros de la comunidad que deseen apoyo. Si deseara hablar con un profesional de salud mental en forma más privada, adjunto una lista de profesionales locales con quienes debe concertar una cita.

Aun cuando nosotros pensamos ofrecer apoyo a sus hijos durante el día escolar, sabemos que usted querrá hacer lo mismo en su hogar. Nosotros tenemos recursos para ayudarlo en este proceso. Si deseara hablar con nosotros de preocupaciones que tenga sobre su hijo, por favor no dude en llamar a nuestro personal de recursos al número telefónico principal de la escuela.

Los próximos días serán muy difíciles. Usted puede sentirse confundido por los rumores que sin duda aparecerán para llenar las lagunas de información sobre lo que sucedió. Incluso escuchará hablar de lo que la escuela está o no está haciendo al respecto. Le aseguramos que estamos preparados para atender las necesidades de sus hijos, y estamos dispuestos a hablar con usted sobre cualquiera de sus preocupaciones.

Yo sé que nosotros, como una colectividad escolar competente y compasiva, nos solidarizamos en la tristeza sobre esta pérdida. Abrigo la esperanza que juntos podemos superar esta tragedia.

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