

Tragedy Response Manual

Mission

The purpose of the Canby Public Schools Tragedy Response Team is to respond to immediate crisis needs that affect students, staff, and the community. The goal is to help reduce the long-term effects on the students, staff and community from a stressful event by providing quick and effective action in the event of a crisis.

Tragedy Response Team Members

Superintendent
High School Principal
Elementary Principal
School Social Worker
Mental Health Practitioner
School Psychologist
Elementary Nurse
High School Nurse
High School Custodian
Elementary Custodian
Transportation
High School Administrative Assistant
Elementary Administrative Assistant

Activation

The Tragedy Response Team will be activated by any of the following tragedies or stressful events below, as well as other instances that are deemed necessary by the Superintendent of Canby Public Schools.

- Death of a student, staff member, or any other community member that may possibly affect people in the school building
- Death that impacts Canby Public Schools from neighboring districts and towns
- Accidents involving students or staff
- Suicide attempt by a student
- Community disaster or world significant event that causes stress on the school environment
- Cyberattacks that threaten students
- An assault on school property witnessed by students

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Tragedy Response Team Checklist

General Process That Tragedy Response Team Needs to Follow

Originally created by S. Reznechek, L. Betker (RCW) & T. Kroes (BOLD) 20 12.
Some materials adapted from Suddenly in Command, Schoenfeldt and Associates.

Immediately Following the Notification of a Crisis

The administrator/crisis response team member should implement the following procedures when the school is notified of a neadeath or fatal crisis situation or similar situation.

- Tell the person providing the information not to repeat information elsewhere in the school. Explain the school's need to verify the information and have any announcement of the event come from designated individuals.
- Tell office staff not to repeat or provide any information ~~un~~ specifically instructed to do so. Have any inquiries directed to an administrator or crisis response team media liaison.
- In cases of student death or accident, verify the reported incident by calling appropriate sheriff/police liaison. **DO NOT DISTURB THE AFFECTED STUDENT'S FAMILY!**
 - Note: The timing of the notification of a crisis may alter the order of the initial steps taken. For example, if the school is notified in the morning, all procedures should be implemented on that day with emergency faculty meetings scheduled during lunch or after school if necessary. If notification is received at night or on the weekend, there will be a meeting with faculty before school starts.

Following the Verification of Crisis

- Convene the crisis response team.
- Share cell phone numbers with team members for communication during the day.
- Briefly review roles and functions of specific members (pg. 6-7) and determine if any changes need to be made.
- Determine if outside supports (SWWC School Crisis Response Team, Ministerial Association) are needed and contact them as appropriate. Have somebody prepared to meet them, get them signed in, and direct them to appropriate locations.
- Determine if Students in other buildings or districts may be impacted and notify the appropriate administrator(s), if necessary.
- If appropriate, determine a time and place for a staff meeting and announce it to staff.
- Draft a formal statement (Script) for initial announcement to classes. Provide guidelines to encourage teachers to facilitate conversation about the incident. Include necessary details and note additional details will be provided if appropriate. Also prepare statements for telephone inquiries.
- Make announcement to classes, including where students can find support i.e. grief room, counseling rooms, clergy, etc. Ensure that support members are stationed prior to making announcement and that there is a student sign-in sheet.
- Designate a place for staff and students to leave well-wishes, messages and memorial items.

- Team will determine how information will be disseminated. Possible ways of dissemination may include: Type letter to send home with students, place on webpage, e-mail or a School Reach message with voice of school personnel.
- Once the announcement is made:
 - When possible, have a mental health professional follow the deceased student's schedule for the day to help classmates and staff cope with the loss.
 - Monitor the school for students leaving the building without permission. Redirect them to support services. If unable to intervene, notify a family member expressing the school's concern. Also check restrooms, locker rooms, and other out of the way places periodically.
 - Monitor for student's that are at-risk or are more vulnerable to the loss and refer any for more individualized intervention.
- Tragedy Response Team members will provide support to Canby School Staff during lunch in the lounge. This will be to address staff concerns and remind them to get a list of at-risk students to the Tragedy Response Team. A staff meeting will also be held after school to convey any new information.
- Call Substitutes as needed (floater) to cover teachers when a break is needed.
- Make sure debriefings with staff take place after school and as needed (lunch/morning).
- Clean out deceased student's locker in the time frame of the funeral and any personal items or work from classrooms. This option may be given to the family to clean out as well. These belongings will be given to the family. An explanation may need to be given to the students.
- Hold Crisis Management Briefing for the entire community. This can be done daily if needed. The purpose of CMB is to lower anxiety, guide people, acknowledge the incident and get accurate information out. See page 22 for details of the process.
- We should attempt to keep the schedule and school day as normal as possible, yet allowing for flexibility for students and staff most affected.
- Restore regular school functions as quickly as possible.

Tragedy Response Team Meetings will occur at the end of every day and as needed

- Team will collaborate and discuss high and medium risk students. Lists should be gathered from the following places: secretary, teachers, counselors, social workers, clergy, rgom staff, and administration. Each Tragedy Response Team member will be assigned a list of at-risk students to follow up with. Make parent contact and referrals as needed. (see Documentation form on Page 11 and definitions of risk levels on Page 12)
- A plan will be made for the next day.

Hospital/Funeral Arrangements

- Provide staff with information regarding visitation and/or funeral arrangements.

- If the funeral is scheduled during a school day, all students and staff should be excused from school.
- Encourage staff and students to attend the funeral to provide support for the family and bring closure to the incident.
- Designate staff to visit the hospital and/or attend the funeral.

Traumatic Incident Policies

Absenteeism: Establish absentee policies for teachers/students after an incident

Student Pick up: Even though students will be encouraged to stay, parents will be able to take their children provided law enforcement does not require them to stay. Students who are in the high to medium risk category will have to meet with one of the members of the mental health team prior to leaving. Parents will receive resources and information as needed to handle various situations.

Parent Meeting: A parent meeting may take place as needed after school hours either at the school or local churches. This meeting will use the CMB model described on page 22. Information on this would be sent to parents and staff.

Funerals: Students may attend the funeral with a signed note from the guardian. Canby Schools will not provide transportation to or from the funeral. A funeral may be held on Canby Public School property with proper arrangements.

Memorials: Canby Public Schools does not accept tangible memorials, but monetary donations can be made to the school foundation. All memorial suggestions or requests should be brought to the Superintendent's office.

Outside Agency Counselors: Their "home base" will be the Counselor's office (place for coats, purses, etc.) They will check in and out of the central office. Please have them wait for School Social Worker for direction. Water, snacks, and free school lunch will be provided for all volunteers.

Available Space for Tragedy Response

Outside Agency Home Base: Counselor's office

High School Grief Room: ITV Rm 115

Elementary Grief Room: Rm 101

High School Counseling Rooms: Social Worker's office, rooms on either side of social worker's office, and Audio Video rooms.

Elementary Counseling Rooms: Mental Health Practitioner's office. Other space will be determined at time of need.

Canby Tragedy Response Roles

Title	Roles
Superintendent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Activate the Tragedy Response Team 2. Oversee the Tragedy Response Team 3. All media contact 4. Assign a spokesperson with family 5. Contact neighboring schools of the tragedy 6. Approve all statements and letter 7. Attend all Tragedy Response Team meetings 8. Attend all staff meetings 9. Contact school board members
Elementary Principal High School Principal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notify building staff of the crisis 2. Prepare a statement for teachers to read to their students 3. Communicate teacher roles (from this chart) with teachers 4. Identify students & staff of concern & notify the School Social Worker, Elm MHP 5. Support building staff and get subs as needed to help them 6. Write parent letter that goes home and consult with Tragedy Response Team 7. Schedule staff debriefings as needed 8. Hold daily staff meetings during tragedy 9. Assign a staff member to purchase water and snacks for the volunteers from outside agencies 10. Fill in for Superintendent or other Administrations duties as needed 11. Send out an email to all staff stating the location of grief room.
Technology Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Place letter to families on webpage 2. Place community resources on webpage (crisis number and mental health agencies) 3. Handouts on reactions to stress (SCRT good resource for this)
School Social Workers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notify SWWC SCRT of the tragedy and request assistance 2. Place Grief Room sign in sheet and outside agency sign in sheet 3. Communicate with secretaries regarding kids to monitor 4. Call parents to check on absent kids and notify parents of major issues 5. Help direct grief counselors & debriefing staff to needed locations 6. Respond to teacher requests for counseling in the classroom 7. Refer at risk students to mental health agencies 8. Contact local ministers if needed 9. Arrange debriefing & counseling rooms & notify secretary of locations 10. Counsel students and teachers 11. Provide CISM Team and Clergy with documentation form (pg. 10 & 12) 12. Provide CISM Team and Clergy with handout (pg. 13) 13. Gather clipboards, sticky notes, pen, etc. for Counselor's office 14. Post a school schedule for outside agencies

School Psychologist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Counsel students and teachers 2. Calls to parents to check on absent students and notify parents of major issues 3. Help direct grief counselors & debriefing staff to needed locations 4. Respond to teacher requests for counseling in the classroom 5. Fill in for School Social Worker if needed
Secretaries & Human Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Answer phone calls and use prepared statement from Tragedy Response Team 2. Send kids to appropriate rooms for counseling or debriefings 3. Remove deceased student from class list/attendance 4. Keep a list of all phone calls from concerned parents share with Tragedy Response Team 5. Refer all at risk students or staff to School Social Worker Elm MHP or CISM team member immediately 6. Print off absent list and give to School Social Worker or Elm MHP. 7. Secretaries will assist CISM team with student schedules, supplies, and any other needs
Teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide School Social Worker, Elm Counselor with a written list of at-risk students and the concern 2. Read statement provided by the Tragedy Response Team to the class. 3. Take attendance ASAP 4. Distribute resource materials to students provided by Tragedy Response Team 5. Notify administrator if in need of sub
All teachers of the student	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read statement provided by the Tragedy Response Team to the class 2. Take attendance ASAP
Outside agency personnel (CISM and Clergy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Document all student contacts on provided form ● Document all group contacts on provided form ● Document all classroom visits on provided form ● Document all phone calls on provided form ● Turn in all documented contacts to Counseling Office every day

Handout for Secretary Duties

Secretaries	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Answer phone calls and use prepared statement from Tragedy Response Team2. Send kids to appropriate rooms for counseling or debriefings3. Remove deceased student from class list/attendance4. Keep a list of all phone calls from concerned parents share with Tragedy Response Team5. Refer all at risk students or staff to School Social Worker or CISM team member immediately6. Print off absent list and give to School Social Worker, Elm MHP7. Secretaries will assist CISM team with student schedules, supplies, and any other needs
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Emergency Numbers

Emergency: 911

YMC Sheriff's Office: 320 -564-2130

Canby Police Department: 507-223-7211

Lincoln County Sheriff's Office: 507-694-1664

Duel County Sheriff's Office: 605-874-8212

YMC Family Services: 320 -564-2211

MINNESOTA POISON CONTROL CENTER – EMERGENCY: 800 -222-1222

MINNESOTA POISON CONTROL CENTER -- NON-EMERGENCY: 800 -764-7661

AMERICAN RED CROSS- SW MN Chapter: 507-372-4702 Prairie Winds Chapter: 507-372-4702

AMERICAN RED After Hours: 855-891-7325

Sanford Hospital Canby: 507-223-7277

National Youth Crisis Hotline: 800 -448-4663

Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program: 800 -784-2433

Mental Health and Crisis Numbers

Woodland Centers Crisis Center: ~~800~~32-8781

Greater Minnesota Family Services: ~~320~~149692

Western Mental Health: 800-658-2429

Southwest Psychological Services: ~~507~~76-5462

Tragedy Response Documentation Form

Date: _____

Time: _____

Crisis team member completing assessment:

Student name: -----

Reason for referral: -----

Priority Level:

_____ No Risk

_____ Low

_____ Medium

_____ High

Additional follow-up needed:

_____ No

_____ Yes, Explain: -----

Meeting Notes

Guardian contact information:

Risk Determination Descriptions

HIGH RISK

Imminent Danger to Self Requires: IMMEDIATE Response

1. If the student is talking about, threatening, or has attempt suicide, they are considered high risk. Report them immediately to School Social Worker for assistance.
DO NOT LEAVE THE STUDENT UNATTENDED
2. If School Mental Health people are not available ~~not~~ the office to page administration or school social worker.
3. The School Social Worker will take appropriate action including a parent meeting and/or a referral to outside agencies for assistance.

MODERATE RISK

Potentially Dangerous to self Requires: Thorough Evaluation/Referral

1. If the student is displaying some abnormal behaviors, stay close to the victim please notify the School Social Worker ASAP.

LOW RISK

Requires Short Term Monitoring

NO RISK

No follow-up needed

Defusing/Debriefing Documentation Form

Date: _____ Time: _____

Crisis team member completing assessment: _____

Class/Grade:

School Staff Present:

Students Present:

Please circle students who are at-risk and need follow up.

District Information Sheet for Outside Agency Responders

Please check in and out of the Central office. Your home base will be the Counselor's office. You may keep your personal items there. Also, school lunch will be provided free of charge.

Expectations:

- Document all individual contacts, group contact, classroom visits, and all phone calls on provided form
- Turn in all documented contacts to School Social Worker every day

Canby School Staff to Know

Superintendent

Ryan Nielsen, ext. 2005

High School Principal

Elementary Principal

High School Social Worker

Elementary MH Practitioner

High School Secretary

Elementary School Secretary

High School Nurse

School Psychologist

Elementary Nurse

Ministerial and Mental Health Sign IN/OUT Sheet

- No cell phones or iPads
- Kleenex
- At least 2 people staffing
- Have grief resources available
- Provide the following supplies: crayons, markers, pens, pencils, 8x10 paper, large roll paper
- If you are in need of more support please call:
High School: Renee Frazier, ext. 2002
Elementary:

High School Grief Room: ITV Room 115 (across from the counseling office)

Elementary School Grief Room: Room 101 (next to the elementary office)

Phone Call Log

Utilize event script when answering district telephones.

Sample Telephone Script Memo

Canby Public School District 891 Memorandum

To: Secretaries, principals and staff

From:

Date:

RE: Phone inquiries from students or families about (event)

Please us the following information when responding to telephone inquiries from students or families. This statement has been approved for use by (approved name)

Please refer all media inquiries to:
Superintendent or designee
(Name, phone, email address)

Script for Announcing Details of Incident

Early this morning before the start of school [name of student], a [name of school] [year in school], died when [cause of death].

The incident happened [location of accident]. At least two other students witnessed the accident.

[Name of student] will be missed by our entire school community. We do not know any further details about the death at this time.

Further Questions or Information

If you have questions about the accident, or have information that can help investigators, please call local police at [phone number].

Funeral Arrangements

When we learn of funeral arrangements, we will share them with staff and students, so they can express their support to the family.

Availability of Counselors

The [school name] has counselors at our school today. Students and staff can talk with them about their grief. [School name] is also providing counseling to the students who witnessed the accident.

Corresponding with Family

If you wish to send a card or letter to the family, you can drop it off at the school office, and we will forward it to the family. Because of student record confidentiality, we are unable to provide the family's address.

School Open/Closed

The school is not open tomorrow.

But when we are open again on Monday, [date], counselors will still be in place if anyone should need them.

Author of Memorandum: _____

Date: _____

Sample Letter Following a Suicide

(DATE)

Dear School Community:

I am sorry to inform you that a staff person/student/friend **(NAME)**, at **(SCHOOL NAME)** has died **(DAY/DATE)** *(Before stating this is a death by suicide, be sure of the accuracy of the report, and if the family will allow this information to be shared. Only then insert the information regarding the cause and circumstances regarding the death.)*

Death can be difficult for us to understand, especially when it is sudden. All of us will be feeling a variety of emotions: shock, sadness, even some confusion. What is most important is that we care for and support each other.

The Tragedy Response Team has made plans to ~~respond~~ respond to the emotional needs of the students. *(Spell out what is being done: grief counseling, classroom debriefing, ~~referrals~~ referrals)* family has experienced a death or similar loss recently, the death **(NAME)** may bring up feelings about that death. This is a normal experience. Although rare, sometimes students may be so overwhelmed by the death of someone close to them, that they may express suicidal thoughts or actions. Please let your child's teacher or school social worker know if there is any additional information the school should be aware of so we can provide the support your child needs.

Any time death touches us, it is extremely stressful. This sudden death may be disturbing to you as well as to your child. It is for this reason that we especially want you to know of our caring and support.

Be sure to include appropriate resources for families. See section 1 for possibilities.

Sincerely,

(PRINCIPAL'S NAME)

Sample Letter to Families Following a Death

(DATE)

Dear Parent and Caregivers:

I am sorry to inform you that a staff person/student/friend **(NAME)** at **(SCHOOL NAME)** has died **(DAY/DATE)** *(Insert what information can be shared about the cause/circumstances of the death.)*

Death can be difficult for us to understand, especially when it is sudden. All of us will be feeling a variety of emotions: shock, sadness, or confusion. What is most important is that we care for and support each other.

The Tragedy Response Team has made plans to respond to the emotional needs of the students. *(Spell out what is being done: grief counseling, classroom debriefing, referrals to support service staff and community based organizations)*

If your family has experienced a death or similar loss recently, the death of **(NAME)** may bring up feelings about that death. This is a normal experience. Please let your child *(teacher or counselor)* know if there is any additional information the school should be aware of so we can provide the support your child needs.

Any time death touches us, it is stressful. This sudden death may be disturbing to you as well as to your child. It is for this reason that we especially, want you to know of our care and support.

Sincerely,

(PRINCIPAL'S NAME)

Sample Announcement to Staff Following a Death

(Date)

Dear Staff,

There are times when it is necessary to communicate news that is painful for all of us. During those times we must be prepared to support each other as we deal with the many feelings ~~that~~ begin to experience. It is with great sorrow that I inform you that **(NAME OF PERSON)** **(SCHOOLNAME)** has died.

Death can be difficult for us to understand, especially when it is sudden. We will all begin to feel different emotions: shock, sadness, confusion, even some anger. What is most important is that we care for and support each other.

Sometimes students are affected by the death of someone important to them, and they may need to express their feelings. Please contact a Tragedy Response Team member if you notice a student who appears to be having more difficulty with his/her feelings than might be expected.

(Add here where the grief room will be and to notify administration if in need of a sub.)
Administration will keep you updated as more information is given us at the school.

Sincerely,

(Principal's name)

Sample Letter to Students Following a Death

(DATE)

Dear Students,

I have asked your teacher to read this letter to you because I want to make sure that all students receive the same information about the recent tragedy at our school. It gives me great sorrow to inform you that **((NAME))** a **(teacher student/friend)** at **(SCHOOL NAME)** has died **(DAY/DATE)**.
(Insert what confirmed information can be shared about the cause and circumstances of the death.)

Death can be difficult for us to understand, especially when it is sudden. Many of us may be confronted with a variety of emotions which might include shock, sadness, and confusion. I want to assure you that we, the **(SCHOOL NAME)** staff, care about you and the feelings you may be experiencing.

Please know that we want to support you during this time. The Tragedy Response Team will be available to meet with you in **(PLACE)** to assist you in dealing with any feeling you may be having.

You might wish to share memories you have of **(NAME)**. Tragedy Response Team members will be available at any time during the day to help you if you feel a more urgent need to talk with someone. *(Insert here specific information on how students can access support service staff and collaborating agencies for support.)* I want to encourage those students who may be particularly upset, perhaps even struggling with a death in the family or of a friend, to talk with Tragedy Response Team members. They will be available to meet with you.

Any time death touches us, it is stressful. This sudden death may be quite shocking to you and confuse you. For these reasons, we especially want you to know of our care and support.

Sincerely,

(PRINCIPAL'S NAME)

Tips for Dealing with the Media

All media requests should be referred to the superintendent or District public information officer.

- Superintendent serves as District's public information officer unless he/she designates a spokesperson. If spokesperson is unavailable, an alternate assumes responsibilities.
- Refer media requests to the District public information officer, who will assume responsibility for issuing public statements during an emergency.

District public information officer:

Name	Telephone numbers (home, work and cell)
------	---

Alternate public information officer:

Name	Telephone numbers (home, work and cell)
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Prepare

- Write down what you want to communicate.
 - State appropriate concern for victims and their families
 - Provide appropriate factual information (e.g., students involved, ages)
 - Include information about the steps taken to deal with the tragedy (as well as any preventive measures previously taken)
 - Safeguard privacy and confidentiality and details that police should handle related to criminal acts and suicide.
- Ask media to communicate resources for assistance available at the school and in the community.

Give Straightforward Information

No matter what you are told, assume that everything you say will be quoted (and misquoted). Thus, respond to questions by reiterating points from your prepared statement. However, when you don't have information on a matter, simply state this in a straightforward manner. Keep a positive demeanor.

Avoid Common Mistakes

- Don't restate any question you are asked (especially negatively phrased questions) because through editing and selective quoting it can be made to appear part of your statement.
- Don't interpret events or motives, or predict what will happen.
- Don't speculate, ad lib, blame anyone, or try to be deceptive.
- Don't let anyone bait you into an argument because you are almost certain to look like you are defensive (perhaps trying to hide something), and you probably will say something in a way that reflects badly on you and the school.
- Do not say "no comment" or ask to speak off the record and do not argue with the media

Correct the Record

As you become aware of errors in media coverage, take the opportunity of future media inquiries to include corrective information in your statement.

Crisis Management Briefing (CMB) Large Group Assembly

Purpose: lower anxiety, guide people, acknowledges the incident and gets accurate information out.

Invitations to the CMB to be sent by: School Reach, letter home, newspaper, radio, email

Assembly

Speaker: can be superintendent or other administrator

Cover: Introduction, explain why we are here, how the CMB works. This will be ~~was~~ information with no interruptions.

Information:

Speaker: Person with the most information, may be law enforcement

Cover: Overview of the situation, explaining why and what happened, share the plan for response.

Reactions:

Speaker: Outside CISM Team Member

Cover: Explain the processing they have experienced because of the incident, physically, mentally, and emotionally

Strategies:

Speaker: Mental Health practitioner, school social worker, school nurse, or another CISM team member.

Cover: Handout and shared ~~hw~~ they will process it more as time goes on. ~~Self~~ care info and resources.

Do's and Don'ts Related to Suicidal Threats

Teacher Handout

The publications of many organizations and governmental agencies contain advice for people who want to help suicidal youngsters. That advice is summarized below.

DO's

- LISTEN** to what the student is saying and take her/his suicidal threat seriously. Many times a student may be looking for just that assurance.
- OBSERVE** the student's nonverbal behavior. In children and adolescents, facial expressions, body language, and other concrete signs often are more telling than what the student says.
- ASK** whether the student is really thinking about suicide. If the answer is "yes," ask how she/he plans to do it and what steps have already been taken. This will convince the student of your attention and let you know how serious the threat is.
- GET HELP** by contacting School Social Worker or the office to find another Mental Health Professional. Never attempt to handle a potential suicide by yourself.
- STAY** with the student until Mental Health assistance can get to you. The student has placed trust in you, so you must help transfer that trust to the other person.

DON'Ts

- DON'T** leave the student alone for even a minute.
- DON'T** act shocked or be sworn to secrecy.
- DON'T** underestimate or brush aside a suicide threat ("You won't really do it; you're not the type"), or try to shock or challenge the student ("Go ahead. Do it."). The student may already feel rejected and **noticed**, and you should not add to that burden.
- DON'T** let the student convince you that the crisis is over. The most dangerous time is precisely when the person seems to be feeling better. Sometimes, after a suicide method has been selected, the student may appear happy and relaxed. You should, therefore, stay involved until you get help.

DON'T take too much upon yourself! Your responsibility to the student in a crisis is limited to listening, being supportive, and getting him/her to a trained professional. Under no circumstances should you attempt to counsel the student

What Students Could Go Through in a Crisis

Parent and Teacher Handout

When should teachers refer students for more individualized assessment and intervention?

The following are guidelines for determining which students should be referred to counselors for additional intervention:

- students who cannot engage adequately in classroom assignments and activities after a sufficient amount of time has passed since the crisis and after a majority of their peers are able to do so
- students that continue to exhibit high levels of emotional responsiveness (e.g., crying, tearfulness) after a majority of their peers have discontinued to do so
- students who appear depressed, withdrawn and non-communicative
- students who continue to exhibit poorer academic performance and decreased concentration
- students who express suicidal or homicidal ideation, or students who are intentionally hurting themselves (e.g., cutting themselves)
- students who exhibit an apparent increased usage of alcohol or drugs
- students who gain or lose a significant amount of weight in a short period of time
- students who exhibit significant behavioral changes
- students who discontinue attending to their hygienic needs

What types of behaviors/reactions can teachers expect from their students after a crisis situation has occurred?

The manner in which people react to crisis situations is dependent upon a number of variables including personal history, personality variables, severity and proximity of the event, level of social support and the type and quality of intervention. While no two people respond to situations, including crisis situations, in exactly the same manner, the following are often seen as immediate reactions to a significant crisis:

- shock, numbness
- denial or inability to acknowledge the situation has occurred
- dissociative behavior—appearing dazed, apathetic, expressing feelings of unreality
- confusion
- disorganization
- difficulty making decisions
- suggestibility

It is important to note that most children will recover from the effects of a crisis with adequate support from family, friends and school personnel. Their response to a crisis can be viewed as “a normal response to an abnormal situation.” While the emotional effects of the crisis can be

significant and can potentially influence functioning for weeks to months, most children will evidence a full recovery.

Following are descriptions of responses likely to be observed in children:

- **Regression in Behavior** Children who have been exposed to a crisis often exhibit behaviors that are similar to children younger than themselves. This is especially true of toddlers, preschool and elementary school children. They may return to behavior that was abandoned long ago (e.g., thumb sucking, bedwetting, fears of the dark). Traumatized children may also exhibit separation anxiety, clinging to parents and resistance to leaving the parents' side. They may resist going to bed alone. Bladder and bowel control may be temporarily lost in younger children.
- **Increase in Fears and Anxiety** Children also exhibit an increase in their fears and worries. They may again become afraid of situations they mastered long ago. As mentioned above they may become fearful of the dark and refuse to go to bed alone. A school phobia may emerge where the child refuses to go to school for fear of something happening and/or fear of leaving his/her parents. They may openly verbalize their fear of the crisis occurring again in the school. It is important that parents do not allow the child to remain home as a means to deal with his/her anxiety. This will result in the anxiety increasing once the child needs to return to school. Due to the increase in fears, additional demands are made for parent attention and support. Adolescents may experience a more generalized anxiety and not the specific types of fears that are seen in younger children.
- **Decreased Academic Performance and Poor Concentration** Given the increase in anxiety and the disruption a crisis can have on children's sense of safety and security, there is a decrease in the amount of mental energy and focus available to learn and complete academic assignments.
- **Increased Aggression and Oppositional Behavior, and Decreased Frustration Tolerance:** Children who have been exposed to a crisis can experience difficulty controlling their anger and frustration. Situations that would not have caused a heightened emotional response prior to the crisis, can postcrisis result in an aggressive response and/or expression of frustration. Adolescents may also exhibit an increase in oppositional behavior, refusing to live by the rules and regulations of school and home, and/or meet their responsibilities (e.g., chores, academic assignments). Some adolescents may resort to antisocial behavior (e.g., stealing).
- **Increased Irritability, Emotional Liability and Depressive Feelings** Children can also exhibit stronger and more variable emotional responses to situations. There could be symptoms of depression that include general sense of sadness, difficulty falling and remaining asleep or sleeping more than normal, change in eating habits, loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, social withdrawal, mental and physical fatigue and/or suicidal ideation. In younger children there may be an increase in irritability and moodiness.
- **Denial:** In an effort to cope with the psychological and emotional ramifications of a crisis, certain children and adolescents will deny that a crisis has occurred and/or deny the significance of a crisis. A child whose mother has died suddenly may demand that he can

return home so that they can watch their favorite television program together. An adolescent whose favorite teacher was badly injured in a car accident may insist that he will recover fully, despite the medical evidence that indicates that this will not happen. Children who continue to utilize denial to cope may need to be confronted in a sensitive but straight forward manner. Anger and resentment may be expressed when confronting the child with the reality. In time, and with support, children do come to accept the reality of a situation.

Reactions of Teachers and Adults

What types of personal reactions can teachers expect after a crisis situation has occurred?

As in the case of children, the answer to this question is dependent on a number of variables including personal history, personality variables, severity and proximity of the event, level of social support and type and quality of intervention. The fact that some of the possible immediate adult reactions to a crisis are confusion, disorganization and difficulty in decision making, underscores the need for a preplanned practiced and organized response plan.

Longer term reactions that are experienced by adults are:

- denial
- feelings of detachment
- unwanted, intrusive recollections
- depression
- concentration difficulty
- anxiety
- psychosomatic complaints
- hyper vigilance
- withdrawal
- eating disturbance
- irritability and low frustration tolerance
- sleep difficulty
- poor work performance
- loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- emotional and mental fatigue
- emotional changes
- marital discord

Since teachers are likely to be affected by the crisis situation, it is imperative that they receive the appropriate support and intervention. Without such intervention, they will be limited in their ability to meet the needs of their students. It is important that teachers have a forum to discuss their own feelings and reactions to the crisis and receive support. Teachers usually look to other teachers, and possibly school support personnel (e.g., psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor) to share their feelings.

Family and friends outside the school environment can also serve as important sources of support. As with their students, most teachers will show a full recovery from the crisis situation. However, if

the symptoms outlined above persist and continue to interfere with functioning, professional consultation may be beneficial.

Explaining Suicide To Children

Teacher Handout

“What should I tell the children?” A question often asked after the suicide of a loved one. The answer? The Truth.

Many people still believe it is best to shield children from the truth, that somehow this will protect them. More often than not, the opposite is true. Misleading children, evading the truth, or telling falsehoods to them about how someone died can do much more harm than good; if they happen to hear the truth from someone else, their trust in you can be difficult to regain. Not knowing can be terrifying and hurtful. We’ve always been told that “honest is the best policy” and just ~~use~~ the subject is suicide, that doesn’t mean this time is any different.

What children might be feeling after losing someone they love/care about to suicide:

1. Abandoned– that the person who died didn’t love them
2. Feel the death is their fault if they would have loved the person more or behaved differently.
3. Afraid they will die too.
4. Worried that someone else they love will die or worry about who will take care of them.
5. Guilt– because they wished or thought of the person’s death
6. Sad
7. Embarrassed- to see other people or to go back to school
8. Confused
9. Angry– at the person who died, at God, at everyone.
10. Lonely
11. Denial– pretend like nothing happened.
12. Numb – can’t feel anything
13. Wish it would all just go away.

Children and adolescents may have a multitude of feelings happening at the same time or simply may not feel anything at all. Whatever they are feeling, the important thing to remember is that they understand it is okay. And that whatever those feelings are they have permission to let them out. If they want to keep to themselves for a while, that’s okay too.

Their age will be a factor in how much they can understand at the time, and how much information they can take in. What is important is having honest conversations with them about what has happened.

What Adults Can Do To Help Children Cope With Feelings Of Loss/Grief

- ❖ Talk with your child, providing simple, accurate information to questions
- ❖ Talk with your child about his/her feelings
- ❖ Listen to what your child says and how your child says it. Is there fear, anxiety, insecurity? Your repeating the child's words may be very helpful, such as, "you are afraid that...", or "you wonder if the storm will come again today." This helps both you and your child clarify feelings.
- ❖ Reassure your child. "We are together. We care about you. We will take care of you."
- ❖ You may need to repeat information and reassurance many times. Do not stop responding just because you told the child once.
- ❖ Hold your child. Provide comfort. Touching is important for the children during this period.
- ❖ Spend extra time putting your child to bed. Talk and offer assurance. Leave a night light on if necessary.
- ❖ Observe your child at play. Listen to what is said and how the child plays. Frequently children express feelings of fear or anger while playing with dolls, trucks, or friends.
- ❖ Provide play experiences to relieve tension. Work with playdough, paint, play in water, etc. If children show need to hit or kick, give them something safe, like a pillow, ball or balloon.
- ❖ If your child lost a meaningful toy or blanket, allow the child to mourn and grieve (by crying, perhaps). It is all part of helping the young child to cope with feelings about the disaster. It time, it may be helpful to replace the lost object.
- ❖ If you need help for your child, contact a community mental health professional or a minister. There are resources to help!

Tips for Parents

What types of behaviors/reactions can parents expect from their child after a crisis situation has occurred?

The manner in which people react to crisis situations is dependent on a number of variables including personal history, personality variables, severity and proximity of the event, level of social support and the type and quality of intervention. While no two people respond to situations, the following are often seen as immediate reactions to a significant crisis:

- shock, numbness,
- denial or inability to acknowledge the situation has occurred,
- dissociative behavior appearing dazed, apathetic, expressing feelings of unreality,
- confusion,
- disorganization,
- difficulty making decisions, and
- suggestibility.

It is important to note that most children will recover from the effects of a crisis with adequate support from family, friends and school personnel. Their response to a crisis can be viewed as “a normal response to an abnormal situation.” While the emotional effects of the crisis can be significant and can potentially influence functioning for weeks to months, most children will evidence a full recovery.

Following are descriptions of responses likely to be observed in children:

- **Regression in Behavior** Children who have been exposed to a crisis often exhibit behaviors that are similar to children younger than themselves. This is especially true of toddlers, preschool and elementary school children. They may return to behavior that was abandoned long ago (e.g., thumb sucking, bed-wetting, fears of the dark). Traumatized children may also exhibit separation anxiety, clinging to parents and resistance to leaving the parents’ side. They may resist going to bed alone.
- **Increase in Fears and Anxiety** Children also exhibit an increase in their fears and worries. They may openly verbalize their fear of the crisis occurring again. It is important that parents do not allow the child to remain home as a means to deal with his/her anxiety. This will result in the anxiety increasing once the child needs to return to school.
- **Decreased Academic Performance and Poor Concentration**
- **Increased Aggression and Oppositional Behavior, and Decreased Frustration Tolerance:** Children who have been exposed to a crisis can experience difficulty controlling their anger, behaviors and frustration.
- **Increased Irritability, Emotional Liability and Depressive Feelings** There could be symptoms of depression that include general sense of sadness, difficulty falling and remaining asleep or sleeping more than normal, change in eating habits, loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, social withdrawal, mental and physical fatigue and/or suicidal ideation. In younger children there may be an increase in irritability and moodiness.
- **Denial:** In an effort to cope with the psychological and emotional ramifications of a crisis, certain children and adolescents will deny that a crisis has occurred and/or deny the

significance of a crisis. Children who continue to utilize denial to cope may need to be confronted in a sensitive but straight forward manner. Anger and resentment may be expressed when confronting the child with the reality. In time, and with support, children do come to accept the reality of a situation.

What types of reactions may *parents* experience after a crisis situation has occurred that involves themselves and/or their child?

As in the case of children, the answer to this question is dependent on a number of variables including personal history, personality variables, severity and proximity of the event, level of social support and type and quality of intervention. The fact that some of the possible immediate adult reactions to a crisis are confusion, disorganization and difficulty in decision making, underscores the need for a preplanned, practiced and organized response plan. Longer term reactions that are experienced by adults are:

- denial
- feelings of detachment
- unwanted, intrusive recollections
- depression
- concentration difficulty
- anxiety
- psychosomatic complaints
- hyper vigilance
- withdrawal
- eating disturbance
- irritability and low frustration tolerance
- sleep difficulty
- poor work performance
- loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- emotional and mental fatigue
- emotional changes
- marital discord

Since you are likely to be affected by the crisis situation, either directly through exposure to the crisis or indirectly through your child's exposure, it is imperative that you receive the appropriate support and intervention. Without such intervention you will be limited in your ability to meet the needs of your child. It is important that you have a forum to discuss your own feelings and reactions to the crisis and receive support. You should look to family members, other parents in the district, friends, and/or school support personnel (e.g., psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor) to share your feelings.

It is encouraged that you attend any meeting that the school may have to get the needed support and encouragement you need to deal with yourself and your child. If the symptoms outlined above persist and continue to interfere with your ability to function, professional consultation may be beneficial.

What can parents do to address the reactions of their child to a crisis situation?

As parents you are probably the most influential factor in the recovery of your child from the emotional consequences of a crisis. Since you are the most emotionally involved with your child, your support, encouragement and reassurance is of utmost importance in your child's recovery. While you may be frequently frustrated that you can't do more to alleviate your child's suffering, you need to realize that your efforts cannot be replaced by anyone else. As a parent of a child exposed to a crisis, you face several challenges in your effort to help your him/her. First, you may experience guilt because you were unable to protect your child from the wrath of the crisis. Even though this guilt may have no foundation in reality, it is real to you, and needs to be kept under control so that it doesn't disable you from focusing on your child's needs. Second, you need to keep yourself under control in a situation that may have been very emotional and traumatizing to you.

This is especially true if you were also exposed to the crisis situation. You need to realize that you can suffer secondary traumatization due to your child's exposure to a crisis. As discussed above, you need to attend to your own emotional responses and seek intervention. While you need to be fully involved in your child's recovery, time for yourself will do more to help your child.

Following are interventions that you can provide to address the reactions of your child to a crisis situation.

- Speak to your child regarding the crisis and provide him/her with accurate information regarding the crisis in a language that he/she can understand.
- Your child needs to feel that he/she is allowed to express his/her thoughts and feelings regarding the crisis without the fear that he/she will be judged negatively. It is important for you to listen carefully to your child and show him/her that you understand what he/she is feeling and thinking.
- Your child needs constant reassurance that things will get better and that in the long-term things will improve. This should only be stated if it is indeed true. No false statements regarding the future should be made in an effort to help your child feel better in the present. This will only lead to false hopes and distrust in the future.
- Reassure your child that you will continue to "be there" for him/her, and that you will see them through the aftermath of the crisis.
- Your child may need additional affection in the form of hugs and other physical contact.
- You will most likely need to keep in touch with your child's teacher to monitor his/her academic performance.
- You will need to spend additional individualized time with your child. Try to structure your time with him/her by playing games, having discussions and going places. During your time together, focus a majority of your attention on your child.
- You will need to monitor the adjustment of your adolescent from somewhat of a distance since his/her primary support group may be his/her peers. Don't be hesitant to ask your adolescent child how he/she is coping even though you may expect an answer of "fine." The fact that you ask will most likely be important to your adolescent child, even though he/she may not show this.

- Monitor your adolescent child for increased use of alcohol or drugs. There may be an attempt to “self-medicate” by using these substances. Also monitor your adolescent child for increased symptoms of depression.
- Regardless of your adolescent child’s response to you, reassure him/her that you are there if he/she needs help and/or assistance.

When should your child receive additional help in the form professional intervention?

He/she should be able to meet the demands of his/her environment, most particularly his/her home and school environments. Most children should recover just fine from a crisis, however, there is a chance that your child, due to the nature of the crisis itself and due to his/her psychological makeup, history and ability to respond to support, will continue to experience difficulties which interfere with his/her functioning. If the symptoms outlined above persist use the following guidelines for determining if your child requires additional intervention from professionals trained in addressing traumatic stress:

- your child can not engage adequately at home or school assignments and activities after a sufficient amount of time has passed since the crisis
- your child continues to exhibit high levels of emotional responsiveness
- your child appears depressed, withdrawn and non-communicative,
- your child continues to exhibit poorer academic performance and a decreased capacity for concentration,
- your child expresses suicidal or homicidal ideation, or your child is intentionally hurting him/herself (e.g., cutting him/herself),
- your child exhibits an apparent increase usage of alcohol or drugs,
- your child gains or loses a significant amount of weight in a short period of time,
- your child evidences significant changes in behavior, and
- your child discontinues attending to his/her hygienic needs.

What can school personnel provide in the form of support and intervention for your child?

The Crisis Response Plan discussed earlier incorporates support and intervention to help your child return to pre-crisis functioning and cope effectively with the crisis. Teachers have been made aware through similar literature as this, disseminated by the district, on how to address their students’ needs. The building psychologist, social worker and/or guidance counselors can consult with teachers to help them deal effectively with their students’ reaction to the crisis. Discussions led by support staff and/or the classroom teacher regarding the crisis can be implemented if deemed necessary. These discussions hopefully will afford your child a forum to express his/her feelings regarding the crisis and understand how his/her classmates are coping. Specialized work may be assigned that can help your child to deal with the emotional aftermath of the crisis.

The classroom teachers can also assess students’ functioning and recovery from the crisis. They should be sensitive to the effects of the crisis on their students and can adjust the classroom demands accordingly. They can also monitor their students for signs that additional, and more individualized intervention is needed. If your child is experiencing difficulty in class and/or is

referred to support staff for assessment and/or intervention, you will be notified as soon as possible.

Honoring Students Who Have Died While Attending Canby Public Schools

No family should have to suffer the death of a child. Such a loss is a tragedy of immeasurable proportions and it touches many people beyond the family, including friends, classmates, ~~teachers~~ and staff in our school.

Acknowledging this death within the school is also a difficult process. Every death is felt in a unique way, driven by different factors such as the age of the child lost, parent and family 'connectedness' to school life and friendship groups of the child. To be sure, every loss is felt by the school with an equal sense of 'emptiness' and a concern for those who grieve in a direct way, as well as for those who were simply lost a classmate. Everyone understands that the death of a child is unjust and unfair and it leaves everyone with a heightened sense of vulnerability.

During the grieving process, the school works to provide support for everyone. For our students, grief counselors will be made available and students wanting 'to take action' are given guidance and support. Parents are also provided with support as desired and are often provided the opportunity to create a lasting memory by making a contribution to the school through scholarships or the school may accept a living memorial, such as a bush or tree.

In recognizing the importance of providing support to a family experiencing such a loss and while wanting to provide support that is meaningful to everyone, the district has established a set of practices to honor a child who dies while a student at Canby Public Schools.

1. At the request of the parent, the district will assist in the development of a memorial scholarship in the name of the deceased child or family. Proceeds given and accepted will be in accordance with school guidelines and parent wishes in establishing a scholarship award.
2. At the graduation ceremony of the class of the deceased student, a single flower will be displayed in honor of his or her memory and the loss will be acknowledged in the ceremony.

The district will accept no other forms of memorials. We believe that the proper place for a lasting memorial is in the homes of those who have been lost, at their final resting places and in the hearts of the many people who have been touched by knowing them.

