

SSCC Postvention Communication and Procedures After a Student Death by Suicide

The Behavior Intervention Team (BIT) will direct all steps in this procedure, and will document every step in the handling of information about the suicide. The following form template may be used for this purpose and then signed by appropriate staff members.

√ STEPS for Counselors/Administrators/Designated Staff

- _____ 1. OFFICIAL FACT GATHERING: The Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, a BIT member and/or other designated staff should contact the police or coroner in order to verify the death and get the facts surrounding the death (if available). It is important for school staff to know the facts in order to reduce imitative behaviors and to place focus on means restriction strategies for family and friend, and the college.
- _____ 2. PARENTAL COMMUNICATION: Contact with parent/guardian should be made by phone call or in person by the President, a BIT member, and/or other trained college personnel. The President and/or a designee will offer support to the family, letting them know specifically those services which the college can offer as well as referral information for the services which cannot be provided by the college. Ascertain any information that the family wants to make known, such as funeral arrangements, visitations, etc.
- _____ 3. PARENTAL PERMISSION: Parental or family permission to release information related to the death is not required, since a death is public information. However, the death *must* have been officially ruled a suicide for these procedures to be followed. When this is not the case, the death of a current/former student procedures should be followed.
- _____ 4. NOTIFICATIONS: Notify the following:
 - a. President
 - b. Board members
 - c. Designated college faculty and staff
- _____ 5. COMMUNICATION TO STAFF: The President or designee, working with the BIT, will notify the staff through memo or meeting.
- _____ 6. STAFF MEETING: A meeting with all staff is advisable as soon as possible. At this meeting:
 - a. Inform all staff about the facts known at that point.
 - b. Allow time for staff to ask questions and express feelings.

- c. Ensure that all staff have an updated list of referral resources.
- d. Announce to staff how the school will interact with the media and inform staff who will act as the school's media spokesperson.
- e. Review planned in-class discussion formats and disclosure guidelines for talking to students. Prepare staff for student reactions.
- f. Alert staff of the possible contagion effect and advise to watch for "at risk" students.
- g. Compile a list of all students who are close to the deceased.
- h. Remind staff about risk factors and warning signs for suicide.
- i. Provide information regarding counseling/support opportunities for students and staff.

_____ 7. STAFF MEMO: A memo should be distributed to staff and faculty for communication to students. The memo should include instructions listing two options that the faculty or staff member has for handling the information. In all instances the faculty and staff should answer students' questions truthfully, if the information is available.

Communication Options:

- a. Faculty may read the information themselves and discuss it with the class as they choose.
- b. Faculty may choose to have a member of the BIT read the announcement.

The memo should state:

- a. "This is the correct information as we know it at this time." All memos should be time-dated.
- b. Do not provide morbid details such as method or location of the suicide.
- c. The memo should identify the designated individuals (which may include such people as BIT members) to whom troubled students may be sent, to whom additional questions may be addressed, and where the designated individuals will be located.
- d. The final line of the memo should communicate that the staff will be kept informed as new information becomes available. If a staff meeting is to be held, it may be announced at this time.
- e. Allow students an opportunity to express their feelings. "What are your feelings and how can I help?" should be the structure of the conversation.
- f. Explain and predict what students can expect as they grieve (feeling angry, guilty, shocked, anxious, lonely, sad, numb, or experiencing physical pain). Express to students there is no one right way to grieve. What is important is to recognize feelings and communicate them.
- g. Reorient students to ongoing classroom activities.

NOTE: Avoid assemblies for notification and do not use impersonal announcements over the public address system. Notify students in small, individual classrooms through faculty members or BIT members.

_____ 8. MEDIA: Designate a staff person to handle media requests for information. Students and staff should refer media requests for information to this person.

_____ 9. PROVIDE CARE TO OTHER STUDENTS:

- a. Have designated staff members talk with the most profoundly affected friends and determine the type of support needed.
- b. Designate space for identified peers to receive support services provided by BIT members. Provide necessary passes to release these students from class to receive services.
- c. Contact community support services which should be supervised by college mental health professionals. Community support services can include local mental health agencies, other school counselors, community crisis hotline agencies and clergy members.
- d. Members of the BIT should follow the student's classes throughout the day providing counseling and discussion to assist students and faculty. This could also help to identify and refer students who may be "at risk."
- e. Reschedule any immediate stressful academic exercises or tests if necessary.
- f. Follow up with parental contacts and referrals if necessary.

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11. GUIDELINES regarding Memorialization and Funeral Arrangements

- _____ a. Arrange for students, faculty, and staff to be excused from school to attend the funeral if necessary.
- _____ b. In order to avoid glamorizing the death, do not fly the school flag at half-mast.

School Staff Signature: _____ Date: _____

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