

Christ the Teacher Catholic Schools

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

SECTION:	100 – GENERAL ADMINISTRATION	CODE:	AP 166.1
PROCEDURE:	SAMPLE SCHOOL CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN		

PROCEDURES

1. When news of a traumatic event is received, the initial tasks for the Principal are:
 - 1.1 Verify the death or event and obtain as much information as possible from primary sources (family, police, etc.).
 - 1.2 Notify the Director/designate, School Counsellors and Parish Priests
 - 1.3 Convene Crisis Response Team and assign duties.
 - 1.4 Prepare formal statement or announcement.
 - 1.5 Announce the time and place of emergency staff meeting.
 - 1.6 Identify other students, staff and parents likely to be most affected by the news.
 - 1.7 Assess need for additional community resources.
 - 1.8 Identify a secretary to respond to and coordinate all phone calls.
 - 1.9 Hold a staff meeting to discuss the facts of the situation and to outline the intervention plan.
 - 1.9.1 Pass around a photograph of the deceased/injured student to familiarize staff with the student.
 - 1.9.2 Direct staff and others not to repeat information until verification is obtained.
 - 1.9.3 Emphasize facts to dispel rumors and speculation; this is best accomplished through a school wide announcement.
 - 1.9.4 Help staff members process their responses to the situation.
 - 1.9.5 Describe the feelings that students may experience and suggest how teachers might handle specific situations.
 - 1.9.6 Provide guidelines for helping students who are upset.
 - 1.9.7 Encourage teachers to allow for expressions of grief, anger, etc., in the homeroom or class in which the announcement is received or in other classes throughout the day. Emphasize the acceptability/normalcy of a range of expressions. The guiding principle is to return to the normal routine as soon as possible within each class and within the school. The structure of routine provides security and comfort to all members of the school community.

- 1.9.8 As needed, assign team members and other staff to monitor students; notify parents, support staff and feeder schools; provide support to staff; collect student belongings and withdraw student from roll calls.
 - 1.9.9 Request staff to meet at the end of the day to review procedures and debrief the day. If the crisis occurs on a Friday, call the meeting for the following Monday morning.
- 1.10 Make official announcement.
- 1.11 Hold a day two (2) staff meeting.
 - 1.11.1 Gather staff members and update them on any additional information and procedures.
 - 1.11.2 In case of death, provide funeral/prayers information if affected family has given permission.
 - 1.11.3 Identify students in need of follow-up support and, in accordance with the schools' crisis response plan, assign staff members to monitor the most affected students.
 - 1.11.4 Co-ordinate any ongoing counselling support for students.
 - 1.11.5 Announce ongoing support for students with place, time and staff facilitator.
 - 1.11.6 Notify parents of affected students regarding community resources available to students and their families.
- 2. Secondary Tasks are:
 - 2.1 Keep the staff informed.
 - 2.2 Return to a normal school routine as much as possible.
 - 2.3 Be highly visible, especially during class changes and lunch periods.
- 3. Intervention Protocol
 - 3.1 All information is directed to and verified by the Principal.
 - 3.2 The Principal contacts the family (in person if possible) to:
 - 3.2.1 Offer condolences;
 - 3.2.2 Obtain information;
 - 3.2.3 Discuss with the family what information may be shared.
- 4. The Principal reviews the situation with the School Counsellor. The Principal is to:
 - 4.1 Notify staff and students as appropriate before their arrival at school.
 - 4.2 Hold a staff meeting to discuss the plan of the team.
 - 4.3 Coordinate all media statements with the Director's office.
- 5. The School Crisis Response Team meets with individual students or groups.

6. The School Crisis Response Team meets with administrators to:
 - 6.1 Exchange information between team members and administration.
 - 6.2 Discuss those persons who were identified as vulnerable and suggest follow up.
 - 6.3 Contact parents of vulnerable students.
 - 6.4 Document interventions.
7. What can the School Crisis Response Team provide?
 - 7.1 Consultation and support for administrators.
 - 7.2 Support to the staff.
 - 7.3 Support to students:
 - 7.3.1 Individual.
 - 7.3.2 Group.
 - 7.3.3 Classes.
 - 7.3.4 Assessment for individual risk.
 - 7.4 Parent consultations and information.
 - 7.5 Classroom debriefings.
 - 7.6 Identify school and community resources.
 - 7.7 Parent and community meetings.
 - 7.8 Follow-up activities.
8. Counsellor Responsibilities
 - 8.1 Attend the planning meeting to discuss interventions and protocols.
 - 8.2 Identify and arrange for specific rooms and areas for group and individual counselling.
 - 8.3 Be available to go into classes with teachers to assist in discussions.
 - 8.4 Meet with individual students that are referred or request individual counselling.
 - 8.5 Identify students that may be "at risk" who need follow-up services or referral.
 - 8.6 Clarify information and dispel any rumors.
 - 8.7 Call parents of those students seen during the day, or who may be in need of further help.
 - 8.8 Coordinate parent meetings as needed.
 - 8.9 Provide information to staff, parents and students.
 - 8.10 Attend debriefing.
 - 8.11 Arrange follow-up services.

9. Teacher Responsibilities

- 9.1 Attend staff meeting.
- 9.2 Read any prepared announcement to students.
- 9.3 Make referrals to the Intervention Team as needed.
- 9.4 Keep all other students in the classroom.
- 9.5 Help identify students "at risk".
- 9.6 Provide information, clarify rumors and misinformation.
- 9.7 Modify classes as appropriate.
- 9.8 Work with the School Counsellors to coordinate follow-up services.

10. School Crisis Response Team Responsibilities

- 10.1 Meet with the Team Leader to receive assignments and initiate protocol.
- 10.2 Meet with students in small groups or individual sessions as assigned.
- 10.3 Bolster natural coping skills
- 10.4 Identify students "at risk".
- 10.5 Call the parents of students identified as "in need of follow-up".
- 10.6 Attend debriefing; provide names of all students served.
- 10.7 Assist in planning follow-up.

11. Response Coordinator Responsibilities

- 11.1 Meet with administrators and counselors to review protocol as outlined.
- 11.2 Attend staff meeting to outline the intervention plan and answer questions.
- 11.3 Coordinate intervention management, counselling and media access.
- 11.4 Assist in directing students to appropriate groups or for individual counselling.
- 11.5 Contact feeder schools to arrange interventions as needed.
- 11.6 Contact community resources as needed.
- 11.7 Provide resources and/or information.
- 11.8 Conduct debriefing and evaluation.

12. How will we announce the death?

- 12.1 Should students close to the death be contacted first?
- 12.2 Should the staff be informed first?
- 12.3 Can the announcement be made in a way that will dispel speculation and rumor and diffuse sensationalizing the event?
- 12.4 Is this a school wide or community wide crisis?
- 12.5 Who else should be notified?
- 12.6 How will students, staff, or parents react?

- 12.7 What type of media coverage might be expected?
- 12.8 Has a written statement been prepared?
- 12.9 What legal issues need to be addressed?
- 12.10 Have secretaries been briefed on how to handle questions and direct inquiries to the proper spokesperson?

13. Announcement to the Staff – Example:

"We have called this staff meeting to inform you we have had a death involving one of our students.

- ♦ Give the student's name.
- ♦ Give facts of the tragedy:
 - Date.
 - Time.
 - Location.
 - Other pertinent facts.

This death may be upsetting to many of our students and staff. We will make an announcement at the beginning of school. If, in your judgment, any of your students need to talk to someone, please send them to the counselling office. The Crisis Intervention Team is here to assist us at this time."

- ♦ Provide an opportunity for staff members to ask questions.
- ♦ Allow the Intervention Coordinator to outline how the team will assist.
- ♦ Emphasis is to be on flexibility, compassion and as normal a routine as possible.

14. Classroom Announcements –

14.1 Example of Individual Student Loss

"(Student's name) will not be with us in school today. Her mother was killed in a tragic car accident last night. She was killed on the freeway when another car hit her car, causing her car to roll over.

(Student's name) may have a difficult time with her mother's death and may need our help in dealing with this tragedy. Perhaps we can explore some ways to help her with the sadness she will feel. We have invited some counselors here to talk with us about our concerns and about how we can help."

14.2 Example of Student Death

"I have very sad information for you today. As many of you may know, we lost one of our students in a tragic accident last night. (Student), was driving home from school last night and was killed by a train at the crossing on Highway 89 and State Street. (Student), died instantly and did not suffer. We will miss (Student). Those of you who want to discuss this may do so with a counselor. If you need to talk with someone, you may go to the media center where a counselor will meet with you."

15. Response to Parent Inquiries

"Yes, one of our students has died. We have a School Crisis Response Team in place to handle student and parent concerns. Do you need to talk to an administrator about the situation?"

"Yes, we have had some students involved in an accident. We cannot release the names of the students at this time. If your daughter was involved, you would have been notified. We have a team of counselors to talk with students. It may be an hour before I can get a message to her. Would you like to have her call you?"

16. Sample Letter to Parents

Printed on School Letterhead, and with the date indicated:

Dear Parents:

We regret to inform you of the death of (name), a student here at Saint Peter's School. We are deeply saddened by the death and express our sincere condolences to the family.

The Division Crisis Team visited the school to meet with our staff and students. All students were allowed to meet with a counselor. A member of the Crisis Team should have contacted those of you that had a student meet with a counselor.

We urge you to talk to your son/daughter about (name)'s death. Children/Youth need caring adults with whom they can discuss their feelings about death and dying. We encourage you to take this opportunity to share your beliefs and discuss ways of coping with the feelings your son/daughter may have.

Please feel free to contact the school if you have any concerns about your student's response to this tragic event. A counselor will be available to consult with parents or to provide any additional help we can.

Sincerely,

Principal

17. Sample Phone Call to Parents

"This is (give your name) from (give the school's name). The purpose of my call today is to inform you of the death of one of our students, (give the name).

The Division Crisis Team has been working with some of our students who wanted help in dealing with the death. We are concerned about (give their child's name) because of (briefly state the facts without disclosing inappropriate information).

We have discussed your student's feeling about (deceased's name)'s death. We would suggest that he not be alone after school today. It might also be helpful if you discuss not only the death, but what your son/daughter feels about the situation.

(Ask for questions.)

If we can be of any help, please call us at (give phone number). If you need immediate help we suggest you call (give appropriate information about counselling services).

Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance."

18. Sample Media Responses

"Yes, we have had a student death. I would like to put you in touch with our Division Office and allow them to discuss the details with you. Please call (give persons name and appropriate phone number)."

OR

"As you can appreciate, there are some sensitive privacy issues for those involved. If you will call the Director's office at (give phone number and person to ask for) s/he can better provide you with the facts you need."

OR

"We have a Division representative here at our school. He/She will meet with you to answer your questions and provide you with any information they can.

19. Sample Media Release

"We have had some students from our school involved in a tragic accident. The names of those involved can be obtained by contacting the Police Department at (give phone number).

The details as we know them are (give factual details as known).

We will try to help you with your responsibility to report this event.

We ask that you help us in our responsibility to the family and friends of those involved, as well as to students needing our attention.

To help you receive accurate information we ask that you not interview any students during the initial crisis.

We ask that you not videotape students on school grounds during this time of shock and emotion.

We will answer your questions as best we can. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation."

20. What do I Say to a Bereaved Family or Student?

A crisis is an event that is highly unpredictable and extraordinary in its make up. However, the way individuals behave in a traumatic situation is very predictable and consistent. Being aware and having an understanding of how people will react during an event makes it possible to take action that can assist and defuse those reactions. Proper and appropriate action will help prevent a secondary, potentially more severe traumatic event.

21. Guidelines for Informing an Individual Student

There is no way to soften devastating news...no way to ease the wrenching pain. But it is incredibly important that someone who cares enough to try do it.

- ♦ Someone whom he or she trusts is to tell the student.
- ♦ Someone who is close to the student (teacher, counselor or fellow student) is to be asked to remain with the student after he or she receives the news.
- ♦ The student is to be taken to a place where he or she will have privacy.
- ♦ The student is to be told what has happened quietly, simply and directly. (Hint: before you say who has died, give four brief statements that indicate you are about to deliver bad news that can help prepare the person to receive the devastating news. Example: I have some bad news to tell you. You may want to sit down. There was a bad accident on the highway. The accident involved a member of your family. I am sorry to tell you that your father died.)
- ♦ Unnecessary details are not to be offered but all questions must be answered directly and honestly. Do not be afraid to speak about feelings and emotions. This can help the student to sort out confusing reactions and to see the school in a support role (even at a later date).
- ♦ The wishes of the family are to be respected as much as possible.

22. Talking With a Bereaved Student

- ♦ Be there.
- ♦ Listen — let them tell it over and over.
- ♦ Resist the urge to "fix", minimize or give advice.
- ♦ Be honest, concise, complete and factual.
- ♦ Re-establish a sense of safety, predictability and control. Don't be afraid to be "directive".

23. Immediate Emotional Signs Requiring Referral

- ☐ When upset, crying becomes hysteria.
- ☐ When anger, self-blame becomes threats to others or self.
- ☐ When anxiety becomes panic.
- ☐ When fatigue or slowness becomes physical shock.
- ☐ When dulled response becomes no response, rigidity, fetal position.

24. Do "NOT" Checklist

- ☐ Do not tell students how they should feel or what they should do.
- ☐ Do not avoid reaching out to others because of your own discomfort.
- ☐ Do not give incomplete explanations that can lead to confusion. ("He was sick..." So am I, will I die?).
- ☐ Do not say, "I know how you feel" or "You'll get over it."
- ☐ Do not act as if nothing happened or hide your feelings.
- ☐ Do not give a theological lecture or discuss religious issues.

25. "DO" Checklist

- ☐ Be honest at all times.
- ☐ Use the deceased's name when talking about them.
- ☐ Expect volatile reactions? view the loss from their unique perspective.
- ☐ Use your normal voice and SAY, "dead, died, dying, death" as needed.
- ☐ Say, "It's okay to cry."
- ☐ Remember it's appropriate to say, "I do not know."
- ☐ Be straightforward: "I am sorry your brother died." "I do not know what to say." "I am concerned about you."
- ☐ Help students find appropriate ways to express their feelings.
- ☐ Reassure students that anger, sadness, guilt, fear, shock, etc., are normal feelings.
- ☐ Encourage the student to express fears and concerns.
- ☐ Reassure the student that the death is NOT their fault. Death is NOT contagious and it is not likely other loved ones will die soon.
- ☐ Support students who choose not to verbally express their feelings.
- ☐ Explain that someone can be sad even if they are not crying.
- ☐ Share your own feelings.
- ☐ Allow time for students to grieve and mourn. This takes time.
- ☐ Let the student ask questions and give honest, short answers.
- ☐ Be patient.

26. Talking With Bereaved Families

People who are grieving hope to find supportive, caring and understanding people at their child's school. The staff of a school can communicate their concern in action and by the words that they use. "How are you?" is often a brief encounter greeting, but the bereaved person has a difficult time answering this question. Consider making a statement rather than asking a question. Use 'how are you?' sparingly, thoughtfully, and with a willingness to listen.

Appropriate statements might be:

"I'm glad to see you. This must be a painful time for you."

"I'm so sad about the death of _____."

"I thought of you again this morning. I want you to know I care."

"I can't imagine how painful it must be to have your son die."

"I'll always remember _____ and her happy smile."

"Our class just isn't the same without _____ here."

"When you want them, we've saved the items in her locker/desk and the work she completed.

I can make a copy of her records for you."

"I wish I could ease your pain somehow."

"Thank you for coming to school. It must have been very difficult for you to return. I want you to know you're always welcome here."

27. Immediately Following Resolution of the Crisis

27.1 Convene School Crisis Response Team for debriefing as soon as possible.

27.1.1 Discuss successes and problems; and

27.1.2 Discuss things to do differently next time.

27.2 Allow staff the opportunity to discuss feelings and reactions.

28. Long-Term Follow-up and Evaluation

28.1 Provide list of suggested readings to teachers, parents, and students.

28.2 Amend crisis response procedures as necessary.

28.3 Write thank you notes to out-of-building Division and community resource people who provided (or are still providing) support during crisis.

28.4 Be alert on crisis anniversaries and holidays. Often students will experience "anniversary" grief reaction the following month or year on the date of the crisis, or when similar crises occur that remind them of the original crisis. Holidays, too, often are difficult for students who have experienced loss.