

Guidelines for Staff Session

Idaho Youth Suicide Prevention Program

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 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
- A support mechanism to deal with their own self-care, e.g., EAP (Employee Assistance Program) visits 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 Youth Suicide Prevention Program to occur in a few weeks.

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

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES IN STUDENT INTERACTIONS

- Replace rumors with facts
- Encourage the expression of feelings
- Emphasize that grief and stress responses are normal

- Discourage attempts to romanticize the death or to criticize the student who died
- Identify students at risk for imitative response and awareness of changes in students in the next few months
- Remind students that this was not their fault
- Know how to make the appropriate referrals
- Stand outside your classroom door during passing periods, share high fives and smiles, and create a safe, welcoming space for all students

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