

THE HURON-PERTH CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

SUBJECT:

SCHOOL CRISIS RESPONSE

3E:19

**POLICY STATEMENT:**

The Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board is a team of school, home and parish working together. The Board recognizes that the Catholic school community can provide a valuable support to its members who experience personal loss.

PROCEDURE:

Therefore, the Board empowers the Director to establish a structure that will assist school communities to:

- provide support, compassion and understanding;
- demonstrate an understanding of the grief process;
- provide ways to help others work through the grieving process.

BOARD APPROVAL:

September 22, 2003
Reviewed August 2004

EFFECTIVE DATE:

September 23, 2003
Reviewed August 2004

RATIONALE

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the School Crisis Response Procedure is to provide a framework for support action in the event of a traumatic occurrence in the school community. As with any emergency response plan, we cannot predict the specific act that will occur nor the time frame in which a response is required. A plan and framework has to be put into place to address a situation that causes serious, sudden grief and disequilibrium in a school community. The most common incident is death of a staff, student, or significant community member but may also include an accident, a serious illness or an event such as a fire.

In today's complex and unpredictable society, the school community is not immune to experiencing firsthand unexpected trauma and crisis. As educators, we must be prepared to deal with and to assist those affected by traumatic events. The school community can provide a supportive and nurturing environment where the healing process can begin. As Catholic educators, we have our faith to help sustain us and help us to transform sadness and loss into hope and promise for the future.

In times of crisis, emotions are intense, factual information may be limited and routines are disrupted, generating panic in those who are unprepared. Tragic events call for decisive action. Having a set of guidelines and suggestions to follow at moments of uncertainty enhances our ability to react in a positive manner. Prior planning, decisive action and knowledge of what to expect helps to reduce confusion.

It is most appropriate that the school community's response to tragedy reflect our Catholic beliefs, values and traditions while respecting the increasing diversity of our communities. Since cultures can greatly differ in their responses to bereavement, it is important to be sensitive to related practices and traditions. The most effective support response is locally developed. In order to provide assistance to the school community, the following guidelines, procedures and suggestions have been developed.

2.0 PLANNING

- 2.1 In September of each year, the principal shall review all emergency procedures (e.g., the Board Policy on Emergency Procedures and School Crisis Response Policy, etc.). As part of this review, the identification of the school based response team members should be completed and recorded in the School Crisis Response log.
- 2.2 By September 30th the names and position of team members will be submitted to the Superintendent of Education.

2.3 The School Crisis Response Quick Reference Chart is provided to each school and should be kept readily available for reference.

3.0 SCHOOL CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM MEMBERSHIP AND MANDATE

3.1 Membership on the School Crisis Response Team will vary depending on factors such as comfort level, skills, interest, community involvement, availability, involvement in reacting to a situation, etc. Determination of the composition of the team must be made annually, taking into consideration the local situation.

3.2 The Team's role will be to provide leadership in times of emotional crisis. They will need to give clear directions, delegate tasks, draw on resources of the school and system staff and mobilize the formation of supports for staff, students and the community.

3.3 The School Crisis Response Team at the **elementary** and **secondary** level must include the principal and vice-principal/designate and 2 or more of the following:

- ™ Classroom Teacher(s);
- ™ Secretary;
- ™ Parish Priest / Deacon;
- ™ Custodian;
- ™ Educational Assistants;
- ™ Chaplain;
- ™ Guidance Counsellor;
- ™ Others as deemed appropriate to the local situation (e.g., nurses, police, CAS).

4.0 SYSTEM CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

4.1 At the request of the Superintendent, the Board will have available staff from the System Crisis Response Team to assist the school. The Superintendent of Education must also be informed of the incident by the Principal. School Principals must contact the System Crisis Response Team, liaison person, designated for their school to either inform them that external support is not required or to communicate the level of external service that is requested. School principals may choose to contact the System Crisis Response Team liaison person designated for their school to communicate the level of external support required.

4.2 The mandate of the System Team is two fold:

- ™ to review the plan and framework and resources available to schools;
- ™ to coordinate the system services provided to a school.

4.3 The System Crisis Response Team includes:

- ™ Chaplain at St. Anne's – liaison for Huron County;
- ™ Chaplain at St. Michael – liaison for Perth County;
- ™ Board Chaplain or designate;
- ™ Program Support Team;
- ™ Huron County Principal;
- ™ Perth County Principal;
- ™ Others as deemed appropriate by the Superintendent of Education.

5.0 SCHOOL RESPONSE TO TRAGIC EVENT (SEE ADDENDUM)

6.0 LITURGICAL RESOURCES, LETTERS TO SCHOOL COMMUNITY, ETC. (SEE ADDENDUM)

ADDENDUM

5.0 SCHOOL RESPONSE TO TRAGIC EVENT

SCHOOL LIAISON / PRINCIPAL CHECKLIST

- Verify or clarify the facts around the death and/or event. _____
- If necessary, initiate telephone tree for staff members. _____
- Meet with your School Crisis Response Team and collaboratively outline roles of responsibility for each member. _____
- Notify the following people:
(the time and the order of contact would be at the Principal's discretion)
 1. Director of Education or Superintendent of the School. _____
 2. Religious Education Consultant. _____
 3. Parish Priest. _____
 4. Area Trustee. _____
 5. Persons directly associated with the school (School Council President, absent staff members, previous principal...). _____
 6. Contact person in ethnic community or a liaison person of the given cultural background. _____
 7. Neighbouring public school. _____
 8. Previous school(s) attended by student. _____
 9. Bus carrier. _____
- Decide how classes should be informed. _____
- Establish a designate to act as contact with the family re: special considerations and funeral wishes. _____

Parental/Guardian distress is great and parents/guardians may be understandably reluctant to discuss the death of their child with a person unknown to them. Therefore, it is important that the designated contact person be someone with whom they are familiar, e.g., principal, classroom teacher, or person in the ethnic community.
- Gather staff for prayer and sharing of information. _____
- Prepare a written announcement that should be given to teachers. **(DO NOT USE THE P.A. SYSTEM)** _____

This Announcement should be given apart from other school business. It should include:

 - π *who died;*
 - π *accurate account of the details of the death and/or traumatic event;*
 - π *who the individual is in relation to the school (e.g., Gr. 4 – Mrs. Smith);*
 - π *share your feelings of grief and personal remembrances;*
 - π *prayer (see Appendix 1).*
- Prepare as soon as possible an announcement to be given to each family of the school community. This could include: the name of the deceased, the relation to the school, the circumstances of the death, and funeral arrangements if they are known (see Addendum). _____
- If necessary, hold a follow-up staff meeting as soon as the staff can be gathered together, to share up-to-date information. _____
- In most circumstances, lower the flag to half-mast when a student or teacher has died. _____
- Reconvene Crisis Response Team at the end of the day to reassess the situation and further revise/organize plan. _____
- Identify groups of students or staff at risk and in need of support. _____
- Arrange a location where they can go to receive that support. _____
- **If applicable**, contact the Director's Office regarding communication to the media. _____

ADDENDUM

6.0 LITURGICAL RESOURCES, LETTERS TO SCHOOL COMMUNITY, ETC.

This addendum will include:

- Suggested Liturgical resources;
- Sample prayers;
- Sample school announcements;
- Sample letter to parents/guardians.

Liturgical resources etc. will be reviewed and revised on a needs basis