



Crisis Response

By: Shelia Munafo-Kanoz

Our prayers are with you and the community you serve. As we begin our support, we want you to know we first begin all of our support united to Christ, rooted in His love and ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to come down upon us and everyone whom we serve.

Crisis team consists of highly-trained individuals in the field of trauma, grief support and post-vention.

- **Sheila Munafo-Kanoza** - National Certified Bereavement Facilitator for children, teens and adults trauma, post-vention to suicide, certified QPR instructor
- **Ann Marie Kahwaty-Bogan** - LISW, ACSW
- **John Dorger** - M.ED Retired School Psychologist
- **Patricia Buckley** - Bereavement and Facilitation, certified QPR instructor
- **Audrey Young** - M.Ed school counselor

We collaborate with our community: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, MindPeace, AFSP, Life Span, Talbert House, pastors, youth ministers and other mental health professionals.

Crisis Response / Post-Vention to Suicide

COJ offers ongoing support to children, teens and adults following the death of a loved one or someone in the community. Our Crisis Response Team offers support from the time of the initial call and works with the school personnel, students, parents, media and families for as long as needed.

Best situation -As part of our regular school based program, we ask schools to review this plan yearly and offer a prevention program called "QPR".

When we receive a call: We at Companions on a Journey begin our work by becoming prepared prior to going into the school to assist school personnel, students, and parents. We learn as many facts as possible. We validate feelings and emotions and look for children who may be at risk. We make ourselves available to the school for the week of the crisis; attend visitation, funeral. We offer support groups for the students for the first several days or first

week, then follow up on a weekly basis for 4 weeks tapering to a monthly basis for as long as needed. Our programs are offered to follow students through their graduation if needed.

We recommend that schools offer support to children and teens who have been traumatized by death.

1. When Companions is called into a school following a crisis due to various types of death, illness, car accident, murder, or suicide, **confirmation is needed and as much informational details as allowed to help prepare us for the work ahead to stabilize the situation.**

When we are not called into a school and have been notified by someone in the community, we contact the school via email or phone call. *(Note: We do not just show up to assist or bother the school with numerous phone calls. Rather we make one phone call and send an email to offer our support with helpful information as well as our prayers.)*

We do an assessment of the schools we currently are servicing because the death of a student or teacher can have a ripple effect in our community, church communities, youth groups and places of employment.

2. **We do a review of the crisis plan asking what is the school's plan of action.** Our job is to look through a different set of lenses as we are more grounded coming into the crisis rather than being in the midst of the crisis. (Is this correct? It made no sense to me the way it was written.)

We ask the question "how many have suffered a death due to illness, an accidental death, murder, suicide, or death similar to the crisis we have been called in to assist with".(I'm missing the total meaning in the initial wording.)

- Intake call - confirmation of death, gathering of information -- Debriefing phone call usually comes from the school, counselors or a person in the community.
- We ask if there are any students who may be at higher risk. (See listed outline below in point #6.)

3. **Provide the school with information via email and hard copy.** Have the school confirm the information being shared. School is asked to make someone the point person to contact the families and offer support. Who provides in the 1st sentence?

- School packets of information to be shared with the community
- For an illness, it is important to support your students and provide answers to the questions they may have.
- For a suicide, we encourage schools to post on their website links to available tool kits from AFSP and tips to help parents.

- SERA - Suicide Education and Research and Advocacy is currently sending out packets.
 - Review of cultural, religious beliefs: a brief overview is given to school personnel.
 - We meet with the staff to go over their crisis plan, making sure teachers are prepared and know what they need to look for with their students
 - We offer a parent session– “Understanding Your Child/Teens” grief session -- Make available QPR sessions, Assist or other prevention to suicide sessions to the community to help in the prevention of suicide and to educate on the warning signs.
 - Two (2) groups are provided: one for the students, the other for staff.
 - Counselors from the school and community are on hand to provide support for one-on-one's with any student displaying at risk behaviors or for students closest to the situation.
 - Media coverage – needs to be handled by the principal or appointed spokesperson. Cameras should not be allowed on the grounds, and students should be instructed not to talk to the media. There must be respect for the family and bereaved needs. With a suicide, coverage is a delicate matter; we believe that this is a time to educate.
4. **We create a safe place at school for students to meet with our crisis team.** We partner with the schools mental health team and together we assist students, depending on the size of the school and situation.
 5. **We allow the students to come and cry, and share their feelings and emotions.**
 6. **We look at the demographics** - family members, neighbors, classmates, and teachers; what schools may have students who are **being affected by the death**; who are the closest family members, friends, neighbors, and classmates; did anyone witness or receive a phone call from the person who died; and we make sure any surrounding or private schools are contacted either by the school or COJ and that they are sent post-vention materials.

Children, teens and adults who may be at higher risk or who may have a more difficult time are:

- Those students and staff members who are family members, siblings, cousins who attend the same school or another school. If there are children at other schools who were closely related to the person who died notification and possible support is offered to other schools depending on the situation and on our availability. We have assisted several schools in one school district following a death.
- Those students and staff members who may have been involved with the person who died.
- Those students and staff members who may have experienced a death.
- Those students and staff members who may have a cancer or have a family member battling cancer, mental illness or depression.

- Those students and staff members who may have suffered the death of a loved one: parent, sibling or friend.
- Those students and staff members who may have family members who suffer from mental illness or a terminal illness.

Stabilizing students, depending on their culture, there may be different degrees of emotions displayed. Cultural grief needs to be reviewed and information given back to the school.

- Allow the feelings, emotions to flow, tears and anger.
- BE aware of the present situation--is there anger towards a person or feelings of blame, guilt etc..
- The room should have Kleenex, water, snacks, paper and markers to write notes or to create a sign for the family.
- There is a power of connection by allowing students to come together.
- There may be a need for two groups, depending on the demographics or situation. Most of the time we allow for larger groups to help bring down the barriers and stigma of suicide.
- Have school personnel members with you, a counselor, teacher, or someone from the school who is connected to the kids so that when we are gone, there will be an avenue for them to connect. IF there is a staff member who has been bereaved by suicide and if they are grounded, they might be a good person to be part of this group.

Groups

- Introduce yourself; touch base on your experience if you've known someone who has died by suicide and share why you are there.
- Ask students to sign in--this needs to be asked throughout the day. Appoint someone to ask the new people coming in to sign in; this might be a school person or one of your team members.
- Share why you are there--share that if at any time their feelings are too big to manage there are counselors and people on hand to help them.

Ground Rules: CONFIDENTIALITY, RESPECT

Throughout the day, there will be different ways in which you can engage the students to share. **Below are some of the ways we have found that help the teens to share.**

- Become present to their feelings and emotions.
- Become aware: stop, look and listen.
- Be observant of how the students respond. Are they withdrawn; are they over-expressive; are they cradling themselves; are they extremely shy; how they are dressed, etc.

- Talk about the many possible feelings. Ask them what they are feeling. Talk about fears. What is it that they fear. Talk about where they are emotionally--stress levels allow this sharing to be portholes to educate and validate their feelings and emotions.
- If the crisis is post-vention to suicide, at some point when the suicide is confirmed, address suicide.
- Have students come together in a circle and share what they are experiencing. Ask how many have ever suffered the death of a parent, sibling. Then ask who has experienced or known someone who has died by suicide.
- Have them share their feelings and emotions and validate them.
- Ask them about their friend, what made him/her special, what did they like the most about their friend, special memories.
- If an illness, it is important to identify students who have or have had a loved one battling an illness, or who may have suffered the death of a loved one through an illness.
- If the death was by an accident, it is important to address the fact that we did not have time to say goodbye or that there may be unfinished business, such as an argument etc. If the death was by suicide, look for ways to talk about suicide. Explain it as an illness of the mind; that there are always options.
- Help them to create a network. Ask them who this might be: parent, guardian, friends, counselors, teachers, etc. Look for those students who seem to have no one.
- Ask the question, "Who will be there for you when you get home?" Make sure parents are not out of town.
- Give them breaks -- this is intense grieving.
- Allow students to know that this group is being offered throughout the day as some students may want to go to certain classes or lunch to be with their friends.

Students may want to go to the class that they shared with the deceased.

- Water and food are important as sugar levels can drop during extreme emotional times. Share this with the students.
- Schools might want to provide snacks or a pizza lunch for the students; local restaurants might provide a pizza lunch—this is up to the school to call for food.

As you see the intense emotions, allow them to flow but look for breaking points to ask what the person who died may have been like in class, or what were their favorite things.

Address Grief

Everyone grieves differently. Talk about how there will be the close friend having a difficult time--yet there may be someone who may not have known the student who will be completely torn apart. This may be due to past events that may have been triggered due to this death.

Topic: Spiral of Grief -Creating a Balance - use a slinky

This session talks about and show a person that in life we will all face moments where life is unbalanced. We talk about the importance of creating balance, we share with everyone that throughout life a person may feel like they off balance and at times may feel like they are bottoming out, we explain that with time and talking out our feelings most of the time we will spring back up. We encourage the students to name the people, places and things they can turn to when they feel life is weighing us down. We talk about what weights them down and what bring them us. We discuss how most people in life go through difficult moments and that nothing in life is worth ending their life. We talk about when life is not springing back or if they feel like things are hopeless explain that there are people here to help them to help them create a network of people who care.

Address Illnesses, Accidents, Murder, and Suicide

Talk about illness of the mind; compare it to cancer, diabetes, heart disease; share with them that mental illness is treatable and yet often due to the illness of the mind that person is unable to see through the darkness. Again, we stress that nothing in life is worth ending you life. We share with students them part of our purpose is to be there to support them.

- **Offer Hugs**, if welcomed and allow students to share what brings them strength. Kids love HUGS
- **Ask if anyone has questions**; ask if they've been to a funeral, if not talk about it.
- **LISTEN**

Many will share their faith; some may have faith questions, and others may not believe; acknowledge that it is okay to let them take the lead. Great strength comes from their peers.

Find ways to compliment the students and to help them find creative way to reach out to the bereaved family or to support their friends.

1. Ask students what their plans are for the evening.
2. Debriefing after school
3. Set up "Understanding Your Child/Teen" sessions for parents.
4. Suggest the importance of QPR or other programs such as "Steps to Last" or other trainings to help in the prevention of suicide.
5. Suggest that schools post information to help grieving children and teens.
6. Continued support throughout the week
7. Be present at the visitation, funeral.

8. 4-5 week sessions: Grief in a Bag Series
 - Spiral of Grief- Creating a Balance
 - Protective Wall - Segments of Grief
 - Masks or Body Scans
 - If You Could Walk in My Foot Steps this is What you See- What bring them Hope
 - Picking Up the Pieces- Giant Jenga
9. Be prepared for students who may be extremely depressed, may be suicidal, and need help.

Parent Session: COJ offers Understanding Your Child's/Teens Grief

Companions on a Journey Grief Support

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