
The Recovery Phases

Initiating a long term recovery plan after responding to a grief in school event is the next step in the process. This phase is the essential component to moving students and staff forward. There is a natural instinct to return to “normal” and get students back on track. Understand there is a new normal, a new landscape for students and staff to navigate. Some will quickly adapt and others will struggle. Striking a balance between the two is an on-going challenge.

Failure to develop and incorporate a recovery plan has long term effects on the entire school community. It is not enough to be prepared and to respond to the initial crisis. Students require on-going education, support and processing of the event to effectively move forward.

The recovery phase begins the moment the news of the death announced. The first days and week of the crisis is spent addressing the immediate needs. Addressing long terms needs involves reflecting on how well the immediate needs were met, identifying students and staff at risk, and seeking feedback from students and faculty about issues needing immediate attention as well as the “slow burner” issues.

Taking the information gathered, the crisis team can develop strategies to meet the needs of the school community. Issues to add to the list are:

- Determine memorial for student/ teacher.
- Determine if there is time to include a yearbook dedication page.
- Determine on-going support – informal support group, processing opportunities
- Determine on-going education – regular updates of information on the school web site and/or the schools social network site. Parent Education.
- Determine how to remember the one year anniversary

School Memorial

Memorials/Activities/Rituals Following Traumatic Events

Suggestions for Schools

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/memorials_general.aspx

"School memorials, ceremonies or memory activities following a traumatic experience serve an important function in the healing process for both students and staff. Such activities provide the opportunity to express emotions through a variety of ways besides talking. In addition, a school memorial helps to bring closure to a period of grieving and serves as a point from which to move on with regular school activities. Memorial activities can take many forms, from tree planting or writing letters and cards, to more traditional "services." It is best to plan a variety of activities rather than only one "big" event; some students will be more comfortable, and more comforted by, one activity versus another. Providing a range of opportunities to express feelings is essential.

Guidelines for Planning School Memorial Activities

Participation in memorial activities is important even when students or school personnel do not know any of the victims or their families. The following are key points for schools to consider:

- Proceed slowly and involve students, staff, families, and the community in your planning and decision-making.
- Schools should form a committee that includes administrators, teachers, parents and students to plan memorial activities. It is very important to involve students in the planning process including those who had personal ties to the victims if possible.
- Memorial events can be planned as a series of activities, not just the more traditional permanent marker or structure in memory of those who died. Schools can hold group "services" as well as involve classrooms in creating their own tributes, artwork, cards, letters, etc.
- Demonstrate acknowledgement of and sensitivity toward issues of diversity including culturally specific rituals, traditions, beliefs, activities, and practices.

Suggested Memorial Activities

- A temporary memorial site can be established. Flowers, notes, poems, ribbons, stuffed animals, pictures and other objects can be brought by students and staff to a designated location at school to pay tribute to those who died and those who helped to rescue and support survivors. School and community input should be obtained to determine if a more permanent place for these objects is feasible or to otherwise determine an appropriate, sensitive way to dismantle the memorial site. The location of permanent memorials at school should be considered very carefully and locations other than main entrances are recommended.
- Schools and communities who have experienced significant traumas often look for what is termed as “the gift of hope”; i.e., activities and projects that will make a difference and prevent similar tragedies in the future. Following violent events, activities and curriculum that address tolerance and bullying would be appropriate “gifts.”
- Be sure to involve all students, including those with disabilities. Activities can be tailored to the cognitive and emotional development levels of all students. Special education staff can be helpful in assuring that all students feel included and that activities are appropriate for them.

Developmental Considerations

Memorial activities should be planned to be appropriate to the developmental level of students involved.

- Young children need to do something to express their grief, even though they may not really understand all that has happened. Drawings—to hang up in the school hallway, to send to the firemen and policemen who helped victims, to send to school children in disaster areas—are an excellent way for young children to express and share their feelings. They can also perform songs or reading of poems as part of a school-wide memorial service.
- Adolescents need activities that provide them with a sense of contribution to the school’s and community’s efforts, not only in recognition of the event and honoring the victims, but in preventing such tragedies in the future. Involve middle school and high school students in all aspects of planning memorial activities, including performing as well as helping with setting up and cleaning up.

Specific Guidelines for School Memorial Services

- Involve students of all ages in planning the service.
- Keep the memorial service brief and appropriate to the age of the students. For elementary students, 15-20 minutes is appropriate; for older students, up to an hour.
- Include music and student performances. Playing soothing music as people enter and leave the service will help set and maintain a calm mood.
- Preview the service with students, parents and staff ahead of time. Teachers should help students anticipate how this will be different from typical school assemblies, and should discuss appropriate behavior.
- Have several brief speakers. Select individuals who are well known to students and who represent security and safety—people who students can recognize as able to provide reassurances and support (mayor, superintendent, local police chief or school liaison officer, etc.)
- Invite family members to attend.
- For memorial services/programs, all staff and students should attend (unless parents specifically object). Such programs can be very powerful in uniting the school community, and send the message that each individual is important. If some students choose to not attend, provide a quiet activity as an alternative.
- Use symbols of life and hope in memorial activities. Balloons and candles can be used very effectively to promote a positive, uplifting message that acknowledges pain and sadness yet also is hopeful for the future.
- Following a school-wide memorial service, students should return to their classrooms for at least a short time prior to dismissal. This allows time to talk with each other, their teacher or a mental health staff member (if available) to “debrief” the experience.
- Provide a forum that allows the inclusion of diverse traditions and rituals that are specific to members of the community.”

Parent Education

Parent education is another instrumental piece of the recovery phase. There are many venues to use in effective dissemination of grief materials. Providing multiply locations to obtain this information is non-threatening and access to can occur at a convenient time.

Parent education ideas include:

- Offer a grief education program in the evening at school. Offer to provide daycare for children and provide refreshments in addition to grief material. Ask a grief professional to talk to parents about how children/teens respond to grief and how they can support them.
- Use the school's web site to offer information or links to information on the internet. Identify a contact at school or within the community the parents can seek additional grief information.
- Use the schools social network site to provide regular updates on grief process.
- Ask local libraries to gather grief materials and create a display for parents and students to easily access.
- Send home snail mail or e-mail grief information.

Be consistent in the delivery of grief information. Recycling what has already been sent home from previous crisis events is acceptable.

Acknowledging the One Year Anniversary

Regardless of how well the students have adapted to the death, the one year anniversary looms large. Typically those close to the deceased experience flashbacks to events that occurred a year ago. The grief resurfaces and would've, could've, should've swirls around in everyone's mind. There is also the realization for some students they have survived the year without their friend.

Work with the class directly impacted by the death at the elementary and middle school level. At the high school level in addition to the impacted class, include other friends as well as siblings in planning the acknowledgement ritual.

Suggested One Year Acknowledgement Activities

- Offer a butterfly or balloon release.
- Invite students to share funny stories about the student.
- Create a one year anniversary card for the family and ask students and staff to sign.
- Hold a fundraiser for funds for a special project in memory of the student/teacher.

Support Groups

Establishing an on-going support group for impacted students is another consideration for the recovery phase. The group can be open ended, closed, monthly, or weekly. Determine what the student need is by talking with staff and students. The idea of "if we build it, they will come" does not apply in this situation. Engage students who would benefit from participating in the group and seek their input about the group. The focus of the support group should include grief education, cultivating coping tools and allow time for processing.

The time to initiate a group depends on need and interest of students.