



# Responding to a Critical Incident

Prepared by the Catholic Education Office,  
Catholic Diocese of Ballarat

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## Foreword

There is no doubt that learning is enabled and enhanced in a healthy and safe school where leaders plan consciously, actively and systematically to improve safety for all members of the community. Taking the time to plan and train for a critical incident, therefore, is never a wasted activity, for it gives a school community the best chance of minimising the impact of such an event on students, staff and families.

The Student Services Staff Group of the Catholic Education Office Ballarat (CEOB) has recently reviewed and updated the diocese's critical incident documents. These revised materials will help schools work systematically through the phases of preparing for, dealing with and following up on a critical incident.

Ideally, no school community will ever need to make use of these resources. In reality, though, schools in our diocese deal with critical incidents quite regularly. None of us can hope to escape forever the sort of random events that might change a school community in a split second... but all of us can ensure that we are trained and prepared for whatever critical incidents might come our way. This sort of stewardship is a core responsibility for all school and system leaders.

I commend this document to you as a key resource for your Leadership Team, Governing Authority and School Advisory Council. In coming months, I encourage you to use the document to audit your current practices and to plan for the future – for an event which may not happen, but for which it is best to be prepared; I ask that you give consideration to the training that might be needed by your team, by your staff and by your extended community to prepare for such an event; and I recommend that you use this opportunity to renew and/or establish connections with agencies and partners beyond your school who will be of support to you if a critical event occurs. The CEOB, of course, hopes to walk with you every step of the way.

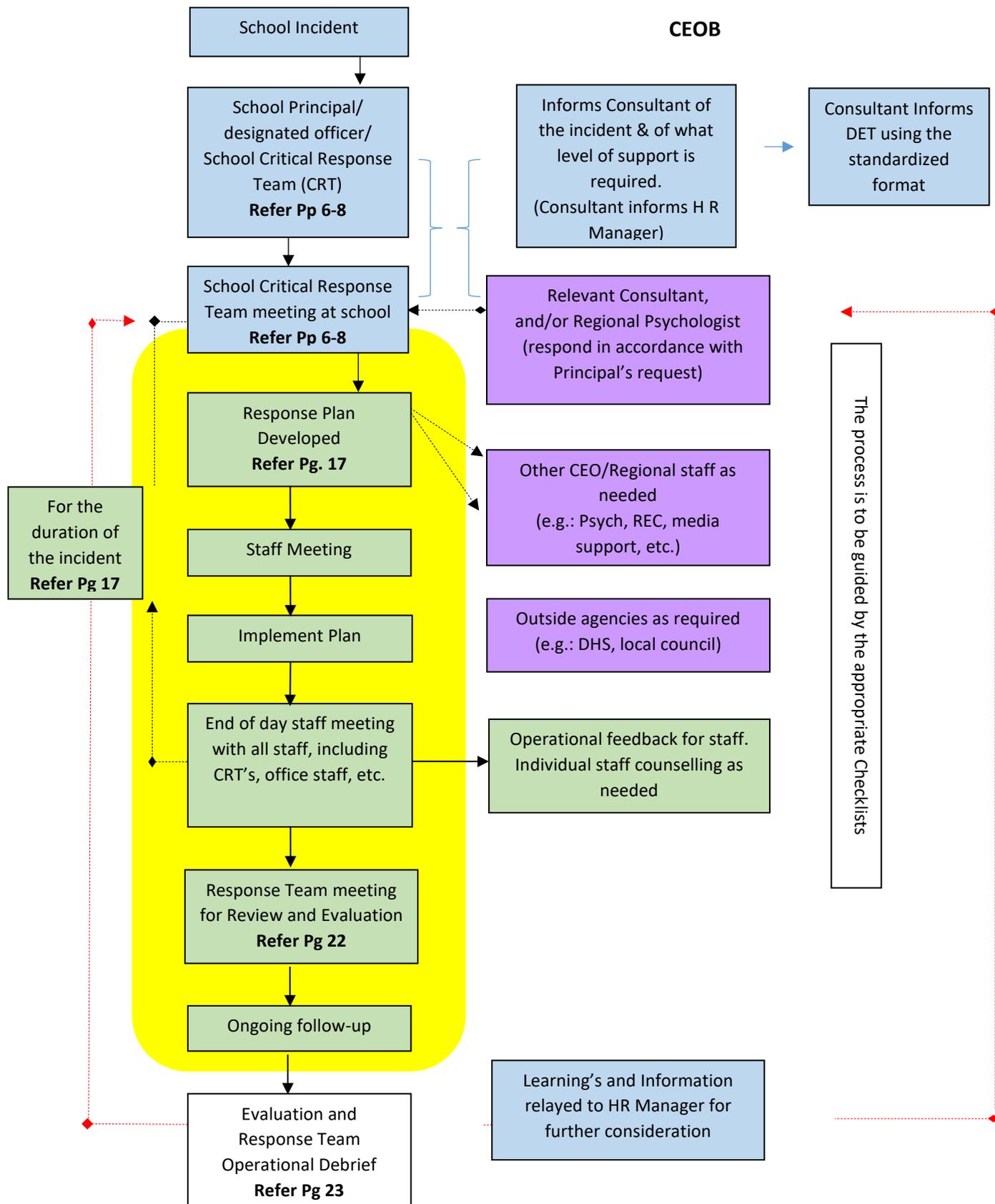


Director of Catholic Education

Diocese of Ballarat

January 2014

# Typical School Critical Incident Flow Chart



## Response Phase

### Principal / Designate Checklist

- Take a few minutes to gain composure and to collect your thoughts before taking action
- Confirm incident/collect reliable and accurate information. (Use Data Collection Sheet, page 13)
- If the incident is on-site ensure staff and students are safe, (follow school's EMP)
- Check if emergency services have been contacted or phone them if needed. (Refer to pages 15 & 16)
- Inform Educational Consultant and decide whether s/he is to be part of the Critical Incident Response Team (see page 8)
- Convene a meeting of the School's Critical Incident Response Team (SCIRT) to decide at what level the emergency plan needs to be activated (see page 8) and allocate roles to staff members. (If Canonical Administrator and/or the regional psychologist is not a member of the response team, ensure they are notified)
- Where appropriate, allocate locations for an emergency coordination centre, a recovery room for those affected (students, parents)
- Decide on how, when and by whom staff, students and parents are to be informed of the incident. (Use Staff Phone Tree where necessary – (use one out of school's EMP)
- Control the use of phones- allocate specific lines for incoming and outgoing calls (i.e. use fax line/mobile phone if the school has only one line), and if necessary, decide on alternative means of communication
- If appropriate, arrange security (staff may be required to supervise the gates and ensure adequate security)
- If the media become involved, make immediate contact with the CEOB HR Manager. (Phone 53377123) For further guidance refer to (Refer to Appendix F, pages 82 - 86)
- Ensure that all staff are willing and able to complete their duties, make provision for those that require support
- Be visible and accessible to staff
- If required arrange for the provision of psychological first aid and trauma services
- Facilitate the maintenance of normal school routines and activities
- Inform staff that **all media inquiries** are to be referred to the principal
- Complete a post-incident evaluation (page 22)
- Conduct an operational debriefing (page 23) –Send Report to HR Manager CEOB.

## School Critical Incident Response Team Checklist

**Please note:** some listed items may have already been addressed on the Principal's checklist

- Decide if phone tree needs to be activated and who else needs to be informed. (Staff Phone Tree, page 19) as contained in school's EMP
- Delegate responsibility for recording all messages and offers of assistance and keep the principal informed
- Contact affected families (and/or police) to ascertain what information may be released. If required discuss what information is to be given to sibling/children at school or in another school
- Allocate tasks to staff
- Decide how and when staff, and then students should be informed (It is preferable to inform students in class groups). It would be helpful if staff were given a brief written statement about the incident
- Compose a letter to parents (Refer to Appendix G, pages 88 – 89), briefly stating the event and providing them with information (Appendices A: page 26 & B: page 37) for possible responses by their children, the school's plan and where to go for help
- Set aside a support centre, with refreshments during the day, for distressed students and/or parents
- Plan any necessary changes to the timetable for the day
- Arrange extra staff for yard duty throughout the day
- Organise emergency teachers to release teachers as needed
- If appropriate advise all other schools in the area so they are prepared for any reactions in their schools and to dispel rumours
- Decide on a time for prayer for students & staff who wish to attend. (Refer to Appendix C, page 60)
- Organise support through CEO and/or local agencies if needed, and monitor school community reactions and support those in care-giving roles. (This includes all school staff.)
- Meet regularly to review progress
- Convene staff briefing/meeting to keep staff up to date
- Identify a list of students/staff who may be more significantly impacted by the incident
- Issue appropriate checklists to staff members
- If appropriate advise WorkCover of accident/injury

## Level of Support Required

The school's critical incident response team needs to determine whether it wants to deal with the incident using its own resources or whether community or other external help to manage the incident is required. After evaluating the nature, extent and possible impact of the incident, consider what level of support you may need. (In this instance it is always better to over-estimate.) This support could be, for example:

- Logistical support – e.g. replacement staff
- Administrative support – e.g. operating phones, photocopying etc.
- Emotional support for members of the school community – e.g. counselling
- Emergency Services support, etc.

Peruse the following list and identify the level of support you require:

- The school can manage the incident without any additional support. e.g. a school bus accident without any injuries
- The school can manage the incident but would like assistance from local community agencies like Centacare
- The school can manage the incident but would require support from the CEO. e.g. After the sudden death of a student or staff member, counselling of the staff and students is wanted
- The school requires a Catholic Education Office member/s to be part of the school's critical response team to help facilitate the recovery process. e.g. where staff members are themselves traumatised and need external support to guide them through the response process. e.g. A violent assault at school
- The school requires the CEO to manage the response process. e.g. A major school disaster involving a number of staff and students

## Responding to Parents

- Send a letter to parents about the incident. (Refer to Appendix G, pages 88 - 89)
  - Advise parents about arrangements which have been put in place
  - Provide copies of the 'Reactions to Trauma/Grief' information sheets where appropriate. (Appendices A page 26 & B page 37)
  - Provide a room for parents to gather at the school if that is required
-

## Teaching and Ancillary Staff Checklist

- Attend staff briefings / meetings
- Assist office by acting as guide to school visitors
- Be prepared to assume classroom teaching duties or to release other staff
- Maintain records of those present at the time students are informed of the incident to ensure that all students are informed
- Assemble students in a calm manner preferably in class groupings
- Present the facts to the students clearly and calmly. (Use script provided by office)
- Allow reaction time while they talk briefly to their friends
- Provide information to students on common reactions to stressful news given and how to care for self and others. (Refer to Appendices A page 26 & B page 37)
- Inform students of the support provided and how and where this may be accessed. Ensure very clear procedures
- Identify students at risk and/or extremely upset and help them feel safe. Refer to support counsellors if necessary
- Phone parents of any student who needs to go home or who may go home in a distressed state. Keep a record and follow-up on the student later
- Be prepared to assist with security arrangements as e.g. monitoring gates, etc
- Engage in classroom activities as suggested. (Refer to Appendix B page 37)
- Allow opportunities for discussion about the incident and reactions, remembering to:
  - Reiterate information as often as it is required
  - Never force participation
  - Provide information on normal grief reactions. (Refer to Appendices A page 26 & B page 37)
- In cases of suspected suicide: (Refer to Appendix E page 71), be sure to:
  - Monitor students who show extreme reactions
  - Do not go into detail about the method used, the motivations, the family's reactions, etc
  - Be aware that students may express feelings of guilt or responsibility for the death. Reassure them and refer to a supporting counsellor
- Emphasise to students the need to let the school know if they are leaving the school grounds to seek support from others

## Office Staff Checklist

- Attend staff meeting/briefings convened by Principal
- Note resource allocation as follows:
  - Location of recovery room
  - Assembly point for parents
  - Identify incoming and outgoing telephone lines
  - Security arrangements
  - Staff on duty
- Respond to all enquires about the incident utilising a written authorised version
- Receive expected visitors (i.e. parents, counsellors, etc.), record name and issue with name tag
- Direct students, parents, and emergency personnel to appropriate locations
- Receive offers of assistance from other members of the public, noting details such as:
  - Name, address, telephone numbers
  - Assistance being offered. Keep record of notes of condolences / support (Refer to Proforma Sheets, page 20)
- Dealing with the Media - give no details – pass requests on to the Principal
- Set up a central phone contact number (keep a number as private for staff/principals only)
- Receiving messages of condolence/flowers - note the name of the sender/caller; - note where they are

## Proforma Sheets

- Data Collection Sheet (Refer pg 13)
- Injury Data Sheet (Refer pg 14)
- Which Emergency Service? (Refer pg 15)
- Emergency & Recovery Telephone Numbers (Refer pg 16)
- Action Planner (Refer pg 17)
- Local/Feeder School Telephone Numbers (Refer pg 18)
- Staff Contact Tree (Refer pg 19)
- Record of Incoming Calls of Assistance/Condolences (Refer pg 20)
- Record of Actions Completed (Refer pg 21)
- Post Incident Evaluation (Refer pg 22)
- Operational Debriefing (Refer pg 23)

## Data Collection Sheet

DATE:

What happened and when?

Who was involved?

Who witnessed the event and what did they see?

Who knows about the incident?

Are there siblings in the school?

Have parents been contacted? (Record on injury data sheet)

What action has been taken so far?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Has there been Emergency Services or Police involvement?

Name of contact/s

Time called:

Time arrived:

Name of other agencies involved?

Have neighbouring schools been notified?

Injury Data Sheet

Name Student, Staff, Other	Nature & extent of injury. (cause of death, if applicable)	Hospitalised? Where?	Next of Kin	Next of Kin Phone	Notified by	Time/ Date Notified
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						
7.						
8.						
9.						
10.						

Those Involved but not Injured

Name Student, Staff, or Other	Currently located	Next of Kin	Next of Kin Phone	Notified by	Time/Date Notified
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					

## Which Emergency Service?

### **Call Police for :**

- fatality
- serious assault/sexual assault
- siege/hostage/firearms
- disappearance or removal of student
- bomb threat
- collapse/major damage to building or equipment
- motor vehicle collision
- rescue on land or water

### **Doctor/Ambulance for:**

- serious injury

### **Fire Brigade for:**

- fire in school building/bushfire
- fumes/spill/leak contamination by hazardous material
- rescue – road or rail

### **State Emergency Service for:**

- flood/windstorm
- earthquake or other natural event

## Emergency and Recovery: Telephone Numbers

### All Emergency Response to 000

Catholic Education Office Ballarat	
Media Liaison Person – Ballarat Regional Office	
Police	
Fire Brigade	
Ambulance	
State Emergency Service (e.g. Flood / windstorm)	
Telecom (e.g. bomb threats / nuisance calls)	
Hospital Emergency Department	
Hospital	
Hospital	
Interpreter Services	
Child Protection – Intake and Assessment Unit	
Sexual Assault Medical Service	
Domestic Violence Service – Crisis Intervention Service	
Poisons Information Centre	
<b>Media - Television and Radio Stations</b>	
<b>Radio</b>	
ABC	
Local	
Local	
<b>Television</b>	
ABC	
WIN	
PRIME	
TEN	
<b>Counselling Services</b>	
Centacare	
Anglicare	
Children’s and Adolescents Mental Health Services	
Kids Helpline	
Community / Government Agencies	
Local Counsellors	
<b>Material Aid</b>	
St Vincent de Paul	
Salvation Army	
City Mission	
<b>Other</b>	

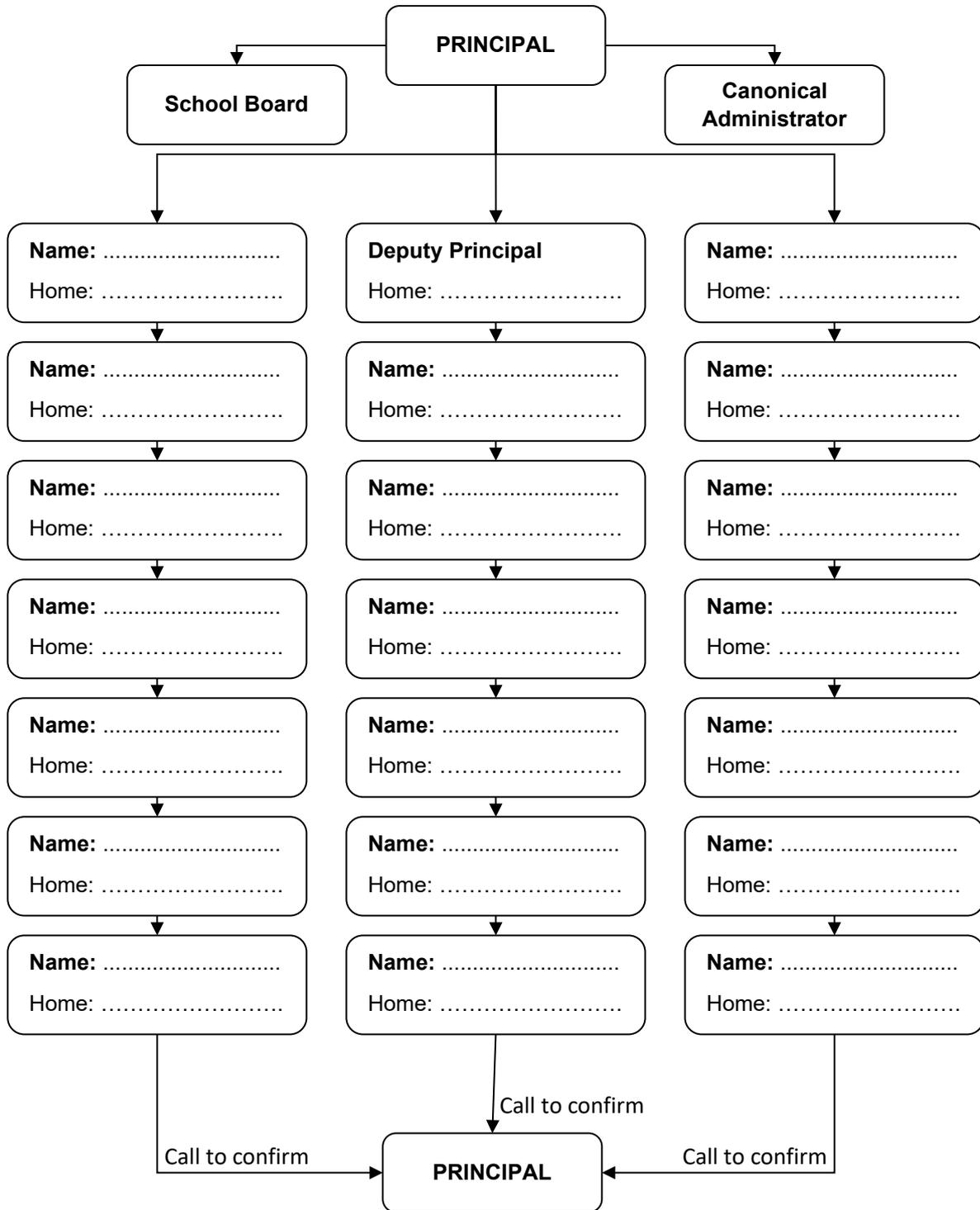
Action Plan For .....

ACTION	PRIORITY	RESPONSIBLE PERSON	RESOURCES REQUIRED	VENUE	COMMENTS	ACTION COMPLETED

Local/Feeder School Telephone Numbers

<b>Local Catholic Schools</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Telephone</b>
<b>Local DEECD</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Telephone</b>
<b>Feeder Parishes</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Telephone</b>

## Staff Phone Tree



**Please note – people at the bottom of the phone tree call the Principal / Organiser to confirm information has passed through the tree.**

Record of Incoming Calls of Assistance / Condolences

<b>Time</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Phone No.</b>	<b>Offer/Message</b>	<b>Action Yes/No</b>

Record of Actions Completed  
(ONCE ACTION COMPLETED, RETURN FORM TO CI CONTROLLER)

---

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Action required:

Responsible Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Completed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Action Completed:  \_\_\_\_\_

---

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Action required:

Responsible Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Completed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Action Completed:  \_\_\_\_\_

---

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Action required:

Responsible Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Completed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Action Completed:  \_\_\_\_\_

## Post Incident Evaluation

<b><i>Purpose:</i></b>	Briefly record what happened taking into account CEOB policies.
<b><i>The event:</i></b>	Who was involved? Where? When? Who else was present?
<b><i>Response:</i></b>	Actions taken CEOB informed Interagency support Other important details
<b><i>Recovery:</i></b>	Current situation Future Actions
<b><i>Review:</i></b>	What worked well? Recommendations for change/improvement at school, Regional, central office, local community and interagency levels
<b><i>NB: Remember:</i></b>	Record factually correct information Avoid defamatory statements Avoid attributing motives or explanations for other people's behaviour The report is a legal record. As such it is discoverable under FOI

## Operational Debriefing

**PURPOSE:** A review of the management of an emergency or critical incident in order to affirm and reinforce what worked well, and refine and improve future processes and practice.

### The Course of Action

<b>Who?</b>	Key staff or entire staff to be involved? Include Regional Office and interagency partners
<b>When?</b>	School Principal will convene when the emergency or critical incident is declared over
<b>Where?</b>	Venue as agreed
<b>How?</b>	Independent facilitator (HR Manager or CEOB Psychologist.) Verbal format Brief introduction Formal sequential process, or informal small group discussion Ground rules? Confidentiality Time sequenced action input Recorder takes notes
<b>Outcome:</b>	Post Incident Report compiled Modification to EM plan Inform HR Manager of the Modifications
<b>Support:</b>	Counselling for students and staff Referrals to outside interagency partners Information session/newsletter for school community

### The Procedure

1. Introduction & Orientation (of those involved in accident)
2. Members share information and responses about the incident
3. The facts of incident as known (understand event)
4. Impact on those involved (students, teachers etc.)
5. Current Functioning of those involved
6. Can additional control measures be introduced
7. Changes identified and needed to present school emergency management service provision (Inform HR Manager of the changes)
8. Reaffirm that they are valued and important
9. Instil confidence in their ability to handle their reactions to this event and other similar events
10. Validate strengths and identify improvement opportunities, resulting in improved preparedness related to incident
11. Access additional support resources (critical incident supportive counselling/ACCESS)

## Medium Term Recovery

The primary goal in the medium term is to restore school routine whilst providing on-going support for those who need it. To ensure this occurs, the Critical Incident Team should continue to meet regularly.

### **School's Critical Incident Team**

- Keep the school community updated re the incident and the wellbeing of those involved
- Opportunity must be created for parents to discuss any change in their children's behaviour patterns
- Consider establishment of a parent forum
- Restore school to regular routine as soon as possible, whilst acknowledging that some variations are appropriate
- Provide a support room staffed by a counsellor to assist individual students who are distressed. This leaves classroom teachers free to focus on restoring the classroom to normality
- Review expectations regarding class work
- Provide advice on distinguishing between 'normal' reactions to the incident and those that may require referral
- Arrange for replacement teachers for the funeral etc
- Continue to monitor reactions of staff, students and parents and provide appropriate support (including any staff/students who may have been hospitalised, and those in caring roles)...
- Observe whether tensions develop between various groups of staff, students or parents
- Formally close any daily operational debriefing of staff and parents
- Acknowledge the offers of support and assistance provided

### **Classroom Tasks**

- If and when appropriate allow opportunities to talk about the incident and individual reactions, but limit this to specific times. The aim now is to re-establish a classroom routine.  
N.B. Although this is an important part of the recovery it must not be forced upon students
- Use specialist support staff for those who need it
- Monitor students' reactions for signs of distress
- If appropriate keep a scrap book of all relevant material

## Long Term Recovery

The initial responses to a critical incident are vital for the successful management of the event, but it is the recovery activities that primarily influence the extent to which individuals and groups will cope in the long term.

A common reaction to critical incidents by some individuals is to deny that the event has had any significant influence on them and consequently they overlook the value of external support.

Factors that have been found to minimise distress or trauma are:

- speed of response
- appropriate response
- opportunity to talk about the event and personal reactions to it, and
- on-going support

The following long-term activities need to be maintained for appropriate lengths of time:

- Continue to monitor students and staff for signs of abnormal reactions and report concerns to the principal/incident team member and where appropriate to parents/counsellor
- Provide a means for classroom activities to resolve any outstanding issues
- Co-ordinate appropriate commemorations e.g. plaques, gardens, tree planting etc. These are not encouraged where they romanticise a suicide
- Organise the time and ritual of closure for the critical incident response
- Set up a debriefing of the critical incident management team
- Invite guest speakers to help with closure (If necessary)
- Acknowledge the offers of support and assistance provided
- Document and evaluate the process and make the necessary changes to the critical incident management plan
- Modify structures and procedures where necessary
- Organise in-service training for changes to the plan
- Be alert and sensitive to the influences of anniversaries, inquests and legal proceedings and provide appropriate support
- Continue liaison with outside agencies and maintain contact networks
- Inform new staff members about the significance of the critical incident for individual students
- 

### Principal

- Monitor own wellbeing and take the necessary action
- Monitor staff for signs of undue stress and if appropriate seek the support of professional counselling if needed. Provide for increased teacher release time
- Monitor and support members of the school community
- Prepare people for any coronial inquests and legal proceedings, if required
- Review the curriculum and include or enhance life skills programmes and bereavement education where appropriate

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - Reactions to Trauma

	Reactions to Trauma	Page Number
A1	Information for Teachers and Parents	27
A2	Helping your Children Manage Distress after a Traumatic Event	29
A3	Trauma and Teenagers – common reactions	31
A4	Discussing a Critical Incident with the Class	34
A5	Responding to Violence	35

## Appendix A1: Information for Teachers and Parents

(From Managing School Emergencies, Department of Education, Victoria)

When trauma strikes, our usual ways of coping and behaving can be thrown into turmoil. It is helpful to know that many of the unaccustomed reactions and emotions being shown are generally **NORMAL** reactions to **ABNORMAL** events.

### **SOME COMMON REACTIONS FOLLOWING TRAUMA**

#### **Lower Primary**

- Generalised fear e.g. anxieties due to incomplete understanding, fear of recurrence
- Sleep disturbances e.g. nightmares, afraid to go to sleep
- Anxious attachment e.g. clinging, not wanting to be separated
- Regressive symptoms e.g. thumb sucking, bed wetting
- Cognitive confusion e.g. does not understand that the event is over
- Intermittent or seemingly inappropriate reactions e.g. emotions not sustained
- Lack of verbalisation e.g. repetitive nonverbal play, unable to talk about their worries

#### **In Upper Primary School Children**

- Preoccupation with their own actions during the event
- Specific fears triggered by traumatic reminders
- Retelling and replaying of the event e.g. traumatic play, obsessive detailing
- Interference with concentration and learning
- Afraid of their emotions e.g. afraid to cry, to be angry
- Different and inconsistent behaviour e.g. aggression or inhibition
- Sleep disturbance

### **In Adolescents**

- Self-consciousness about their emotional responses e.g. afraid of being labelled abnormal
- Anger e.g. desire for revenge, rebellious behaviour
- Work deterioration e.g. lack of concentration, daydreaming
- Inappropriate laughter, hysteria - especially in a group situation
- Denial, guilt, disbelief, confusion
- Loss of motivation or interest in school, or truancy

### **In Adults**

- Delayed and/or cumulative stress reactions which may be intensified by the return of emotions from past or unrelated crises
- Flashbacks, sleep disturbances and seemingly irrational behaviour
- Loss of a sense of security, confidence, trust e.g. detachment from other, preoccupation with the event
- Emotional turbulence e.g. anger, guilt, irritability, depression
- Somatic complaints, e.g. nausea, breathlessness, shaking, muscular tension

## Appendix A2: Helping your children manage distress after a traumatic event

([www.apce.org/helpcentre/aftermath.aspx](http://www.apce.org/helpcentre/aftermath.aspx))

As a parent, you may be struggling with how to talk with your children following a traumatic event. It is important to remember that children look to parents to make them feel safe. This is true no matter what age your children are, be they toddlers, adolescents or even young adults.

### **Consider the following tips for helping your children manage their distress.**

**Talk with your child.** Talking to your children about their worries and concerns is the first step to help them feel safe and begin to cope with the events occurring around them.

- Find times when they are most likely to talk: such as rising in the car, before dinner, or at bedtime
- Start the conversation; let them know you are interested in them and how they are coping with the information they are getting
- Listen to their thoughts and point of view; don't interrupt – allow them to express their ideas and understanding before you respond
- Express your own opinions and ideas without putting down theirs; acknowledge that it is okay to disagree
- Remind them you are there for them to provide safety, comfort and support. Give them a hug

**Keep home a safe place.** Children, regardless of age, often find home to be a safe haven when the world around them becomes overwhelming. During times of crisis, it is important to remember that your children may come home seeking the safe feeling they have being there. Help make it a place where your children find the solitude or comfort they need. Plan a night where everyone participates in a favourite family activity.

**Watch for signs of stress, fear or anxiety.** After a traumatic event, it is typical for children (and adults) to experience a wide range of emotions, including fearfulness, shock, anger and anxiety. Your children's behaviours may change because of their response to the event. They may experience trouble sleeping, difficulty with concentrating on school work or changes in appetite. This is normal for everyone and should begin to disappear in a few months. Encourage your children to put their feelings in words by talking about them or journaling. Some children may find it helpful to express their feelings through art.

**Take “news breaks.”** Your children may want to keep informed by gathering information about the event from the internet, television, or newspapers. It is important to limit the amount of time spent watching the news because constant exposure may actually heighten their anxiety and fears. Also, scheduling some breaks for yourself is important; allow yourself time to engage in the activities you enjoy.

**Take care of yourself.** Take care of yourself so that you can take care of your children. Be a model for your children on how to manage traumatic events. Keep regular schedules for activities such as family meals and exercise to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.

These tips and strategies can help you guide your children through the current crisis. If you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed, you may want to consider talking to someone who could help.

A professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to get professional help if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living.

(Adapted from: Psychologists Ronald S. Palomares, PhD, and Lynn F. Bufka, PhD)

## Appendix A3: Trauma and teenagers – common reactions

This fact sheet was taken from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au))

### **Fact Sheet**

Teenagers who experience a distressing or frightening event can be concerned by the strong emotions they feel. Examples of such events include car accidents, bushfires, floods, sudden illness or traumatic death in the family, crime or violence.

Teenagers can also be deeply upset by local, national or international tragedies, or trauma that affects their friends. Your teenager will handle trauma differently to younger children or adults. A younger child depends directly on their family, whereas many teenagers look to their peer group for support. In order to help them, parents need to understand the ways in which teenagers manage distress.

### **Common reactions in teenagers**

Every young person is different, but common symptoms of distress include:

- Strong emotions including sadness, anger, anxiety and guilt
- Overreacting to minor irritations
- Constantly thinking about the traumatic event and the need to talk about it often
- Problems going to sleep, staying asleep or sleeping more than usual
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Wanting to spend more time alone
- Needing to be close to the family
- Returning to younger ways of behaving, giving up responsibilities, wanting to be looked after and needing comfort or reassurance
- Increased need for independence
- Sudden rebellious behaviour
- Self-absorption and caring only about what is immediately important to them
- Loss of interest in life, school, friends and hobbies
- Pessimistic outlook on life, being cynical and distrusting others
- Depression and feelings of hopelessness
- Difficulties with short-term memory, concentration and problem solving.

### **Adolescence and independence**

The transition from child to adult can be rocky. A teenager may lose the confidence they had as a child. Unlike a younger child, a teenager isn't as dependent on the family. A younger child realises they couldn't survive without their parents, whereas a teenager is more aware of their ability to make it 'on their own'.

Friends and peer groups are very important. By comparing themselves with their friends, a teenager gets a sense of how 'normal' they are. Teenagers tend to seesaw between independence and insecurity after a distressing event. This sort of contradictory behaviour can be confusing to the teenager and to parents trying to help them.

### **Teenagers don't always talk to their parents**

A teenager may be deeply upset by the event, but not want to share their feelings with parents. Some reasons for this could include that they:

- Need more time to absorb what has happened
- Don't want to acknowledge the event by talking about it
- Don't want to upset their parents
- Want to be strong for parents and other family members
- Don't think their parents will understand them
- Think parents will tell them what to feel or what to do
- Don't agree with their parents' point of view on the event
- Prefer to talk to their peers about it
- Find that peers help take their mind off it
- Feel confused about how they think and feel about the event
- Don't know how to express complicated, unfamiliar thoughts
- Are frightened of strong feelings and fear they are 'going mad'
- Would rather distract themselves than think about the event
- Already have a problem with communication before the event

### **Family problems**

Family problems can occur if:

- The family doesn't talk about the event
- The family misunderstands the teenager's behaviour and assumes the teenager is just being difficult or taking advantage of the situation
- Parents try to keep the teenager from their peer group or criticise their choice of friends
- Parents feel hurt or angry because the teenager prefers to talk to friends about the event rather than the family
- The family argues over different points of view
- Parents try to get emotional support from the teenager

### **Supporting teenagers**

Recovery is supported and teenagers are often helped by small gestures and allowing them to take their own time.

- Encourage communication without judging or advising until asked
- Show them you care, are interested and enjoy being with them
- Negotiate changes in roles and responsibilities during recovery
- Continue to give love, support and trust even if things are difficult
- Remember your teenager is the same person they were before the event, even if they seem different

### **Seek professional help**

Signs that your teenager or family could benefit from professional help include:

- Your teenager's behaviour doesn't make sense to you
- Their behaviour is dangerous, reckless or harmful
- They seem persistently depressed or anxious
- They start abusing substances, such as cigarettes or alcohol, or their use increases dramatically
- They won't communicate about where they're going, what they're doing or how they're feeling
- They don't seem to be showing any signs of recovery
- You are worried about them for any reason at all

***If at any time you are worried about your mental health or the mental health of a loved one, call Lifeline 13 11 14.***

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Counsellor
- Psychologist
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
- Parentline Tel. 13 22 89
- Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 55 1800
- Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Australian Psychological Society Referral Service Tel. 1800 333 497

### **Things to remember**

- Teenagers tend to seesaw between independence and insecurity after a distressing event
- A teenager may be deeply upset by such an event, but not share their feelings with their parents
- Seek professional advice if you are worried about your teenager

## Appendix A4: Discussing a Critical Incident with Classes

(From Managing School Emergencies Department of Education, Victoria)

### **Practical ideas for use with all groups**

- Let the students tell their understandings of what happened
- Discuss what actually happened: give facts, and sort out rumours from facts (keeping in mind the age / maturity of students)
- Allow discussion time:
  - e.g.      Where were you when it happened?
    - How did you find out?
    - What did you feel? / How might significant others feel?
    - What rumours have you heard about the fire/accident/ etc
- The attribution of blame can be quite difficult to handle. Instead, try to incorporate discussion of what can constructively be done now
- Some students like to write or draw - to recall events, people, emotions. Clay is also a useful medium
- Help the class and teachers plan how they will reintroduce and support survivors/victims when the return to school or during their absence (e.g. letters, drawings, company etc.)

## Appendix A5: Responding to Violence

(From Willamette Regional Education Service – Student Support Room)

Violence (a murder, a drive-by shooting, a knifing) generally takes away a feeling of safety about life that we normally have. When violence occurs away from the school that results in serious injury or death of student or staff member, the effect on the school community can be very profound. Normal concern or grieving will likely be complicated by shock and disbelief and by anxiousness on the part of students and/or staff regarding their own safety.

It is important for the school to appropriately share accurate information with staff and students as the school receives it. This reduces rumours that can further destabilize the school community. If a student or staff member has been seriously injured, updates about their condition are important. If the perpetrator has been taken into custody that is important news to share. If police officers or investigators are going to be on campus, that is important news to share.

In responding to individual staff members or students, members of the support team can help them with both safety issues and grief issues. As a responder, you can't supply a sense of safety, but you can help the person you are talking with to rediscover it for him or herself. Asking questions can help this process, e.g. Are you scared at all right now? Are you worried that this (violence) could happen to you or to someone else you know or care about? What do you think is the likelihood that it (violence) could happen again? What would help you feel safe right now? How are you planning to take care of yourself or get support after school is over today? If the perpetrator is in custody, that can be reassuring. In general, while you can't be totally reassuring, you can note the rarity of such violence and the unlikelihood of its recurrence.

If the perpetrator of the violence was a student or staff member, the feelings of lack of safety will likely be even more intense. Those who have a friendship with the perpetrator may be especially affected and may question their own judgment and the wisdom of trusting others. Acknowledging this feeling, you can note that no one can totally know another person and that no one can be expected to know what another person might choose to do. Stress the rarity of such behaviour. Note that those who commit violence have many aspects to their personality and that the person you are talking with was connected to the positive aspects of that person.

## **Violence Occurring at School**

If violence occurs at school that results in serious injury or death, the effect on the school community is immediate and potentially devastating. The effect on individuals depends on the amount and degree of violence.

In the instance of violence at school, the school's duty is to keep students safe, assist the victim or victims and cooperate with law enforcement in apprehending the perpetrator. Hopefully the school has a crisis plan for such an eventuality. Depending on the situation, the school might deem it necessary to cease normal operations and evacuate the school in an orderly fashion.

When responding in the aftermath of such an event, especially if a student or staff member has been killed it is important for the response team's leadership to establish a working relationship with the police or other official personnel who may be on campus. Management of the media by the school is especially important. Support team size should be larger (the need is greater and the presence of many adults on campus is reassuring to all) and depending on the situation, an ample number of personnel who have been trained to do trauma debriefing should be present to support those traumatized by the violent event.

## Appendix B – Dealing with Loss and Grief

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## Appendix B1: Experiences of Grief



It is important to understand the various experiences of grief. The graph gives the picture of grief, but it may be misleading. Everyone does not necessarily go through every experience, nor do they go through them in any set order. Each person has his or her own timetable and his or her own style of grief. You may struggle with several feelings at the same time.

The depth and duration of each experience is different for everyone. You may experience a feeling briefly, intermittently or struggle with it daily. Understanding the various phases helps you to cope. Knowing that others have gone through this pain and have eventually been able to reinvest themselves in life gives one a sense of HOPE.

## Appendix B2: Reactions to Grief or Loss

When students are of an age where they are capable of thinking abstractly about death, with support, they normally are able to progress through the four main tasks of mourning:

- Accepting the reality of the loss.
- Dealing with the pain of grief.
- Adjusting to the environment without the lost person or possession.
- Withdrawing emotional energy and re-investing that energy in another relationship.

Thought patterns which mark the early stage of grieving are disbelief, helplessness, confusion, preoccupation and sometimes a sense of presence of the deceased and hallucinations. These may be accompanied by frequent crying and the treasuring of objects which belonged to the deceased.

Behaviours following a bereavement are similar to those which may occur after a traumatic incident. However, where grief is acute some physical sensations may be apparent:

- Hollowness in the stomach
- Tightness in the chest and/or throat
- Dry mouth
- Over-sensitivity to noise
- Sense of depersonalisation where nothing seems real
- Breathlessness, sighing
- Lack of energy

When grieving is associated with a traumatic experience, reactions to the shock of the trauma tend to dominate and the grief process may not properly begin for several weeks.

Students in the early teens may wish to explore philosophical or religious questions about death. While peers are the most probable target for these discussions, teachers and parents may be approached about this issue.

## Appendix B3: Emotional Responses People may Experience after a Loss

### **SHOCK AND DENIAL**

- Usually happens immediately
- Generally does not persist, but gives way to next step

### **DISTRESS**

Has several components:

- Fear and Anxiety - that it may happen again
- Anger or Rage - at the source of the disaster – why me/us?
- Helplessness - nothing can be done  
- not within our control
- Guilt - because of real or imagined responsibility  
- sometimes those not affected feel guilty  
- because of possible excitement/fantasies about the death  
(young children find it hard to separate fantasy and reality)
- Depression - reaction to realistic sense of loss

### **ACCEPTANCE**

- When earlier feelings are sufficiently expressed, the individual is able to feel acceptance and resignation

Learning to face loss and disappointment is an important developmental task in children growing up.

## Appendix B4: Information for Parents and Teachers of Children Affected by the Death of a Child

(Source unknown)

Parents also have a reaction to trauma. Your own reaction may make it harder to respond to your child's reaction; sometimes it may help you to understand your child.

- Often children experience considerable insecurity about this situation that adults were powerless to prevent. Some behaviours may regress, e.g. bed-wetting, wanting to sleep with parents etc
- Try to re-establish as "normal" a routine as soon as possible. In the transition period children may test out "the rules" of good behaviour to see if some rules still apply
- Children are likely to require lots of reassurance, adult understanding and attention. Allow them to express their reactions, their grief (anger, frustration) at the loss. But, **do not force expression:** it may come out in non-verbal ways like drawing, actions (in games). Very young children often will talk in abstract ways (the "thing" or monsters)
- Handle any problem in a supportive, matter of fact way. Do not over-emphasize problems
- Bizarre or aggressive games or fantasies are possible. These are quite normal, and if not over-reacted to, are likely to disappear. Talking and drawing are good outlets. Of course, if any physical harm appears likely (in games), intervene as per usual
- Some reactions may appear weeks/months later and could be triggered by another loss. Children will grieve more intermittently and over a longer period of time than an adult. The intensity of the emotions cannot be sustained for very long, so children will let the grief go, then come back to it in small spurts
- LISTEN..... REASSURE..... RE-ESTABLISH NORMALITY..... ALLOW EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS.
- Children's questions can be answered simply and directly. If the question is too hard, feels inappropriate or you find it very distressing to answer, asking the child what they think the answer to their question is, can help you and the child begin to discuss the feeling behind the question being asked
- Some people decide that they will only discuss the issue with a child if and when the child raises it. Other people decide that raising the issue themselves gives the child permission to talk (because a child isn't talking about the loss, doesn't mean the child isn't thinking about it). The view you take will depend on your own personality and experience

## Appendix B5: Supporting Children Following Grief or Trauma

(From "National Association for Victim Assistance", Washington DC, [www.try-nova.org](http://www.try-nova.org))

**Rebuild and reaffirm attachments and relationships.** Love and care in the family is a primary need. Extra time should be spent with children to let them know that someone will take care of them and, if parents are survivors that their parents have reassumed their former role of protector and nurturer is important. Physical closeness is needed.

**It is important to let children talk about a tragedy** - to address the irrationality and suddenness of disaster. Children need to be allowed to air their feelings, as do adults, and they have a similar need to have those feelings aired. Reenactments and play about a catastrophe should be encouraged. It may be useful to provide them with special time to paint, draw, or write about the event. Adults or older children may help pre-school children reenact the event since pre-school children may not be able to imagine alternative "endings" to the disaster and hence may feel particularly helpless.

**Parents / Caregivers (and teachers) should be prepared to tolerate regressive behaviours** and accept the manifestation of aggression and anger, especially in the early phases after the tragedy.

**Parents should be prepared for children to talk sporadically about the event** spending small segments of time concentrating on particular aspects of the tragedy.

**Children want as much factual information as possible** and should be allowed to discuss their own feelings about what happened in order for them to begin to master the trauma or to reassert control over their environment.

**Since children are often reluctant to initiate conversations about trauma** it may be helpful to ask them what they think other children felt or thought about the event.

**Reaffirming the future** and talking in "hopeful" terms about future events can help a child rebuild trust and faith in his/her own future and the world. Often parental despair interferes with a child's ability to recover.

**Issues of death should be addressed concretely.** The child is not to blame for others' deaths. The death is not a rejection of the child. Death is permanent and sad. The grieving process should be acknowledged and shared.

**We help others by being:**

- Honest, empathic, caring and patient as we listen to people share their grief
- Willing to suggest alternatives and encourage people to explore them. e.g. Seek help from friends and/or counsellors when it seems that the healing is not proceeding
- Able to grieve with others and understand their different needs and modes
- Accepting of tears, and recurring pangs of intense pain, loneliness
- Prepared to give people space, and continue to maintain contact over a period of time
- Accepting if people decline our invitations
- Prepared to take the initiative on others' behalf (especially in the early days of severe loss). Answer your telephone, run errands and prepare meals
- Able to disclose some of your own deep experiences of loss so that others' reactions to loss are seen to be normal and okay

**How we can help ourselves?**

- Accept the reality of the loss and give oneself permission to experience the full pain of that loss
- Come to terms with an environment that is now forever changed
- Reinvest in life by developing new interests, friends and other opportunities
- Seek help from friends and/or counsellors when healing is not proceeding or consider becoming involved in a community support group
- Give oneself time for the healing to take place
- Be kind to oneself and pamper oneself
- Forgive oneself and others for the pain, the failure and the guilt of the past
- Regain strength through adequate rest, relaxation and meditation
- Seek assistance through exercise, read helpful books, music and hobbies
- Ensure one has an adequate diet
- Accept as normal the strong negative feelings that are experienced
- See the loss within the context of one's own faith, religious beliefs and philosophy on life, and derive comfort and assurance from one's faith

## **BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES (our own and others) THAT DO NOT HELP PEOPLE COPE WITH LOSS AND GRIEF**

- Being told to be brave when you feel weak
- Being told to hurry up with the grieving and get on with living
- Not being permitted to talk about the loss experienced
- When others suggest to you that it is wrong for you to feel angry, guilty, resentful, anxious or helpless
- When what has been lost is idealised by others, e.g. as though the deceased person was perfect in every way
- When you think that others can grieve for you
- When you see an alternative to grief work in drugs, unceasing activity, punishing yourself or investing too quickly in another relationship
- When you live with the fear that you will never recover and never again find any joy in life (panic and anxiety)
- Being obsessed with finding rational explanations for life's tragedies
- Avoiding help when troubled by your guilt, hostility or physical problems
- Considering yourself abnormal because your experiences are different from others

## Appendix B6.1: Early Childhood

### 6 - 9 years (concrete reasoning). These students...

- tend to personify death (death angel)
- become superstitious, lots of ghost stories (chants, oaths)
- associate death with non-movement (the dead can't talk, move, walk)
- begin to explore concepts of death relative to family ('one day mum will die')
- may experience sadness in anticipation of deaths that are not imminent
- believe it will happen to others, not themselves
- moving away from magical thinking towards grasping concepts of finality and irreversibility
- may have a fascination with death, killing
- may have morbid fascination with death rituals, dreams of death and resurrection
- material facts around the death may seem funny

### Symptoms

Regressive	Physical	Emotional
Increased competitive behaviour	Head aches	Withdrawal
Attention demands	Stomach aches, nausea	Shift in social behaviour
Lack of verbalisation	Sleep disorders	Difficulty in concentrating
	Changes in appetite	Excessive concern for others
	Dizziness	Difficulty coping with change
	Bowel and bladder Problems	Uncooperative
	Small ailments	
	Clingy, tearful	
	Lies, generalised anger	

**Support for these students requires:**

- Rest, comfort
- Reduction of demands / expectations
- Encouragement of normal routines and responsibilities.
- Keeping change to a minimum and preparing them for it.
- Age-appropriate information about the death.
- Provision of language/labels for reactions/feelings.
- Provision of opportunity to talk about thoughts / feelings.
- Enabling child to let significant others know about the death.
- Opportunity to draw, play.

## Appendix B6.2: Pre-Adolescence

### 9 -12 years (abstract thinking) are...

- more realistic sense about death – often, because of a pervasive fear of it, think death is sudden and unpredictable
- beginning to realise the universality of death
- fearful of the 'void' following death -inanimate suspension
- fearful of a painful death, poisoning, falling

### Symptoms

<b>Regressive</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Emotional</b>
Competing for parental attention Reappearance of earlier habits - speech, behaviour Fears about returning to school	Head aches Vague aches and pains Gastro-intestinal problems Skin rashes Sleep disorders Changes in appetite Visual/perceptual problems Reckless activity School refusal Anger, aggression Impaired memory	Loss of interest Difficulties with parents or siblings Ambivalence to authority Preoccupation with own role in the death/event Concern about own/others safety

**Support for these students requires:**

- Reduction of demands / expectations
- Encouragement to talk about thoughts/feelings - provide language/labels for reactions/feelings
- Provision for peer group activities
- Normal routines and activities
- Age-appropriate information about the death
- That distorted thinking be addressed
- Acknowledgement that it is normal to feel grief reactions
- A supportive environment that has a tolerance of expressions of anger, sadness, fear, guilt
- Encouragement to talk about thoughts / feelings
- Encouragement of child to let significant others know about the death
- Development a supportive network
- Help associating emotions and reactions with what has happened.

## Appendix B6.3: Adolescence

### 12 years onwards. These students...

- grow increasingly closer to adult views and experiences
- can begin to be philosophical in viewing death
- may idolise the deceased, especially if a friend, sibling or parent
- may experience conflict in needing to be growing towards independence (which is appropriate for this stage) while needing family support
- may have great fears of separation and non-existence
- may have radical changes in life attitudes

### Symptoms

Behaviour	Physical	Emotional
Decline in previous responsible behaviour	Head aches	Ambivalence towards authority
Decline in independence	Aches and pains	Feeling inadequate/helpless
Decline in typical dating/social interests	Gastro-intestinal problems	Difficulty concentrating
Poor school performance	Skin rashes	Withdrawal, suicidal ideation
Rebellion	Sleep disorders	Substance abuse
Increased risk-taking behaviour	Changes in appetite	Lack of affect
Marked increase/decrease in activity level		Sibling competition
		Detachment, shame, guilt
		Self-conscious about reactions
		Fear of labelling, being different

**Support**

- Discuss the experience - encourage talk about thoughts / feelings
- Explore fears, phobias
- Reduce demands / expectations
- Encourage peer group activities
- Encourage peer acceptance and understanding of emotional responses
- Provide information about safe ways to relieve psychological pain
- Link attitude changes to the loss / event
- Acknowledge the significance of the loss for them
- Encourage networking
- Help them hold onto positive memories
- Connect with significant adults

## Appendix B7: For School Staff: Responding to the Bereaved

One of the most difficult situations people have to face is knowing what to say to someone who has just suffered a major loss. It is normal to feel uncomfortable and awkward, but try not to let that prevent you from communicating that you care. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to pick an appropriate time or manner in which to do this, but the following general points may help.

- If a student has been killed or seriously injured, the school will need to acknowledge the loss directly – e.g. by a telephone call to the parents, followed by a visit at a time convenient to the family. Whilst this initial contact is extremely painful, a simple expression of sorrow, and your presence can be the beginning of coming to terms with the reality of the situation. Practical matters, such as the family’s funeral arrangements and religious considerations may need to be discussed, so that the school response can fit in. (Refer to Appendix D, page 82)
- When a student has been bereaved, some brief gentle words may help to ease his or her way back to class, and opportunities could be created for talking about it when the need arises, perhaps in a more private setting
- Avoid clichés and easy answers when talking with the bereaved about the loss. It may be best just to be prepared to listen - without changing the subject - as emotions are expressed, or to accept silence if the mourner doesn’t feel like talking. For some people, the need for a degree of privacy in their grief may mean making sure that you do not overwhelm them with pity, or probing as to how they are feeling or coping at times when all their emotional energy is needed just to be there
- Be aware that anger is a normal element of reaction to death, particularly following sudden or violent death. Accept this without judgment and without minimising. This is not a good time to try to reason - this will come later as the anger is spent
- It is important to keep treating the bereaved as normal people. Teenagers, especially often hate being singled out. They may, however appreciate you telling them that if they feel upset or overwhelmed during class they can quietly leave the room and you will understand
- When a friend or classmate has been killed, adolescents tend to get much support from each other, and this peer support can serve to help teenagers validate their emotions and experience. Very young children, too, may use their small playgroups to create informal rituals, such as playing “dead” games, or re-enacting their fantasies about the death. Both peer support and ritualistic behaviours are healthy characteristics of childhood grieving

- Do not be surprised if some groups of students react with noisy active behaviour such as macabre humour, aggression, or even regression. Grieving for them may come and go in waves, and dealing with intense emotions may lead to unexpected behaviours. Recognition of this, rather than reprimand, can assist students in understanding themselves
- Abnormal situations may stretch people's capacity to cope beyond its limits. Consider utilising outside consultants, to support any staff member who feels emotionally vulnerable in the difficult task of facing groups of students in the aftermath of a sudden death. The support person can assume control when needed, thereby allowing the teacher to express his or her own emotions if overwhelmed

## Appendix B8.1: Classroom Activities - General

Normal classroom routines may be disrupted, or even impossible, because of student preoccupation with what has happened. In such circumstances it may be appropriate for the class teacher, year level coordinator, or pastoral care teacher to organise some class or group activities that:

- allow students to express their thoughts and feelings about the trauma. With adolescents peer support is often most effective - the intrusion of adults, no matter how well-intentioned, can be counter-productive
- allow for varying levels of exposure to the trauma, and
- cater for non-verbal means of expressing emotions

**It is imperative that classroom activities are coordinated, especially in secondary schools where students have many teachers. Dwelling excessively on young peoples' grief or trauma reactions can be harmful.**

### **Commemoration Activities**

- Compile a collection of students' memories of their classmate - including things like favourite songs, colours, jokes, sayings or playthings. If appropriate, give them to the family or arrange a special corner of the school library as a place of tribute
- Encourage older students to organise a tribute or commemoration activity

### **Writing and Drawing Activities**

- Allow for the event to be incorporated into essays, creative writing, art work, discussions
- Invite students to write (or draw) about their activities during the general time of the incident, thereby allowing them to choose whether or not they will refer to it. Be alert to any personal issues about the trauma that may be revealed, and to previous losses/traumatic experiences that are rekindled by the current event
- Brainstorm with the group various adjectives and phrases that describe strong emotions, both positive and negative, making sure that all emotional labels are seen as acceptable when seeking to describe feelings. The list may be extended with some less common words, such as "ambivalent", or "distraught" so that more complex emotions can be identified

### **Closure Activities**

- Ask the class to plan something by way of restoration or prevention such as a new school wing, an evacuation shelter or maybe a wilderness survival kit
- In the case of a natural disaster, discuss the scientific details of what caused the event, and use this to look into prevention issues
- Incorporate discussion on reactions to crises and how people cope, into curriculum areas such as English, Religious Education, Health Education, Pre-driver Education, or Personal Development

## Appendix B8.2: Activities for Processing Loss & Grief- Primary School Years P- 6

(From Willamette Regional Education Service)

**Letters of sympathy and appreciation.** This is an opportunity for youth to process their "unfinished business" by getting clear about anything which is fostering feelings of guilt as well as helping them begin to get in touch with the wonderful things about that person that they will miss.

**Planning of a memorial activity.** This can be something that happens either in or out of the safe room environment. That should be determined independently with each crisis. There could be one person from the building assigned to coordinate the memorial activity efforts. Students need to be aware of how they can be involved in this.

**Feelings list.** Students generate a list of feelings that are written on the board. Make a second list of what we can "do" or how to express those feelings. Do not expect immediate resolution of grief issues. In this type of discussion, you can also point out that it is an opportunity to make choices about how to solve problems and how we will share serious feelings. This may be a new experience for many students.

**Create a mural.** Put up huge pieces of newsprint roll or butcher paper on the walls and let the students create a mural of their thoughts and feelings.

**Invite a specific outside person to talk.** It may be helpful to have a specific person come in to process this event with the students. e.g. a nurse could describe material facts about a particular death or illness, or a paramedic who was at the scene can help dispel rumours.

**Drawing happy memories of the person.** This internalises that the love does not die.

**Think of analogies** that make sense to the developmental age of the students and encourage them to draw pictures which represent grief, loss or sadness, e.g. "Every time someone dies it is as though we have a bucket of tears inside us. Draw yourself and the bucket inside you. How high is the level of tears?" or "If sadness were an animal, what would it look like?" or "If we could do all of our grieving on a special island, what would that island have on it?"

**Do lifelines.** Hang a long piece of butcher paper on the wall, and invite students to draw a long line representing their lives, and let each one note significant life events, both happy and difficult, along the line. This helps them find balance in their lives.

**Create a "question wall".** Students write their life questions on paper and place them on a "Question Wall." The questions are asked of the group. As questions are answered or discussed through group dialogue or activity, remove the question and replace it with a new one.

**Create a treasure box, a memory book or some other means of saving or keeping the memories of a loved one alive.** Create a place to put special things that belonged to the person or writings and pictures of him/her. The memory book could be something the child writes in or could be something that is passed around to many who knew the person who died. Many people could put their memories down so the child has these for later years.

## Appendix B8.3: Activities for Processing Loss & Grief- High School Years 7 - 8

**Cards and letters to the family.** Youth can share their sympathy with the family by sharing a happy memory or attribute about the deceased either in words or by drawing a picture. These must be screened by an adult to be certain that what goes out to the family is appropriate.

**Create a memory bulletin board** that is accessible to all students to display special pictures or poems written about this tragedy. Screen contributions for appropriateness before posting.

**Give it all a story.** This is a series of three pictures which begins by drawing what life was like before the event, and then a picture of what happened/how they were hurt/bothered, etc. The last picture is one of what will need to happen for them to make that shift or change.

**Create a treasure box, a memory book or another means of retaining the memories of a loved.** This is a place to put special things that belonged to the person, or writings and pictures of him/her. The memory book could be written in by a child or the many people who know the person.

**Art supplies and butcher paper or poster paper.** Often students want to make a giant poster that expresses their loss. This is something a whole group can do.

**Letters of regret and appreciation.** This is an opportunity for youth to process their "unfinished business" by getting clear about anything that is fostering feelings of guilt as well as helping them begin to get in touch with the wonderful things about that person that they will miss. .

**Planning of the memorial activity.** This can happen either in or out of the classroom environment. There could be one person from the building assigned to coordinate the memorial activity efforts. Students need to be aware of how they can be involved in this.

**Feelings List.** Students generate a list of feelings that are written on the board. Make a second list of what we can "do" or ways of expressing those feelings. Point out that it is an opportunity to make choices about how to solve problems and how we will share serious feelings.

**Create a mural.** Put up large pieces of newsprint roll or butcher paper on the walls and let the students create a mural of their thoughts and feelings.

**Invite a specific outside person to talk.** It may be helpful to have a person come in to process this event with the students, e.g. a nurse could describe material facts about a particular death or illness, or a paramedic who was at the scene could help dispel rumours.

**Drawing happy memories of the person.** This internalises that love does not die. Think of analogies that make sense to the developmental age of the students and encourage them to draw pictures which represent grief, loss or sadness.

**Lifelines.** Hang a long piece of butcher paper on the wall, and invite the students to draw a long line representing their lives, and let each one note significant life events, both "good and bad" (or happy and difficult) along the line. Help them see what balance you can find in their lives, and similar experiences between students.

**Create a "question wall".** Students write their life questions on paper and place them on a "Question Wall." The question is then asked of the group. As questions are answered or discussed through group dialogue or activity, remove the question and replace it with a new one.

## Appendix B8.4: Activities for Processing Loss & Grief- High School Years 9 - 12

**Letters of regret and appreciation.** This is an opportunity for youth to process their "unfinished business" by getting clear about anything that is fostering feelings of guilt as well as helping them begin to get in touch with the wonderful things about that person that they will miss.

**Cards and letters to the family.** Youth can share their sympathy with the family by sharing a happy memory or attribute about the deceased either in words or by drawing a picture. These must be checked by an adult to be certain that what goes out to the family is appropriate. (Ensure that students are informed that this checking process will occur)

**Create a memory bulletin board** that is accessible to all students to display special pictures or poems they write about this tragedy. Check contributions for appropriateness before posting. (Ensure that students are informed that this checking process will occur)

**Create a treasure box, a memory book or another means of retaining the memories of a loved.** This is a place to put special things that belonged to the person, or writings and pictures of him/her. The memory book could be written in by the children or the many people who knew the person.

**Art supplies and butcher paper or poster paper.** Often students want to make a giant poster that expresses their loss. This is something a whole group could do.

**Planning of the memorial activity.** This could happen either in or out of the classroom environment. There could be one person from the building assigned to coordinate the memorial activity efforts. Students need to be aware of how they could be involved in this.

**Create a mural.** Put up huge pieces of newsprint roll or butcher paper on the walls and let the students create a mural of their thoughts and feelings.

**Invite a specific outside person to talk.** It may be helpful to have a person come in to process this event with the students, e.g. a nurse could describe material facts about a particular death or illness, or a paramedic could help dispel rumours.

**Drawing happy memories of the person.** This internalises that love does not die. Think of analogies that make sense to the developmental age of the students and encourage them to draw pictures which represent grief, loss or sadness.

**Lifelines.** Hang a long piece of butcher paper on the wall, and invite the students to draw a long line representing their lives, and let each one note significant life events, both "good and bad" (or happy and difficult) along the line. Help them see what balance you can find in their lives, and similar experiences between students.

**Create a "question wall".** Students write their life questions on paper and place them on a "Question Wall." The question is then asked of the group. As questions are answered or discussed through group dialogue or activity, remove the question and replace it with a new one.

**Wise Board.** On the chalkboard, put quotes, topics, questions related to their grief experience and tell students they are free to express their feelings through art. Use crayons, paints, coloured paper, magazines, scissors, musical sheets, glue, etc.

## Appendix C – Religious Education Centre Resources

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## Appendix C1: Picture Story Books for all Ages

Bahr, M. (2000). *If Nathan were here*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

If Nathan were here, there are so many things we would do. We'd spy on his sister, we'd eat berries from the neighbour's yard and we'd laugh. Nathan could always make people laugh. Even our teacher! But Nathan isn't here. I am on my own.

Dumbleton, Mike. (2001). *Passing on*. Milsons Point, N.S.W: Random House.

A grandmother and her young grandchild treasure the time they have together. The wonderful hours spent reading, fishing and paddling in the sea will always be remembered. An uplifting story about a relationship that never dies, even after grandmother does die.

Hanson, Warren. (1997). *The next place*. Golden Valley, MN: Waldman House Press.

"The Next Place" is an inspirational journey of light and hope to a place where earthly hurts are left behind. An uncomplicated journey of awe and wonder to a destination without barriers.

Hathorn, Libby. (1994). *Grandma's Shoes*. Ringwood, Vic: Penguin.

The child does not want to share her room with her little sister when Grandma dies. Finding some left-behind shoes of grandma's she takes thrilling journeys. Finally she comes face to face with her grandmother, only to be told she must go back. Her grandma also tells her lovingly that she must wait until her feet are large enough to properly fit the shoes before wearing them again. Caroline Magerl's soft water colours enhance the sensitivities of the text.

Mellonie, Bryan. (1989). *Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between*. Ringwood, Vic: Penguin.

There is a beginning and an ending to everything that is alive. In between is a lifetime. It is the same for plants and animals, even for the tiniest insects. Lifetimes is important for everyone because it helps us to remember, to understand, and to explain that dying is as much a part of living as being born.

Norman, Lilith. (1998). *Grandpa*. Sydney: Margaret Hamilton Books.

The powerful opening sentence "My Grandpa died last Saturday" pulls on your heart strings, enticing you to find out how the story will unfold.

The sadness you feel when losing a grandparent is often expressed through remembering the good and the difficult times shared with that person. Lilith Norman has taken this idea and written a story that is both realistic and convincing - portraying the changes and emotions experienced by a family when an elderly relative comes to stay.

Rock, Lois. (2004). *When goodbye is forever*. Oxford: Lion.

When Goodbye is For Ever by Lois Rock is written for infant children. This book has lovely bright pictures and simple text to understand. The story tackles the topic of bereavement through a series of goodbyes. On the back it says 'This book will help you find hope when you have to say the hardest goodbye of all'.

Stickney, Doris. (1982). ***Water bugs and dragonflies: explaining death to young children***. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press.

How can we answer the many questions young children have about death? Looking for a meaningful way to explain to neighbourhood children the death of a five-year-old friend, Doris Stickney adapted the graceful fable about the water bug that changed into a dragonfly.

Weigelt, Udo. (2003). ***Bears last journey***. New York: North-South Books.

A story of how Fox and the other forest animals deal with the loss of their friend is a moving story about death, grieving, and the solace to be found in memory.

Wild, Margaret. (1999). ***Jenny angel***. Ringwood, Vic: Viking.

Jenny's little brother Davy is very ill and her mother says that no one will be able to keep him alive. But Jenny thinks that as long as she watches over Davy, nothing can happen. An emotionally charged story about a young girl's courageous stand, and the uncertainty and beauty of life.

Wild, Margaret. (1995). ***Old Pig***. St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.

Old Pig and Granddaughter have lived together for a long, long time. They share everything, including the chores, until the day when Old Pig does not get up as usual for breakfast. Calmly she puts her affairs in order, then she takes Granddaughter on a last long walk - looking and listening, smelling and tasting. Old Pig and Granddaughter say goodbye in the best way they know. A tender story of living and loving, giving and receiving a glorious celebration of the world.

Wood, D. (1999). ***Grandad's prayers of the earth***. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Because Grandad has explained how all things in the natural world pray and make a gift to the beauty of life, his grandson is comforted when Grandad dies.

## Appendix C2: Videos for Children

### ***The fall of Freddy the leaf: a story of life for all ages.***

Freddie is a handsome leaf whose life has meaning for us all.

"I recommend it for young children, for classroom use and for parent-teacher association meetings to make both parents and children more familiar with the still often tabooed subject of death."  
Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

Level:-Middle primary+

Year:-1985

Duration:-16 min.

### ***Inside your feelings: children dealing with loss and grief.***

This video teaches children about normal responses to separation and loss, encourages them to understand their feelings and provides them with a range of strategies for dealing with these feelings. It can be used in counselling or classroom settings.

Level:-Primary – Adult

Year:-1996

Duration:-20 min

### ***The tenth good thing about Barney.***

"A lovely movie to help children come to grips with the death of a pet. It is a good preparation to bring up the issue of death and dying in little children and is done sensitively and lovingly." Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

Level:-Primary

Year:-1986

Duration:-13 min.

## Appendix C3: Videos for Adults

### ***Inside your feelings***

This video teaches children about normal responses to separation and loss, encourages them to understand their feelings and provides them with a range of strategies for dealing with these feelings. It can be used in counselling or classroom settings.

Level:-Primary – Adult

Year:-1996

Duration:-20 min

### ***A new road to grief recovery.***

Session 1 - Keys to Recovery. Discusses realistic recovery expectations and the importance of support environment.

Session 2 - The Child's Grief Recovery. Focuses on healthy coping skills to aid in children's grief work.

Session 3 - Young Widow with Eleven-month-old Son. Affirms the importance of care - givers.

Level:-Adult

Duration:-15 min. X 3

### ***Shadowlands.***

The spiritual crisis faced by C S Lewis when his wife died from cancer is depicted in this British Academy award winning film. Lewis questions his Christian beliefs as he experiences the grief of the loss of his wife. He eventually comes to terms with his grief and regains his faith.

Level:-Senior Secondary+

Year:-1985

Duration:-75 min.

### ***Tuesdays with Morrie.***

Based on the book by Mitch Albom. Introduced by Oprah Winfrey. University Professor Morrie Swartz is dying. He wants to spread a message to the world about the importance of living life to the full. Mitch, a former student visits Morrie every Tuesday. Morrie's lessons on life speak of challenge and struggle, of love and death. Mitch struggles to apply these lessons to his own life.

Level:-Adult

Year:-2001

Duration:-86 min.

## Appendix C4: Prayer and Liturgy

### **BOOKS**

#### **AT THE DEATH OF A GRANDPARENT / GRANDFRIEND.**

Abbott, M. (2003). *Sparks of life: rituals for children*. Unley, S.A.: MediaCom.

#### **PRAYERS FOR SICK RELATIVES**

Bretherton, B. (1999). *Prayers at your fingertips: everyday personal and communal prayers for classroom and staffroom, chapel and home*. Katoomba, N.S.W.: Social Science Press.

#### **ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS**

Eilich, T. (Ed.). (1996). *Life is changed not ended: a workbook for preparing a Catholic funeral*. Brisbane: Liturgical Commission.

Piil, M.A. (1997). *A ministry of consolation: involving your parish in the order of Christian funerals*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

#### **DEATH OF A PUPIL / STAFF MEMBER / FRIEND OF SCHOOL/NATIONAL GRIEF**

Glassock, G. (1992). *Learning to grieve: life skills for coping with life losses: for high school classes*. Newtown, N.S.W.: Millenium Books.

#### **VOICES OF GRIEF, VOICES OF HEALING**

O'Brien, M. (1997). *Praying through grief: healing prayer services for those who mourn*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press.

Groden, J. (1999). *Assemblies for liturgical seasons and school occasions*. Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmon Publishing.

Pate, J. (1995). *Praying with children: some ways and means*. Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmon Publishing.

Wezeman, P. Vos. (2003). *Guiding young teens through life's losses: prayers, rituals & activities*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications.

Wezeman, P. Vos. (1998). *Guiding children through life's losses: prayers, rituals & activities*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications.

### **PERIODICAL ARTICLES**

Lenehan, K. (2001). Breaking the silence of the tomb. Remembering the dead for the life of the world. ***Summit: Journal of the Office for Worship Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne***, 28(3), 2-5.

McKissock, D. & McKissock, M. (1996). The mourning after: understanding your own and others' grief. ***Inform***, (51).

Smith, M. (2002). Order of Christian funerals. ***Inform***. (77).

### **SCHOOL, FAMILY, COMMUNITY - SUPPORT MATERIAL**

#### **BOOKS**

Edwards, H. (1992). ***I thought I was the only one: coping with grief and loss in schools: a resource for teachers***. North Blackburn, Vic: Collins Dove.

Glasscock, G. (1992). ***Learning to grieve: life skills for coping with losses: for high school classes***. Newtown, N.S.W.: Millennium Books.

Guntzelman, J. (2001). ***God knows you are grieving: things to do to help you through***. Notre dame, IN: Sorin Books.

Whitla, M. (1994). ***Coping with crisis in schools: preparation, response and recovery***. North Blackburn, Vic: Collins Dove.

## Appendix C5: Gathering Prayer

**For those whose loved ones have died, are sick or in need of our prayers**

### **Gathering music**

#### **Welcome**

#### **Leader:**

Come among us God You, who bless the poor and the broken and stand by the sad and the strong.

**R/:** COME GOD AND MEET US HERE

Come among us God You, our light in the darkness.

**R/:** COME GOD AND MEET US HERE

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Psalm 139**

God, You know me better than I know myself. Wherever I go you are right there.

If I walk one way, you walk with me; and wherever I have been, You know it well.

While I am trying to figure out what I am going to say, You already know what it is.

You place your hand on me and I feel loved.

#### **Gospel: John 14: 1 – 3**

Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me.

In God's house there are many places to live – If it were otherwise I would have told you.

I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place,

I shall return to take you to myself, so that you may be with me, where I am.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Response:** Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **A space to remember...**

At this point those present are welcome to come to the prayer table and light a candle for the person(s) they wish remembered and for whom they wish prayers to be offered.

*Reflective music will be played throughout.*

**Closing Prayer Together:**

All our laughter, all our sadness

SAFE NOW IN GOD'S HANDS

All our anger, all our gladness

SAFE NOW IN GOD'S HANDS

All our stories, all our memories

SAFE NOW IN GOD'S HANDS

Those we remember, those we love

SAFE NOW IN GOD'S HANDS

We ask for the love of the Triune God to bless us on life's journey

AND LEAD US SAFELY HOME

Amen.

**Concluding song:**

**For all Resources, please contact:**

Ballarat Religious Education Resource Centre

5 Lyons Street South / PO Box 576, Ballarat Vic 3353

Ph: 03 5337 7149

Fax: 03 5333 5048

E-mail: [klawry@ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au](mailto:klawry@ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au)

Web site: <http://web.ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au/library>

## Appendix D – Funeral Arrangements

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## Appendix D1: Funeral Arrangements and Rituals

Engaging in rituals helps people to:

- Reduce unreality
- Counteract fantasies
- Increase understanding
- Work through the emotional issues
- Say goodbye

### **Viewing of the Body**

Adults need to prepare themselves for the viewing of the body first and then to prepare young people for the event, describing the room, how different the person may look and feel, etc.

### **The Funeral**

It is generally beneficial for students to attend the funeral, but they should not be forced.

Preparation for the event should provide students with:

- A detailed description of what will happen and what the chapel, casket, etc. will look like.
- A warning about some of the reactions that some people may have.
- An understanding of how they themselves might feel.
- Information about the service and the burial. There may be cultural differences in this regard and therefore those attending the funeral need to be well briefed.
- Facilitation, should families wish to allow classmates to assist with planning and participation in the funeral.

Practical responses to large numbers of students attending a funeral:

It is preferable that students be accompanied by a parent or caregiver. However if this is not possible and students attend as a school community, the following need to be considered:

- Students encouraged to remove warm clothing to prevent fainting or hyperventilating.
- Arrangement of trained personnel to attend to distressed students.
- Provision of cold drinks and cool face cloths available in warm weather.
- Preparation for media presence at the funeral.
- Provision of refreshments at school after the ceremony to monitor reactions and give support.
- Students not attending the funeral encouraged to make whatever appropriate contribution they may wish to make.

## Appendix E: Responding to Suicide

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## Appendix E1: Immediate Response

(Taken from: DEECD Guidelines to assist in responding to attempted suicide or suicide by a student)

### **If the attempted suicide, or suicide, takes place at school, ensure the immediate safety of community members.**

- Ensure no one is in immediate danger
- Administer First Aid as necessary (avoid contact with blood or other bodily fluids by using protective gloves)
- Call emergency services for medical advice, ambulance/police support: Phone **000**
- Report incident to CEOB HR Manager : Phone 53377123

### **Provide the following information:**

**Who?** The number and name of persons involved

Name of the person reporting the incident

**What?** The nature of the incident

**When?** The time when the reporting person became aware of the incident

**Where?** The location of the incident and contact phone numbers

- Move witnesses to pre-established safe locations. They must be supported and supervised by staff/counsellors until police have taken statements or advised other actions.
- Isolate the site from student or unauthorised staff access by using screens and blocking corridors etc. Do everything possible to protect others from viewing the site without disturbing the area until police have concluded their work and advised that the area is no longer a secure area. In the case of a suicide the police will arrange for the body to be taken to the mortuary.
- Depending on the means of the attempted suicide or completed suicide, consider making changes to the environment or access to materials.
- If the student has attempted suicide but is physically unharmed, it is important that a risk assessment is undertaken by an experienced mental health practitioner. Contact the local Hospital Emergency Department or a local mental health agency for advice.

### **If the attempted suicide, or suicide, takes place outside school, find out the facts**

- Do not ignore student, parents or staff “rumours” about suicide. Do not ignore suicide notes, /e-mails, /messages sent to staff by students. Follow up both these situations immediately.
- If, after following up on notes or rumours, a student is found safe in the school, organise a school welfare staff member or a counsellor to meet with them straight away to assess their wellbeing and the background to the suicide concern. In most cases it will be essential to share this information with the student’s parents and refer the young person to a mental health provider if one is not already involved.
- If the student cannot be located at school, make contact with the family immediately. If the parents are unaware of the student’s whereabouts and safety, contact the police.
- Suicide reports made by people other than direct family members should be verified through the police, hospital staff or, with extreme sensitivity, the family.

### **If a suicide report is made or confirmed by the family**

It is appropriate to seek family's feelings straight away about informing the school community of the attempted or completed suicide. If the family asks for advice it is appropriate to discuss:

- These guidelines
- The damaging impact of misinformation
- The importance of parents discussing how best to support their own children's grief
- The option of only naming their son/daughter to their peer group and referring anonymously to their son/daughter with the rest of the school population.

The loss of a young life is always tragic. The range of emotions and reactions to loss of life are unpredictable and the depth of grieving not always immediate.

- Quote from a principal

### **Ensure that affected students, parents and staff are not left alone.**

Exposure to suicide or attempted suicide is a traumatic experience. Staff, students and parents immediately affected by a suicide or attempted suicide should not be left alone but should be comforted and supported by others until family members can take over that care. Safe and secure environments where this kind of crisis support can be provided to staff and students should be identified in the school's Emergency Management Plan (EMP)

## Appendix E2: A Theological Perspective

(Taken from: Crisis management: Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn)

The family, friends and staff who have known the person, who has committed suicide, often question, “What is this person’s place before God?”

The following could be part of a response to the above question:

- When a person takes their own life, we know that they are overwhelmed at the time, by either depression, a psychiatric illness, or severe emotional pain which they want to stop.
- At this time, their emotional disturbance interferes with their normal mental functioning. They are unable to contemplate alternative positive solutions to their problems. However we cannot condone suicide, and it is a poor choice.
- We know that God does not condemn people experiencing such severe distress. It is with that knowledge that we entrust the person to the mercy and compassion of our loving God.

## Appendix E3: Responding to a Suicide

All the issues and aspects of grief apply to suicide, but they can be more intense or extreme. After a suicide, care should be taken to stress that this was the person’s choice. **It is a poor choice.** It is important not to romanticise the event by describing the act as something brave or requiring courage.

Some people may feel guilt and anger toward the person for not seeking or accepting help and for leaving them.

Teachers need to be aware that students can be seriously affected by a suicide, particularly children who have experienced some other loss, have poor self-esteem, who are isolated and have an inadequate support system outside of the school. Those who are already depressed and/or presenting at risk behaviour may see this as a valid solution and must be referred for counselling. Friends of the deceased need counselling, as they can be at risk at this time, especially if the above factors apply.

**Even if a school or individual or counsellor does try to help someone who may be at risk, this does not mean that this person will be prevented from succeeding. It is their decision finally.**

School staff should not refer to a student’s death as a suicide unless family has given permission to do so or if the death has been officially declared a suicide. It is rare that such a determination is made on the day of the crisis. It is a good idea in cases of ‘obvious’ suicide to seek permission from the parents to refer to the death as a suicide. If that is not possible, it is important to respond directly to any critical or angry statements from students about the school and team not acknowledging a death as a suicide. Point out that the school is not qualified to judge the cause of death and then move the conversation back to what the hurting student is thinking and feeling. “We cannot say for sure how JK died. We have to wait for the police to make a determination. But I am wondering how JK’s death is for you right now?”

If a student has committed suicide, there are numerous potential issues for the students who are left behind. As in any death, a possible suicide may bring up other losses. This can be especially painful if the student has lost a parent, sibling, relative or, friend due to suicide.

For a student who is thinking about suicide, the fact of a completed possible suicide may further support or validate the notion of suicide as a feasible option, making the student more at risk. If a student makes comments that lead you to think he or she may be at-risk, it is a good idea to ask questions like, "Have you ever thought about ending your own life?" and "What thoughts are going through your mind now?" Make sure to refer the student to the school's counsellor so that a risk assessment can be made.

For a student who may have treated the deceased student badly, the fact of a possible suicide may produce guilt and a sense of responsibility. "I used to make fun of her and mock her on the bus in the morning and now she's dead and it's my fault." If a student makes such statements, acknowledge the regret you are hearing but stress that no one is responsible for the choice to end life other than the person making the choice.

For a student who was a friend of the deceased student, the fact of a possible suicide may produce a sense of responsibility. "He was my friend, I knew he was down, I should have let someone know that he was depressed, if I did he'd be alive now" etc. If a student makes such statements, note that those left behind often do feel responsible, and then stress that no one is responsible for the choice to end life other than the person making the choice.

For a student who was a friend of the deceased student, anger is also a possible reaction. The student left behind may feel abandoned or even devalued by the choice of the deceased student to reject his/her life - a life shared with the student left behind. If students make such statements, note the understandability of this feeling and then share that those who commit suicide are often making a regrettable choice to escape a situation that they define as intolerable and that in making that choice they simply aren't making a conscious choice to reject others.

If a staff member has committed suicide, students may experience the negation of life by an adult as very destabilizing. Teachers are adult role models. "If they can find life too much to handle, how can I/we handle life?" Also, the same issues listed above regarding a student's death by possible suicide apply in the case of a staff member's death by suicide. For example, students may feel guilty about acting up in the staff member's class. Or, they may have noticed that the staff member seemed down and feel guilty that they did not mention it to anyone.

For staff members, a completed suicide by either a student or staff member may impact on them in the same way as on students. They may alternatively feel angry, sad, powerless, guilty or responsible. Respond in the same way you would to students as described in the paragraphs above. When responding after a completed suicide, it is important to protect students from the press. Suicide has news value and the likelihood of press interest is high.

## Appendix E4: Helping Students Cope after a Suicide

Suicide, like other forms of sudden death and trauma, affects the whole school community. Managing recovery after a suicide is especially difficult as it is often surrounded by taboos, myths and secrecy.

The secrecy that often surrounds suicide develops a climate in which it is difficult for students to gain assistance with their own reactions and depression. Schools that manage the event successfully are likely to be less at risk of copy-cat suicides or related risk taking behaviours.

It is important for teachers to monitor students who may be at high risk following a suicide, particularly those who show extreme reactions, are particularly close to the deceased or who have had previous traumas in their lives. Students may express feelings of guilt or responsibility for the death. It is valuable to emphasise that suicide was the choice of the person.

### Short-term tasks

- Inform staff about the death and discuss ways of dealing with students
- Where possible, check with parents to determine what information can be released
- Have a brief written statement to read to each class
- Provide unambiguous information to staff and students which will dispel rumours
- Inform students about the death in an honest and sensitive manner
- Avoid providing excessive detail about the method used to bring about the death, the motivation, family reaction
- Be aware of affected brothers and sisters, close friends, girlfriends or boyfriends
- Do not glorify or romanticise the death or encourage others to do so
- Try to dispel any myths that students may express about the death ... *he must have been brave to kill himself*
- Encourage discussion which emphasises that the person chose to commit suicide and prevent misconceptions that someone else is to blame
- Discourage students from apportioning or accepting blame
- Use active listening skills to support students who want to talk about the death
- Wait for students to raise issues rather than forcing discussion when they may not be ready to do so

- Provide students with information about grief reactions and the grieving process
- Emphasise that grief reactions are normal and that they will disappear over time
- Reassure students that there is no right way to feel or react in these circumstances
- Encourage students to talk to their parents about the suicide
- Provide information to students and parents / caregivers about support services which are available through the school and the community
- Identify a recovery room where students can go if they need a quiet area
- Monitor students to identify those who may need support - particularly those who show extreme reactions, those who are close to the dead person or are known to have had traumatic experiences of their own
- Monitor anyone who seems particularly withdrawn and be aware of the potential for copycat behaviour

#### **Medium-term tasks**

- Continue to monitor those students who are most affected or at highest risk
- Encourage students to use networks of friends
- Discuss with students how they might support one another
- Provide staff with information about warning signs and risk factors
- Ensure that provision is made for staff to deal with their own grief
- Prepare staff and students for the funeral

#### **Long-term tasks**

- Continue to monitor the school community over the long-term
- Be aware of the significance and sensitivity which surrounds anniversaries, sporting events, school photos
- Review the school's response to death and suicide and accommodate changes to the curriculum and personal development policies where appropriate
- Consider suicide prevention and death education as core elements of your Personal Development and Pastoral Care policies and curricula, and of the professional development of all staff (teaching and non-teaching)

## Appendix E5: Suicide Warning Signs

Students often let peers or teachers know they are considering suicide by making obvious or leading verbal statements. Students may write a note or a poem focusing on death or dying as a release from pain. Students may display behaviors that indicate possible suicidal intent, such as drawing pictures depicting death or dying; giving away possessions; saying goodbye to others; appearing “instantly” calm & happy after a long depression; showing off possession of lethal means; dramatically changing their behaviors (e.g. outgoing student becomes withdrawn, good student begins failing, quiet student becomes aggressive); showing signs of depression (apathy, loss of interest, hard time concentrating, etc.)

Knowledge of warning signs is necessary to establish whether a young person is suicidal.

An assessment needs to look at the context of the situation.

Is there any event which has happened to cause this feeling? e.g. a life-threatening medical condition or chronic illness, a pending court hearing or conviction, a death of someone close, problem of relationships, family conflict, academic failure, loss of employment, experienced/witnessed chronic family violence, loss of a boyfriend/girlfriend, or sexual abuse. Taken in context of the material below, one or several of these factors can be precipitants of an attempt.

- Is there a history of this person being depressed or acting out their problems?
- Is (are) the behaviour(s) uncharacteristic of that person?
- Has there been any recent reports in the media or recent fictional drama on T.V. on youth suicide?
- Has this person previously attempted suicide?
- Is there involvement in activities that would lead to charges against them?

The answers to these questions can assist in deciding the seriousness of the situation. However, any incident, thought or threat of self-harm requires serious attention.

**Any one** of the following signs does not particularly indicate a risk of suicide by itself particularly as adolescents are susceptible to erratic behaviour. However, a combination of several signs may indicate the person is experiencing serious problems, which **may** lead to a suicide attempt. A young person who is suicidal may present as if nothing is wrong and show no obvious signs. The following are the most common indicators shown by a suicidal person:

- Withdrawal from friends or family or other major behavioral changes
- Personality changes, such as unusual nervousness, increased irritability, out-bursts of anger, impulsive or reckless behavior, or apathy about appearance or health
- Aggressive behavior which may be masking depression
- Sudden and extreme changes in eating habits; i.e. losing or gaining weight dramatically

- A change in school attendance, e.g. increased absences: decrease in concentration with work not being completed
- Changes in sleeping pattern - too much or too little
- Feelings of hopelessness or perceived constant failure
- Abuse of drugs or alcohol
- Preoccupation with themes of death or expressing suicidal thoughts, written work or art
- Recent suicide of friend or relative or the anniversary
- Previous suicide attempts may mean that the person is at high risk of trying again
- Giving away prized possessions, making a will or other 'final arrangements', such as writing to friends when this is out of character. This can indicate that an attempt is imminent
- Threats of suicide, such as 'it won't matter after tomorrow', or "I won't be back after the weekend." as well as overt threats "You'll be sorry, I'll kill myself". Always take threats seriously
- Sudden lift in mood after a period of depression may indicate that the person has found a solution for solving the problem or ending the pain, i.e. committing suicide

Do not assume that the student is receiving help or that the problem will go away. Do not be afraid to ask the person if you have serious worries about them, if they have considered harming themselves. It is better to try and reassure yourself of their personal safety by checking it out.

Some of the above behaviors can be signs of other difficulties, in which case they still should be responded to appropriately.

## Appendix E6: Suicide Prevention

Take a person seriously if they are making threats to harm themselves. Try not to diminish the situation.

Do not promise you will not tell anyone else. It is important to try and get help. If you are going to obtain help without the person's consent, please let the person know to whom you are going to speak that it is important to respect the person's right to privacy, as much as is feasible when you are trying to protect their life. Please do not let everyone know. Other people you tell may not be able to handle the information, and inadvertently talk about it.

Suicide threats or attempts are usually a cry for help.

- Try to sound calm and concerned
- Try to stress how important and valued the person is, and show that you care about them
- A suicidal person's thinking can be irrational at the time, when they are unable to see achievable alternative solutions. The student can feel powerless by the size of the problem
- Ask questions that will help the person define the problem into manageable parts and encourage them to work on one area at a time so that the person feels some control again. An extreme sense of hopelessness or loss may prevent this from occurring
- Try to look at the person's network of contacts with them. This needs to include adults that they trust. It is important that other students are not made to feel they are responsible for a person who is suicidal
- Encourage the person to think of other ways they can ask for help, depending on their level of distress
- Do not leave the person alone until you get help
- Be prepared to get help for the person, but do not promise to be available all the time when this is not feasible
- If they agree to see a counsellor, the counsellor may make a contract with the person not to harm him/herself. The contract needs to be simple and achievable for both parties. Contracts can imply that someone cares
- It is important that you debrief, after dealing with such a situation. However, this needs to be with the counsellor, or the most appropriate senior staff at school

### **What Teachers Can Do**

Listen and observe. When a student makes a veiled or obvious statement, don't minimize or judge; instead probe for more information by asking open-ended questions. When a student is hedging, ask them directly if he or she is thinking about hurting or killing himself or herself.

Emphasize that:

- You care about the student
- Other people care
- There is hope for the future (that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem)
- There is help available
- Talk to school principal or counsellor immediately

### **What Happens When You Refer?**

The principal or counsellor will usually contact the parents. A staff member will stay with the student until he/she is judged not dangerous to self or until parent or outside agency arrives. When a student is at-risk, parents, school and outside agencies can work together to intervene, assess and support the student.

## Appendix F: Media

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## Appendix F1: Media Coverage

From time to time the impact of some mass media reporting following a disaster has overwhelmed individuals and communities, generating enormous amounts of resentment and stress. In particular the following have caused distress:

- large numbers of seemingly insensitive reports
- the harassment of individuals and families
- the continual play-backs of pictures from the disaster on news reports over a number of years
- and the over-exposure of views of individuals which do not reflect those of the community concerned

The conflicting time scales of the media and emergency services can also create tensions for those waiting for news.

Media coverage however, can provide accurate and helpful information about the disaster and about sources of help. It can also evoke a necessary sense of value and significance to the event. It can describe the process of grieving and give examples of how the community can help. It may also facilitate the grieving of the public at large through publicising and broadcasting memorial services. It may help raise funds.

Managing the media interest at critical incidents has emerged as a major issue. Thought needs to be given in planning for critical incidents to optimise the media's advantages and restraining its excesses.

Principals need to have clear guidelines for working with the media. In the midst of a crisis it is difficult to think clearly. The following reminders may be useful:

- **The media do not have automatic right of access to school property. Permission should be obtained from the principal**
- The principal generally assumes the role of sole spokesperson for all dealings with the media. This may need to be pointed out to staff and students
- No statement should be given to the media, or comments made, prior to consultation with the Media Liaison Officer at the Catholic Education Office before all parents whose children have been directly involved in the incident have been notified of the full circumstances
- In the event of a death the names of the deceased should not be revealed to the media until released by the police and family
- Remind parents of the need to respect school protocol and student privacy
- In the event of a suspected suicide no comment is to be made on cause of death until revealed by the police
- A great deal of consideration should be given to any statements or answers that are offered. A careless comment, or a question answered under stress, could have a bearing on the proceedings of future inquiries or give the media the opportunity to imply blame or fault

- Before statements are made to the media, it is in the best interests of all that any media statements are checked by another principal or the CEO media spokesperson before they are released to the media
- Information statements should be released on Facebook (if the school has a page) and via SMS, to ensure consistency of message
- Only factual information should be provided. It is better to offer updated information by phone, fax or e-mail, or set up regular briefings, rather than offer speculation before all details have come to light
- Copies of released information should be kept for cross-reference, and for school records. Copies should be immediately made available to those involved in the response and to the staff
- The same information, incorporating updates, should be given to all media representatives. Providing the information at specially convened briefings, in appropriate venues, can help ensure factual reporting
- No media access should be given to students on the premises without the permission of parents. Guidelines need to be given to students and parents who may be approached by the media on their way home from school
- There should be no attempt to cover up, or down play the circumstances surrounding the event. There is a need for honesty and openness and the dissemination of facts, only. The media are entitled to report anything they are told and there is no place for "off the record" comments or "second guesses"
- Recommend a template for the initial Media Statement

## Appendix F2: Coordinating Media Coverage

- Nominate someone to coordinate all media enquiries
- Instruct staff and students to refer media requests to the school's media coordinator
- Confirm with police media liaison or appropriate CEO staff whether the school is authorised to provide media comment
- Liaise with the family about any statements made to the media
- Establish rules for interviews which exclude discussion of policy matters and limit comment to the emergency and the school response
- Brief staff, students and parents, if possible, about probable media coverage
- Set rules for dealing with persistent media
- Fax an initial media release to chiefs of staff of major media organizations
- Send out an SMS to parents to ensure consistency of messages
- Obtain a media contact list
- Issue regular media releases containing updated information
- Keep a record of media enquiries
- Offer scheduled interviews and press conferences in return for media commitment not to seek uninvited access to staff, students or parents
- Provide media with ideas which minimise distress to the school community, emphasising positive recovery activity being undertaken such as the use of trauma counsellors
- Negotiate accepted areas for filming such as the school boundary, outside the church at funerals but not within
- Check that information provided to the media does not conflict with court requirements or police investigations
- Keep a scrap book of newspaper clippings, web page articles and videos of media coverage
- Anticipate renewed media interest arising from anniversaries, similar events, court cases

## Appendix F3: Preparing a Media Release

When preparing a media release make sure that it has been verified for accuracy with the police, parents and other directly involved parties.

- Paragraph one: **briefly outline the verified facts**
- Paragraph two: **outline what the school has done to assist those who have been affected**
- Paragraph three: **outline support and recovery arrangements**
- Include a name and contact number for the school media coordinator
- Fax the release to chiefs of staff of the major media in the area

### **Sample media release**

(All Correspondence to the Principal)

Three students and a former student from xxxx Secondary College died and one was critically injured when the car in which they were traveling crashed on the Western Highway at Stone Creek in the early hours of Sunday morning.

Catholic Education Office staff, psychologists and social workers are working with the school community to develop a recovery plan for the school as well as to support the wider community.

Counsellors have been working with school staff to identify those who may have been affected by this traumatic event.

More information will be provided at a later time as necessary.

### **Alternative Media Release Outline**

(To be released by the Principal only)

The activity concerned (e.g. Yr. 9 camp, Yr. 12 science laboratory activity)

What happened:

Where it happened:

When it happened:

Who was involved - names of those injured, including current condition  
- rescuers:

Why it happened: May be difficult to say this

Some information about the school:

Description (e.g. Catholic, secondary, co-ed, 400 students)

Relevant Programs (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh, Outdoor Ed elective)

Precautions taken:

Safety Record:

## Appendix G: Sample Letters to Parents

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## Appendix G1: Sample Letters to Parents

Such letters need to be brief and should include:

- the facts
- what the school has done
- the school's plans
- how their children may react (Refer to Appendix A/B)
- how to get help if required

### **Sample of a letter in School Newsletter**

Dear Parents,

We were all very saddened and shocked at the news yesterday of the fatal accident at \_\_\_\_\_ in which two students from neighboring schools were killed. It brings back many painful memories of the loss within our own school community some eighteen months ago. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to the families and friends of the children concerned.

I have contacted the principals of Primary and Secondary Colleges expressing our sympathy and offering our support to them at this sad time.

### **Sample of a letter dealing with the death of a teacher**

Dear Parents

Today we had some very bad news about one of our teachers. As some of you will know Ms JJ has not been well and sadly she died yesterday. Your child may be very upset and in particular those in Ms JJ's class. We have talked with all the children and we have had trained counsellors at the school today. If your child is very upset and needs further counselling or if you would like to speak with the counsellors yourself about this matter, they will be available tomorrow at school.

Although your child will be affected by the loss of his/her teacher, it would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible and children should attend school. Reactions of children will vary and may include crying, not wanting to talk/wanting to talk, anger, wanting to be alone, lack of concentration, sleeping or eating problems. If there is any way in which the school can assist your child to deal with this sad event please contact me at the school.

### Sample letters - student death

Dear Parents,

Yesterday two of our students were tragically killed in a road accident while returning from camp. XX and XY were in the bus with other Year 11 students when it went out of control on the icy road near \_\_\_\_\_ and rolled down the hill.

Several other students, teachers and the driver were injured, but none sustained serious physical injuries. All were able to go home after medical treatment.

I have visited the parents of XX and XY and offered them the condolences of our whole community together with any support we are able to give.

We intend to hold a school memorial service for XX and XY on Wednesday afternoon. Further details will follow.

Although your sons and daughters may be affected by the death of our students, it would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible, and students should continue attending school as usual.

A counsellor from Centacare has spoken to the Year 11 students today and will be available for you to contact if you wish. Contact may be made through the student welfare coordinator, or on telephone number.

Reactions of students will vary and may include crying, not wanting to talk (or wanting to talk), wanting to be alone, anger, lack of concentration, sleeping and eating problems. Should you or your child feel the need for professional help or counselling, please contact myself or the student welfare coordinator who will be able to assist you.

Dear Parents

Last week one of our students was killed in tragic circumstances. Details have not been released but charges have been laid and a court case is pending. The school has made a floral tribute to AB's family and offered them the sympathy of our school community. The Year 5 children will establish a memorial.

We have been reassured by the care and concern demonstrated by students, teachers and parents in the support offered at this difficult time. Also, we have in place at school a support system which involves psychologists from the CEO. Your child may be affected by AB's death in many different ways.

Reactions may include not wanting to go to school, crying, not wanting to be alone and lack of concentration. Should your child need counselling, please contact me and I will make the necessary arrangements. It would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible and for students to attend each day. There is no doubt we have all been saddened by this event.

Every effort is being made to support the children at school and I feel sure you will be doing the same at home.

**Sample letter – when the death was anticipated**

Dear Parents

As some of you will know .....has not been well for some time and she died yesterday. .... has been a wonderful support to our school. Many of you will know her from her times on canteen duty and the work she did in Ms Timms' class taking reading each Wednesday morning.

We offer our heartfelt sympathy to her two children, John in Prep 1 and Michaela in Year 4B, and her husband, Bob. The school will be represented at the funeral by Ms Timms and myself. A floral tribute has also been sent.

Your children may be upset, and in particular Ms Timms' class. We have talked with all the children and have had some trained counsellors at the school today. Reactions of children will vary and may include crying, asking questions about death and fear that their own parents may die. If your child is very upset and needs further counselling, or if you would like to speak with the counsellors yourself about this matter, they will be available tomorrow at school.

If there is anyway we can help you or your children deal with this sadness, please contact me on telephone ....., and assistance can be arranged. Please feel free to talk with me at anytime.

Families who wish to assist Bob and the children by taking part in the Parents and

Friends casserole drive can contact ..... on .....

## Appendix H: References

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## Appendix H1: References

**Material included in this document has drawn on the thorough work of other educational organisations, in particular:**

“Managing School Emergencies: Minimizing the Impact of Trauma for Staff and Students” (1997). Department of Education, Victoria. Pg. 32.

"Crisis Management: A Strategy to Deal with a Serious Incident in an Educational Setting" - Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

State of Victoria (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development)  
February 2013 - “Guidelines to assist in responding to attempted suicide or suicide by a student”

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd.

Catholic Schools Emergency

Management Manual Revised Edition (v1.2) August 2011

### **Websites:**

<http://web.ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au/library>

[www.wesd.org](http://www.wesd.org) (Willamette Education Service District)

[www.apec.org](http://www.apec.org)

[www.betterhealth.org](http://www.betterhealth.org)