



GUIDELINES FOR STAFF SESSION

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT TO IDAHO SCHOOL PROTOCOLS FOR RESPONSE TO SUICIDE OR OTHER STUDENT DEATH

Students will remember how the school and staff react and treated them related to this death. It is important to provide students with a sense of safety, and for staff to show empathy and control of the classroom. Staff should be convened at least one hour before the school day — or the previous afternoon if the death happened on this day — and be provided with:

- Current information about the death
- An opportunity to ask questions and express feelings
- Information about suicide contagion
- Suicide risk factors and warning signs
- An updated list of referral resources
- Direction on how to deal with emotional students
- Substitutes, if requested, to cover their classes or student services personnel to read the announcement or be in their classroom for preliminary discussion
- Direction about referral of all media requests to the principal or designee
- Plans for the provision of crisis intervention services and a reminder to document any students leaving their classroom and follow up to ensure these students arrived
- A support mechanism to deal with their own self-care, e.g., EAP including at school for the next few weeks if available, a separate confidential support room for the day, school activities that support mental health (see self-care)
- Staff debriefing session at the end of the day. If staff struggle with this death, request a debrief from the Idaho Lives Project to occur in a few weeks.

Specific activities/responsibilities for teachers/staff in student interactions include:

- Replacing rumors with facts
- Encouraging the expression of feelings
- Emphasizing that grief and stress responses are normal
- Discouraging attempts to romanticize the death or to criticize the student who died
- Identifying students at risk for imitative response and awareness of changes in students in the next few months
- Reminding students that this was not their fault, no matter what interactions they had with the deceased as suicide is not about one issue and generally about mental health
- Knowing how to make the appropriate referrals today and in the next few months
- Standing outside your classroom door during passing periods, sharing high fives and smiles, and creating a safe, welcoming space for all students

In addition, address staff reactions including giving them permission to feel uncomfortable. Have them identify in dyads to whom they can talk, what activity will help them today, and some simple actions they can take to support their students and fellow staff members.

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