

# **ASHLAND COUNTY YOUTH CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM**

Updated 1/03  
Updated 8/11  
Updated 10/22  
Updated 1/24

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mission, Services, Access	4
Immediate Information Needed for Crisis Response	
Intake Sheet	5
Crisis Team Phone Numbers	7
School Phone Number	9
School/Community Liaisons	10
Team Activation	11
Crisis Intervention Procedure	12
Suggested Checklist for Schools	
Immediate Actions	13
Contact Family	13
School Plan of Action	13
Announcing the Loss	13
Faculty Responsibilities	14
Counseling Responsibilities	14
Administrative Responsibilities	14
Responding to the Media and Community	15
Memorial Services/Special Activities	15
Senior Activities and Graduation Ceremonies	15
Miscellaneous Issues	16
Information to be Used and Copied during Crisis Response	
The Announcement	
Announcement Guidelines	17
Sample Announcement	17
Teacher Guidelines for Telling Students	18
Communication with Parents/Guardians	
Initial Letter Home	19
Follow-up Letter	20
Handouts for Teachers and Parents/Guardians	
Possible Developmental Reactions to Death	21
Grief Responses Related to Bereaved Students	22
Responding to Children after a Critical Incident	23
Hints for Helping a Child Understand Death & Grief	24
Fifteen Tips for Grieving Kids	25

Helping Children Cope	26
How Can I Tell When a Child Needs Counseling	27
Evaluations	
Student	28
Faculty	29
Team Members	30

## MISSION

The purpose of the Ashland Youth Crisis Response Team (YCRT) is to provide a valuable community service geared toward immediate intervention for all students, faculty, and staff of Ashland County Schools and surrounding areas involved in a traumatic situation.

## SERVICES

- 🕒 Upon request, provide trained personnel for on-site intervention in the event of a crisis
- 🕒 Assist school districts with writing and updating local crisis response programs.
- 🕒 Provide in-service training to faculty and staff in crisis response and post-traumatic stress debriefing.

## ACCESS

Call any of the numbers below to activate the Youth Crisis Response Team between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

	<u>Work</u>	<u>Cell</u>
Jennifer Barlow	419-289-7968 ext. 3327	419-566-5152
Linda Hoadapp	419-289-7968 ext. 3313	419-651-4523

After hours contact the Appleseed Community Mental Health Center's 24-hour answered line at **419-289-6111** or 888-400-8500.

# CRISIS RESPONSE INTAKE FORM

Date/Time of Call \_\_\_\_\_ Incident Number

Intake Initiated by \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time of Crisis \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Crisis \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Agency/School/Organization

\_\_\_\_\_ Street Address City Zip

Caller's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Name \_\_\_\_\_

If different from the caller

Position \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Nature of Crisis (describe incident - be specific) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Team Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Intervention \_\_\_\_\_ # of team members needed \_\_\_\_\_

Team Members Contacted to Respond	Confirmed	Phone #
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

\*Indicates on-site coordinator

Incident Number

Date of Response \_\_\_\_\_

Time/Length of Response \_\_\_\_\_

Comments/planned follow-up \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Post Debriefing with Team Members**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Debriefer \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

**Follow-up Phone Call**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## TEAM ACTIVATION

Step 1: The school superintendent or his/her designee activates the team by calling one of the following numbers:

To activate the Youth Crisis Response Team:

Appleseed 24-Hour Crisis Hotline      419-289-6111 or 1-888-400-8500

Step2: The YCRT Chair intakes details of the crisis.

Step 3: The YCRT Chair will decide who will call the rest of the team.

Step 4: The YCRT Chair calls the school contact person (if appropriate) AND calls additional team members.

## CRISIS INTERVENTION PROCEDURE

Step 1: The YCRT goes to the site.

Step 2: The school contact person will meet with the YCRT coordinator to conduct a needs assessment and give direction if this has not yet been done by phone.

Step 3: At the request of the school administration, the team could:

- Meet with school staff to provide support.
- Help target close friends of the victim(s) and other at-risk students.
  - Have informal groups to work with these peers on-site.
  - Make student/staff referrals.
- Meet one-on-one with severely impacted students or staff members.
- Assist classroom teachers with questions.
- Provide a resource list of mental health consultants.
- Provide information/education related to the crisis.

Step 4: Optional follow-up activities:

- Determine if any other students are at-risk.
- Review/evaluate team process.
- Provide interventions for children at-risk in small groups.
- Plan a school/community-wide meeting for parents and students.

Step 5: Debriefing

- Debrief with school staff if appropriate.
- Debrief with the team on-site or within 24 hours.
- The YCRT coordinator does a follow-up/evaluation with the school contact person.

\* The school contact person defines the needs of the school, and the YCRT chairman designates the roles of the team.



## SUGGESTED CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOLS

### I. Immediate Actions

- A. Verify information regarding the tragedy.
- B. Notify the superintendent and appropriate assistant superintendent(s).
- C. Notify Community Relations Director (Communications Officer).
- D. Contact school security/police regarding special circumstances such as murder, suicide, shooting . . .
- E. Contact the district's crisis team coordinator and activate team members.
- F. Identify key support staff.
- G. Contact Board of Education members.
- H. Remove personal items from lockers, desks, etc.
- I. Stop disciplinary, testing, or special placement notifications sent to the family.  
Note: It is almost impossible to stop scholarship notifications from the National Merit Program and colleges.

### II. Contact Family

- A. Contact family personally and offer support.
- B. Establish school contact person and family members.
- C. Obtain information regarding funeral arrangements, flowers, and home visits.
- D. Verify names of surviving siblings, including cousins and schools.

### III. School Plan of Action

- A. Announcing the Loss
  - 1. Make every effort to notify all staff before returning to school through a telephone tree.
  - 2. Hold an all-staff meeting before school.
    - \* Provide recommendations for dealing with a loss in the classroom.
    - \* Review procedures for referring students to counseling.
    - \* Provide a statement to be read in all first-period classes.
    - \* Plan to extend the homeroom period.
    - \* Provide substitute(s) for any teacher(s) who feel they cannot go directly to class.
    - \* Check on the emotional needs of support staff.
    - \* Meet with class officers and the student council president.
  - 3. Update faculty and students with printed messages throughout the day if new and pertinent information becomes available.

4. Debrief students. Allow them to express their feelings and offer suggestions for coping with the loss.
5. Identify any students who may be at risk and assign counselors to phone parents.

B. Faculty Responsibilities

1. Identify students who were close friends, involved in club and activity groups, teammates, and church friends.
2. Notify the principal at the previously attended school. The principal will notify the faculty of the loss. Staff will watch for any distress signs among students.
3. Identify students in distress and talk with them or have them escorted by another student to a group or individual counseling activity.
4. Shorten and structure assignments. Postpone and reschedule tests if necessary.
5. Allow for students to discuss the loss - grieving, talking, and venting together.
6. Acknowledge emotions through discussion and involvement in constructive activities in the classroom.
7. Discuss funeral arrangements to prepare students who will be attending.
8. Discuss whether students will be taken on school buses or drive themselves to the funeral.
9. Discuss wearing athletic or activity uniforms to the funeral.

C. Counseling Responsibilities

1. Work with the district crisis response team if available. Remember that the crisis team is there in a supportive role.
2. Provide large and small groups and individual areas to talk with counselors.
3. Cancel appointments and meetings, not of an emergency nature.
4. Request additional secretarial or volunteer help to answer phones.
5. Maintain a list of students counseled. Make follow-up calls to parents for students in distress.

D. Administrative Responsibilities

1. Keep staff updated on circumstances and events as new information becomes available.
2. Identify staff members who need mental health support services. Utilize the crisis team, employee assistance program, and community counselors.
3. Emphasize the need to use prepared statements to control rumors.
4. Be highly visible to show the situation's presence, support, and control. Make students feel safe.
5. Make announcements about activities and future meetings.
6. Plan to excuse absences for students wishing to attend the funeral. Arrange bus transportation if large numbers of students attend the funeral.

7. Plan for rescheduling standardized testing programs or other canceled activities.
- E. Responding to the Media and Community
1. Identify a spokesperson if the district does not have a spokesperson.
  2. Develop a written statement for staff to read in classes.
  3. Develop a statement for secretaries/volunteers to respond to inquiries.
  4. Develop a press release for immediate release. Update as new information becomes available—number all subsequent releases.
  5. Set limits for media locations. Keep out of the buildings. (Parents are excellent in assisting in this area.)
  6. Provide handouts for all media. Emphasize action taken by the principal, staff, crisis team, and others in assisting students.
  7. Prepare a letter for the principal's signature to go home with all students at the end of the day. The letter should include the following:
    - \* A brief statement of the incident.
    - \* Outline what has taken place throughout the day.
    - \* Changes to watch for in students - physically, emotionally, and academically.
    - \* Contact phone numbers for community assistance.
    - \* Request to notify the counseling office of any student concerns.
  8. A similar letter should be sent to parents of other impacted schools.
  9. Provide a meeting for concerned parents and students if safety is a perceived or real issue. Have the principal, counselor, police officer, and community relations director address the group.
- F. Memorial Services/Special Activities
1. Involve staff and students - encourage involvement in planning.
  2. Provide mass transportation if many students plan to attend.
  3. Have counselors available for students the following funeral.
  4. Plan appropriate assembly/recognition.
 

* Assembly	* Scholarship fund
* Plaque	* Letters to family
* Tree planting	* Recognition at a special awards ceremony
* Yearbook dedication	* High school graduation
  5. Invite family as guests to special ceremonies.
  6. Provide an area for staff and students who do not wish to attend special activities.
- G. Senior Activities and Graduation Ceremonies
- \* These activities are only suggestions, and each school should develop its own traditions.*
1. Farewell Assembly - It will be announced to all seniors that they may bring a flower and drop it off in the library before the Farewell Assembly. Someone will be there to arrange the flowers in a vase. The vase will be displayed at the assembly. Students will be permitted to give flowers anytime up until graduation, and the vase will be given to the family at the

end of the ceremonies. A candle and a single rose will be placed on or around the lectern in memory of the deceased member of the class.

2. Baccalaureate - The candle and rose will be displayed at this service. The vase of flowers will also be displayed in their memory.
3. Graduation - There will be a note in the graduation bulletin to remember the student(s). The vase rose and the candle will be displayed. The flowers will be given to the family after the ceremony. Each school must decide if they will present the diploma to the family. How close the loss was to graduation will be important in making that decision.

#### H. Miscellaneous Issues

1. Prior years' teachers - especially at other schools.
2. The flag - do you lower it to half-staff?
3. The reader boards - take all messages off?
4. How to deal with "sicko" phone calls.
5. How to organize or politely discourage excessive offers to help.
6. After-school traffic safety - many students should not be driving home.
7. Who will answer the cards and letters sent to the school?
8. School newspaper coverage.
9. Food for the crisis response team and staff members working all day without a break.
10. After-school practices (plays) and events (Leadership team).
11. Alumni and recent graduates often know the victim.
12. Impact of news reports and media coverage on staff and students.
13. If a violent death on campus:
  - \* Mace for self-defense
  - \* Student visits to the murder site
  - \* Fear of dark places
  - \* Student transfers
  - \* Fear of brushy areas
  - \* Staff resignations
  - \* Late afternoon and evening practices
  - \* Demands for curriculum changes - addition of self-defense classes
  - \* Explanation of current and increased security procedures at school
  - \* Continued work with law enforcement
14. One-year anniversary
  - \* Prepare for significant media coverage at least one month in advance. Some papers want their stories to run before or on the anniversary date.
  - \* Review all information from the original crisis.
  - \* Be aware of any special school memorials.

*Note: If the assailant has not been captured, a news conference on the anniversary date, which law enforcement officials sponsor, will probably remove most of the coverage from the school.*

## **ANNOUNCEMENT GUIDELINES**

- Before the announcement, the team coordinator should verify the facts with the police or coroner's office. **NO ANNOUNCEMENT SHOULD BE MADE THAT CAN NOT BE SUBSTANTIATED!**
- The team or family service coordinator should be the only school official contacting the family or funeral director.
- It is best if the announcement preceded media coverage to prevent rumors and control emotional contagion.
- Honoring the family's wishes regarding announcements is recommended.

## **SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT**

Students, I have some unfortunate and bad news to share with you. On the way to school this morning, a traffic accident occurred.

John Doe, an eighth-grade student in Mr. Jone's class, was killed. Currently, we have no other information. Mr. Smith, our principal, is in contact with the family and will notify us of any arrangements regarding the funeral. Our Youth Crisis Response Team will be available throughout the day to talk with any students who need support.

## TEACHER GUIDELINES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT TO STUDENTS

- ⌚ Have the chairs arranged in a semi-circle before students enter the classroom, if possible. If the announcement must be made during class, have students rearrange the chairs first. The teacher should sit within the circle and maintain eye contact with students. Tissue should be readily available and visible.
- ⌚ The teacher should center him/herself first by assuming a nurturing adult role.
- ⌚ Read the announcement in a soft and calm voice.
- ⌚ Give the students time to process the news. Ask if anyone has any questions or feelings he/she would like to share. Respond as needed to students' concerns. **DO NOT RUSH STUDENTS THROUGH THIS PROCESS.** Allow them to talk and express their disbelief.
- ⌚ Students who become distressed and need special assistance should be accompanied to the room designated by the principal, where the Youth Crisis Response Staff will be available for support. The teacher should follow procedures for releasing students.
- ⌚ When the discussion is over, rearrange chairs and return to regular routines. However, be prepared for the need for students to discuss issues periodically.

## SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As you may know, a tragedy occurred early this morning involving a Mumawa sophomore student, John Doe, and a Mumawa junior student, Sue Smith. Both students died because of an automobile accident.

Events like this can cause many different emotional reactions. Your child (and you) may be experiencing feelings like shock, fear, anger, hurt, sadness and/or confusion. As a parent/guardian, you may not be sure what to say or do to help your child through this challenging time. I hope that the following suggestions will be of assistance to you:

- Your child needs you now. Be there for him/her.
- Let your child talk, write, or draw about his/her feelings.
- An event like this can cause children to recall past feelings about the death of family members or friends. Allow your child to express these feelings freely - time and time again.
- Your child may express the fear that you or other family members will die. This is a realistic fear. Assure your child that you are there for him/her.
- Death and dying conjure up different meanings to children than to adults. The facts of death should be explained to children naturally and lovingly.
- Let your child know that it is okay to experience anger, hurt, guilt, sadness, and confusion - and that sometimes these feelings overlap. Also, it is okay for your child to see you cry.
- The behavior of your child may change temporarily. For example, he/she may become more restless, have trouble sleeping, act more hostile, or become withdrawn.
- Due to the circumstances of this tragic accident, be aware that your child may have concerns about driving or riding in a vehicle. (\*Will not always apply)
- The most important thing to remember is to be there for your child. Be gentle, understanding, and listen.

We have support staff available at school to help you and your child should you need extra support. Call (phone number) to receive assistance.

Sincerely,

John Smith  
Principal

## FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The accident a week ago was a traumatic event for many students. It is very common, in fact, it is expected, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event. Sometimes, the emotional aftershocks appear immediately after the traumatic event; other times, aftershocks may appear hours, days, weeks, or months later. Understanding and supportive loved ones usually help the stress reactions pass more quickly. However, sometimes the traumatic event may be so painful that professional assistance is necessary. This does not imply weakness or "craziness." It simply means that the event was too powerful for the person to manage himself/herself. Below are some helpful numbers if professional assistance is needed.

Appleseed Mental Health Center 419-281-3716

Appleseed Crisis Line 419-289-6111 or 888-400-8500

Catholic Charities 419-289-1903

ACCADA 419-289-7675

Cornerstone Counseling 419-289-1876

Please feel free to contact the school at (phone number) should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

John Smith  
Principal



## POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTAL REACTIONS TO DEATH

AGE	THINK	FEEL	DO
3-5 years (preschool)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* death is temporary and reversible</li> <li>* finality of death is not evident</li> <li>* death is mixed up with trips, sleep</li> <li>* may wonder what deceased is doing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* sad</li> <li>* anxious</li> <li>* withdrawn</li> <li>* confused about changes</li> <li>* angry</li> <li>* scared</li> <li>* cranky (feelings are acted out in play)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* cry</li> <li>* fight</li> <li>* are interested in dead things</li> <li>* act as if death never happened</li> </ul>
AGE	THINK	FEEL	DO
6-9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* about the finality of death</li> <li>* about the biological processes of death</li> <li>* death is related to mutilation</li> <li>* a spirit gets you when you die</li> <li>* about who will care for them if a parent dies</li> <li>* their actions and words caused the death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* sad</li> <li>* anxious</li> <li>* withdrawn</li> <li>* confused about changes</li> <li>* angry</li> <li>* scared</li> <li>* cranky (feelings are acted out in play)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* behave aggressively</li> <li>* behave withdrawn</li> <li>* experience nightmares</li> <li>* act as if death never happened</li> <li>* lack concentration</li> <li>* have a decline in grades</li> </ul>
AGE	THINK	FEEL	DO
9-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* about and understand the finality of death</li> <li>* death is hard to talk about</li> <li>* that death may happen again, and feel anxious</li> <li>* about death with jocularity</li> <li>* about what will happen if their parent(s) die</li> <li>* their actions and words caused the death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* vulnerable</li> <li>* anxious</li> <li>* scared</li> <li>* lonely</li> <li>* confused</li> <li>* angry</li> <li>* sad</li> <li>* abandoned, isolated</li> <li>* guilty</li> <li>* fearful, worried</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* behave aggressively</li> <li>* behave withdrawn</li> <li>* talk about physical aspects of death</li> <li>* act like it never happened, not show feelings</li> <li>* experience nightmares</li> <li>* lack concentration</li> <li>* have a decline in grades</li> </ul>
AGE	THINK	FEEL	DO
12 years and up (teenagers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* about and understand the finality of death</li> <li>* if they show their feelings they will be weak</li> <li>* they need to be in control of their feelings</li> <li>* about death with jocularity</li> <li>* only about life before or after death</li> <li>* their actions and words caused the death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* vulnerable</li> <li>* anxious</li> <li>* scared</li> <li>* lonely</li> <li>* confused</li> <li>* angry</li> <li>* sad</li> <li>* abandoned, isolated</li> <li>* guilty</li> <li>* fearful, worried</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* behave impulsively</li> <li>* argue, scream, fight</li> <li>* allow themselves to be in dangerous situations</li> <li>* grieve for what might have been</li> <li>* experience nightmares</li> <li>* act like it never happened</li> <li>* lack concentration</li> <li>* have a decline in grades</li> </ul>

## **GRIEF RESPONSES RELATED TO BEREAVED STUDENTS**

Death touches us. It is never easy to deal with, and as one teacher said, "It just breaks your heart." All of us are human, and we become frightened, shocked, and bewildered about what to do. The following are some common responses in grieving students and grieving adults. If prolonged, they might be seen as red flags alerting you to talk to the student, parents, and/or your school counselor.

### **Physical Response (Bodily Distress)      Emotional Responses (Feeling Reaction)**

Headaches

Shock

Crying

Anger

Regressive changes in bowel and/or  
bladder control

Hostility

Temper tantrums

Sleep disturbances

Guilt

Restlessness

Sadness

Disrupted eating patterns

Loneliness

Illness

Panic

Confusion

Clinging

Lack of concentration

Withdrawal

Lack of energy

Blame

Lack of attention

Depression

Mood Swings

Fear of being teased and rejected by  
classmates

### **Effects on Learning (Performance Reaction)**

Lower grades

Absenteeism

Less productive work

Loss of interest in school and activities

Peer relationships

*Grief Comes to Class, A Educator's Guide*

*By: Majel Glino-Braden*

## HOW DO I RESPOND TO MY STUDENTS/CHILD AFTER A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

An individual who is emotionally or psychologically traumatized needs safe and supportive people. A "SAFE HAVEN" for recovery can only be provided by "SAFE" people. Below are the characteristics of a "SAFE" person.

- ◆ A SAFE person does not discount another person's feelings. To discount means to make light of or discourage the person from expressing real feelings. For example, discounting occurs if a distressed person expresses anger and is told that he/she should not be angry.
- ◆ A SAFE person does not invalidate another person's feelings. To invalidate means to deny the validity of the feelings or to act as if the person is not in touch with feelings accurately. For example, if a distressed person says that he/she has no sense of feeling in their feet after having learned about the death of a classmate but is told that he/she is all right, invalidation has occurred.
- ◆ A SAFE person does not give advice.
- ◆ A SAFE person does not use clichés when conversing with a wounded person. For example, "It was God's will," "I know how you feel," or "God doesn't give you more than you can handle."
- ◆ A SAFE person gives his undivided attention to the speaker.
- ◆ A SAFE person does not reflect incompetency to the wounded person. Instead, a SAFE person reflects a belief of empowerment that the injured person can cope with the problem. He/she may brainstorm solutions with the distressed person but will not assume responsibility for acting on the solutions unless the individual cannot respond himself/herself.
- ◆ A SAFE person listens and clarifies but does not reflect negative reactions when the distressed person is thinking in an illogical fashion.
- ◆ A SAFE person keeps personal information confidential.
- ◆ A SAFE person honors personal boundaries.

## HINTS FOR HELPING A CHILD UNDERSTAND DEATH AND GRIEF

- Be honest. Answer children's questions as honestly as possible. It is necessary to keep the lines of communication open.
- Use real words - "Grandpa died." He isn't "lost," "on a long trip," "sick," or "asleep." We must differentiate for our children.
- Be careful of "God talk." We need to share our faith but recognize how we sound to our children.
- Share your feelings. Allowing your child to understand your emotions also permits them to have feelings and share them with you.
- Let children know that feelings are okay. Remember that emotions are not good or bad; they just are. This is an ideal opportunity to express our feelings and teach our children healthy ways to do that.
- Make sure children know they aren't responsible for our tears. Don't hesitate to cry in front of your child. Explain that the tears come from your sadness about the loss, not because of anything the child has done.
- Demonstrate constructive ways to deal with emotions. When we are angry, we can hit a pillow, throw horseshoes, or run a mile. This is a time to show by example what we can do with our emotions.
- Provide memories and keepsakes. Allow the child to keep things that may remind them of their loved one who has died. Initially, it may be necessary to keep items in a box where they can go, rather than in plain view. Eventually, they may wish to keep pictures next to their bed or sleep with some item of clothing that belonged to their loved one.

### **In summation:**

- The best way to protect a child is not to pretend a death didn't happen or that grief isn't real.
- The best way to protect a child is to give them the keys to coping with grief, walk through it with them, answer questions honestly, and allow them to be a part of this vital family event.

*Keys to Helping Children Deal with Death and Grief*  
By: Joy Johnson

## 15 TIPS FOR GRIEVING KIDS

By: Jessie Flynn

- ❖ Tell them honestly what happened concerning the death: when it occurred, where it happened, how the person died, and who was there.
- ❖ Encourage them to ask questions and answer each one simply and directly.
- ❖ Include them in the funeral or memorial planning. They need to know that they are part of this significant family ritual.
- ❖ Provide a consistent presence and structure to their daily lives.
- ❖ Accept all their feelings and help them appropriately express these feelings.
- ❖ Search out other children, in a support group or alone, who have experienced the death of someone they love.
- ❖ Share stories about loss. Read books as a springboard for discussing death ... and life.
- ❖ Reassure children that they do not have to take care of their surviving parent.
- ❖ Clarify that they are not responsible in any way - through thoughts, feelings, or actions - for the death of their loved one.
- ❖ Keep telling them of your love and hugging and touching them.
- ❖ Reassure them that healing from loss takes a long time but that they will feel better.
- ❖ Mention the deceased person's name, reminisce, and tell stories.
- ❖ Plan, with their input, for holidays and special days.
- ❖ Expect abnormal behavior. After all, death is not an everyday occurrence.
- ❖ Know in your heart that children become stronger and develop coping-with-life-skills as they healthily heal their grief.

## HELPING CHILDREN COPE

### The Phoenix Center for Grieving Children

Coping with a loss is challenging no matter what your age. Unfortunately, people are not born with developed coping skills. One may naturally gravitate towards activities or interactions that help deal with one's feelings, but most coping is learned. Children can have great difficulty coping with their emotions because of their developmental limitations. When children cannot express or communicate their feelings openly, the sensations often emerge in mild to extremely unpleasant behaviors. Some children internalize their feelings and end up with headaches, stomachaches, sleep disturbances, or engage in self-destructive behavior. Children may also express their inner turmoil by hurting others with words or physical violence. There is no way to prevent some behavioral reactions from occurring in children after a loss. Yet, there are ways to lessen the intensity and duration of the behaviors by teaching children different ways to cope. Listed below are some suggestions.

- 🕒 Read books on grief. You can find some at your local library or bookstore.
- 🕒 Talk to a trusted friend or adult and tell them how you feel.
- 🕒 Join a support group. This is an excellent way to find others that can relate to what you have been through.
- 🕒 Laughter- watch a funny show and play a fun board game (remember to laugh with others and not at others).
- 🕒 Give yourself a break from grief - watch TV or go to a movie or play a video game.
- 🕒 Do something meaningful that makes you feel good about yourself. Help around the house; volunteer at a nursing home, shelter, or at church; or raise money for a charity.
- 🕒 Keep a diary or journal. Writing is a great way to express your thoughts and feelings. Looking back, you can see all you have been through and how far you have come on your grief journey.
- 🕒 Write poetry.
- 🕒 Sing and/or dance.
- 🕒 Draw or paint about your grief.
- 🕒 Pursue a new interest or hobby.
- 🕒 Pray.
- 🕒 Attend services at a place of worship/youth group.
- 🕒 Get involved in a group or club.
- 🕒 Create a photo memory book about the loved one who died.
- 🕒 Listen to music.
- 🕒 Spend time with your pet.
- 🕒 Play sports.
- 🕒 Write a letter to the deceased sharing your thoughts and feelings.
- 🕒 Cry.
- 🕒 Ride your bike, run, play. Get that energy out!

## HOW CAN I TELL IF A CHILD NEEDS COUNSELING?

### The Phoenix Center for Grieving Children

First, trust your instincts. If your gut feeling tells you a child needs additional support, work to get that help for him/her. Many signs and symptoms of complicated grief are the same responses in normal grief. What makes these "red flags" is a matter of degree. Fear and/or anger, for example, are normal grief reactions. However, persistent, or prolonged fear or anger is symptomatic of unmet mourning needs. Reactions should soften in intensity and duration if the child is progressing in his/her grief journey.

#### **SIGNS OF NORMAL GRIEF**

- Usually connect the depressed feelings to the death.
- Disbelief, denial, shock.
- Often openly angry.
  
- Sense of unreality, withdrawal from others.
- Disruption of typical behavior patterns or personality.
- Children respond to comfort and support.
- Can still experience moments of enjoyment in life.
- Adults can sense sadness and emptiness in child.
- Often has transient physical complaints.
- May express guilt over some aspect of the loss.
- Self-esteem temporarily impacted, but is intact.

#### **SIGNS OF COMPLICATED GRIEF OR CLINICAL DEPRESSION**

- \* Often do not relate depressed feelings to any life event.
- \* Total denial of the reality of the death.
- \* May suppress anger. May complain and be irritable but may not directly express anger.
- \* May be persistently angry and hostile.
- \* Consistent withdrawal from family and friends.
- \* Prolonged change in behavior or personality.
  
- \* Children often reject support.
  
- \* Often project a pervasive sense of doom.
  
- \* Often projects a sense of hopelessness and chronic emptiness.
- \* May have chronic physical complaints or acute medical illness.
- \* Often have prolonged feelings of guilt over the death or generalized feelings of guilt.
- \* Typically a deep loss of esteem. May use drugs and alcohol.
- \* Suicidal thoughts or actions.

So, how do you tell them once you determine that a grieving child could benefit from counseling? Talk to them with compassion and understanding: many children and adults associate counseling with something for people who have something "wrong" with them. Assure the child that they are not crazy or abnormal. Explain that just as there are people like doctors and nurses who can help with physical pain, such as a broken arm, there are people that can help with the pain of grief.

## STUDENT EVALUATION

### ASHLAND COUNTY YOUTH CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

We are interested in feedback on how your school and the Youth Crisis Response Team responded to the recent tragedy. If you are willing, please complete this questionnaire and return it to the person designated below at your earliest convenience. Thank you!

1. Were you informed of the recent tragedy? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
2. Were you informed of services available to you at school? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
3. Did you participate in any of these services, even if only briefly? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, indicate what kind of participation.

\_\_\_\_\_ Someone came to my classroom.

\_\_\_\_\_ I participated in a group. Where? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. I think it was helpful for our school to offer these services. (Place an X on the scale below):

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Agree Disagree

Comments:

5. The services offered were helpful to me. (Place an X on the scale below):

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Agree Disagree

Comments:

6. What was not included that you think would have been helpful or important?

7. If you feel like you need more information or would like to talk with someone, please do one of the following:

- a. Notify your counselor or other faculty member.
- b. Write your name on the bottom of this form and return it to the person listed below.

Please fold in half and give to \_\_\_\_\_ when finished.



## FACULTY EVALUATION

### ASHLAND COUNTY YOUTH CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

We are interested in feedback on how your school and the Youth Crisis Response Team responded to the recent tragedy. If you are willing, please complete this questionnaire and return it to the person designated below at your earliest convenience. Thank you!

1. Please indicate your reaction to each part of the process listed below using the following scale. S = Satisfactory, Q = Questionable, N/A = No basis for judgment
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Staff briefing
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Availability of crisis team to students
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Availability of crisis team in the classroom
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Availability of crisis team for teachers in general
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Staff debriefing
  
2. If you indicated any of the above was questionable, please indicate your concern(s).
  
3. What did you find most helpful?
  
4. What was not included that you think would have been helpful or important?
  
5. We also appreciate any concerns you may have about specific students who were impacted by this tragedy. If there are any students you are concerned about, please list their names here or mention the students to one of the counselors.

Please return to \_\_\_\_\_ at your earliest convenience.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ (optional)

**TEAM MEMBER EVALUATION**  
**ASHLAND COUNTY YOUTH CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Crisis Location \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

YCRT Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_

School Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluation**

What went well:

Suggested changes:

Problems/Unforeseen Issues:

Summarize your participation:

Follow-up recommendations (individuals, services, etc.):

Was a debriefing offered to you?    \_\_\_\_\_Yes            \_\_\_\_\_No

Please return this form to \_\_\_\_\_.