

## Crisis Day Guidelines For Counselors

Students know where to find you in your office, so it may be more beneficial to them if you remain there on a crisis day, rather than helping in the Safe Room. Any students who have check-in programs with you still need their chance to check in. If you are in your office, those students who are most in need of having some one-to-one time with you have a chance to do so. If you are in the Safe Room or moving about the school, sometimes those students are a bit at loose ends. Keeping the chaos level down is best facilitated by having as little disruption as possible and providing a stable environment. Your providing a consistent, trusted, stable place for those with the most need is vitally important.

The purpose of the Safe Room is to allow students to talk among themselves while they try to give meaning to the loss. If there are students who are particularly disturbed or in need of counseling support from you, the Flight Team will send them to you from the Safe Room. It is not the Flight Team's goal to take over your role; it is their goal to facilitate a space where students who are not ready to return to academics can congregate and begin healthy grieving. It will be very helpful for them to be able to send you those students who are most devastated.

Try not to overextend yourself too much today -- the Flight Team may only be here for a day or two. You will be picking up the pieces for a long time to come. Staff and students will be turning to you for comfort, advice and support for some time. Consider turning anything over to the Flight Team that you can for today... ask whether your needs are within their scope.

Invite students about whom you are most concerned to stop by your office during the day. There is a form on the following page. Have the forms delivered to students' rooms during the day or hand them out to teachers at the staff meeting before school.

The Flight Team usually sets up meetings for specific groups with whom the deceased was involved. This often includes sports teams, debate, drama, music or other special activities or clubs in which the person participated. The Team members will have ideas as to what makes those meetings work well and what some of the pitfalls tend to be. It is very helpful to participate in those group meetings, because long after the Flight Team is gone, those groups will still be grieving. If you are there at the initial meeting, they will identify with you as being knowledgeable, trustworthy and supportive.

Encourage teachers to keep lists of students whose behavior, academics or attendance change in the days and weeks following a tragedy. You could organize some informal "lunch bunches" or grief groups as a follow-up to this event.

Counselors, clerical staff and the administrator-in-charge tend to be among the most overworked during these kinds of crises. They also tend to find very little time to meet their own needs. If you can anticipate some of their needs, ask the Flight Team to provide direct support to specific staff people. Staff depends on building counselors in many ways and these events certainly can create added demand. Go on record with your staff as being a "regular" person with your own real needs, and ask for support or breaks when you need them. Reach out to other counselors in your district for support, ideas and understanding.

Check the section on Life Tributes (**Section G**) if you anticipate being the person who oversees the planning of that activity with students. Call on Flight Team members for suggestions. There are some wonderful outcomes from Life Tributes; they are almost always recommended. But there are some pitfalls to be avoided, too. Lean on the Flight Team's expertise and past experience. Don't allow parents of the deceased to speak or you'll have set precedence for future deaths; parents of some students could voice blame or create feelings of guilt by their messages. Always screen what students plan to say, and recognize that an open mic has great inherent risks. Further information in the Life Tribute chapter.

Be kind to yourself and ask the Flight Team to help in any way you wish! Your school is fortunate to have you, especially now. Let the Flight Team take the lion's share of the burden in any way you can, because long after they've gone, you'll be doing follow-up from this event. Save yourself for future needs.

