

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO A TRAGEDY

CHECKLIST TO USE DURING A SCHOOL CRISIS

#1: CONFIRMATION OF A CRISIS

Confirming Incident Details:

- The person receiving the information about a school crisis contacts the school principal
- Principal confirms the information with law enforcement, PPS Communications or the impacted family
- Principal contacts Deputy Superintendent
- Principal informs PPS Communications of the facts of the incident
- Principal contacts School Level Crisis Team liaison
- Principal contacts District Emergency Counseling Support Team Coordinator for consultation and/or to mobilize the team

Family Communication:

1. Possible script for the family contact: "We have received distressing news. We are calling to find out how we can best help you, and to decide what information we can give to the student body, parents and staff."
2. Families generally appreciate the concern and do not consider such a call intrusive.
3. An effort should be made to honor the family's wishes about the information delivered to the school community. It is important to discuss the advantages of sharing truthful and factual information with the family.
4. A family member or a family friend needs to be identified as the ongoing family spokesperson.
5. A request is made for information about the viewing, memorial, etc (if and when it is available and appropriate).

#2: PREPARATION FOR THE SCHOOL DAY

School Level Crisis Team Response:

- School Level Crisis Team members decide whether to call an all-staff meeting before school the next day. A phone tree is set up to tell staff about the time and location of the all-staff meeting.
- School Level Crisis Team members meet before the next day of school to:
 - o Share facts
 - o Define initial actions
 - o Inform staff? who? when?
 - o Inform students? who? when?
 - o Plan the school day and create a script for teachers
 - o Call the District Emergency Counseling Support Team Coordinator for additional helpers (if needed)
 - o Call PPS Communications at 503-916-3304 to work with the press (if needed)
 - o Send a letter home to parents (if appropriate)
 - o Choose an ongoing contact person in the impacted family
 - o Designate team members to specific jobs during the day
 - o Share reactions and feelings

#3: DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Staff Notification:

- The staff is informed via a written notice or in a before-school staff meeting facilitated by the principal:
 - Identify School Level Crisis Team members
 - Share the facts
 - Identify District Emergency Counseling Support Team members (if called upon)
 - Share reactions and feelings
 - Pass out a prepared script of information for staff to share with students
 - Give plans for the day: e.g., tell students in first period, open the Safe Room for students to meet with counselors
 - Give out “Guidelines on How to Lead a Discussion with Grieving Students”
 - Offer teachers assistance from the School Level Crisis Team or District Emergency Counseling Support Team
 - Discuss how students may react and how to help at-risk students who may need additional assistance
 - Respond to questions, reactions
 - Refer all media contacts to PPS Communications at 503-916-3304
 - Remind the staff of their own vulnerability
 - Provide information about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), available to all PPS staff (if needed) by calling 866-750-1327.

Student and Community Notification:

- Students are informed by school staff:
 - Gather in small groups, not bigger than class-size as soon as possible in the school day (first period, if possible)
 - Sit in a circle, read the script, answer questions truthfully
 - Listen, allow for reactions, speculation, feelings, silence
 - Share your own feelings if you wish and take ample time
 - Inform students about the Safe Room (if one is available)
 - Encourage students to share concerns about themselves or friends with counselors
 - Offer a time for a release: e.g., a brief recess on the playground, a time to draw, or time to write in a journal after the sharing time
 - Return to normally scheduled activities but put aside curriculum when needed to enable students to express feelings and discuss events
 - Give students letters to take to parents

- Parents
 - Send a letter home with students
 - Invite a community meeting for education and support (if appropriate)

- Invite parents to utilize the Safe Room (if appropriate)
- Offer referrals to community providers (if needed)

The Media

- All media contacts should go through PPS Communications
- Press should not come onto school grounds

Miscellaneous School Partners (alert partners about the incident if it is appropriate and if it will impact their service provision)

- Multnomah County Crisis Line
- School Based Health Center staff
- Mental health providers
- SUN Community School staff
- Social service agencies or culturally-specific service providers, etc.

#4: DEBRIEFING AND FOLLOW-UP

Staff Debriefing and Follow-Up Tasks:

Staff debriefing meeting

- Gather at the end of the first day or soon after to share feelings and reactions
- Share new information about the crisis (if available)
- Identify and plan for at-risk students
- Share ideas that worked and suggest flexible classroom approach
- Remind staff about the Employee Assistance Program available to all PPS staff

Ongoing follow-up

- Determine the need for ongoing Safe Room support, support groups or a parent night
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the crisis response
- Disseminate community resources
- Inform students and staff of the date and time of a Memorial Service (if appropriate)
- Monitor staff and students for delayed reactions