

Brown County Schools Suicide Prevention Policy

Appendix M

PROCEDURES FOR TALKING TO STUDENTS ABOUT SUICIDE DEATH

1. Prepare students for the serious and tragic nature of the information you are about to share with them. Say that it is expected this news will upset many of them and that both you and other staff are there to help them get through this.
2. Announce the facts of the situation and what actions are being taken as a result (i.e. all classes are being informed, counseling centers are being set up, etc.).
3. Allow students to react; pay special attention to the following:
 - a. Dispel any rumors or unconfirmed information.
 - b. Stress that we each react differently to tragedies and must respect one another's feelings and ways of reacting.
 - c. Point out that grief, sadness, anger, guilt, fear and disbelief are all normal reactions to such news. Grief is unique to each person and there is no one way to grieve.
4. Convey a sense of acceptance for all the feelings expressed, avoid judgmental or value statements about anyone's feelings.
5. Note that some people's feelings will be stronger than others and that individual help is available.
6. If student's reactions seem particularly intense or you feel unable to respond to them adequately, strongly encourage them to seek assistance from one of the designated counseling personnel. Use judgment in terms of the student's need for an escort.
7. If students have questions you are unable to answer or if you inadequate to continue discussion, seek out a member of the crisis team to assist you.
8. Encourage students to be supportive of one another but stress the importance of seeking help or encouraging their friends to seek help from adults if their feelings seem more intense or persistent than "normal".
9. Reassure students that they are not responsible for what happened - discourage guilt and unrealistic "hindsight regrets". Instead, focus discussion on how they might use what they now know to avoid similar tragedies in the future.
10. In cases of suicide, avoid focusing on the details or circumstances that led up to the person's death; stress the reasons that someone dies by suicide are not simple, and are related to mental disorders that get in the way of the person thinking clearly Blaming others—or blaming the person who died—does not acknowledge the reality that the person was battling a mental disorder.
11. Allow students who do not want to participate in the discussion to study quietly in the room or seek assistance from one of the counselors. Don't assume that the lack of a visible reaction means the student has no reaction.
12. Allow as much time as students seem to need for the discussion. Try to move discussion toward how students can help one another and encourage help-seeking behaviors.
13. Students who wish to memorialize the dead person in some way should be referred to a crisis team member.
14. End the class by reminding students of the counseling and support services that are available.