Care Station Levels

After a traumatic death, hosting care stations allows communities/schools to identify those who may need further assistance. Doing so also provides immediate care for those who may initially be in shock or possibly at risk of suicide. The flow of care listed below is a road map for what is called a "continuum of care."

LEVEL 1: Caregivers might be school staff, school counselors, faith leaders

This is generally the use of care stations after a traumatic event.

Supporting everyone in the community who is exposed to the death(s) by providing care stations with

- immediate care
- generally short term
- resources
- referral information
- follow-up

A care station is a designated place in the school or community, staffed to provide immediate assistance for those grieving or who may have questions.

LEVEL 2: Care might be in school grief groups, in faith grief groups, by peer helpers, or by licensed clinicians

This is the second step after the use of care stations moving forward to recovery.

Providing extended care through organized groups for those who may have difficulty with

- coping
- letting go
- staying on task
- having continual tearful episodes

Grief groups generally meet weekly for several months.

LEVEL 3: Licensed clinicians

In the continuum of levels of care, persons who need additional care are referred to mental health providers.

Providing services to those who

- have complicated grief
- may be at risk of using other forms of coping
- may need help reintegrating back into the environment
- may have intense grief

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Care Station Management

Guidelines for Student Support

The purpose of care stations in the aftermath of a crisis is threefold:

- to provide a safe, private location where affected students can discuss feelings and reactions with trained staff and student reactions can be stabilized
- to provide an opportunity for supportive group interaction with peers
- to identify students who may need continuing follow-up either in school or through referral to off-campus resources

In some situations, what happens at the care stations is simply allowing students to express their feelings about the shock of the loss, which the care station leader validates. For most students, having an opportunity to talk about their initial reactions will be sufficient, and they won't need additional support services. For other students, however, there may be a need to provide longer-term support in the form of a group. If your school has both the resources and the need for this kind of student support service, here are some guidelines for its operation:

1. Try to staff each station with at least two crisis team members (this may include pairing your school staff with community partners). This allows flexibility to provide individualized support to students who need it.
2. Limit group size to six to eight people. In smaller groups, it will be easier to provide an opportunity to stabilize initial crisis responses and help students identify other sources of support. Larger groups can be more difficult to control and often offer limited opportunities for each member to participate. Additionally, discussion in larger groups often turns into repetitive recitation of the details of the event and speculation about the causes, neither of which is usually helpful. Try to limit the group meeting time to the length of a normal class period, and do not include students who seem emotionally "out of control" (that is, visibly upset, sobbing uncontrollably, or unable to communicate). These students should receive individualized support.

Care Station Objectives

- Provide an opportunity for students to "ventilate" how they feel about what happened that will be "validated" by the group facilitator
- Stabilize students
- Provide resources
- Assess the need for follow-up

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3. Recognize that the goals of these groups, especially in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, are *very* limited: to help stabilize students and assess their need for additional follow-up. Because of the intense emotions students usually experience after a traumatic loss, the main technique of the facilitator is to listen and validate student feelings and identify students who may need additional support. These groups are not designed to provide what has been called "psychological debriefing," a controversial process that encourages participants to relive or revisit in a graphic way the particular events and experience of the trauma.

Remember to Provide

- Control
- Support
- Structure

4. Remember the guiding principles of postvention (providing control, support, and structure), and apply them to your interactions with students.
    a. You provide *control* with clear leadership that will give students a sense of security. Start by greeting each arriving student by name and introducing yourself. Explain that the group has been set up to provide students with extra support during this difficult time. Review and reinforce group rules that only one student speaks at a time, information shared in the group remains in the group, and every reaction or response is to be accepted without criticism or judgment. If a student becomes emotionally distraught during the group, assess the need for individual support and respond appropriately. At the end of the group, if a student expresses the need for additional support, speak to him or her privately to initiate a referral.
    b. *Support* is conveyed by your tone of voice and your acknowledgment and validation of all student responses. The presence of tissue boxes and bottled water are visible symbols of a supportive climate that recognizes personal needs. Students may also feel supported when they are given permission to participate by simply listening. Knowing that they are *not* required to share personal feelings and observations can be a relief to the more reserved students. Make sure you check in with these quiet students at the conclusion of the meeting to find out what they're taking away from the meeting and if they feel they need additional support.

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c. The setup of the group can announce *structure* as soon as students enter. Arrange chairs in a circle, with or without a center table. A center table that holds the tissues and water bottles is actually a very effective structuring device. Psychologically, it also provides a physical boundary that can create feelings of safety and protection for participants, especially the more reluctant members. Explain that the group will last for a class period. Clarity about the time frame is important, since it announces up front what the limits to the discussion will be. Briefly explaining the process of grief, especially initial reactions, also begins to provide an organizing structure for the emotional responses of group members. (See the handout How to Help Students Deal with Death from chapter 1.)

d. An effective opening statement to the group can be "We're here to talk about what happened and how we can be helpful to you." Be sure to mention the other staff or community resources that are also available to support the students. Explaining to students that the school is offering a safety net of support can be very comforting and reassuring.

e. Label and summarize the reactions that are expressed, since they may be confusing. Naming the feelings you hear in the group also helps clarify them. For example, "It sounds like most of you are still very shocked about what happened and really can't believe it" or "And you, LaToya, suspected that Justin was feeling really sad, but you never believed he would do anything to hurt himself" or "In general, I also hear that you are worried that another student might copy what Justin did. Am I getting that right?" Sometimes students will be experiencing other losses that have been stored in their grief closets. For example, "Chuck, it sounds like Sam's death reminds you of your brother's death." Check out your summary with group members to make sure you've gotten it right.

f. Realize that students may seem preoccupied with the details of what happened and with trying to find reasons to explain it (especially if the death was a suicide). Briefly review the facts of the death that have been released by authorities, but don't let them dominate the discussion. This search for reasons will continue for some time, and your task is to help students understand that ultimately they may never be able to truly answer the question of why their peer chose to take his or her own life. Point out that when we try to understand what was going on in the mind of the deceased, we are really trying to safeguard ourselves from ever being in the same emotional condition, and this is part of the reason why this search seems so important. It can be a way of helping us learn ways we can protect ourselves and others by reaching out for help.

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g. Try to move the discussion from the reasons for the death to what the students will miss about the deceased and what the person meant to them. This can be very challenging, especially if students are still trying to accept that the person really died. The primary emotions of shock and disbelief may need to run their course before any other meaningful discussion can take place.

h. Recognize that just as each student may express grief in personal and individual ways, each small group may also differ in its expression of grief. Some groups, as mentioned above, may remain stuck in disbelief about what happened. Take your leadership cues from group content. Your task as the leader is to give students permission to express their feelings, whatever they happen to be, validate what you hear, and suggest supportive ways for students to address their feelings.

i. At least five minutes before the scheduled ending of the group, discuss coping methods and sources of continuing support. Encourage students to actively participate in this discussion and brainstorm strategies if time allows. Here are some examples of what you might say as the group closes:
   - "Make a mental note of at least three trusted adults with whom you can share your feelings and concerns."
   - "Understand that upsetting feelings are part of the grief process, but know that you can share those feelings with a trusted adult or close friend if they become too overwhelming."
   - "Recognize that the death has affected the entire community and support is available at more locations than just the school." (Distribute a list of community resources; remember to include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number: 1-800-273-8255.)
   - "Write a note to the family of the deceased not only to express your feelings but also to share a memory of your friend. This can be a way to 'contain' some of your emotion as well as give the family an additional memory of the deceased to hold on to."
   - "Remember that the suicide of a friend or peer may make you begin to think about suicide yourself. And although this is a normal outcome after a suicide, it is absolutely *essential* that you share these thoughts or feelings with someone who can help you manage them."

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Care Station Management

Guidelines for Supporting Community-Based Facilitators

Care stations are places where students or faculty/adults may go to talk with a counselor or someone designated as a helping person. Care station staff listen as those ventilate their feelings and validate the fact that they are struggling with the recent death.

Often care stations are located within the school, but community partners may also provide them.

When working with community partners who provide care stations, the crisis team members should keep these points in mind:

- If possible, connect with community resources to establish Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) or Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) proactively to clarify roles in care station facilitation.
- Invite community resources to training sessions; screen potential facilitators as part of this training.
- Ensure the front office has a list of those vetted resource people who will be in the building to staff care stations.
- Create identification or credentialing badges for those who complete the training. Make sure they can be easily recognized.
- Provide resources with written guidelines and procedures along with a school point of contact name and phone number. **See the following page for an example, which can be copied and handed out to community-based care station facilitators during training.**
- School point of contact will maintain and provide a follow-up of each person who signed into a care station.

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INSTRUCTIONS: The school representative who is working with community-based care station facilitators can (1) photocopy/print out the forms below, (2) write in the contact name and number, (3) cut them apart at the dashed lines, and (4) hand them out to community care station facilitators during their training for their use as a reference later.

Guidelines for Community Care Station Facilitators

- Report to the office, sign in, and receive directions.
- Receive and wear a name badge provided by the school and return it when leaving the building.
- Stay in the care station assigned area and do not roam the halls of the school.
- Maintain a sign-in sheet of those who visited the care station.
- Deliver the sign-in sheet to the point of contact or school counselor at the end of the day.
- Contact the school counselor or point of contact listed below with any immediate concerns:

_____ _____

(contact name) *(phone number)*

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Care Stations in Elementary Schools?

While the Hazelden Lifelines model suggests the use of care stations as designated places in a school where students can go to receive support in the aftermath of a traumatic loss event, their value may be most helpful in middle and high school settings. In elementary schools, it may be more useful to provide support and validation to affected students individually for the following reasons:

- The impact of traumatic loss events tends to be more contained in an elementary school population. Third grade students, for example, may know the names of their own classmates but usually don't know or socialize with older students.
- Younger students tend to be more comfortable talking privately with an adult they know and trust.
- There may be more competition for air time in a meeting with peers; conversely, shy students may be intimidated and say nothing.
- Unless they have some personal connection to the person who died, younger students may have no reaction to the death. They may be confused about the function of care stations or may feel guilty that they have no reaction to the death.
- The meaning of death or, more accurately, its consequences, may not be clear for quite some time even to students who have been impacted. It may be more beneficial for teachers to keep an eye on the students they know have been affected and watch for changes in behavior, attitude, appearance, etc. that might signal the child is more actively dealing with the loss.
- Sometimes students may seem impacted even if they did not know the deceased. What can be happening is that this loss is reactivating previous losses in the child's life. You can ask the child something like, "I wonder if Timmy's death reminds you of anything that's happened to you. It may be helpful to talk with the counselor about that."
- It can be very helpful to provide parents/guardians of elementary students with some direction to assist them in talking with their child about the loss.

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Care Station Dismissal Procedure

Sample Protocol

In the event of a crisis event affecting the entire student body, locations throughout the building will be designated as care stations. Crisis team members will be available at care stations to provide support to students identified as requesting or needing care.

A. Eligible Students

1. Any student who expresses a need to talk with a crisis team member about the event. You do not need to determine the reason for this request.
2. Students who appear upset or distracted or who are behaving in ways that compromise the learning environment of the classroom
3. Any student who had a close, personal relationship with the deceased
4. Students who congregate in the halls, at the home of the deceased, or at the site of the event

B. Dismissal Procedure

1. Students are to be escorted to care stations by crisis team members or their representatives.
2. Contact a designated crisis team leader by phone or text. Identify by name students who need to be escorted to care stations. If possible, provide reasons for these requests (for example, close friend of the deceased; recent losses in family; teammate; motivation unclear).

C. Follow-Up

1. Check in with a designated crisis team leader before the end of the school day to determine whether students you referred will need additional support or temporary adjustment in classroom assignments during the crisis.

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CARE STATION AGENDA

Before you begin, review the goals of a care station:

a. To provide a safe, private location where impacted students can discuss feelings and reactions about the event with trained staff
b. To validate student reactions
c. To provide an opportunity for supportive group interaction with peers
d. To identify students who may need continuing follow-up either in school or through referral to off-campus resources

1. Stand outside the door and greet students as they arrive. Introduce yourself to students you may not know.
2. Give students a couple of minutes to settle. Pass around sign in sheet
3. Thank students for coming and explain the purpose of the care station. Say or paraphrase: ***"Thank you for coming. I know many of us at school are upset by NAME's sudden death and I would like to personally express my sorrow and sadness, especially to those of you who were friends of NAME. We are going to spend the next class*** **period talking about how you are doing. I am going to ask you to sign out at the end of** ***our meeting but if you feel like you need to talk more about this, either at another care station or privately with a counselor, let me know and I will make that happen.***
4. Go around the room and ask students to introduce themselves. Start with the student on your left. Explain that the only time you will ask people to speak is in these introductions because you understand some people are helped by simply listening to others.
5. Ask students to share their reactions to leaning about the death. WAIT for student responses! The first response may come slowly. You do not have to go around the group- let students respond randomly.
6. Students may start to talk about specific details of the death which can be traumatizing. Refocus by saying something like: ***I know there are a lot of stories going around about what happened to NAME but I am not sure anyone is clear on all the details. What I am sure about, however, is that NAME was injured and died. I am extremely sad about that, and I wonder if you can share your FEELINGS with each other. Who would like to start?***
7. Validate responses and recognize how hard this may be to talk about. For example:

    a. ***I can hear that most of you are still so shocked by what happened that it is hard to identify any feelings beyond that.***

b. ***Does anyone have any other reactions?***

c. ***Sometimes we can feel more than one thing at the same time which can feel confusing. Is that going on for anyone?***

8. Move the discussion along by asking students to tell you some of the things they remember/stories that have about the deceased. This is an important step in the grief process, especially after a sudden loss: to go back in time to when the deceased was still alive. It helps in identifying what we have lost.

9. If details about funeral/memorial services are known, ask students how they feel about attending. If this discussion seems premature, say something like: ***I know the family has not said anything yet about the details of services for NAME. Have any of you thought about those?***

10. Provide support by telling the group that staff will continue to be available if they would like to check in once those details are available.

11. At least 5 minutes before scheduled ending, shift conversation to how students can cope with their feelings and where they can continue to get support. For example:

a. *Y****ou may continue to feel unsettled by what happened for several days. While it can certainly be helpful to talk with your friends, it may help even more to share your reactions and ask questions of an adult in your life whom you trust. Can everyone think of who they could go to for that type of support? If you are having trouble thinking of anyone, remember the counseling staff at the school will continue to be here for you***

b. Sometimes events like this leave us feeling helpless. What might help you feel like you are doing something positive is to write a short note to NAME'S family, sharing some of your memories about them. This is "gifting the family with memories" and there are note cards available in the front office if you would like to do that. You may feel a little less helpless by giving to the family in that way.

c. It is not unusual for the death of someone our own age to make us think about our own death. This can be upsetting so if this happens to you, you can talk to any of the counseling staff to help you cope with this.

12. Close by reminding students of all the supportive resources your school has in place and asking them to sign out. Let them know extra support will continue to be available for several days. Thank them for having the courage to share such vulnerable feelings.