

Sample Announcements to Students, Faculty and Staff after a Death

Option #1

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 informed of the suicide first and they should be given time to express their emotions and concerns before informing their students.

Day 1

Sample Announcement For When a Suicide Death has Occurred

Morning, Day 1 "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."

Sample Announcement For a Suspicious Death Not Declared Suicide

Morning, Day 1 "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."

Sample Announcement Primary or Middle School

Morning, Day 1 "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."

End of Day 1 Announcement

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:

“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 _____.”

Day 2 Announcement

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:

“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 ____ pm. There will be a funeral Service _____ at ____ am/pm 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.”

Source: “School-based Youth Suicide Prevention guide,” published by the Department of Child and Family Studies, Division of State and Local Support, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida, 2003, accessed at www.fmhi.usf.edu/institute/pubs/bysubject.html

Sample Announcements to Students, Faculty and Staff after a Death

Option #2

Sample Letter to Staff

Date:

To: All Staff

From: INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL Crisis Team

Re: INSERT NAME OF DECEASED

The recent death of (Insert Name) (has OR is expected to make) a significant impact on our entire school community. Our crisis team has been mobilized to respond to this tragic event.

On (insert date), (Insert name of deceased)¹ (INSERT brief facts about the death)². We expect a variety of reactions to this loss from our students, parents, and members of our staff. Some of these reactions may be mild, others may be more intense.

To effectively assist all members of our school community, an emergency staff meeting will be held at (Insert time) on (Insert date) in the (Insert place such as the cafeteria or other large area). At that time, our crisis team will provide further details and answer questions. We will also discuss how to present the information to our students. In the meantime, please refer all inquiries from outside sources to (Insert name of the Media or Communication Coordinator).

With students, you can acknowledge that this death has occurred. However, please avoid discussion of any details; simply tell students that the school staff will provide information to everyone shortly. Please refer any student who appears to be in crisis or having significant difficulty to (Insert name of Counseling Services Coordinator). As this tragedy has also affected our staff, we encourage you to also seek assistance from (Insert name of Counseling Services Coordinator), if desired.

Emergency Staff Meeting

Time:

Date:

Location:

If you have any questions or concerns before the meeting, please contact (Insert name of Crisis Team Coordinator).

Examples of information to insert in the opening paragraph:

¹John Smith, one of our 9th grade students; Mrs. Jones, who taught 7th grade English

²was killed in an automobile accident; died after a long-illness; died suddenly; died by suicide (*before inserting this information, be sure the immediate family is fine with this information being released*)

Sample Information for Students

This information should be given to teachers and other staff to read to students at a designated time to share with the entire student body (e.g., homeroom or first/second period)

It is with sadness that I tell you about a loss to our school family. On (INSERT date) (INSERT name of deceased) (INSERT fact about the death).

I understand that many of you may have upsetting feelings and questions about (INSERT name of deceased)'s death. I will try to answer any questions that I can. If you would like, we will take the remainder of this class period to talk about what has happened. At times like this, it is okay to have many different feelings, including sadness, anger, and disbelief. It is okay to cry. Together, we can talk about whatever you may be feeling or want to talk about. If I cannot answer your questions, or you would like to talk to someone privately, there are support rooms now available (INSERT where support rooms are located). Anyone who would like to go to talk to someone in the support rooms may do so now. I will give you a pass.

Determine which students would like to leave for a support room. Ask the remaining students if they have any questions or comments they would like to share. Take time to answer and to talk as the students' desire.

If there is not lengthy discussion, consider quiet seat work rather than lesson plans as usual.

Source: National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, <http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/svc/alpha/s/school-crisis/letters-template.htm>, accessed January 18, 2010.