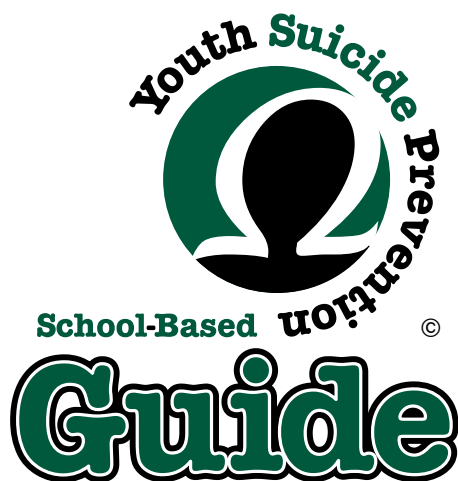


# Checklist 7b



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# Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide

## Responding to and Working with the Media Sample Forms for Schools

- Announcements for Students, Faculty, and Staff
- Notification Letter to Parents Following a Suicide
- Formal Statement to Notify Media of Suicide
- Sample Response Form for Incoming Calls from the Media

The following announcements have been suggested for use when addressing students, faculty, and staff. These announcements should be presented in a small meeting room as soon as possible following the death. A member of the crisis team and possibly the principal should lead the meetings. The goals of the meetings are to inform the faculty, students, and staff and allow them time to express their emotions, and prepare them to meet and deal with a suicidal crisis. Faculty should be given accurate up-to-date information regarding the suicide first and they should be given time to express their emotions and concerns before informing their students. These sample forms were synthesized from four sources (see references for complete resource information):

- *Managing Sudden Traumatic Loss in the Schools: New Jersey Adolescent Suicide Prevention Project* (Revised Edition) by Underwood & Dunne-Maxim.
- *Youth Suicide Prevention Intervention and Postvention Guidelines: A Resource for School Personnel* by The Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program.
- *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools* by The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center.
- *Suicide Postvention Guidelines: Suggestions for Dealing with the Aftermath of Suicide in the Schools* by the American Association of Suicidology.

# Sample Forms for Schools 7a continued

## Announcements to Students, Faculty, and Staff **Morning Day 1**

### Sample Announcements for When a Suicide has Occurred

"This morning we heard the extremely sad news that \_\_\_\_\_ died by suicide last night. I know we are all saddened by his death and send our condolences to his family and friends. Crisis stations will be located throughout the school today for students who wish to talk to a counselor. Information about the funeral will be provided when it is available, and students may attend with parental permission." (2)

**Or**

"It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that one of our students, \_\_\_\_\_, has taken [his/her] own life. All of us want you to know that we are here to help you in any way we can.

A suicide death presents us with many questions that we may not be able to answer right away. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we ask that you not spread rumors you may hear. We'll do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us.

Suicide is a very complicated act. It is usually caused by a mental disorder such as depression, which can prevent a person from thinking clearly about his or her problems and how to solve them. Sometimes these disorders are not identified or noticed; in other cases, a person with a disorder will show obvious symptoms or signs. One thing is certain: there are treatments that can help. Suicide should never, ever be an option.

Each of us will react to \_\_\_\_\_'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Feeling sad is a normal response to any loss. Some of you may not have known \_\_\_\_\_ very well and may not be as affected, while others may experience a great deal of sadness. Some of you may find you're having difficulty concentrating on your schoolwork, and others may find that diving into your work is a good distraction.

We have counselors available to help our school community deal with this sad loss and to enable us to understand more about suicide. If you'd like to talk to a counselor, just let your teachers know.

Please remember that we are all here for you." (3)

### Sample Announcement for a Suspicious Death Not Declared Suicide

"This morning we heard the extremely sad news that \_\_\_\_\_ died last night. This is the only information we have officially received on the circumstances surrounding the event. I know we are all saddened by \_\_\_\_\_'s death and send our condolences to his family and friends. Crisis stations will be located throughout the school today for students who wish to talk to a counselor. Information about the funeral will be provided when it is available, and students may attend with parental permission." (1, 2)

**Or**

"It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that one of our students, \_\_\_\_\_, has died. All of us want you to know that we are here to help you in any way we can.

The cause of death has not yet been determined by the authorities. We are aware that there has been some talk about the possibility that this was a suicide death. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we ask that you not spread rumors since they may turn out to be inaccurate and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to \_\_\_\_\_ as well as [his/her] family and friends. We'll do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us.

Each of us will react to \_\_\_\_\_'s death in our own way, and we need to be respectful of each other. Feeling sad is a normal response to any loss. Some of you may not have known \_\_\_\_\_ very well and may not be as affected, while others may experience a great deal of sadness. Some of you may find you're having difficulty concentrating on your schoolwork, and others may find that diving into your work is a good distraction. We have counselors available to help our school community deal with this sad loss. If you'd like to talk to a counselor, just let your teachers know.

Please remember that we are all here for you." (3)

# Sample Forms for Schools 7a continued

## Announcements Morning Day 1

### Sample Announcement for a Primary or Middle School

"We want to take some time this morning to talk about something very sad. (Name) \_\_\_\_\_, an eighth grader, died unexpectedly last night. At this point, we do not officially know the cause of (his/her) \_\_\_\_\_ death. Death is a difficult issue for anyone to deal with. Even if you didn't know \_\_\_\_\_, you might still have some emotional reactions to hearing about this.

It is very important to be able to express our feelings about \_\_\_\_\_'s death, especially our loss and sadness. We want you to know that there are teachers and counselors available in the library all through the day to talk with you about your reaction to \_\_\_\_\_'s death. If you want to talk with somebody, you will be given a pass to go to the library where we have people who will help us through this difficult time." (1, 2)

## Announcements End of Day 1

At the end of the first day, another announcement to the whole school prior to dismissal can serve to join the whole school in their grieving in a simple, non-sensationalized way. In this case, it is appropriate for the building administrator to make an announcement similar to the following over the loud speaker (1, 2):

"Today has been a sad day for all of us. We encourage you to talk about \_\_\_\_\_'s death with your friends, your family, and whoever else gives you support. We will have special staff here for you tomorrow to help in dealing with our loss. Let us end the day by having the whole school offer a moment of silence for \_\_\_\_\_."

## Announcements Day 2

On the second day following the death, many schools have found it helpful to start the day with another announcement by each teacher in their homeroom. This announcement can include additional verified information, re-emphasize the continuing availability of in-school resources, and provide information to facilitate grief. Here's a sample of how this announcement might be handled (2):

"We now know that \_\_\_\_\_'s death has been declared a suicide. Even though we might try to understand the reasons for his/her doing this, we can never really know what was going on that made him/her take his/her life. One thing that's important to remember is that there is never just one reason for a suicide. There are always many reasons or causes and we will never be able to figure them all out.

Today we begin the process of returning to a normal schedule in school. This may be hard for some of us to do. Counselors are still available in school to help us deal with our feelings. If you feel the need to speak to a counselor, either alone or with a friend, tell a teacher, the principal, or the school nurse, and they will help make the arrangements.

We also have information about the visitation and funeral. The visitation will be held tomorrow evening at the \_\_\_\_\_ Funeral Home from 7 to 9 pm. There will be a funeral Mass Friday morning at 10 am at \_\_\_\_\_ Church. In order to be excused from school to attend the funeral, you will need to be accompanied by a parent or relative, or have your parent's permission to attend. We also encourage you to ask your parents to go with you to the funeral home."