



CRISIS COUNSELING & INTERVENTION SERVICES

COMMUNICATION

With Staff, Students, Parents/Guardians

In accordance with the SSP Volume 2, the school site incident commander (usually the principal or designee) takes charge of the crisis incident, verifies facts, notifies other offices, and coordinates crisis response services. The school site incident commander collaborates with LD administration to prepare communications for parents, LD and central office. The public information officer (PIO) provides feedback and edits regarding communications, prepares public statements and manages media requests.

- Contact Family to Offer Support and to Obtain Consent**
Identify a staff member to serve as the liaison/point of contact for the family. This person should be an administrator/designee or a trained crisis team member. Limiting the number of people who contact the family helps guard against further exacerbating an already stressful situation for the family. The liaison should contact family members of the crisis victim(s) to gather/confirm information and obtain consent regarding what information may be shared, as well as identify needs for support and resources. If the victim is a minor, ensure contact with the parent/guardian.
- Remove the Name of the Deceased Student from the School's Call Out System**
If an incident involves the death of a student, be sure to remove the name of the deceased student from the school's call out system, including Blackboard Connect and attendance checks, to prevent family members from receiving a call.
- Know the Facts**
Clarify facts and determine what information is to be shared with students, parents/community, staff, media and social media. Refer to Section X. Confidentiality regarding information sharing.
- Collaborate with Law Enforcement**
When the incident involves a crime or an ongoing investigation, it is crucial to maintain communication with LASPD (213) 625-6631 and other local law enforcement. Obtain guidance from local law enforcement regarding how to proceed so as not to interfere with a criminal investigation. (See Attachment E, Collaboration with Law Enforcement When a School Becomes a Crime Scene or Closed Area.)
- Share Information**
Determine how information will be shared (e.g., staff meetings, parent meetings, letters, Blackboard Connect, classroom discussions).

- Develop a Script**
Collaborate with the LD administration to develop and disseminate scripts for teachers, staff memos, parent/guardian letters, and Blackboard Connect messages. For samples and templates of scripts, visit <http://ccis.lausd.net>.
- Collaborate with Office of Communications**
When an incident receives or might receive the attention of news media, the administrator/designee or identified Communications/Media person should contact the Office of Communications (213) 241-6766 for assistance. (See Attachment F, Collaboration with Office of Communications.)

Talking to Staff in Preparation for Addressing Students

Depending on the crisis and the level of media attention it receives, some or many staff might have information about what occurred from television reports. It is important to remember that news media may present incorrect or inaccurate information about an event. Therefore, providing for an opportunity to inform staff of the facts is important. It is important to include as many of your staff as possible, as they can assist with rumor control and with referring student who they find might be in need of support. This includes: teachers, teacher's assistants, support staff, classified staff, before/after school staff, and parent volunteers.

During the staff meeting, the following are some important considerations:

- Share the Facts and Control Rumors**
Ensure everyone has the same information and knows how to proceed throughout the day in the event that students and/or staff need extra support.
- Educate Staff about Psychological First Aid: Listen, Protect, Connect, Model and Teach**
Provide staff with an overview of the 5 components of Psychological First Aid (contact your Local District or Central Office Crisis Team at (213) 241-3841, for support). These are strategies staff can use in the classroom with their students.
- Script for Teachers**
Provide teachers with the script to read to students and other ideas for addressing the classroom. The script should provide age appropriate facts regarding the incident is a general one, although we understand that for the younger students, you may choose to do things differently and change the language to something more age appropriate.
- Students Do Best in the Classroom**
Relay the message to teachers that students do best in their classrooms and with their peers. Encourage them to spend some time talking with students or allowing students to process the news they heard. Sometimes this can also be done with writing or making cards for the family.

Develop a Referral Process

Share the guidelines for referring students for crisis counseling with teachers. It is good practice and most helpful with teachers complete a referral form (Attachment E) for students to be summonsed, rather than send groups of students to one location, which might overwhelm the crisis responders on site, especially if there are only a few. This allows crisis responders to manage the flow of students coming in so each one can be addressed appropriately. It is important to manage these lists as well (go to ccis.lausd.net, under Crisis Response, for a template Crisis Management Excel spreadsheet.). Students referred multiple times by various teachers may be an indication of needing more support.

Sharing with Students in the Classroom

Often, when we have to share difficult news with a classroom of students, we may need help with what to say. The script serves various purposes, gives a consistent message for all students to hear, but also provides support for those who may have more difficulty sharing something that is already hard to share. If the classroom teacher expresses concern or anticipates having difficulty discussing the crisis, assistance should be provided (i.e. an administrator/designee and a crisis responder may assist the teacher when the information is being shared, in addition to engaging students in conversation).

When engaging students in the classroom and sharing the information about the crisis, the following are some important considerations:

Read the Script

Request that staff read the statement during first period or a previously determined time is important so all students hear the same message at about the same time. This avoids confusion and rumors during recess if some have heard and others have not.

Help Support Students in the Classroom

After reading the script, teachers may want to help students process the information. For younger students, talking about feelings might be helpful, such as “When someone dies, people can feel lots of different things. Some people feel sad, while others feel confused. What are some feelings you might be having right now?” or “What are some other feelings people might feel?” For older students, giving them an opportunity to dialogue and/or write/draw cards/letters is often helpful.

Visit Specific Classrooms, as needed

If the crisis involves the death of a student(s), make a plan to visit each classroom of that deceased student(s) and check in with those classrooms. This should be done by an administrator and mental health/crisis response team members.

Refer Student(s)

The Crisis Counseling Referral Form for Teachers could be attached to this script so that if students are having a difficult time in class, they can be referred to the room you have identified for crisis counseling for students.

The Triage/Crisis Counseling Room

This is the room students who are referred will go to. If this is kept open for nutrition and lunch, there might be students who come in and just want to hang out with their peers or make cards. Supplies recommended for the counseling room:

- Tissue
- Pens, pencils, markers
- Butcher paper
- Blank paper
- Summons/pass to go back to class
- Bell schedule (especially if you have outside support)
- School Map, with room numbers
- Access to someone with student schedule in case we can't get to a student during a particular period
- Counseling logs, sign in sheets

Counseling for Staff

Although staff, like high school students, also tend to self-regulate with their peers, it is good to give them the option of a place to go, with a designated person to offer them support. Having a couple of substitute teachers on standby is a great idea in the event that teachers are having a difficult time and need to step out. It is ok for teachers to express emotion and let students know they feel sad. This is good modelling and gives students permission to feel what they need to feel. However, if the emotions are uncontrollable and impacts their ability to manage the classroom and continue with their duties, they should step out temporarily so they can regain their balance.

Sharing with Parents/Guardians

Depending on the crisis incident and the level of media attention it receives, you might expect an influx of parents/guardians at your school site the following day. Once consent has been received to share the information with the school community, limited facts may be shared with parents/guardians via, Blackboard Connect, in a letter, or in a parent/guardian meeting. During the parent meeting it is important reassure them that the school will continue its routine and will have crisis counselors on-site to assist those who need support. If there is an on-going investigation, it is important seek out the guidance and support of the Los Angeles School Police Department during these meeting.

Important Considerations

The following are important action items for consideration:

1. Social Networking

Students, staff, parents/guardians and other community members may often turn to social networking sites as a way to communicate information about the crisis; this information may be accurate or

rumored. Many also use social networking as an opportunity to express their thoughts and/or feelings, positive and negative, about the crisis. Some considerations in regard to social networking include:

- a. Encourage parents/guardians to monitor Internet postings regarding the crisis.
- b. Social networking sites may contain rumors, derogatory messages about the crisis, or messages that bully students. Such messages may need to be addressed. In some situations, postings may warrant notification to parents and/or law enforcement (see BUL-5688.1 *Social Media Policy for Employees and Associated Persons*, January 29, 2015).

2. School Culture & Events

It is important to acknowledge that the school community may experience a heightened range of emotions, including shock, fear, confusion and a lack of feeling safe, in the aftermath of a crisis as significant events transpire such as culmination, prom or graduation. Depending on the impact, such triggering events may require planning for additional considerations and resources.

3. The Deceased Student's Classrooms and Work

It is important to remember that when a student dies, there are many places and spaces that hold memory for students and staff as well. For example, the student will leave an empty chair in each classroom or there might be student work posted inside classroom walls and hallways. Removing or replacing these items too quickly might trigger a variety of feelings in students and staff, such as anger, confusion, and sadness. Some considerations for dealing with the space left by the deceased student are:

- a. Ensure that an administrator/designee and mental health crisis team member visits each class the student had to check in with them on the first day back.
- b. Replacing or moving student seating should be done eventually, but without haste. Perhaps doing so after the services for the student, or at an agreed upon time with other teachers and/or students.
- c. Removing student work from the walls, can be done when all the work is being replaced, being careful to not just remove the one deceased student's work. If there is a memorial set up for the student, perhaps a good time to transition is to make the work available to the family, when presenting them with artifacts from the memorial and/or letters/drawings by students.

4. Memorialization

In the event of a crisis related to a death, it is not uncommon for students/community members to initiate a memorial at or near the school site. The administrator/designee should offer guidelines for a meaningful, safe approach to acknowledge the loss. Schools should strive to treat all deaths that impact the school community in the same way. Memorials or dedications for an individual who has died should not glamorize or romanticize either the individual or the death. Some considerations for memorials include:

- a. Memorials created by students (including flowers, cards, pictures, stuffed animals, or other items):
 - i. Such memorials should not be disruptive to the daily school routine. Memorials placed in the hallway or heavily trafficked areas could be disruptive.
 - ii. Designate staff to monitor memorials for content. Inappropriate messages written by students should be removed promptly.

- iii. An established timeframe for the display of memorials should be shared with students and staff, after which any non-perishable and salvageable items should be reviewed for appropriateness and may be offered to the family by the identified school liaison. An example of a timeframe could be to keep the memorial in place until the day of the services or during a natural break in the school's calendar, whichever comes first.
 - iv. Prior to offering memorial items to the family, designate staff to review content for appropriateness.
 - v. It is important to keep in mind that more permanent memorials, such as trees, benches, or wall plaques, may create expectations among staff and students for any future deaths that might impact the school community.
- b. Memorial services or vigils:
- i. The focus of the school should be to maintain a regular schedule, structure and routine as much as possible given the circumstances, which will benefit the entire student body and staff.
 - ii. It is not recommended that a memorial service or vigil be held at the school site, as this would disrupt the regular schedule of a school. Additionally, a service or vigil at the school may inadvertently connect that individual's death to the school and a space or area of a school, serving as a reminder to students and staff when regular activities are resumed.

5. Fundraising

It is best practice for fundraising to occur off campus and not be associated with District or school officials. Any fundraising activities must comply with District policy (Board Rules 1251, 1255, 1288, and 2525; BUL-1633 dated March 29, 2005). The family of the deceased may choose to initiate a private fundraising activity, such as an online fundraising account.