

Getting Through the School Day

1. Meet with faculty and staff members **prior to the beginning of the school day**, if possible. This is necessary for the following reasons:
 - To provide guidelines on what to say and what not to say
 - To provide guidelines on how to handle different questions students may ask
 - To provide accurate, reliable information
 - To provide an overview of the day's game plan
 - To introduce additional counselors, youth pastors, central office staff, etc. that may be on hand to assist during the school day
 - To review the facts of the death or crisis and any unique circumstances

The principal should talk about what teachers are expected to do:

- Share information with students or be in the classroom when staff support does.
 - Lead a discussion and validate feelings or experiences students have or have had.
 - Keep semblance of schedule, but make accommodations in expectations for academics.
 - Send students to the Safe Room as appropriate.
 - Expect confusion, crying, disruptive behavior; act compassionately.
 - Discuss impact of the event. (Suspend regular curriculum for a while when students seem to need to talk. This may fluctuate throughout the day.)
 - Ask for coverage for a class if you want a break or if you are feeling overwhelmed.
 - Contact the office any time you want support. Help is on the way.
2. Meet with faculty and staff members **at the end of the school day** (after the tragic event), if possible. This is necessary for the following reasons:
 - To provide updates or news of plans for funeral arrangements, if known
 - To determine a game plan for the next school day
 - To ask what is needed for ongoing support
 - To debrief in order to find out what worked well and what areas need improvement
 - To offer appreciation of some things which went well, or the efforts of others
 - To give everyone a chance to catch up on the details from the school day
 - To make a list of students of concern or describe the referral process for those students in need of help

Listed below are possible questions to assist in getting the faculty and staff started in unloading some of the stress of the day:

- What kinds of reactions have you had?
- What parts worked well? Which could be improved?
- How could you have felt more supported during the day?
- What could we do to provide support to you right now?
- What additional resources are we needing in the near future?

3. **Meet with students in small groups** to inform them of a death or tragic event. Suggestions include the following:
 - Meet with each grade level of students—start with the older grades first and then progress to the lower grades
 - Assign counselors to go from room to room in order to talk with students
 - Have a prepared statement from which you will read
 - Allow limited time for students to ask questions
 - Should students need to discuss any information in detail, refer them to a specific room on the campus where they can talk with counselors, social workers, youth pastors, etc.
4. Prepare a letter to be sent home to parents at the end of the school day. (See handout entitled *Outline for Letter to Parents* for additional suggestions.)
5. Refer any and all media inquiries (i.e., newspaper, radio, TV, etc.) to Mr. Terry Wilhite, Director of Communications.
6. Have a prepared statement available for clerical staff (particularly those persons who work in the front office) of the school building. This is especially beneficial for any telephone calls that may be received from concerned parents and/or community members.