

Sample Notifications for Parents following a Death by Suicide

Sample #1

Date: _____

Dear Parent(s)/Caretaker(s),

The death of a child is a sad and tragic event, and the sudden death of our student, _____ (name), has touched both students and faculty here at _____ High School. Based on the information provided to us by the medical examiner and the family, _____ (name of student) died by suicide on _____ (day), _____ (month) _____ (date). The funeral arrangements are as follows: _____. Mr. and Mrs. _____ (name) request that students _____ attend/do not attend. In addition, donations may be sent in care of _____. Since the news of the death, the school has implemented a crisis response plan to help the students and staff respond to this unfortunate death. In conjunction with colleagues from _____ (community agencies), the school continues to provide/has provided professionally staffed support stations available to all students. In addition, students continue to meet with staff from our counseling and social work departments. In the days and weeks ahead, students may have questions and concerns relating to the death and are going to require your support at home and our continued support here at school as they work through their feelings and grief. Although we cannot predict how any child may react, we can be sensitive and aware, both at home and at school, of the common reactions experienced by grieving adolescents. If you feel your child is having difficulty and may benefit from additional support, please feel free to contact _____, the Crisis Team Leader, your child's guidance counselor, or myself so the school can be aware of the needs of your child. We are also supported by local mental health professionals and can provide you with referrals as needed. In addition, if you are interested in attending a parent/caretaker meeting, please contact _____ at _____ (phone) for further information and registration. As the school community continues to cope with the loss of _____ (name), we invite your participation in the healing process. Please feel free to contact the school at any time with questions or concerns.

Source: "School-based Youth Suicide Prevention guide," published by the Department of Child and Family Studies, Division of State and Local Support, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida, 2003, accessed at www.fmhi.usf.edu/institute/pubs/bysubject.html

Sample Notifications for Parents following a Suicide

Sample #2

Date

Dear parent/guardian of ____ School students:

The _____ School community was saddened to learn of the apparent suicide of one of our students. The death of any young person is a loss which, in one way or another, diminishes each of us. The tragic circumstances of _____'s death are perhaps more shocking and more difficult to accept.

We have asked the assistance of the crisis team to help our school community deal with this loss. We are doing everything we can to help your child and our staff through this tragic experience. You may anticipate more questions and a need to talk about the suicide at home.

Jim's funeral will be held at _____ at _____ a.m. Your child may be excused from school to attend the funeral with a written permission from you. We encourage you to make arrangements to accompany him or her and you will need to provide your own transportation. The school will remain open for those students not attending the funeral. _____'s classmates and teachers have decided to receive donations in his memory and will make a contribution to _____. Please contact the school office at _____ for further information.

If you have any concerns regarding your child's reactions to this loss, _____, the school nurse, _____, the school counselor, or one of the crisis team members will be available to assist you. Sincerely,

_____ School Principal

Source: School-Based Crisis Management Recommendations on Suicide by Suicide Awareness Voices of Education accessed at http://www.preventioninflorida.org/SP2006/materials/school_crisis_plan.pdf

Sample Notifications for Parents following a Suicide

Sample #3

Date

Dear Parent,

It is with deep regret that we inform you about a recent loss to our school community. On (INSERT date), (INSERT name of the deceased)¹ (INSERT brief facts about the death)². This loss is sure to raise many emotions, concerns, and questions for our entire school, especially our students.

Our school (and INSERT name of school district, if applicable) has a Crisis Intervention Team made up of a professionals trained to help with the needs of students, parents, and school personnel at difficult times such as this. At our school (or INSERT name of alternative school), we have counselors available for any student who may need or want help or any type of assistance surrounding this loss. We encourage you, as parents, to also feel free to use our resources.

We have enclosed some information that may be useful to you in helping your child at home. If you would like additional information or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact (INSERT name of Communications Coordinator or Counseling Services Coordinator) at (INSERT phone number).

We are saddened by the loss to our school community and will make every effort to help you and your child as you need.

Sincerely,

(Type the name of the signer and title. This letter is usually signed by the principal, superintendent, or crisis team coordinator)

Examples of information to insert in the opening paragraph:

¹John Smith, one of our 9th grade students; Mrs. Jones, who taught 7th grade English

²was killed in an automobile accident; died after a long-illness; died suddenly; died by suicide

(before inserting this information, be sure the immediate family is fine with this information being released)

(Source: National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement,
<http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/svc/alpha/s/school-crisis/letters-template.htm>, accessed January 18, 2010.)