

Informing Students of a Tragedy

There are many ways to announce deaths and tragedies to students. Some schools call an assembly, some use the PA, and some ask teachers to read the announcements and discuss the events with students in the classroom. It is strongly encouraged that you consider having the announcement read by teachers in the classroom. Often if an assembly is called, students who are most upset will slink off into the nearest bathroom and struggle with their emotions alone rather than being in a classroom where a teacher might give immediate support. Again, we strongly encourage teachers read this.

Some teachers may want someone else to read the announcement in their rooms, as they may feel unable to do so themselves. Ask Flight Team Members to provide this support, and to lead the initial discussion. Have teachers remain in the room so they're aware of how things unfolded and what reactions students had.

A guideline for such an announcement might be:

Today we received tragic (or sad) news. We learned that one of our students, _____, died by _____. {Give basic appropriate elaboration without too much detail.} When things like this happen, people have all different kinds of reactions, like shock, sadness, fear and anger. Those reactions may rise and fall throughout the day, and even for days to come. Some of us will want to have quiet time alone and others may want time to talk with peers or adults. Some of you who didn't know _____ may be ready for teachers to return to academics (or "lessons") sooner than others. We all just need to practice patience and respect for each other.

*We can take some time to talk about this. When most of you are ready to return to learning, those who still wish time to talk or think about this may go to the _____ (library?) which we've set aside so you can gather with friends. You will have to sign out of your class as you leave and sign in to the _____ as soon as you arrive. (If there are other supervised gathering places, such as the commons, state that here). We recognize the need for you to gather with friends to talk, so we are providing (this place) (these places) for you to be. **It is important that all students be in some setting that has an adult present.** For those of you who wish to talk one-to-one with the school counselor, s/he will be in his/her office and will see students during the day. (Tell how they sign up for time with the counselor.)*

The school day will remain on schedule, but teachers in any class may suspend regular classroom activities in order to allow you to talk about this event.

At this point we know the following about the memorial/funeral arrangements...

At this point, lead some discussion time.. the following page has suggestions for openers.

*We will continue to keep you updated as this unfolds. Further news will come by
(give details on how updates will be handled.)*

It is recommended that teachers who read this announcement also look over the handout in the first section on "Crisis Day Guidelines for Teachers" and "Handling a Class When a Student or Staff Member Dies" in this section.



Sometimes it is easier for teachers to use their own words instead of reading an announcement. This list will help you remember many things to cover.

A guideline for announcements might be:

- Begin with one sentence of warning -- "We received sad news."
- Tell who died and basic information on how.
- Acknowledge that these events bring up lots of different feelings for different youth.
- Name some of the expected feelings (sadness, anger, fear, shock)
- Stress that it is important for all to have respect for each other, and compassion.
- Share information about availability of the gathering room set aside for students
 - purpose of the room (to talk, share feelings with others, draw, make cards)
 - what behavior is expected of them in that room
 - that they'll need to sign in and out, that this isn't just a way to wander...
- If you know information about the funeral or family plans, share that
- How will they get updates on information?
- Tell them where the counselor will be for the day (office? gathering room?)
- Mention that they need to be where there is an adult present -- not hanging out in the locker room, bathrooms, etc.
- Predict with students how day might go -- weaving in and out of talking about this and doing their schoolwork.
- Talk about the school day remaining pretty much on schedule
- Share that you can take some time now to just talk about how this is for them.

Discussion starters might include:

- Had any of you already heard of this? How did you hear?
- Some of you had probably had other people in your life die... (let them tell)
- How many of you knew ____ ?
- What do you think this might be like for the family?
- What kinds of things have people done for your family at times like this that helped?
- Are there things we'd like to do for _____'s family?

