

Outline for Letter to Parents

When your school suffers a loss, students are apt to talk about it when they get home. It is very helpful for parents to know basic information at times like these. Here are some items to cover in a letter sent home:

- Begin with a statement of regret. *"We had sad news at our school today."*
- Tell basic facts about the tragedy. *"We learned of the death of (student or staff person's name), who was (specific info of student or staff – grade, position). S/he died _____ (tell cause of death) _____ (when).*
- Give information about what the school did to help the children through the day. *"We had the help of our Flight Team, who helped teachers announce the sad news with the students. They also staffed a room for students to go to if they needed a little extra time for expressing their grief with others."* Go on to state any special measures, such as, *"The paramedics who were on the scene came in to reassure students and staff that everything that could have been done was tried, and that nothing could have saved _____'s life."*
- If details of the family funeral or an in-school Life Tribute are known, give information about that. *"The family funeral is at _____ o'clock on _____ at _____.* Students who wish to attend will need to bring a note of permission from a parent." Address transportation -- will the school provide or should parents make those arrangements for their own children? *We at JFK High will hold a Life Tribute on _____ during _____ period. Students will do the planning.*
- Consider whether your students are of an age that adult supervision and support is advisable (which would always be so through Middle School). If so, make the suggestion in the letter that an adult should accompany each group of three or four students attending the funeral. This does not apply to a school Life Tribute.
 - With Life Tributes, let parents know if they are invited to attend this school activity. (Usually not, except for the family of the deceased, but decisions should be based on the culture of the school and nature of the incident.)
- Let parents know who the school contact person is if they have questions.
- Include a section on how parents can support their kids:
 - This event might bring up questions, concerns or fears for your child.
 - Be sensitive about whether she or he is wanting to talk.
 - Bring it up in case she or he is reluctant to do so.
 - Ask about his or her reactions and **accept those feelings as stated!** Resist the temptation to minimize the pain, deny the feelings or give advice. **Simply listen and provide empathy!** Helpful responses on your part:
 - *"Tell me more about that."*
 - *"Have you ever felt that way before?"* (Guess feelings and needs?)
 - *"I wonder if there are other things that are worrying you?"*
 - Be concrete and brief in your answers, especially with younger children. Allow some silence and processing time after a statement.