

Crisis at School Sample Notification Letters

Minneapolis (MN) Public Schools
Cypress-Fairbanks (Houston TX) ISD
Springfield (Oregon) Public Schools

Death of a Staff Member (Minneapolis)

Dear Parents or Guardian:

This past weekend, _____, our head engineer, passed away after falling while working on his home one week ago. _____ was a very special friend to many of the children. They saw him working around the building, fixing things in their classrooms, and each day in the lunchroom. _____ took the time to visit with children and they greeted him by name when they saw him. He will be greatly missed by all of us.

Children have been told about _____'s death. We are working with our school psychologist and social worker to help children understand, and to help them with questions or concerns which they might have.

I want you to know of our loss so that, if your child talks to you about _____, you will be better able to respond to their questions.

Sincerely,

_____, Principal

Accident Involving Student (Minneapolis)

Staff Memo (from Principal):

Last night, _____, Room 204, was hit by a car while she was out trick-or-treating with two other girls, students in middle school. She is at North Memorial Hospital in very critical condition. Officer _____ of the Minneapolis Police Department came to school this morning to report the accident. He suggested that we have an assembly for all students. We will meet at 9:30 am in the Multi-Purpose Room for approximately 20 minutes. At that time, we will tell the children about the accident and then discuss basic safety. _____, our school psychologist, will be available after the assembly to assist any individual children and or classrooms who are having difficulty understanding or dealing with this situation. Our school social worker, _____, will spend the morning in Room 204 to provide some extra support to the children and their teacher.

I have written a letter to parents that will be ready to go home with all students this afternoon. It has been suggested that students might want to draw pictures or make cards to send to _____ or her family. This will provide the children with an opportunity to release their feelings and will to bring some closure to the tragedy.

Death of Student — Illness (Minneapolis)

Dear Parents/ Guardians:

Today we were saddened to learn of the death of one of our students. _____, a 5th grader in Room 305, died from leukemia and other complications. In the short time _____ attended our school, she endeared herself to staff and students, both in fifth grade and in her girl scout troop #117.

We have talked with the students who were in _____'s classroom about her death. We also have our school psychologist, _____, who is available all this week to talk with any children who might need some extra support.

We suggest that you discuss this matter with your child and respond to any questions that arise. If you wish to have one of our support team staff members talk individually with your child, or with to talk with someone yourself, please contact our social worker, _____, so that we can make those arrangements. If you wish to join the staff in contributing to a fund for the family, you may contact us at the school.

Sincerely,

_____, Principal

Student Suicide (Cy-Fair ISD)

Dear Parent of Kennedy Students,

The Kennedy Middle School community was saddened to learn of the reported suicide of one of our seventh grade students. The death of any young person is a loss that, in one way or another, affects each of us. The tragic circumstances of a suicide death are perhaps more difficult to accept.

We have asked the assistance of the crisis team to help our school community deal with this loss. We are providing support to all students and staff to help them cope with this tragedy. We may never know why this death occurred and will not focus on trying to figure it out. Instead, we will focus on suicide prevention in our society. You may anticipate questions and a need to talk about the death with your child.

If you have any concerns regarding your child's reactions to this loss, please do not hesitate to call the school for assistance. Ask for _____ (*Specific names of key contacts you may want to include are those such as counselors, nurses, or psychologists.*)

Sincerely,

_____, Principal

Sample Death Notification to Students (Springfield, Oregon)

Today we received tragic news. We were informed that one of our students, _____, died from _____. (Give any details which are known and relevant here).

When events such as this happen, people react in many different ways. Today you may see people acting sad, upset, angry or shocked. We all need to practice patience and respect for each other. Some of us will want to have quiet time or time to talk with an adult. Some of us will be ready to return to academics sooner than others.

We can take some time to talk about this now. When most of the students are ready to return to our regular schedule we will do so.

If you need to talk to an adult, there will be counselors available for you today in the "Safe Room" (identify location in building). You will need to take a pass and sign-in in the Safe Room when you arrive.

The school day will remain on schedule. Students are expected to stay at school and be in rooms with adults present.

_____, Principal

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Stress Response Information:

A Handout for Students

You have experienced a traumatic event, something which may cause strong physical or emotional reactions. It is very *normal* for people to experience emotional after-shocks when they have gone through a horrible event.

The signs of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, or sometimes longer. You should start feeling better after about a week. If you don't start getting better after about three weeks, talk to your parents, your teacher, or counselor. They will know what to do.

These are some symptoms of a stress reaction:

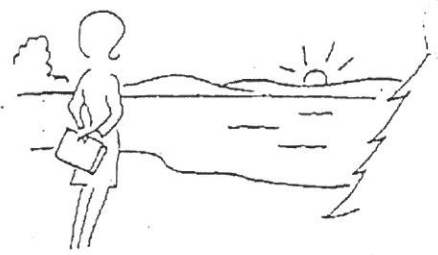
<u>Physical</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Emotional</u>
Fatigue	Memory loss	Anxiety
Profuse sweating	Loss of concentration	Grief/Sadness
Muscle tremors	Flashbacks	Guilt
Twitches	Confusion	Hopelessness
Nausea	Poor attention span	Anger
Chills	Nightmares	Depression
Can't eat	Poor decision making	Fear
Vomiting	Intrusive thoughts	Feeling overwhelmed
Dizziness	Blaming someone	Panic
Headaches	Poor problem solving	Emotional shock
Cramps	Increased or decreased	Irritability
Grinding of teeth	awareness of surroundings	Avoidance behaviors

Asking for help to deal with stress reactions does not mean that there is something seriously wrong with you. It simply means that what happened was just too powerful to manage all by yourself.

Remember! Most stress responses are normal reactions by normal people to abnormal events!

What Do I Do Now?

Here are some things that you can do to help you get through the next days:



- Talk! Spend time with others.
- Take a long bike ride up a steep hill.
- Listen to your favorite music.
- Sing in the shower – really loud, or take a long, warm bath.
- Hit a punching bag. Punch a pillow.
- Cry
- Structure your time with activities you enjoy doing.
- Play a favorite sport.
- Be outside in the fresh air as much as possible.
- Read your favorite book –out loud!
- Cook something for yourself that you really like.
- Stay away from alcohol or drugs.
- Draw, color, paint.
- Jog, run, or take a long walk.
- Build something out of Leggos, blocks, or with wood.
- Play a musical instrument.
- Try to get some rest, eat regular well-balanced meals even if you don't want to,
- Keep a journal, write a poem, or a letter to someone.
- Give yourself permission to do things that feel good.
- Reach out to people –parents, friends, teachers. Talking is the most healing medicine.

GRIEF	TRAUMA
Generalized reaction is SADNESS	Generalized reaction is ANXIETY and FEAR
Individuals are usually able to describe what happened	Most are reluctant to talk about what occurred
Loss is expressed by pain	Loss triggers overwhelming feelings of powerlessness and insecurity
Grief usually does not lead to reactions of anger	Trauma often contains a strong element of anger/rage
Survivors say "I wish I would have..."	Survivors say "It was my fault. I could have prevented it" or "It should have been me instead"
Dreams tend to be of the deceased person	Dreams tend to be about self as victim of the incident
Grief does not typically involve reactions like flashbacks, hyper vigilance, numbing	Trauma involves grief reactions plus specific reactions such as flashbacks, numbing, shock, recurring nightmares

Intervention Models		
Classroom Presentation	Defusing	Debriefing
Type of Incident		
Situations which are likely to lead to acute stress reactions. This would include sudden, unexpected incidents which pose a serious threat to one's own life or physical safety, or pose a similar threat to one's family or close acquaintances. It would also include those individuals who were witnesses to such an incident.		
For Whom		
All grades, mainly those with limited direct exposure to the incident	All grades, preferred model for most exposed children grades K-4	Grades 5-12 and staff, for those with greatest exposure
When		
Immediate- within first two days if possible	One to three days after incident	Three to seven days after incident
Size		
Entire classroom	Recommend 8-10, can be extended to whole classroom	Limited to 8-10 participants
Conducted By		
At least two, one of whom should be the classroom teacher	Two are recommended for most situations	At least two debriefers; three would be preferred
Format		
Giving information, some question and answer and problem solving. May include drawing or storytelling.	Question/answer, information about dealing with stress. May include drawing or storytelling	Emphasis is on individual acute stress reactions and teaching about effective stress reduction
Duration		
Grades K-6: 20-30 min Grades 7-12: 30-45 min	Grades K-3: 20-30 min Grades 4-6: 20-40 min Grades 7-12 Adults: 30-45 min	Grades 4-6: 45 min- 1 hr Grades 7-12: 1-1 ½ hrs Adults: 1-2 hrs
Purposes		
To provide accurate information, allow ventilation of emotions, and assess degree of stress reaction to the incident	Same as for classroom presentation, but more emphasis on dealing with acute stress reactions	For most seriously affected, heavy emphasis on accelerating the healing process through acute stress reduction