

**NORTHWEST MISSOURI SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION (NWMSCA) CRISIS TEAM
TOOLKIT**

Created by Dr. Shelly Hiatt

**With contributions from Northwest Missouri School Counselors
in attendance at NWMSCA's Fall 2020 Critical Incident Responder Training**

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Introduction

The Northwest Missouri School Counselor Association (NWMSCA) has an organized structure to deploy practicing school counselors to schools in the northwest Missouri region when a school needs assistance after a critical incident. NWMSCA has five critical incident response (CIR) teams organized to respond in five defined areas of the northwest region.

In the Fall of 2020, Dr. Shelly Hiatt led the CIR teams in training. The goal of the training was to facilitate the development of a toolkit that would support team members to mobilize with confidence quickly and efficiently after a critical incident. The tasks of the training focused on defining the potential roles team members perform in CIR and focused on the identification of resources needed by team members to perform those roles. Several of the tools organized for the kit were found in the Missouri School Counselor Association's Crisis Manual. In 2022, the Missouri School Counselor Association (MSCA) updated the Crisis Manual (2022), prompting a revision of the toolkit. Dr. Hiatt completed a revision in the Spring of 2023.

The framework on page 3 of this handbook was developed by Dr. Hiatt and contains a concise summary of the resources suggested by the CIR team members in attendance at the Fall 2020 CIR team training.

Instructions for decoding the toolkit's framework:

Column one summarizes typical roles that internal or external CIR team members are asked to perform. Once you identify your role or roles as a CIR team member, this column will help you align with suggested resources for your role(s). To use the tool, find your role(s) as responder in column one and choose the tools, as needed, in column 2 and 3 that are aligned with your role(s).

At the top of **Column two**, there is a link to the MSCA's *Crisis Manual* (2022). This link is for easy and fast access to the full manual. Below the link and aligned with each role are page numbers for tips, guidelines, and forms you might find helpful in your specific CIR role. All of the pages referenced in column 2 were copied from MSCA's *Crisis Manual* (2022) and renumbered to align with this document.

Column three provides suggestions/references for hands on tools that can be selected for use during direct contact activities that support individuals, small groups, or classrooms of students impacted by the incident. These are identified in column 3 by their titles and page numbers as they appear in this document.

This document can be saved on your personal device, printed, copied, and prepared to best fit your circumstances. The intent is to provide team members quick access to all forms and materials referenced in columns 2 and 3. You might want to also consider packing a bag of basic supplies. A basic supply list includes Kleenex, hand sanitizer, paper, markers, crayons, stress relievers (fidgets, stress balls, coloring pages, kinetic sand, stuffed animals). Check the toolkit for other things to include, and you might even want to print the toolkit, so you have quick access to the plans and forms.

FRAMEWORK

RESPONDER ROLE/TYPE	TOOLS FROM MSCA's Crisis Manual (2022) . (P#'s reflect table of content)	Additional Tools (P#'s reflected in this document)
<p>First Responder-provides support to individuals or small groups of students/staff most impacted and supervises group support rooms.</p> <p>Chapter 4 in the MSCA Crisis Manual (2022) defines Group Support rooms (pp. 42-43). Some tools described in this section can be used in these support rooms. The support rooms are the most typical role for crisis team members.</p>	<p>Suggestions for Crisis Team Members Visiting Classrooms- this is for classrooms but might also be a good review for all responder roles (p.17)</p> <p>Good Tips for School Counselors to Remember (Do's and Don'ts). Helpful for all team members (p.19)</p> <p>Tips for Students in Crisis (p.21)</p> <p>Tips for Counselors/Crisis Team Members (p.28)</p>	<p>Apps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Smiling Mind (evidence-based & targets well-being child to adult) App available for phones as well. https://www.smilingmind.com.au/ -Mindfulness Coach (developed for veterans; teen & adult use) App available for phones as well. https://mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach -Healthy Minds Program (associated with U of Wisconsin) App available for phones as well https://hminnovations.org/meditation-app <p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gather Kleenex, paper, markers, crayons, hand sanitizer, stress relievers (fidgets, stress balls, coloring pages, kinetic sand, stuffed animals), and take turn

<p>The tools summarized and provided for this role also provide formal plans for small groups of students or individuals, closer to the incident and will be helpful to you if you are assigned to a room to work with individuals or defined small groups. You can also pull out just the activities from the lesson plans as needed.</p>	<p>Individual/Small Group Contact Log (p.32)</p> <p>Discussion Starters (p.33)</p> <p>Adult Resource: Young People & Grief (pp. 34-35)</p>	<p>prop for small groups. (I keep a crate by the door in my office to grab and go)</p> <p>-A sample script that announces the incident and summarizes the known facts. (Sample p.33)</p> <p>-Sample Formal Session plan to support individuals or small groups to engage/build their coping skills. (pp. 7-9)</p> <p>Less formal/shorter activities to encourage coping:</p> <p>-Discussion starters (p.35)</p> <p>-Tips for Students in Crisis (p.26)</p> <p>- Deep Breathing with Kids-Breathing Tracer https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/using-shapes-to-teach-deep-breathing</p> <p>For completing logs of your student contacts:</p> <p>-Individual/Small Group Contact Log (p.34)</p>
<p>Classroom Responder- provides debriefing for students in collaboration with teacher or covers a class for an impacted teacher. Refers students to first responder activities as needed.</p> <p>Chapter 4 in the MSCA Crisis Manual (2022) discusses what to do if you are asked to follow the schedule of a deceased student or staff member. These suggestions are embedded in the toolkit on p. 12 and they are followed by a formal lesson plan if/when one is needed.</p>	<p>Guidelines for Understanding and Responding to Crisis (p.16)</p> <p>Suggestions for Team Members Visiting Classrooms (p. 17).</p> <p>Good Tips for School Counselors to Remember (Do's and Don'ts). Helpful for all team members (p. 19)</p> <p>Tips for Students in Crisis (p.21)</p> <p>Teacher Handouts-All Levels (p. 24)</p> <p>Handling Crisis Situations: Tips for Teachers (p. 26).</p> <p>Tips for Counselors/Crisis Team Members (p. 28)</p>	<p>Apps:</p> <p>-Smiling Mind (evidence-based & targets well-being child through adult) App available for phones as well. https://www.smilingmind.com.au/</p> <p>-Mindfulness Coach (developed for veterans; teen & adult use) App available for phones as well. https://mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach</p> <p>-Healthy Minds Program (associated with U of Wisconsin) App available for phones as well https://hminnovations.org/meditation-app</p> <p>Tools:</p> <p>-Classroom responders will need a sample script that announces the incident and summarizes the known facts. (Sample p.33)</p> <p>-Ask for a document that records room and personnel assignments so the responder will know where to refer or escort students that need more support. A document for recording can be found on pp. 19-22.</p> <p>-Gather Kleenex, paper, markers, crayons, hand sanitizer, stress relievers (fidgets, stress balls, coloring pages, kinetic sand, stuffed animals), and take turn prop for small groups. (I keep a crate by the door in my office to grab and go)</p> <p>-Sample Formal Lesson Plan for Classroom Discussions (pp. 14-17) or follow the excerpt from the MSCA Crisis Plan on p. 13.</p> <p>-For less formal class discussions or to supplement/adapt the formal lesson plan see</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tips for Students in Crisis (p.26) • Discussion Starters (p. 35) • Deep Breathing with Kids-Breathing Tracer https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/using-shapes-to-teach-deep-breathing

<p>Family Responder-gathers information and resources to assist with debriefing or communication to support families in their ability to help students cope.</p>	<p>Suggestions for Communicating with the Media (p.29) --for guidance & to clarify that there is only one designated spokesperson.</p> <p>Guidelines for Understanding and Responding to Crisis (p.16)</p> <p>Tips for Parents of Students Who are Experiencing Crisis (p.27)</p> <p>Tips for Counselors/Crisis Team Members (p.28)</p>	<p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Family responders will need a sample script that announces the incident and summarizes the known facts (sample p.33) <p>A family responder needs to secure the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -be apprised of the plan for informing families and have copies of communications provided to families -know the plan for handling media and refer as needed -list of community resources/crisis numbers that can be shared if requested - Tips for Parents of Students Who are Experiencing Crisis (p. 30) -keep a contact log (can adapt form p.34) <p>Responding to families/community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Be calm, patient, courteous -Reassure that emergency/crisis management is at work to keep students safe and cared for -Give everyone the same information: In response to the incident read the prepared statement/script; In response to what you are doing to enumerate measures presently in operation -Give time, place for family meetings -Ask if they received communications already sent to parents -Thank people for contacting/calling
<p>Front Office Responder-helps manage and monitor a variety of increased traffic due to incident</p>	<p>Guidelines for Understanding and Responding to Crisis (p.16)</p> <p>Good Tips for School Counselors to Remember (Do's and Don'ts). Helpful for all team members (p.19)</p> <p>Tips for Counselors/Crisis Team Members (p.28)</p>	<p>Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Office responders will need a sample script that announces the incident and summarizes the known facts (sample p.33) <p>Need information sources to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Direct media and questions to appropriate personnel-name/number for media contact (p.32) -Direct visitors to appropriate locations -Brief administrators and team leaders about requests and communications and keep a contact log (can adapt form p.34) -Script for how to respond to phone inquiries -Also see information in parent responder section as needed --A document that summarizes how personnel is organized for the crisis, like the Crisis Intervention Worksheet (pp. 17-20)
<p>Well-being Responders-monitor the common areas where teachers/staff or responder groups gather, and secure resources needed to support gatherings</p>	<p>Guidelines for Understanding and Responding to Crisis (p.16)</p> <p>Tips for Counselors/Crisis Team Members (p.28)</p>	<p>Tools/Information suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gather Kleenex, hand sanitizer, stress relievers (fidgets, stress balls, coloring pages) -Create a playlist on your phone for music -Room and personnel assignments or documents like the Crisis Intervention Worksheet (pp.19-22)
<p>Monitoring Responders-watch and check on venues where people might typically gather, like parking lots, or monitor spaces where students might isolate.</p>	<p>Good Tips for School Counselors to Remember (Do's and Don'ts). Helpful for all team members (p.19)</p> <p>Tips for Counselors/Crisis Team Members (p.28)</p>	<p>Tools/Information suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Fanny pack or bag with Kleenex, hand sanitizer, water bottle -Crisis intervention info/plan; know building security plan/entrances & exits, map of school, and help to identify spaces where students gather and or isolate. A document like the Crisis Intervention Worksheet (pp.19-22) will be helpful.

		<p>-Students gathering in groups should be encouraged to use the Group Support room.</p> <p>-A contact log or way to record names of students that might need a check-in. (can adapt form p.34)</p>
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Small Group or Individual Plan

Objectives

- Discuss thoughts and feelings related to the incident.
- Discuss coping, giving help, and where to receive additional help if needed.

Time

Varied, consider at least 30-40 minutes.

Vocabulary

Take a few minutes to review the session plan. Some vocabulary and procedures might need to be altered based on the grade level of the student participants.

Materials and Preparation

- Information about where/how students can receive additional information or support.
- Individual counseling contact log (p. 32)
- Copies of one of the coping activities (p. 8/9 middle and high school or p.10/11 elementary)

Procedures

Guideline: Spend ¼ of your time on procedures 1&2

1. Session Introduction

- *Welcome the student(s) with small talk.*
- *Let them know this is a space where they can share thoughts and feelings, think about ways to feel better, find support, and learn where to seek help for themselves and friends as needed.*
- *Ask the student to summarize how they are feeling and how you can help. If in a group do a go around and ask the students to say in 1 or 2 sentences how they are doing and how they think the group time can help.*

2. Review the ground rules for small groups only (Have the ground rules written down and visible to students or write them down as you review them) Possible script: *Our group today has important ground rules. The purpose of ground rules is to make it safe for everyone to ask their questions and to share their thoughts and feelings about (incident).*

- *What others share today is confidential (that means no one will use anyone's name outside of this group time/room when talking about what was discussed). Don't tell what others say. The only exceptions to this are if someone reveals intent to harm themselves or another, or someone is experiencing physical or emotional abuse. If someone shares about an exception, then I would have to share that information with whoever would be able to keep you safe.*

- *Respect one another's thoughts and feelings. (Avoid put downs, inappropriate laughter, or behaviors directed at someone's comment, etc.)*
- *Listen to whomever is talking. No side talking is allowed because it is disrespectful.*
- *Everyone has a right to pass.*

Add any other rules that students suggest or that seem appropriate based on the incident or the characteristics of the student group.

Note: Monitor for students that might need additional support after your session and note on the contact log or refer the student to the appropriate on-site crisis services. The team will likely provide plans for referring students that need additional support.

Guideline: Spend at least half of the allotted time with procedures 3 & 4.

3. Begin discussing students' thoughts and feelings.

- *Ask the students how they are doing. Invite the student(s) to share what thoughts/feelings/concerns they have for themselves and their well-being.*
- *It can be helpful to you as the facilitator as well as the student(s) to write the thoughts/feelings down on a flip chart or small make-shift poster so that they can be reviewed. If you are doing a small group intervention, this strategy can demonstrate how many different thoughts and feelings can result from one crisis, and that they are not alone. Make separate lists, one for thoughts, one for feelings, and one for concerns. If you are leading a group, offer an opportunity for all students to share.*
- *If one student has a great need to express repeatedly, it might be necessary to say something like, "You have many thoughts (feelings) about what happened. Let's find out if other students had the same thoughts (feelings) or some different ones." (This type of student behavior may also be an indication that the student may need an individual session or a referral for further assistance.)*
- *Conclude the discussion with a reflection that compares the responses. If you are leading a group, point out if they were similar (to normalize the thoughts or feelings) or different (to show how people can respond differently to the same situation and it is okay).*

4. Address ways to cope and ways to help others.

- *Possible script: Whatever you are feeling today is okay. You might feel angry, sad, afraid, confused, guilty---or a mix of these and other feelings. Feelings are personal and we all have them. When feelings are hard to manage it is important to remind ourselves to avoid unhealthy coping. Unhealthy coping includes things like eating too much or too little; taking your feelings out on others or things; refusing to talk about what is bothering you; avoiding or staying away from people and places; sleeping more than you need to; using substances; smoking; making excuses; harming yourself or thinking about it. In the coming days, if you recognize that any of these unhealthy coping behaviors are happening for you or for others it is important to ask for help. (Note: If you are in a group you can offer to speak*

individually after group with anyone worried about these behaviors. If you are working with an individual, you can ask if they are worried about these behaviors in any way, and then introduce the healthy strategies in the activities.

- *Sometimes when feelings are hard to manage, we just need to be reminded to use helpful ways to cope with our own difficult thoughts and feelings, or ways that we can help others cope and feel better.*
- *Lead a review/discussion of coping strategies using one of the grade-level activities provided at the end of this agenda. The activities are described on pages 9 & 10 for middle/high school and 11 & 12 for elementary school.*

Guideline: Spend ¼ of the allotted time closing/processing the session

5. Process and close the session.

- *Summarize the session.*
- *If you are in a group, ask students to pair and share one thing they plan to do today and one thing they plan to do tomorrow to cope/feel better or to help others cope/feel better. Report out.*
- *Thank the students for participating. Remind them of confidentiality. Remind them of resources.*
- *Follow-up or refer as needed and complete the contact log/small group reporting log.*

Middle School or High School Activity (Handout is on page 10)

Distribute the handout, pencils, and highlighters to the participant(s). Introduce the strategies.

Ask the participant(s) to highlight 2 or 3 strategies that they would like to try and that they think would help them.

Ask the participant(s) to write additional strategies at the bottom of the handout.

Ask the participant(s) to share the techniques they selected and wrote about. Lead a discussion about ideas they plan to try now and over the next few days.

Ways to feel peaceful and calm.

Sit outside	Think about your dream vacation	Take a short nap
Go to the park with a friend	Spend time giving attention to your pet	Get 8 hours of sleep
Eat regularly and eat healthy	Write a letter	Visit a library and browse for books or read magazines
Fix a healthy snack. Focus on the taste and the crunch...	Drink some cocoa-focus on the warmth and sweetness of each sip	Read a book. Stop and take two deep breathes between each chapter
Spend quiet time away from others	Go bowling, go for a walk, or be active in some way	Meditate
Do breathing exercises	Relax in a long shower or bath	Listen to a relaxation video
List of things to do; do the first thing on the list; check it off	Play an instrument	Listen to music
Sing	Attend a free concert	Go for a walk (or jog)
Work on a jigsaw puzzle	Write creatively	Draw or paint
Call a friend	Ask your favorite adult to go for a ride or walk, watch movies	Bake something
Play a game that is not on your phone	Call a family member and catch-up	Start a hobby or craft project
Lie on your back and look at the clouds or the stars	Volunteer	Help a neighbor with a chore
Reflect on or write down a list of the positives in your life	Tear up old papers or magazines	Use your faith
Swim or splash in your bathtub	Finish something	Clean your room
Ask someone for help	Get takeout and have a picnic	Make a sandwich and have a picnic at home
Surprise your family with a simple meal you know how to prepare	Bring your favorite teacher a note or cookie	Use your sense of humor

Add other strategies in the spaces below

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Elementary School Activity (Handout is on page 12)

Distribute the handout, pencils, highlighters, and a small zip lock bag to participant(s). Introduce the “feel better” strategies at the top of the handout to the students. Discuss.

Ask the participant(s) to write strategies from the handout that they would like to try and that they think would help them feel better about their puzzle pieces.

Ask the participant(s) to write additional strategies “feel better” strategies in the puzzle pieces.

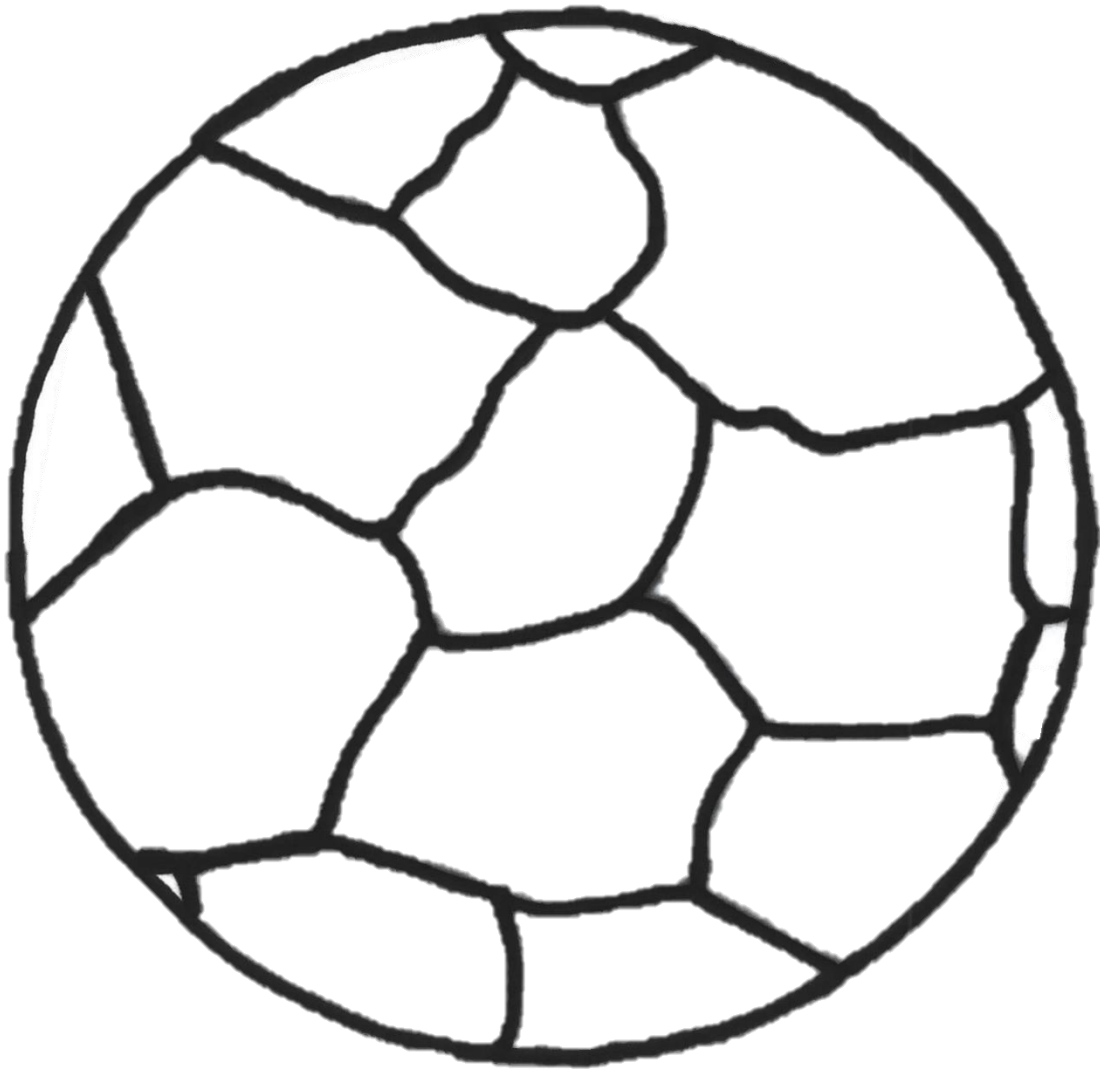
Lead a discussion about ideas they plan to try now and over the next few days.

Ask participant(s) to cut out the puzzle pieces and put them into their “Feel Better Bags.”

Tell the students. *When you feel worried, sad, or upset in any way choose an activity from your bag and do it!! You have added some great ideas to your bag, and you can add more ideas later as you think of them. Remember this is a special bag of tools just for you, and you can use it in whatever way helps you most.*

Elementary Student Handout

Ride my bike	Take a walk	Read a book	Draw a picture
Sing a song	Listen to music	Deep Breathes	Get some rest



Plan for Following a Student/Staff Member Schedule

From MSCA Crisis Manual (2022)

Purpose: To talk specifically with the members of the classes shared with the deceased, provide factual information, answer questions, clarify any misinformation, provide support, and identify students who may need individual or group support.

Mechanics: Two people, preferably the counselor and another member of the crisis team, will follow the deceased's schedule hour by hour. One person should talk and explain, and one person will identify students who are not coping well and escort them to the group support room.

What to Say:

- Review the facts of the death or situation.
- Answer any questions to dispel any rumors or misinformation.
- Provide information on funeral and visitation arrangements if available.
- Explain what funerals and visitations are like and what to expect.
- Suggest what type of things they can say to the family members.
- Explain that a wide range of emotions are involved and how each person may be feeling differently. All feelings are OK. Encourage them to express their feelings.
- Encourage students to talk about the deceased and the memories they have of him/her.
- If there is a seating assignment, deal with the "empty chair." Provide alternatives such as a new seating chart, removing the chair, or leaving the chair alone. The students need to decide but can be allowed to decide at a later time with the classroom teacher.
- Remind students of the group support room and other areas of support and how to access these supports.

NOTE: At the high school level, talking to classrooms is usually more informational in nature than an exchange of feedback and reaction from students.

If you need to fill a class period, need a more formal plan, or just need ideas for some additional ways to organize this discussion a formal lesson follows on the next page. You can pick and choose any ideas from that plan that seem appropriate/helpful for the situation.

Classroom Discussion Plan

Objectives

- Separate the facts of the incident from the rumors.
- Discuss thoughts and feelings related to the incident (if appropriate for group/age/situation/time)
- Discuss what the school/district has done and will do to respond to the incident.
- Discuss coping, giving help, and where to receive additional help if needed.

Time

Take one class period. Additional time might be needed later depending upon the severity of the crisis and student responses.

Vocabulary

Review the lesson. Some vocabulary and procedures may need to be altered based on the grade level of the student participants.

Materials and Preparation

Collect this list of suggested documents from the school's crisis team leader to support and debrief students or others.

- A script of the incident announcement and summary of known facts.
- Common reactions to grief/crisis.
- Information sheets for types of crises.
- Copy of letters/information provided to parents/caregivers.
- Counseling and information resources about where students can receive additional help during the day (list of rooms set up for individual/group sessions or help).

See pages 19-22 for similar documents listed here or refer to column two of the toolkit's list of documents from the MSCA Crisis Manual (2022) that are helpful to classroom responders.

Procedures

Guideline: Plan for procedures 1 & 2 to take approximately ¼ of your time.

1. Share the plan for the class.

Possible script: *The usual class routine will not be followed today so that a discussion about (incident) can take place including (Pick and choose the bullet points appropriate for your group/situation/time)*

- *Identifying facts*
- *Separating rumors from facts*
- *Sharing thoughts and feelings about (incident)*

- *Learning what the school has done and will do to respond or help students.*
 - *What to do if you or a friend need help*
2. Review ground rules. (Have ground rules written down and visible to students or write them down as you review them)
Possible script: *Our discussion today has important ground rules. The purpose of ground rules is to make it safe for everyone to ask their questions and to share their thoughts and feelings about (incident).*
- *Consider what your classmates share today as private (that means no one will use anyone's name outside of class time/room when talking about what was discussed). Don't tell what others have said. The only exception to this is if someone reveals intent to harm themselves or others, or someone is experiencing physical or emotional abuse. If someone shares about one of those things, I would have to share that information to keep everyone safe.*
 - *Respect one another's thoughts and feelings. (Avoid put-downs, inappropriate laughter, or behaviors directed at someone's comments, etc.)*
 - *Listen to whomever is talking. No side talking is allowed.*
 - *Everyone has a right to pass or keep their ideas private.*

Add any other rules that students suggest or that seem appropriate based on the incident or characteristics of the student group.

Note: If any student exhibits difficulty at any time during the debriefing, they can be referred to the appropriate crisis team members. The on-site team will typically provide plans for referring students that need additional support.

Guideline: Plan for procedures 3, 4, and 5 to take approximately ½ of your time.

3. Discuss the facts known about the incident. During this part of the lesson monitor storytelling carefully. Cut-off and redirect "storytelling" that might cause secondary trauma (disturbing descriptions of the event).
- Read the facts from the Incident Fact Sheet provided by the school's crisis team that includes all the facts that can be shared at the time.
 - Let students know what the school has done and is doing to help.
 - You will need to assess if it is appropriate to encourage any discussion/questions/etc.

Note: It might be important to air rumors so they can be dealt with immediately, but that is a difficult task for a visiting responder. Report to the crisis team leader if you sense that there are harmful rumors. One way the school could address this is to share the facts and ask if the students agree with these facts as discussed/read.

Then, take time to separate facts from rumors. Any time a student says something that does not reflect the facts, refer back to the Incident Fact Sheet. If some students were directly involved or witnessed the incident, attempt to make sure what they share is consistent with the facts. There may be differences that can be explained. It is a known fact that when several people witness the same event, different, sometimes even contradicting facts are reported.

4. Begin discussing the students' thoughts and feelings once the facts have been separated from rumors.

Ask if anyone wants to share what thoughts/feelings they had when they saw or first heard about (incident). It can be helpful to you as the facilitator as well as students to write the thoughts/feelings down on a whiteboard so that they can be reviewed. This strategy can also demonstrate how many different thoughts and feelings can result from one crisis. Make a t-chart for two separate lists, one for thoughts and one for feelings.

Give all students an opportunity to share their thoughts/feelings. If one student has a great need to express thoughts repeatedly, it might be necessary to say something like "You have many things to share. I am glad you are sharing. Let's find out if others had the same thoughts & feelings or different ones." (This behavior might also be an indication that the student needs a referral for further assistance.)

Conclude the discussion by reviewing the responses. Point out how they are similar to normalize the thoughts and feelings, and how they are different to show how it is okay to respond to the same situation differently.

5. Address ways to cope and ways to help.

Possible script: Whatever you are feeling today is okay. You might feel angry, sad, afraid, confused, guilty---or a mix of these and other feelings. Feelings are personal and we all have them.

Sometimes when feelings are hard to manage it is good to think about helpful ways to cope with your own feelings or ways that we can help others cope and feel better.

What are some ways you comfort yourself when your feelings are uncomfortable?

How can you help others?

Make a t-chart for two separate lists, one for coping and one for helping. If students need help generating ideas refer to *Tips for Students in Crisis* on p.24

In the helping section be sure to include how to access additional support services and information provided at the school. Reiterate what the school has done and is doing to help.

Guideline: Plan for procedure 6 to take approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of your time.

- 6. Close the lesson.**
 - **Summarize the lesson.**
 - **Ask students to pair and share one thing they plan to do today to cope/feel better or to help others cope/feel better. Ask for volunteers to report out.**
 - **Thank the students for participation. Remind them of privacy and resources.**
 - **Follow-up or refer students as needed.**

The following pages are from the MSCA Crisis Manual (2022).

Note that the page numbers of the documents from the MSCA manual were changed to fit the purposes of this document and have different page numbers in the MSCA Crisis Manual (2022). Some of the documents were edited for format and/or minimal changes were made to phrases to fit the space and format of this document. Thank you to MSCA for making the Crisis Manual available as a Word document to support member use of the materials.

Crisis Intervention Worksheet

This document is designed to organize personnel prior to, during, and after a crisis to minimize the trauma and focus resources.

Date: _____

1. School and Administrator Contact Information

School _____	Phone _____
Principal _____	Home Phone _____
	Cell Phone _____

2. Contact District Administration	Phone Number _____
3. Contact District Counseling Coordinators	Phone Number _____
4. Contact Crisis Team Members in the school, district and/or region.	Phone Numbers (list below)
5. Contact floating sub, if appropriate.	
6. Contact a grief specialist.	

5. Plan for notifying faculty & staff:

_____ If there is a death of a student or faculty member, family should be contacted by the administrator or administrator designee regarding details the family may wish to be shared.

_____ Administration notifies and provides administrative assistants with a prepared script to use for phone calls/emails that may come into the school/district. Information to be provided in regard to questions that may be asked will also be provided to the administrative assistants.

_____ Administrator prepares script to share on phone tree. The best practice that is strongly recommended is for the administrator to work closely with the school counselor on the preparation of the script.

<p>Include approved details of the crisis situation. NOTE: The school/district may ONLY share details approved by the family; the family has the final say. Include time and place of faculty meeting. Remind staff of confidentiality, especially for faculty and staff that may live in the area and have children who attend the school in question.</p>
<p>_____ Contact Faculty by personal phone. Avoid using text and email messages with sensitive information. <i>Decide who will place calls and activate phone tree.</i></p>
<p>Notes:</p>

6. Building Security; plan for monitoring entrances to building (if appropriate)

Entrance Location	Who Will Monitor Entrance

7. Specified District or Building Administrators responsible for any media requests

8. Develop a plan for notifying students of the crisis

_____ Develop a script that will be used by all staff. Check in with staff before sharing information with students. If a staff member is personally affected by the situation and is unable to complete their responsibilities, assign a crisis team member to their classroom to assist.

<p>Depending upon the situation, one of the following may be appropriate:</p> <p>_____ Counselors announce crisis to individual classes by using the approved script.</p> <p>_____ Teachers announce crisis to their individual classes by using the approved script.</p> <p>_____ Announcement may be made over the intercom, if necessary.</p>
--

9. Plan for informing parents/guardians

_____ Letter/email home written by district or building administration (see sample in the Appendix)
_____ If appropriate, parents are notified of meeting place and time

10. Room and personnel assignments for individual and/or group counseling

Location Room #	Person Responsible for Individuals/ Group

11. Provide and deliver supplies for meeting rooms (Kleenex, water, paper (chart paper and note cards), pens, pencils, markers, fidgets, anxiety tools, hard candy, etc.). If a therapy dog is available, be sure to notify staff and students where they may access the dog.

12. Follow up activities

_____ Crisis Team Members complete Individual and Group Counseling Summary (<i>Located in Chapter 3 of the MSCA Crisis Manual</i>)
_____ Crisis Team Members Complete Activities Summary (<i>Located in Chapter 3</i>)
_____ Crisis Team Evaluation/Feedback and plans for the next day (<i>Located in Chapter 3 of the MSCA Crisis Manual (2022)</i>).
_____ Crisis Team and Staff Self-Care Check before leaving for the day.

Guidelines for Understanding and Responding to a Crisis

1. Here are some of the emotions you may observe in your students (or in yourself) following a tragedy.
 - Numbness, shock, denial- After a sudden death, you don't want to believe it has happened; you had no preparation for its occurrence.
 - Confusion- Why did this happen? I don't understand the circumstances. How could this happen to someone I know?
 - Fear/Anxiety- Could something like this happen again? Will something like this happen to me or to someone I care about?
 - Grief- Sadness, crying, a deep sense of personal loss.
 - Depression- emptiness, unhappiness, loneliness, isolation.
 - Guilt- An irrational feeling of responsibility for the event.
 - Anger- Why did someone do a violent, senseless thing? Why did others let it happen? Anger can be directed toward a specific person or persons or be a more general feeling of anger. This could also look and feel like blaming.
2. Here are some of the changes in behavior that you may see. Most, if not all of these changes, will be temporary. Children are resilient and do bounce back.
 - Lack of concentration- inability to focus on schoolwork, household chores, or other leisure activities.
 - Lack of interest in usual activities- preoccupation with current circumstances may impact activities that normally had great appeal.
 - Greater dependency- A need to feel protected may result in a child seeking security by staying close to significant adults, and possibly not wanting to be alone.
 - Problems with sleeping and eating difficulty going to sleep, occasional bad dreams or a decreased or increased appetite are common physical reactions to a stressful event.
 - Overly quiet or overly talkative or a combination- A student may not want to talk about the situation with you, preferring to discuss it with friends, classmates, parents- those who may have been closer to the tragedy; or the student may not want to talk with anyone about it.
3. Here are some things that teachers and parents can do to help a child of any age through this difficult time.
 - Listen- Provide opportunities for voices to be heard and feelings to be expressed.
 - Accept feelings- Every feeling, even if it is not similar to yours, is valid and should be honored.
 - Empathize- Validate all feelings.
 - Reassure- The student is not responsible for what happened.
 - Accept- Not everyone will be prepared to talk about the trauma at the same time. Make sure that students know you are willing to listen whenever it is needed.
 - Be tolerant of temporary changes.
 - Maintain as much of a sense of routine as possible.
 - Provide additional activities if the students seem to have excess energy.
 - Don't hesitate to ask for help. This help can be sought from other parents, family members, the school staff, or an outside professional.

Adapted from Robert L. Lewis, Ph.D.

Clinical Psychologist, Clayton, MO

Suggestions for Crisis Team Members Visiting Classrooms

1. Briefly explain why you are there... "If you are wondering why there are some adults you may not know in the building today, it's because we are all counselors who are and were invited here by your counselor/principal because of the death of (person's name). We care about what you are going through and know it is tough. Even though we may not have been as close to the person as you are, we just want to help out in any way possible." Emphasize that the teams or individual team members are not there to take the place of local counselors, administrators, or clergy, but that you are there to assist and help in any way that you can.
2. If you are following the schedule of the deceased, it's important to recognize the "empty chair."
3. Reinforce that all feelings are Ok. It may be anger, sadness, fear, confusion, guilt- anything, or even a mixture of these and/or other feelings.
4. Help students realize that different people will express feelings in different ways and that is okay. Grieving is a personal journey; not everyone will grieve in the same manner. "Try not to pass judgment because someone else does not seem to be hurting or suffering as much as you are."
5. Help the students understand that some people may not have "known (use the deceased's name) or been "close" to them but what they have heard today may bring back memories of a similar loss or recent experience. It is acceptable for them to be dealing with their own feelings of sadness.
6. Help students understand that the intense sadness or hurt will not last forever. "Life will go on and the terrible hurt you are feeling right now will not hurt quite as much after some time passes. You won't forget (person's name), of course, but time will help and just because we have to go on with school schedules, jobs and everything else does not mean you care less for the person who died."
7. Encourage the expression of present feelings and be accepting of silence.
8. Inform students of the opportunities to meet and share in smaller groups.
9. Help students eventually share about some of their positive experiences they had with (use the person's name), if they feel comfortable. Arrange for students to leave who may not be ready for this type of discussion.
10. Compliment students for being supportive of each other and helping each other.
11. If possible and it seems appropriate, walk around the campus with one to two students. Physical activity helps some students.
12. Invite students to write, draw, or speak about the student who died.
13. Do not be too structured. Allow students to sit close together, sit on the floor or on a desk or table if it's safe. Sitting in a circle is a good way to draw people close together. This will develop intimacy and make members of the group feel together and equal.
14. Allow students to talk to one another.
15. Ask students to think of at least three words that would describe the victim(s) and go around the circle and share these words. Don't force participation, most will want to share.
16. If there is a community wide crisis, let students tell what has happened at their homes and how they felt.
17. Sometimes students want to do something to express their sympathy to the family. The teacher or school counselor could encourage students to write letters or make cards. **School personnel need to read over the letters or cards to make sure they are appropriate before sending or delivering them to the family.**

Good Tips for School Counselors to Remember (A Handout for the Crisis Team)

Use these tips to encourage discussion and to anticipate potential discussion items.

DO's

1. Do listen to the students and wait after you've asked a question to give them adequate time to respond.
2. Do allow students the opportunity to express any and all thoughts regarding the incident without judging or evaluating their comments.
3. Do be aware of your voice tone, keeping it low, even, and warm.
4. Do help all students see that everyone shares similar feelings (i.e., "We're not You're) all stunned that something like this could happen here" or "A lot of us (not you) are feeling angry.")
5. Do expect tears, anger, resentment, fear, inappropriate language (often due to tension and discomfort), and stoicism (apparent non-reaction).
6. Do expect some students to become phobic and have sudden overwhelming concerns that may seem illogical to you but are very real to them.
7. Do be aware that this death could bring about the resurfacing of other losses for students.
8. Do encourage students to sit in a circle, or to make a more intimate grouping in which to have this discussion.
9. Do stress the confidential nature of the feelings and thoughts expressed in the discussion.
10. Do use your own thoughts and ideas as a means to encourage discussion, not as a means for alleviating your own feelings.
11. Do expect that other feelings of loss may emerge.
12. Do give accurate information about the incident. If you don't know an answer, say so.
13. Do squelch any rumors that may exist by either giving the facts or researching what the facts are and reporting back.

DON'Ts

1. Don't give "should, ought, or must" statements (i.e., "You shouldn't feel like that." "We mustn't dwell on this.")
2. Don't use clichés (i.e., "Be strong." "It could have been worse.")
3. Don't ask questions without being ready to listen.
4. Don't try to make them feel better, let them know that it's okay to feel what they're feeling.
5. Don't isolate anyone; each will need to feel a part of the group.
6. Don't expect the students to "get over" the grief/recovery process within a certain time.
7. Don't assume a person is not grieving/reacting just because they don't look or act like it. Let them know you are available at any time (i.e., six weeks or three months from now) IF YOU REALLY ARE.
8. Don't let students interrupt each other, allow each person to finish his/her own statement.
9. Don't repeat what you have heard outside of the school setting. Stick to what has been communicated to you by the crisis team and/or administration. It is important for you to model and practice the elimination of rumors.
10. If you are a faculty member in the school of the deceased and have children in the school or know neighborhood children who attend the school, don't share any confidential information/facts within earshot of these children.

Tips for Students in Crisis
(From the MSCA Crisis Manual, 2022, but edited to fit this page)

All of us, at some time in our lives, experience a death or trauma that evokes a crisis response. It may be from the results of various weather events, accidents, deaths, or other traumatic events. When events of this nature happen, we have what is called a grief response. No two people grieve in the same way, but the emotions or feelings are similar in everyone.

Each of us grieves differently and at our own individual pace. Grieving is hard work. You may feel sad, hurt, and cry a lot. Crying is okay.

Your behavior may be influenced by your feelings. Here are some emotional responses that are expected and normal.

1. Remember that everyone reacts to pain and stress in different ways. Don't expect everyone to act or feel the same. Also, don't expect the pain to last the same amount of time for everyone. Some "normal" responses are:

Denial- "No, it can't be."	Anger/Resentment	Guilt-It must be my fault. If only I had not said....	Numbness or shock
Tears	Life seems out of balance	Disbelief	Bad dreams, sleep disturbance
Sadness	Feeling deserted	Forgetfulness	Increased substance use
Withdraw from friends/family	Nervousness, anxiety: What will I do now?	Loneliness/depression	Self-pity
Hostility/on edge	Sorrow	Self-doubt	Fear of going crazy
Easily excitable	Asking questions-the same questions-over and over		

2. In the case of death, remember that friends and family will need your care and concern long after the funeral is over.
3. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you aren't sure if you can cope.
4. Take care of yourself. Eat well; get plenty of sleep and exercise.
5. Try some of these ideas to help you handle stress and grief.

Talk to someone	Cry	Write a letter	Ride a bike
Keep a journal	Clean your room	Dance	Help someone else
Rearrange your room	Read a book	Create something	Go for a walk
Draw	Plant something	Dig in the dirt	Yell at your pillow
Set some goals	Get a neck rub	Listen to music	Run

The Teachers' Meeting

1. Attached is a copy of "Young People and Grief." This information may be helpful to you as you help students deal with their feelings.
2. Present facts as they are known. Stick to what the school has given you as information to present. Do not offer your opinions and/or what you may have heard from other sources.
3. Discuss procedures and support that will be available.
4. Discuss the use of hall passes as a means of student's getting from class to support rooms. Emphasize the need for sensitivity in approaching students who may be in the hall. Emphasize the importance of monitoring exits. Be alert to students who may be in need of emotional support.
5. Explain that members of the crisis team will follow the victim's schedule in order to speak to classes. Explain that other team members will be available for other classes if needed.
6. Go over the teacher handout pertaining to grief and emphasize "if kids want to talk," be sensitive.
7. Go over how to take care of teacher feelings (your own) and emphasize that support rooms and support are available.
8. Inform teachers of the mandatory debriefing meeting at the end of the day.
9. Discuss staff and students' handling of the press.
10. Inform teachers to notify crisis team members of names of students who may be high-risk.
11. Inform teachers to refrain from discussing death in terms of religious beliefs.
12. Reassure staff members that it is acceptable for them to have the need to grieve. If they are having a difficult time, they should ask for someone to cover their responsibilities until they are able to resume.
13. Emphasize the importance of watching each other, as well as the students. Don't be afraid to "refer" a colleague if you see that they are having a difficult time. No one will be judged for the emotions they are experiencing.
14. Remind staff members that the bells may not ring as usual based on the needs of the students. Let them know that they are to keep their students until the bells ring, or someone directs them differently.

Teacher's Handout- All Levels

1. A support room has been set up for students who need or want additional support. Members of the crisis team will be available for individual and group support. PLEASE LET STUDENTS KNOW WHERE THEY CAN GO FOR HELP, and follow the directions given for releasing them and monitoring their coming and going to these rooms. It is best to have students escorted to the various locations by a member of the crisis team.
2. Please be especially observant for those students who experience a high level of distress and/or whose behavior indicates a strong grief reaction. Names of students who should be monitored or seen for follow-up should be given to counselors.
3. Counselors and members of the crisis team are available to come to classes to talk about common reactions to loss, to provide support, and to answer questions- whatever you might need. Please contact them if at any time you would like someone to come to your class.
4. If students ask questions or want to talk about their feelings, it is usually a good thing to let that happen for an appropriate period of time; it is best to have this type of discussion led by a member of the crisis team. During the discussion, some things you might include are:
 - a. Reinforce the idea that people grieve in different ways. All responses are OK there is no "normal" way to feel.
 - b. Reinforce that people grieve for different reasons. It is acceptable for someone to have grief feelings even if they didn't personally know the victim. What they heard may have resurfaced previous or recent experiences of their own.
 - c. Talk about what they can do with their feelings.
 - i. Talk with people they trust.
 - ii. Encourage talking with a parent/guardian.
 - iii. Encourage talking to school staff.
 - iv. Inform them of the support room.
 - v. Let them know it is fine to seek out help.
 - d. Discuss what they can do to help each other.
 - i. Reach out to each other/listen to each other.
 - ii. Accompany an upset friend to talk to someone.
 - iii. Let an adult know if a friend is very upset and might need to be sought out.
5. Students may be encouraged to write letters, cards, or other expressions of care that can be brought to the counseling center for delivery to the family.
6. State and reinforce the stability of a routine. Allow appropriate time for sharing of feelings and discussion but return to scheduled instructional activities each day.
7. See counselors for additional materials if necessary.
8. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
 - a. Recognize and acknowledge your own feelings of loss and grief.
 - b. Talk to someone you trust about your feelings. The staff support room is in _____.
 - c. Be realistic about what you can do. Maybe you need to take some time for yourself. Do it.
 - d. Stick to a schedule as much as you can. It provides stability and the comfort of a normal routine when your feelings are out of control.
 - e. Give yourself permission to mourn. No matter what the nature of your relationship, there is loss. Give yourself the same latitude you give your students.
 - f. Be kind to yourself. You don't have to "get it all together" right away. You don't have to do it all, be strong for everyone, or take care of everything. Treat yourself with the same gentleness and understanding you would anybody else.

Handling Crisis Situations: Tips for Teachers

1. Be honest. Find out all the information you can and according to the instructions from administrators, share information approved by the administration with students. Cognitive and emotional development will determine how much and in what manner to share.
2. Allow time for students to express feelings, thoughts, and to ask questions. The amount of time will vary with the situation, age groups, and individual groups' concerns. The best practice is to have someone from the crisis team lead this discussion.
3. Look for signs of distress in individual students (i.e., heightened breathing, crying, increased fidgeting, etc.) Use your school's process to refer students who are of concern. It might be in small groups or individual counseling, but be sure concerned students get attention.
4. Allow time for a break or recess after discussing and sharing. In cases of a continuing crisis remember to allow time for breaks.
5. Listen to your students' feelings.
6. Remember that everyone experiences and reacts to grief and crisis in a different way. There is no one-way to act.
7. Some students may express various religious beliefs about death. Remind students that this is a time to honor the deceased and not a time to pass judgment. If a student seems to have a need to discuss a specific religious belief, encourage them to talk with a parent, family member, or member of the clergy.
8. In case of death, discuss ways to express sympathy with the class. This is often a first-time experience for young people, and ways to express sympathy and the funeral process can be confusing. Death and crisis are a part of living, and this can be a valuable learning experience.
9. In case of the death of a classmate or teacher, it is best if the desk can be left empty to help students acknowledge the death. The same is true for a student's locker or cubbies. Sometimes students are angrier if they are not given time to grieve.
10. Removal of student's personal belongings should be arranged by the school's administrator after school hours. If a memorial has been set up for the belongings, notify the students that the belongings will be removed by a certain date, so they are not surprised.
11. In the case of a student's death, remove their name from your roster and/or any other communication sources. This will prevent accidentally calling out their name during upcoming roll calls by you or a substitute.

Tips for Parents of Students Who Are Experiencing Crisis

1. Keep your child informed and updated, keeping in mind the developmental and cognitive level of the child. Children need to feel involved and in control as much as possible. [Developmental Stages of Understanding Death and Grieving](#)
2. Watch for signs of distress. Loss of appetite, aggression, acting out, being withdrawn, sleeping disturbances, and other behavior changes can indicate problems.
3. Send your child to school if possible. The stability and routine of a familiar situation will help young people feel more secure.
4. Remember that everyone reacts to stress and/or grief in different ways. There is no one-way to act in a crisis situation.
5. Allow children the opportunity to express feelings. It is important to validate these feelings, by listening quietly and attentively to what children are saying. Avoid correcting children for how they are reacting, thinking and/or feeling. Communicate that you understand what your child is expressing by restating what they are saying. Resource: <https://www.psychalive.org/why-important-parents-validate-children/>
6. A good diet and plenty of exercise are important for children who are under stress. Encourage your child to eat well and get plenty of exercise.
7. Be honest about your own concerns but stress your and your child's ability to cope with the situation.
8. Respect a child's need to grieve; everyone experiences grief differently and there should be no judgment.
9. Provide somewhere private and quiet for your child to go.
10. Be available and listen to your child.
11. Remember to take care of yourself.
12. Obtain outside help from local mental health professionals, if necessary.

Here is a resource that parents can use to identify what is appropriate for their child's developmental/cognitive level: [Developmental Stages of Understanding Death and Grieving](#)

Tips for Counselor/Crisis Team Members When Assisting in a Crisis Situation

1. Have a plan for your support at home.
 - a. Eat well and get plenty of exercise. A good diet and exercise is important when under stress.
 - b. Balance work and rest.
 - c. Stick to a schedule as much as you can. It provides stability and the comfort of a normal routine when your feelings are out of control.
 - d. Avoid new major projects or decisions.
2. Be realistic about what you can do.
3. Recognize and acknowledge your own feelings of loss and grief.
4. Give yourself permission to mourn. No matter what the nature of your relationship, there is loss. Give yourself the same latitude you give your students.
5. Meet with fellow crisis team members and be supportive of each other or form a support group with fellow counselors or staff members.
6. Be kind to yourself. You don't have to "get it all together" right away. You don't have to do it all, be strong for everyone, or take care of everything. Treat yourself with the same gentleness and understanding you would anybody else. It's Ok to allow a crisis team member to offer support to your school if you are not in the right mindset.
7. Debrief with the Crisis Team members and/or administration before going home. **THIS IS A CRITICAL STEP!!!!**

Suggestions for Communicating with the Media

The administrator in charge of the school communication should work directly with the building administrators on press coverage when outside media is likely to be involved. All media questions and statements may be deferred to that office. However, information of a written nature should only be released after consultation with the designated administrator.

Before a Crisis Occurs

Prepare a preliminary plan for communicating with the media prior to a crisis situation. This plan should be short and simple. It should have activities, roles and responsibilities clearly defined. For example, it should be decided in advance:

- Who should make the contacts?
- Who is to be called?
- Who is to communicate with the media?
 - No one has to speak with the media.
- Where is the media to be located within or outside the building?
- Who is responsible for building security with respect to the media?
 - They should not be allowed to disrupt the crisis intervention efforts.
- How staff is to handle contact from the media

At the Time of a Crisis (this section and heading could be added to a different page in the implementation)

- Briefly state the known facts of the situation, but do not give the name of the victims or persons responsible.
- Do not go into depth or say more than is needed.
- Do not speculate about motives or feelings. If civil authorities are involved, refer to questions that require their expertise.
- Review what is being done to respond to the situation. In general terms, identify the support being provided to the students, their families, and staff. Emphasize that the primary goal is to help the students through the crisis situation.
- Let the media know that the school will try to maintain or quickly return to its normal routine and schedule, based on the response of staff and students and how well people are coping.
- Avoid judgmental statements or opinions.

REMINDERS:

1. Teachers may allow few minutes for students to talk about their reactions to the situation. Teachers should try to resume the normal class schedule as soon as possible. Not everyone will be comfortable leading a discussion; if help is needed, contact a member of the crisis team.
2. Don't dismiss or discount any person's concerns, however; reassure the person that all perspectives need to be considered.
3. Look for signs of emotional reactions over several days that may need attention and then refer them to counselors or a designated crisis center. As a reminder, please have a member of the crisis team escort the student(s) to the designated crisis center.

Signs of Emotional Reaction/Need		
Crying	A major change in behavior	Withdrawal from normal class participation
Change in work/study habits	Excessive daydreaming	Increased absences
Passivity in class	Defiance, especially if not a problem before	Lingering sadness-- improvement should be seen within 7-10 days

Sample Announcements and Script

Announcement information should be approved by the family and building administrator(s). Every script should include how to contact the crisis team for support.

Generic Sample Script:

_____ (died, was killed, was seriously injured, is seriously ill, died by suicide). Relate the facts that were relayed during the initial faculty meeting concerning this issue. **Be certain that whatever is shared has been cleared with the family of the victim(s).**

Sample for Informing a Class: (Individual Loss)

John will not be in school today. His mother was killed in an automobile accident last night. A truck on Highway 10 struck her car. John may not act or feel like himself. Perhaps we can discuss some ways John might be feeling and how we can all help him.

Sample for Informing About a Schoolwide Loss:

We have something very sad to tell you today. John was driving home in the rain last night. His car swerved into an oncoming lane, was struck by a car and went off the road. John died in the crash. It was sudden and he did not suffer.

We have something very sad to share with you today. We've been notified that Elaine died last night. At this time, we have no further details to share. Please keep Elaine's family in your thoughts.

Discussion Starters

Choose one or two of the following statements. Complete the statements by sharing your thoughts about what happened. You may write or draw.

I remember when...

I feel...

I wish...

When we...

Happy times I remember...

My thoughts today are...

You are/we...

Sometimes I wanted...

I wish I told you...

My memories are...

I need...

I want...

RESOURCE FOR ADULTS: Young People and Grief

Grief is an expected, normal, and natural process when dealing with loss. Young people of all ages exhibit grief and reactions to grief. Guilt, anxiety, anger, fear, and sadness may be universal, and the expressions of these emotions may vary from day to day. Helping a young person and yourself through this difficult time may often feel overwhelming; however, knowledge of common reactions to loss may help you recognize behavior for what it is- grieving.

Possible Grief Reactions:

- Anger
- Aggression/acting out: starting fights, outbursts of temper, drop in grades, change of peer affiliation.
- Explosive emotions: gentle tears, wrenching sobs, extremes in behavior.
- Physiological changes: fatigue, trouble sleeping, lack of appetite, headaches, and stomach pains.
- Idealization of the deceased (i.e., remembering the person as having no faults, seeing unrealistic perfection, etc.)
- Sadness/emptiness/withdrawal: overwhelmed by feelings of loss when realizes the person is not coming back; feels extremely vulnerable.
- Guilt/self-blame: “If only...” “Why didn’t I...?” Feels responsible for the loss, seeks self-punishment.
- Disorganization: restless, unable to concentrate, uncontrollable tears, difficulty focusing
- Lack of feelings: denial; protection from pain; can be a form of numbness; may be difficult to admit and may generate guilt.

How to Help a Young Person Experiencing Grief

- Use the terms “died/dead/death” rather than phrases like “passed away” or “taken from us.” Give an honest age-appropriate explanation for the person’s death, avoiding clichés or easy answers. Straightforward, gentle use of words helps a person confront the reality of death. [Developmental Stages of Understanding Death and Grieving](#)
- Explain and accept that everyone has different reactions to death at different times. The reaction might not hit until the funeral or weeks later.
- Reassure the young person that his/her grief feelings are normal. There is no “right” way to react to a loss. Give permission to cry. Let them know it’s okay not to cry if the young person does not typically react in that way.
- Permit or encourage the young person to talk about the person who has died. This is a vital part of the healing process, both at the moment of loss, but especially after the funeral.
- Do not attempt to minimize the loss or take the pain away. Phrases like “Don’t worry, it will be OK,” “He/she had a good life,” or “He/she is out of

pain” are not helpful.

- Grief is painful. There must be pain before there can be acceptance and healing. It is very difficult to do, but most helpful to acknowledge the person’s pain and permit them to live with it without trying to take it away or make it “better.”
- Encourage the young person to talk about his/her feelings. Encourage communication first with family, but also be aware of other support people such as clergy, trusted adults, friends, and trusted peers.
- LISTEN. Listen with your heart. Listening to the feelings of the young person is most important. Listen through the silences. Just being present, and showing you care by listening is more important than knowing what to say or even saying anything at all.
- Help the young person decide about attending the funeral. The funeral can be a way to say goodbye but abide by the young person’s wish and express understanding if he/she chooses not to go.

A Grieving Person’s Needs:

- To cry
- To be held
- To talk
- To be listened to
- To feel caring around them, to be with people they care about.
- To understand how others may react.

Emergency/Help Numbers (MSCA, 2022, p. 53)

Emergency: 911

Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 1-800-392-3738

Suicide Prevention: 988

Trevor Hotline for LGBTQ Youth: 1-866-488-7386

Sexual Abuse: 1-800-656-4673

Child Sex Trafficking Text: BEFREE to 888-383-7888

Behavioral Health Response: (24-hour mental health crisis hotline) 1-314-469-4980

SAMHSA National Helpline (mental health/substance abuse): [samsha.gov/find-help/national-helpline](https://www.samsha.gov/find-help/national-helpline).

References

Missouri School Counselor Association (2022). Crisis Manual (2022). Jefferson City, MO: Missouri School Counselor Association.

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