

Frontier School Division

Critical Incident Response Plan

~ Working Document, December 2017 ~



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CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Team Goals

- To respond quickly to critical incidents which have had/are likely to have an emotional impact on a significant number of students and staff.
- To provide immediate support and assistance to students, staff, and families/school community.
- To assist in communicating information to students and community proactively.
- To assist in mobilizing outside agency support,

DEFINITION OF CRITICAL INCIDENT

For the purposes of this manual, a critical incident is an emotionally significant event that has impacted, or will likely impact a school community.

A critical incident involving either a student or staff member may include:

- Sudden death
- Attempted suicide
- Violent crime
- Death by suicide
- Homicide
- Serious accident

AREA CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

A. RESPONSIBILITIES

The purpose of the Team is to provide logistical support to grieving and/or traumatized school communities in carrying on the day to day function of the school, allowing the school staff to emotionally support their students and colleagues.

The Area Team will be appointed at the beginning of each school year, and will include the following people:

- Area Superintendent (co-chair),
- Student Services Consultant (co-chair),
- School Counsellors (2 per area) – one or both counsellors will be deployed,
- Area Secretaries,
- Divisional Resources – Assistant Superintendent, Student Services Coordinator, Psychologist,
- Other Resources (Governance Support Officer, Manitoba Health, Police).

The Area Critical Incident Response Team will include staff members of the Area who are not part of the school community impacted by the critical incident.

Information regarding the School Critical Response Team is outlined later in this manual.

AREA CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

B. CHART OF CONTACTS

SCHOOL YEAR _____

POSITION	NAME	WORK	HOME	CELL
Area Superintendent (Co-chair)				
Student Services Consultant (Co-chair)				
Area Secretary				
School Counsellor Designate				
School Counsellor Designate				
Other				
Divisional Support as required: i.e. Student Services Coordinator Psychologist, Assistant Sup if required				

Start at the top of the list. You must personally speak to one team member.

Activate the Critical Incident Protocol as per the “Checklist.”

***School Counsellor is chosen from one of the Area’s local schools.**

AREA CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

C. CO-CHAIRS INITIAL MEETING CHECKLIST

- Contact and mobilize Area Critical Incident Response Team (if necessary).
- Designate the following spaces:
 - _____ a) Critical Incident team headquarters with a phone (separate from the office);
 - _____ b) Counselling areas for groups and individuals.
- Direct the meeting with the School Critical Incident Response Team.
- Verify facts and collect information from sources.
- Area Superintendent reviews staff meeting agenda with Principal referring to this manual and protocol.
- Review list of people likely to be most affected (students, staff).
- Review statement to be read to students (age appropriate).
- Ensure that family privacy is respected.
- Prepare statement for parent/community phone inquiries (media inquiries are immediately directed to Chief Superintendent's Office).

AREA CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

(SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM ROLLING RIVER SCHOOL DIVISION)

D. CHECKLIST (COMPLETED AS DIRECTED BY AREA CO-CHAIRS)

- Ensure building security.
- Support/assist teachers in reading the prepared, factual statement to classes (simultaneously, as much as possible).
- Secure space for a safe room / grief room:
 - Who will staff the room? What supports will be available? (materials, refreshments, etc.)
- Secure spaces for individual counselling.
- Determine which staff, if any, need to be relieved of their duties, arrange for coverage and supports as necessary.
- Determine which community services & outside agencies need to be involved & make contact:
 - R.C.M.P./ Police Services
 - Community organization leaders: (Health Centre, Child and Family Services, Chief/Council, Mayor, School Committee Chairperson, Mental Health)
 - Other (Divisional Staff)
- Monitor any social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), and be prepared to deal with students' use of cell phones, text messaging, etc.
 - Consider Synvoice / Local Radio / to send out a brief, prepared statement to families, indicating that a critical incident has occurred and that information will be sent with students at the end of the day.
- Remain in contact with the Chief /Area Superintendent, and advise regarding:
 - Situational updates
 - Media requests **(Chief Superintendent ONLY)**
 - Legal implications/considerations (if necessary)
- Coordinate the purchasing of emergency items for students (i.e. clothing, toiletries, etc.)
- Coordinate accommodations and travel (including meals) required to support immediate families impacted by critical incident.
- Secure locker and/or belongings if needed.
- Contact family (involve school administrator/staff if possible):
 - Who will make contact? Will the representative visit? Bring food or flowers?
- Prepare letter to be sent home with students for parents addressing the incident and the school response.
- Meet with **all staff** at the end of the day. Do **NOT** allow any staff to go home if they are experiencing an extreme emotional response.
- Determine if/which Area Critical Incident Response Team members need to return to the school the next day.
- Area Critical Incident Response Team prepare a brief of the day and provide to Chief Superintendent, Area Superintendent and Principal.

AREA CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

E. POST-CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE CHECKLIST (CO-CHAIRS AND/OR PRINCIPALS)

- Arrange with family to have belongings returned (if applicable).
- Determine family's wishes for funeral and memorial activities (if applicable).
- Consider whether an on-site memorial is appropriate (if applicable):
 - _____ Is the family in agreement?
 - _____ What format will it take?
 - _____ Where will it be?
 - _____ The memorial should be dismantled once the funeral or memorial service has been held.
- Continue to monitor and offer supports to students and staff who need time. Refer to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and MTS for staff.
- Refer those who continue to be affected to community mental health supports as necessary.
- Contact Technology Department to remove deceased from system / close accounts. Close parent portal. Remove student from contact lists (if applicable).
- Inform Divisional personnel and outside agencies, as necessary:
 - _____ Clinical services (SW, Psych, SLP, etc.)
 - _____ Coaches / Consultants
 - _____ Outside agencies (CFS, Mental Health, Family Services, OT / PT etc.)
- Consider anniversaries. Will the anniversary spark emotional responses? Will the Area Team need to provide supports?

SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

A. RESPONSIBILITIES

Each school will **annually** appoint their Critical Response Team and will include the following people:

- School Administrator(s) and Designates,
- School Counsellor,
- Resource Teacher,
- 2-3 Teachers / Support staff members (as necessary, dependent on size of school), and
- Secretary.

SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

B. CONTACTS CHART

SCHOOL YEAR _____

POSITION	NAME	WORK	HOME	CELL
Principal				
Vice Principal and/or Principal Designate				
School Counsellor				
Resource Teacher				
Teacher / Staff (as necessary)				
Teacher / Staff (as necessary)				
Secretary				

**** Members of the School Critical Incident Response Team will be responsible for contacting colleagues.**

SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

C. PRINCIPAL CHECKLIST

Critical Incident: _____

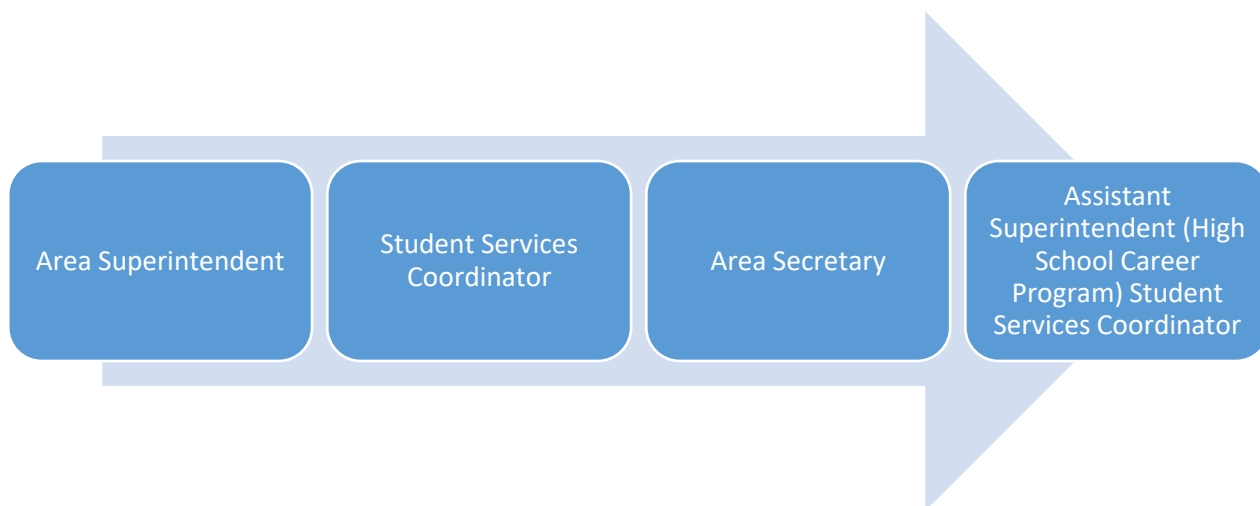
Date: _____

- As soon as you are informed about the critical incident, contact the Area Superintendent who will enact the Area Critical Incident Response Team. You must speak personally to one of the Co-Chairs (Area Superintendent or Student Services Consultant). If both are out of reach follow the contact chart below.
- Phone the R.C.M.P. and document name of Officer and time contacted.
- Inform the School Team to meet/conference call with Area Critical Incident Response Team.
- If incident occurs during school day, initiate staff meeting (All staff including bus drivers, custodians, maintenance, etc.) at earliest possible time. Administrators inform staff classroom by classroom that event has occurred.
- Outside of School time: Initiate the phone tree to contact staff and inform them of a prior and end of school day staff meeting - do **NOT** give out any information regarding the critical incident.

NOTE:

Once these steps have been completed, the School Critical Incident Response Team will assume responsibility for the crisis situation. The Principal or Principal's designate will provide a leadership role to support staff and students in the school. The Principal or the Principal's designate will provide all necessary information related to the critical incident.

The Area Critical Incident Response Team will provide direction and support as required.



SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

D. TEACHERS/SCHOOL STAFF CRITICAL INCIDENT PROTOCOL CHECKLIST

- Attend the initial staff meeting. Bring your class list.
- Be prepared to identify the students who are most likely to be affected. Compile a list of students you think may be emotionally impacted or traumatized.
- Review this manual in order to be aware of the types of behaviours/reactions you can expect from your students.
- Be aware of how to access supports as necessary for your students, your colleagues, and yourself.
- Read the prepared statement to your students. If you are unable to do so, ask for a school team member to do so for you.
- Remain in your classroom and maintain daily structures and routines as much as possible.
- Attend the follow-up meeting to review the process.

SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

E. PROCESS FOR THE DAY OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

1. **You will receive a call from a member of your school's Critical Incident Response Team requesting that you attend a critical incident staff meeting. The team member will ask that you attend because a critical incident has occurred but will not give you any details.**

This will be difficult for staff because it is natural to want to know what has occurred; however, this process has been established because early on during a critical incident, accurate information is not always available. No information is better than inaccurate information.

2. **You will attend the staff meeting prior to start of school day (in the event that the critical incident has occurred outside of school hours). At that time, you will be given more information about the critical incident and the operational plan for the day.**

The school's Critical Incident Response Team will be in attendance and will be helping in all capacities needed that day.

3. Every critical incident affects people differently. There is no right or wrong way to feel or respond. **The most important thing is to recognize when you require assistance and to ask for help.** Your school team Area Team are there to assist.
4. **A process will be established to disseminate accurate and age appropriate information to students.** This will be determined by the school team in consultation with the Area Superintendent and will be shared at the staff meeting.
5. Throughout the day, you can expect a wide variety of responses. **It is best for the day to run as close to normal as possible.**
6. Throughout the day, support for students and staff will be available in the school. **Staff members should access support for themselves as needed and for students who appear to be in need.**
7. **Near the end of the day, a letter created by the Principal sharing information for parents/guardians will be given to students to take home as approved by the Area Superintendent. (See Appendix)**
8. **At the close of the day, you will be asked to attend a final staff meeting.**
9. Check in with your colleagues before you go home. **DO NOT let anybody go home if you believe they are distraught or emotionally vulnerable. Enlist the help of the school team.**
10. On the days that follow, response to the crisis may continue. **Watch for signs of difficulty coping in your students, colleagues, and yourself, and enlist the help of your school team.** Your school team will ensure access of further supports for as long as necessary.

SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

F. WORKING WITH STUDENTS

Note: If, for any reason, you feel unable to cope with the classroom responsibilities at this time, enlist the help of your school team. They are there to provide support.

- Talk about “death” and “dead.” Avoid euphemisms such as “passed away.”
- Be honest. Discuss the facts of the death. Discourage speculations.
- Discuss how you feel. Talk about your memories of the deceased. This will encourage responses from your students.
- Allow your students to express their grief.
- Listen to what your students say.
- Watch your students’ actions and reactions. Identify those who may need help.
- Be supportive and empathetic.
- Focus on the sadness of death. Avoid being judgmental or moralistic.
- Remember the deceased was a human being, with human strengths and failings. Discourage glorification of the deceased.
- Acknowledge anger and consider whether or not counseling may be necessary to help individuals resolve their anger.
- Accept that some students will not wish to participate in a discussion about death. Respect their wishes.
- Organize activities that allow expressions of grief, such as writing, or art.
- Be patient. Grieving takes time.
- Be prepared for disruptions in classroom routines and reduced student achievement. Reset test, exam, and assignment dates as necessary.
- There is nothing positive about tragedy. Discourage your students from looking for it.
- Suffering and pain should not be linked with guilt, punishment or sin. Keep them separate.
- Establish a classroom environment in which student feel free to ask questions and receive honest answers.

Remember: You are not alone. There are others to help you.

SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

(SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCHOOL CRISIS AND BEREAVEMENT)

G. GUIDELINES FOR IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WHO MAY BE AT A HIGHER RISK FOR EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

- Students who were siblings, relatives or close friends of the deceased.
- Students who shared a class with the deceased.
- Students who shared extra-curricular activities with the deceased.
- Students who shared a similar characteristic with the deceased. This will depend on the circumstance of the death (e.g., chronic illness/medical condition; suicide after bullying/ depression; car or pedestrian accident).
- Students who had a troubled or strained relationship with the deceased.
- Students from other schools if the deceased recently transferred or has siblings at another school.
- Students with a history of prior or concurrent deaths and/or emotional difficulties.

POSSIBLE REACTIONS TYPICAL OF AGE GROUPS

PRESCHOOL	LATENCY AGE (6-12)	PREADOLESCENT ADOLESCENT	ADULT	SENIORS
Crying	Headaches & other physical complaints	Headaches & other physical complaints	Psychosomatic problems, e.g. ulcers and heart troubles	Depression, withdrawal
Thumb-sucking	Depression	Depression	Withdrawal, suspicion & irritability	Apathy
Loss of bowel/ bladder control	Fears about weather/safety	Confusion	Anger	Agitation, anger
Fear of being left alone, fear of strangers	Confusion	Poor performance	Loss of appetite	Disorientation
Irritability	Inability to concentrate	Aggressive behaviours	Sleep problems	Confusion
Confusion	Poor performance	Withdrawal & isolation	Loss of interest in everyday activities	Memory loss
Immobility	Fighting	Changes in peer group friends		Accelerated physical decline
	Withdrawal from peers	Withdrawal from peers	Withdrawal from peers	Increase in number of somatic complaints

SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

H. GUIDELINES FOR TALKING TO STUDENTS

Three things teachers can do:

- Listen → Talk → Provide Emotional Support

Statements people often find helpful:

- “I am sorry about your mother’s death.”
- “I don’t know what to say.”
- “I heard about your mother’s death and am concerned and will help if I can.”

Statements people often find NOT helpful:

- “It will be alright. I just know.”
- “Let me know if there is anything I can do.”
- “I know how you feel.”
- “Try not to think about it.”
- “Good people die young.”
- “Time heals.”

What people often find helpful:

- Letting them know that you are aware of the death.
- Acknowledgment of their pain.
- A simple card.
- Doing something special for them.

What people generally need during a critical incident:

- To feel in control of their part of the process.
- To feel like they are not alone.
- To feel competent.
- To feel understood and supported.
- To feel normal.

HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAMS

(Source: National Center for School Crisis & Bereavement)

Schools can be the best setting to provide services to students and staff after a loss that affects the school community:

- Schools provide a safe and familiar environment.
- Large numbers of students can be served.
- Many children will benefit from supportive services that can be readily provided in a school setting.
- Students coping after the loss can be monitored over time and referrals for counselling or clinical services can be facilitated as necessary.
- Parents may be more willing to accept services provided in a school setting, where the stigma associated with mental health services may be decreased.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Suicide

The suicide of a school/community member creates unique issues for school personnel.

- Clarify with family about information they wish to disclose about the cause of death, but be aware if information has already been shared publicly by a reliable source.
- Identify students and or staff considered at greatest risk for mental health distress, especially any student who may have known of the plan or students who may become “scapegoats” after the death.
- Encourage students to seek help; de-stigmatize and legitimize the importance of mental health services and communications with others who can help.
- While being sure to acknowledge the individual who died, avoid romanticizing or glamorizing suicide.
- Protect students from any media coverage of the death by suicide.
- Be aware of any suicides in the larger community.
- Ensure that students, staff, and parents are educated about the warning signs and symptoms of suicide, and ensure that information about school and community supports is broadly accessible.

Other situations where the family may not wish to disclose the cause of death

This may include alcohol-related death, overdose, self-inflicted or intentional asphyxiation, etc.

- Be respectful of the family’s wishes about non-disclosure, where applicable.
- If / when appropriate, educate students about life-threatening behaviours and their consequences.
- Protect students from any media coverage.

Circumstances in which school liability may be at issue

The circumstances of the death may need to be acknowledged, but the ramifications do not have to be discussed. The death itself will need to be addressed and support services provided to students and staff. Appropriate communications with parents informing them of the death and the available supports for students is critical.

Death when school is not in session

If a death occurs during a school break, the school administrator may wish to inform the School Critical Incident Response Team to determine whether or not students or staff should be notified immediately via telephone or written communication. When school resumes after the break, additional plans, in consultation with the Divisional Critical Incident Response Team should be in place in order to provide supports for students and staff, as necessary.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Death of a Teacher

If a teacher has died, consider having another teacher who students know (music, phys ed, etc.) remain with the class over the next few days and have a substitute teacher cover the less impacted classes.

Community Supports

Where appropriate, consider inviting community members (e.g. faith based leaders, Elders, mental health workers) to help provide supports to staff and students during the critical incident response.

Protect Students from Being Re-traumatized

The focus of all communications, including media coverage, should be the protection of students from intrusive attention. Media is not to be given access to the school – all media queries must be directed to the Chief Superintendent's Office. Further, media coverage of the event should not be accessed in the classroom during school hours.

Students' Expressions of Sympathy

Students may wish to send notes / cards of sympathy to the deceased student's or staff's family. Ensure that these are reviewed before sending them out.

Personal Effects of the Deceased

Arrange with family members for the return of belongings at a time that is convenient for them, preferably outside school hours. Have the personal effects available at the office so that they are not presented with the emotional challenge of having to clean out a locker or desk. Have the principal, the teacher of the deceased student, or the counsellor present when parents come to get their child's belongings.

Spontaneous On-site Memorials

Informal memorials may appear after a death of a student or teacher. Plans to handle flowers, cards, etc. should be made in advance. Communication with students should occur around the following: when the memorial will be removed, a plan of what will be done with the items at the site (cards, flowers, stuffed animals, etc.).

Email and Telephone Lists (including Synrevoice)

Ensure that the family's contact information is taken off the communication lists to ensure that further routine mailings are not inadvertently sent to the deceased's family.

APPENDIX: SAMPLE SCRIPTS AND LETTERS

(SOURCE: TURTLE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL DIVISION)

A. SCRIPT FOR TEACHERS – INFORMING STUDENTS ABOUT A DEATH OR OTHER TRAGIC EVENT

Dear Staff:

Your students need to know that a (death/loss/accident) has occurred.

Please be aware that you have the choice as to whether you want to be the one to tell your students. If you don't feel comfortable in doing so, please let your administrator or a member of your School Crisis Response Team know. Arrangements can be made for someone else to take your class, while you get the support you need. If you feel that you can lead the discussion, here are the facts and some guidelines for discussion.

Share only the facts that have been scripted for you. Additional information will be provided to you and the students, as soon as possible. You can begin with, "I have something sad to share with you".

Then share the scripted information provided by the school Crisis Response Team that is listed below.

In leading the discussion, you can say, "I am feeling very sad about what has happened. I would like to spend some time talking about the (death/crisis/accident)."

Take some time for informal discussion, and let the students know there is counselling available, if they need further discussion. Often it is helpful to have the discussion in a circle or with younger children, on the carpet. After the discussion and depending upon the age of the students, you may want to modify your curriculum plans for today, but try to end the day with some form of routine activity. Some students benefit from drawing or writing about their feelings, but all expressions of grief/loss should be accepted. The Crisis Response Team will be sharing other ideas for appropriate classroom activities, as more factual information surrounding this tragedy becomes available.

Please identify any students that you feel are experiencing a severe emotional reaction, and pass their names to the Crisis Response Team within the next two hours (or recess). A counselling area has been set up in the following area of the school: (list place – e.g. in the resource room) _____.

The following activities have been cancelled for today: (list below – e.g. guidance, physical education, resource) _____.

If you need any support, please let the office or the Crisis Response Team know.

Thank you in advance for supporting your students and fellow colleagues.

(Please feel free to reprint this page for staff.)

B. SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR CALL TO FAMILY

Death of Student or Staff

This call needs to center on caring for family and their needs.

“I wondered what we could do to help you during this difficult time...”

“It is not easy for me to call you but I wanted you to know that we at the school are thinking about you.”

“We’ve been thinking about you and wondered what we here at school can do to help...”

“Perhaps if we give the students some information that may stop some of them from calling you directly unless you want to hear from them.”

Rumours, Verification of Death or Accident

“Some of the students arrived at school with some rumours about Sally and we wanted to check them with you...”

“We wondered how you would like us to handle this with staff and students and what information you would be comfortable having us share...”

“We’d like to be supportive of you and we don’t want to do anything to upset the family...”

C. SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR SUICIDE

If the death has been declared a suicide:

“We are sad to announce that _____ took his life last night. Memorial services will be made by his family. Counselling will be provided for those who wish to speak with a counselor. It is always a shock when we hear of someone taking his or her life. Let’s cancel our work for now to discuss this.”

If the death has not been declared suicide or if that fact has not been made public:

“_____ died last night of a gunshot wound (only use factual information provided by police). Counselling will be provided for those wishing to speak with someone. When an unexpected incident such as this occurs, it helps to discuss it. Regular class work will be canceled to allow time for discussion.

D. SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I regret to inform you of the death of _(Name of deceased)_.

(Name of deceased) was a _(student/teacher)_ at _(School)_.

(He/she) was a student in grade _____. (He/she) taught _(Subject)_ and has been on staff at School for _____ years.

Funeral arrangements are pending but will be shared with your son/daughter as they become available.

Each person responds to death in his/her own way. If your son/daughter is showing signs of particular distress please contact his/her teacher. Resource personnel are available at the school to help students deal with the death.

I trust this information is useful in helping you support your son/daughter at this difficult time.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Today, we have been able to confirm that (name of student or teacher), a grade (list grade and identify student or teacher status) has died suddenly. The reported cause of death was (describe cause). While we are shocked and saddened by the news of this tragedy, we wanted to share how we have handled this situation at school.

Since many students and staff were affected by the death, the School Crisis Response Team was activated and an overall school plan was implemented. Directed by myself, as the school principal, the team consists of several specifically trained school staff. The classroom teachers were asked to share the news concerning the death and acknowledge student feelings in a supportive manner, appropriate for the age of your child. In addition, a counselling centre was set up in the (list place), where students most affected could receive further supports. It is hoped that by providing a supportive place for expressions of grief, the students and staff will be able to understand and cope with the loss.

Just as we have encouraged students to express their feelings here at school, we also encourage you to discuss (name of deceased) death at home. Listening to your child and acknowledging their feelings will be helpful. As each child and their experiences are different, the need for discussion and support will also vary.

Should you have any questions about your child's response or need any assistance, please feel free to call the school. If a member of the Crisis Response Team is not available to take your call, please leave your name and number, and your call will be returned as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

Date

Dear Parents:

I am writing to inform you of an unfortunate event which occurred at the school of your son/daughter today.

(Basic details of incident)

We have provided some debriefing to the students around the incident, and tried to reinforce that school is a safe place and that many people are here to make sure they are kept safe. We have also tried to let the students know that the perpetrator is being dealt with on this manner.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your son/daughter's response to this matter, please give me a call at _____.

Sincerely,

Principal