

RESPONSE TO GRIEF CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

ADJUSTMENT TRAINING CENTERS

This response to grief crisis management plan has been developed using a series of documents from various sources, including schools and developmental disabilities articles and resources throughout the United States. While it is believed this is a quality document, individual adjustment training centers wishing to adopt any or all pieces should give careful consideration to their individual needs and how this document relates to those needs. The specific plan starting on page 13 is to be used as a starting point and in no way should be considered without review, consultation, and discussion among professionals prior to implementation. A clear focus of this manual is on a “crisis” resulting from the death of a person supported or staff member.

Note: This information is intended to focus on persons supported, but much of this information is not exclusive only to this population. In addition, during those situations in which a terminal illness is involved, the grief process often begins prior to the actual death.

Sources from which information was gleaned include:

- Luchterband, C., & Murphy, N. (1998). *Helping adults with mental retardation grieve a death loss*. Bristol, Pennsylvania: Accelerated Development.
- APA “Understanding and Treating Traumatic Grief” - 2005
- Cornbelt Educational Cooperative, Parker, SD
- USD #305, Salina, KS
- Sioux Falls School District, Sioux Falls, SD
- Virginia Department of Education

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Definition and Purpose

Clearly, the purpose behind every crisis management plan is the safety, health, and well-being of persons supported and staff. Thus, when needed, adjustment training centers must be prepared to respond to situations of crisis with appropriate and timely reactions.

As stated earlier, this document focuses on responses to grief; however, there are many other “crises” that adjustment training centers will need to deal with. This includes death of a person supported, staff member, or member of a person supported’s immediate family. In addition, many other situations can be perceived as a “crisis” or “critical incident” such as natural disasters, fire, etc. Whatever the situation, adjustment training center staff need to make the decision of how to respond.

Not included in this document are two forms that would be helpful. These documents include a calling tree and a special skills tree. The calling tree, which is often used during inclement weather, is also useful during crisis situations to pass along important bits of information. Secondly, it is helpful to keep a list of staff that have special skills that are useful in crisis situations. For example, those with emergency medical training, bi-lingual education, and knowledge of sign language should be noted and on file as part of the master crisis plan.

Information on Grief

Understanding Grief Reactions of Persons Supported

A variety of reactions can be assumed when a person supported becomes informed of a death. It is certainly possible that the person supported may experience a combination of reactions.

Possible reactions include:

Guilt – This is a common reaction because individuals often feel guilty about last interactions, not being nicer to their loved one, etc. Persons supported may also have “wished the deceased would go away” and thus, they somehow believe they are responsible for the death. If the individual was in no way responsible for the death, it is referred to as “magical thinking”. Persons supported must understand that they did not cause the death(s) to happen.

Anger – Those experiencing bereavement may react more intensely and more quickly than usual. It can be difficult for some to control these emotions. Anger can be expressed through verbally and physically aggressive behavior and various other means.

Sadness – This emotion can also take a variety of forms such as withdrawal, crying, avoidance, increase in sleeping, etc. With sadness, it is important to remember that the emotion can often mean crying, but it does not guarantee crying.

Reactions and Feelings after a Death or Loss

- Consistently talking about the person who died
- Feeling angry at the deceased or guilty
- Cutting off feelings in order to cope
- Using alcohol or drugs
- Turning away from or toward God or a spiritual belief
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Changes in eating patterns – experiencing a loss of appetite or a desire to eat constantly
- Taking on the characteristics of the person who died
- Body complaints – breathing difficulties, heaviness in the chest, sighing, tightness in the throat, lack of strength, & exhaustion
- Irritability, restlessness, and anxiety for no known reason
- Difficulty concentrating and with short-term memory
- Fear of being alone, etc.
- Increases in activity in order to cope with a restless feeling
- Regression toward previous patterns of behavior
- Difficulty completing a daily routine
- Believing they see, hear, or feel a presence of the deceased

- Disbelief of the death
- Denial of the activity
- Sadness

Length of Grieving

No specific timelines should be discussed in regard to the length of grieving. A number of factors will affect how the grieving proceeds such as method of the death, circumstances, etc. Typically the length of time it takes to adjust to a death or loss is significantly underestimated and unrecognized.

Support and sensitivity to persons supported who have experienced a death or loss should exist for at least the first year after the death. It is common for the bereaved to experience reminders of the death, such as the “first holiday season”, or the “first spring”, etc. Other time periods of significance include three months, six – nine months, 12 months, and 18 months following a loss.

Grief Triggers

Many things, such as a special date, etc. can trigger [_____] a death or loss. This may include years later. New losses may remind persons supported of old losses, developmental changes, such as moving into an apartment, or a first job without mom or dad to witness the event, seasonal changes (especially spring & fall) can all spark grief reactions. Consequently, it is not uncommon for death or loss to resurface and behaviors to change.

Understanding Death

Most adults with developmental disabilities have either mild or moderate cognitive disabilities. They often have emotions about a death, but may or not have the ability to understand and or talk about the issue.

Persons supported do not have to understand the concept of death to feel a loss. They are likely to experience loss and grief if people previously close are no longer in their lives. This will happen regardless of their understanding of death.

Persons supported should not be “protected from the truth”, nor should they be discouraged from discussing the issue. Expect that they will feel the loss and should be treated accordingly.

Actions to Take

1. Tell the person supported that the death has occurred. Persons supported should not be left to wonder why “mom doesn’t love them anymore and visit”, etc.
2. Allow and encourage the person supported to share his or her feelings.

3. Provide assurance that there are those who can help.
4. Be patient with the person supported grieving.

Communicating Information about Death

- Use words that you think he or she might understand.
- Be honest, open, and direct.
- Use phrases that don't have multiple meanings.
- Answer questions honestly.
- Use examples that the person may have already experienced.
- Use concrete images, while avoiding abstract concepts. For example, say, "Do you remember how sick Grandma looked when we saw her last week? The doctors were not able to help her get better and she died".
- Use multiple ways to communicate to increase chances of gaining an understanding.

Activities to Help Accept the Reality of the Loss

During the days surrounding the death, help the person supported identify and stay overnight in a location that provides the most comfort.

Utilize physical contact (pat on the back, hold someone's hand, etc.) with those who it seems appropriate.

Have staff or family members most connected with the person supported talk with the bereaved person about the death openly and honestly.

Involve the bereaved in making funeral/memorial arrangements.

Encourage clergy to plan a service that makes it meaningful for the person supported. For example, allow the person supported to respond at appropriate times in the service with sound in his/her own way, read *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* (Buscaglia, 1982) while having people hold leaves, etc.

Encourage participation in the service by the person supported.

Help the person supported make a display or collage of photographs at the visitation, funeral, or memorial service.

Do not force, but encourage the person to attend the appropriate activities, such as the visitation, wake, funeral, memorial service, and burial. This should happen after the purpose of the [_____] and a description of how the body will look has been explained. The use of movies, books, and pictures can be helpful in explaining the situation. When choosing teaching tools such as movies, books, and pictures, extreme care should be used in the education process.

If possible, videotape the funeral or memorial service. Thus, if the person supported chooses or is unable to attend the service, they can watch the process during a time in which they are ready. As with the previous recommendation, care should be used if this is attempted.

Include the person supported in planning an informal memorial service, especially when another person supported or staff member dies. For example, stories about the individual can be shared while playing the deceased's favorite music, while pictures are displayed.

Help the person supported continue with their "normal" routine as much as possible.

Activities to Experience the Emotions of Grief

Support the person supported through activities and discussions.

If you as a staff member are grieving, allow the person supported to see your grief and have a discussion about it. When doing this it is important that the person supported recognizes that they did not cause the unusual behavior. Encourage the person supported to help others as a way of feeling good about themselves.

Books from the library or a local hospice can help explain the concept of death along with the accompanying emotions. Examples of books include:

When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief (Heegaard, 1988).

Saying Goodbye (Boulden, 1992).

Waving Good-Bye: An Activities Manual for Children in Grief (Dougy Center, 1990).

Identify feelings with persons supported through the use of visual aids or by drawing a picture of how the person supported is feeling.

Work with the person supported in identifying a hymn, prayer, poem, scripture, etc. that may help comfort the person supported.

Encourage the person supported to create a "feelings box". Pictures from magazines or drawings that help describe how the person supported is feeling can be placed inside the box, to show how that person supported is feeling on the inside, while pictures on the

outside of the box can show how the person supported is showing their feelings on the outside.

If the person supported has a difficult memory or a regret regarding the deceased, a message or note can be buried. The goal of this activity would be “letting go” of the energy and emotion that is still going into it.

Plan activities during those times of the day that are especially difficult for the person supported.

Visit with the person supported at regular intervals about the death. This could happen once a month or every other month by asking questions, such as “Do you ever think about....?”, “What do you think about...?”

Activities to Encourage Adjusting to the Environment with the Deceased Missing

Display a meaningful photo more prominently by enlarging it or framing it.

Aide the person in identifying others who will provide support. Sometimes this can be accomplished by drawing a circle in the middle of a paper and then writing the names of those who are helpful around the person supported.

Encourage the person supported to attend a grief support group.

Help the person supported obtain an item that belonged to the deceased individual.

Organize sympathy cards in a scrapbook format.

Review photo albums of the deceased together with the person supported.

Help coordinate visits to the cemetery, memory dinners, and anniversary rituals as needed.

Encourage journaling and the development on a home video regarding the deceased.

Help the person supported create a bracelet, necklace, or decoration from beads in memory of the person who died.

View a movie with the bereaved person supported that shows other people coping with losses.

Help the person supported become more independent by focusing on his or her competence and abilities.

Activities to Move Beyond Grief

In honor of the person who died, plant a tree or other living item as a memorial.

Encourage the bereaved person supported to engage in opportunities to help others.

Help the person supported experience and choose a new leisure activity.

Help the person supported learn simple relaxation/yoga exercises.

Encourage physical activity.

Spend time outdoors observing nature.

Warning Signs That May Necessitate Professional Assistance

A referral to a mental health professional should certainly be a consideration during those times when a person supported experiences more than normal amounts of difficulty related to a death. Specific signs that may need a referral include:

- The person supported experiences multiple losses
- The intensity of the grief reactions has become significant
- When acting out grief continues over time, for example, taking on the mannerisms of the deceased, becoming aggressive, etc.
- Using drugs or alcohol to cope with the loss
- Talking about suicide
- Developing physical symptoms of the person who was ill and died
- Sleep deprivation
- A problematic relationship with the deceased in the past
- The death was sudden or unexpected

Helpful Hints for Facilitating Discussions

Goals for Group Discussion

Provide persons supported with an opportunity to begin expressing their reactions to the loss and gain support from others

- Identify persons supported who seem especially distressed and refer to crisis team members

Key Points about Person Supported Reactions

Persons supported will experience a wide range of emotions and each person has a unique response to crisis

- There is no "right" way to grieve
- Talking about feelings is an appropriate way of expressing grief

Key Points about Discussing Person Supported Feelings

Encourage them to talk with people they trust like a friend, parent or staff member

- Reinforce the idea that people grieve in many ways, all responses are OK

Key Points about Group Facilitation

Encourage persons supported to share their reactions, acknowledge and label them

- Be willing to explain your own reactions to the death
- Avoid judging reactions as "right" or "wrong"
- Allow for silence and tears
- Allow for laughter and joking
- Allow for curiosity
- Educate persons supported about common grief reactions

Key Points When Ending Discussions

Bring closure to the discussion by encouraging persons supported to talk with parents, clergy, counselors, or staff if they have further feelings which need exploring

- Proceed with the normal routine

Ways to Help a Person Supported Experiencing Grief

1. Use terms such as "died, dead, death" rather than phrases like "passed away", avoiding cliché's or easy answers. Straightforward, gentle use of the words help persons supported confront the reality of the death.
2. Encourage communication and expression of feelings.
3. Explain and accept that everyone has different reactions to death at different times.
4. Point out that there is no right or wrong way to react to the loss.
5. Give permission to cry.
6. Do not attempt to minimize the loss or take away the pain. Avoid phrases like "Don't worry, it will be OK."
7. Listen empathetically and allow for silences.

Helpful Hints for Guardians/Parents of Grieving Persons Supported

When a tragedy happens, parents/guardians play a key role in helping their person supported move through the grieving process. Listed below are some suggestions and information that may be helpful to you as you support your person supported.

1. The person supported should be told what has happened quietly, simply, and directly. Unnecessary details should not be offered, but all questions should be answered.
2. Parents/guardians should not be afraid to speak about feelings and emotions. If this is difficult try this, "I know what has happened and I know it might be hard for you. It is important that we talk so I know you are going to be OK".
3. If the person supported wishes to merely sit, his/her wishes should be respected.
4. The single most important message to relay to the person supported is you are not alone, I am with you.
5. Look for trouble signs; "Will someone else die?", poor sleeping or eating habits, listen for safety concerns.
6. Talk with the person supported about safety rules and how to keep safe.
7. Remember, if you need additional help, call someone. You may contact a relative, counselor, pastor, staff member, or someone else you trust.

Example of a Response to Grief Crisis Management Team and Plan

A variety of members are responsible for crisis management and implementation at the local level. Critical of any team is the support and sharing of responsibility of duties. In addition, collaborative decisions are of great importance to provide appropriate services during times of crisis.

Specific duties of a crisis management team are listed below:

Core Crisis Team Members

- President/CEO
- Vice President/Chief Financial Officer
- Nursing/Medical Director
- Service/Program Coordinator Closest to the Situation
- Community Support Specialist
- Law Enforcement Officers
- Ministerial Association Chairperson/Pastoral Support Person
- Residential Living Supervisor Closest to the Situation

For each core crisis team member listed above, a chain of command phone tree shall be maintained, updated and distributed annually to all individuals involved.

Core Crisis Team Members Absent

In the event that the President/CEO is not available at the time of the crisis, the adjustment training center shall implement its local chain of command for decision making purposes. If any other member of the core crisis team is not available, the President/CEO shall assign that person's duties and responsibilities to the other team members of the core crisis team.

Core Crisis Team Meeting

Ideally, the core crisis team meeting shall be called by the President/CEO at 7:00 a.m. the day after the crisis. However, the President/CEO, or designee, shall obviously have the authority to call a meeting at any time to address the crisis. At this meeting, the President/CEO, or designee, shall be responsible for coordinating the adjustment training center's response action plan and reviewing individual responsibilities.

General Responsibilities of the Core Crisis Team

President/CEO: Will ensure that all of the core crisis team members know and understand their individual duties and responsibilities as described in the crisis management plan. Will also ensure that all team members understand and relay to all other employees that the President/CEO or designee is the sole spokesperson for the adjustment training center regarding the crisis.

Vice President/Financial Officer: Will ensure that all staff are notified of the crisis via internal phone tree and that all individuals know that the President/CEO is the sole spokesperson for the agency regarding the crisis. Will assume President/CEO's role in his/her absence.

Law Enforcement: Will report to the President/CEO and the core crisis team factual information regarding the crisis to eliminate rumors and provide staff, persons supported, parents, and community members with accurate information.

Nursing/Medical Director: Will provide technical assistance to the core crisis team and coordinate with the crisis intervention team in developing counseling strategies to assist persons supported, staff, and parents, adversely affected by the crisis.

Program Coordinator(s): Will notify the ministerial association chairperson and determine the number of mental health staff needed and make accommodations for them prior to arrival.

Ministerial Association Chairperson/Pastoral Support Person: Will notify all members of the ministerial association regarding the crisis and inform them that the President/CEO is the sole spokesperson for the adjustment training center regarding the crisis. Will inform all members of the ministerial association that they are invited to attend the general meeting of all staff regarding the crisis and the adjustment training center's proposed response action plan. May help coordinate counseling services for persons supported at risk.

Residential Living Supervisor Closest to the Situation: The supervisor's major role is to obtain as much information about the crisis as possible and to assist the team in communicating with persons supported adversely affected by the crisis.

The Day of the Crisis

A crisis will be an event that has significant emotional impact on persons supported, staff, parents, and community members. Generally, on the day a crisis occurs the most important action includes appropriate notification of individuals and putting into action the adjustment training center's crisis management plan.

Reporting a Crisis

Any person learning of the crisis shall immediately notify the President/CEO. In the event the President/CEO is not available, the person shall follow the local district chain of command.

Notification of the Crisis

The President/CEO or designee shall:

Contact law enforcement officials or other appropriate sources of information to identify as many "accurate" details of the crisis as possible.

1. Make a determination, based on the information presented, that a "crisis" exists and put the crisis management plan into action.
2. Notify all members of the core crisis team by invoking the crisis notification chain of command telephone tree that also notifies all employees and support personnel that a crisis has been declared and that the adjustment training center's crisis management plan is being implemented immediately.
3. Notify the core crisis team members to report to the President/CEO's office at 7:00 a.m., or at a designated time, to review procedures and develop specific actions.
4. Direct the Vice President/Financial Officer, Nursing/Medical Director, Program Coordinator, Community Support Specialist, and Residential Living Supervisor to invoke the internal phone tree to notify all appropriate staff to report to a designated room at 7:30 a.m., or at another time, for an explanation of the crisis and the adjustment training center's proposed response action plan.
5. Direct the Vice President/Financial Officer and Program Coordinator to notify all appropriate staff that there will be a meeting at the end of the work day to discuss results of the crisis intervention plan and to address additional concerns.

During the Crisis

President/CEO's Duties and Responsibilities

Notify all members of the core crisis team that the President/CEO is the sole spokesperson for the adjustment training center regarding the crisis and that all media inquiries and community questions be directed to the President/CEO. Likewise, all team members are to notify all staff that the President/CEO is the sole spokesperson.

To be Completed at the 7:00 a.m. (or at a Time Designated by the President/CEO) **Core Crisis Team Meeting**

1. Present all known factual details of the crisis to the core crisis team with law enforcement assistance.
2. Develop a log of all activities and actions.
3. Have ample copies of the adjustment training center's crisis management plan available.
4. Provide copies of the specific duties and responsibilities for each member of the core crisis team as outlined in the crisis management plan. If a core team member is absent, designate those duties and responsibilities to other team members. Assign additional duties and responsibilities as deemed necessary.
5. Designate one central location for the core crisis team to function from throughout the day.
6. Review the President/CEO's letter that will be sent to the parents/guardians regarding the crisis.
7. Review staff announcement.
8. Review staff's response to persons supported.
9. Review staff response to visitors.
10. Review media parameter policy and response to call inquiries.

Vice President/Financial Officer's Duties and Responsibilities

1. Ensuring that all appropriate staff are in attendance for the 7:30 a.m. (or at a different time) general meeting describing the crisis and the actions to be taken.
2. Ensuring that all support staff understand that the President/CEO is the sole spokesperson for the adjustment training center when inquiries are made by the media, visitors, or community members.
3. Ensuring that all staff have copies of the following correspondences:
 - President/CEO's letter to parents/guardians
 - Staff announcement
 - Staff response to persons supported
 - Staff response to visitors
 - Secretarial response to phone inquiries
 - Media parameter policy
4. Designating specific rooms/areas in the building for mental health support to be assigned for the purpose of providing counseling to persons supported, staff, and community members.
5. Ensuring that all visiting personnel have identification **NAME TAGS**. Individuals without identification name tags must report to the main office.
6. Informing appropriate staff that there will be a meeting at the end of the work day with the core crisis team to review the overall effectiveness of the adjustment training center's actions and to address additional concerns.
7. Assisting the President/CEO in the dissemination of information and coordinating the actions proposed by the Core Crisis team.
8. Contacting the funeral director or ministerial group regarding funeral arrangements.

Service/Program Coordinator(s) Duties and Responsibilities

1. Ensuring that all mental health staff are introduced to the core crisis team and to all appropriate staff.
2. Ensuring that all visiting mental health staff know their assigned counseling areas within the buildings and have name tags.
3. Ensuring that all assigned counseling areas have appropriate chairs and an environmental setting conducive for counseling.

4. Assigning selected mental health staff to specific buildings/areas adversely affected by the crisis to aid staff in making announcements regarding the crisis and assisting the staff as they help persons supported cope with the crisis.
5. Establishing a communications system with all staff in identifying individuals in need of immediate counseling services. This will be accomplished by requiring all staff to write the names of individuals they feel are in need of counseling services, on a sheet of paper, and giving it to one of the program coordinators at a central location.
6. Working directly with the ministerial group in providing counseling services during the work day and arranging for after hours counseling services and other support services.
7. Assisting the ministerial group in identifying persons supported, staff, and parents/guardians, adversely affected by the crisis for additional counseling and support outside the adjustment training center setting.
8. Determining the need and extent of on-going counseling services after the crisis subsides.
9. Notifying the persons supported regarding the funeral arrangements.

Ministerial Group/Pastoral Support Person Duties and Responsibilities

1. Working closely with the program coordinators in providing counseling services to persons supported, staff, and community members adversely affected by the crisis.
2. Providing individual and group counseling services for persons supported and family members, and community members adversely affected by the crisis outside the work setting.
3. Working directly with the President/CEO to develop an appropriate plan if a funeral is to be held on a work day, including making arrangements for staff that plan to attend.
4. Working directly with the program coordinators to arrange for a common location for persons supported to gather before or after the funeral to share and discuss their feelings and needs.
5. Help in making the wishes and desires of the family known to the adjustment training center and likewise advising the family of the actions proposed by the adjustment training center.
6. Working directly with the family/guardian and staff regarding the return of any personal items that the adjustment training center may have in its possession.

7. When appropriate, providing counseling services at the church setting, during the work day, for persons supported with the approval of the administration.

Nursing/Medical Director's Duties and Responsibilities

Review at the 7:30 a.m. (or designated time) meeting with staff and persons supported the feelings and reactions or behaviors which might be expected following the specific crisis (e.g. Disbelief, Anger, Denial, Sadness, and Loss).

1. Review at the same meeting how staff and community members should respond to the reactions and behaviors listed above and recommend approaches and strategies they should use with persons supported.
2. Encourage all employees and community members to extend mutual support for each other and assure them that it is okay to openly express feelings and concerns.
3. Notify all staff that support counseling services are available and that program coordinators will assist them in making announcements to persons supported and help them with persons supported adversely affected by the crisis.
4. Provide technical assistance to mental health staff as they provide counseling services for persons supported, staff, and community members.
5. Work directly with the ministerial group and program coordinator in establishing communications between the family adversely affected by the crisis and adjustment training center.

Duties and Responsibilities for Residential Living Supervisor Closest to the Crisis

Persons supported's emotions vary depending upon their emotional strength, understanding, temperament, and prior experience with a crisis. Most persons supported have experienced tragedy or loss, while all experiences are unique to them.

In addition to emotional differences among persons supported, the proximity to the crisis and the person supported's direct involvement to persons affected, all have an effect on emotional responses. Just as persons supported vary, so too will the circumstances and seriousness of the loss or tragedy.

While certainly not inclusive, the following guidelines will enable staff to respond to crisis situations and meet the needs of many persons supported.

The staff member with the best relationship should inform the persons supported of the incident/death/crisis by telling them the factual information. Information should be provided by the President/CEO. In sharing this information, keep in mind the following suggestions:

- a. Use a statement such as “I have some sad news to tell you”.
 - b. Suggest talking in a quiet place.
 - c. Ask the person if there is someone they would like to have present.
 - d. Allow the person to react in a manner that helps them cope and absorb the news as long as they are not a danger to themselves or others.
1. If persons supported ask questions or want to talk about their feelings it is advisable to let that happen for an appropriate period of time. During such discussion, some things you might include or consider are:
- a. Don't overly control discussion if persons supported spontaneously express their feelings. However, discretely limit discussion if feelings begin to build or "set-off" persons supported in a resonating effect.
 - b. Avoid building or adding to emotions by trying to excessively "draw-out" feelings or expressing one's own concerns.
 - c. Reinforce the idea that people grieve in different ways. All feelings or responses are OK -- there is no "one" way to feel.
 - d. Talk about what they can do with their feelings:
 1. talk with a friend or people they trust;
 2. encourage talking with parent, guardian, staff member, or minister;
 3. give permission to visit a counselor;
 4. discuss what they can do to help each other and dispel rumors.
 - e. State and reinforce the stability of the normal routine. After allowing appropriate time for sharing of feelings, return to the schedule of activities of the day.
 - f. Permit more time for sharing of feelings.
 - g. Encourage persons supported to draw pictures, write letters or cards which can be delivered to the family.

Following the Crisis

Specific Action

1. Crisis Core Team:

Should remain organized and continue to function as in the first day after the crisis. The decision to continue with the **before** and **after** [school] meetings with employees shall be decided by the core crisis team. As a general rule, these meetings should fade-out as the crisis subsides.

2. Administrators:

Continue to provide overall supervision of crisis activities. Address the needs of anxious individuals, meet with concerned staff, and refer those needing more "in-depth" assistance or specific answers to members of the crisis core team.

Communication Tools for Crisis

Notification Statement for Crisis Team (can be read in person or distributed in letterform)

To: Core Crisis Team Members
From: Vice President/Chief Financial Officer
Date:
Re: Death of Person Supported or Employee

I regret to inform you of the death of _____. According to the information provided by the medical examiner and the family (when permission to release has been given), _____ died from _____ at _____ on _____.

I know that for those of you who knew _____ the next few days will be especially difficult. For anyone who would like to be immediately excused from the crisis team for this situation, please contact me as soon as possible. I fully support your need to attend to your own well being during this crisis.

Our first emergency meeting will be held at _____ in _____. Please advise me if you have a conflict with this time. Also note that the media spokesperson is _____ and he/she should receive all media inquiries.

Thank you in advance for your support of our persons supported and staff through your participation on the crisis team.

Notification Statement for Staff during Work Hours

To: All Staff
From: Vice President/Chief Financial Officer
Date:
Re: Death of Person Supported or Employee

I regret to inform you of the death of _____. According to information provided by the medical examiner and the family, _____ died from _____ at _____ on _____. I know that for those of you who knew _____ personally, the next few days will be especially difficult.

The crisis team has already convened and arranged an emergency staff meeting for today at _____ (am/pm) in _____. It is imperative that we respond collectively as a team to meet the needs of our persons supported, so attendance is mandatory.

Attached is a copy of the information about the death to be read aloud to your persons supported.

We know it is helpful to begin processing such tragic news immediately, so we encourage you to allow ample time for persons supported to process this news. Attached is a handout with activities that might be helpful.

Media relations during such an event are especially sensitive. The center's designated spokesperson is _____ and I ask that you refer all media-related questions to _____ at _____ or myself at _____. Our goal is to meet the needs of our persons supported and avoid sensationalizing _____'s death. Equally important is that we ensure those who would like additional support with this sad news, please contact _____, our crisis team leader, at _____, or _____, our outside agency referral at _____. All information is kept confidential.

Thank you for your patience and teamwork during this difficult time. We will provide you with additional information during the emergency meeting at the end of the day in room _____ at _____. In the mean time, please see with any questions or concerns.

**Example Notification Statement for Staff
(evenings and weekends)**

To: All Staff
From: Vice President/Chief Financial Officer
Date:
Re: Death

I regret to inform you of the death of _____. According to information provided by the medical examiner and the family, _____ died from _____ at _____ on _____.

Funeral arrangements are as follows: _____.

The crisis team has already convened and arranged an emergency staff meeting for _____ at _____. It is imperative that we respond as a collective team to meet the needs of the persons supported. Attendance is mandatory.

We know it is helpful to begin processing such tragic news immediately, so we encourage you to allow ample time for persons supported to process this news. Attached is a handout with guidelines for facilitating discussion with your persons supported. If you would like additional assistance, please see _____ in room _____ and a crisis team member will help in your persons supported.

Media relations during such an event are especially sensitive. The designated spokesperson is _____ and I ask that you refer all media-related questions to _____ at _____ or myself at _____. Our goal is to meet the needs of our persons supported. Equally important is that we ensure the wellness of each other during this crisis so we can best serve the needs of our persons supported. For those who would like additional support with this sad news, please contact _____, our crisis team leader, at _____ or _____, our outside agency referral at _____. All information is kept confidential.

Thank you for your patience and teamwork during this difficult time. We will provide you with additional information as it becomes available. Please feel free to contact _____ at _____ or myself at _____ with any further questions and concerns.

Example Notification Statement for Persons Supported

I have some sad news to share with you today. As some of you may already know, _____, a person supported/staff member here at _____, died at _____, on _____.

This tragedy will affect each of us differently. Some may respond immediately and recover quite quickly, while others may need several days or weeks to process their feelings of loss. We ask that each of you be respectful of each other and be tolerant, civil, and supportive. As we learn more about the events that may have contributed to _____'s death, we will share them with you.

Before we begin with our normal routine today, I want to take some time to talk about _____'s death. Does anyone have any questions or thoughts to share right now?

Notification for Media
(Formal Statement and Response to Incoming Calls)

Formal Statement

_____ (Adjustment Training Center) is sad to report that it has confirmed the death of one of its persons supported/staff members, _____ with the medical examiner's office and the deceased's family. _____ (name) died _____ (day).

He/she was a resident of _____, and was active at the adjustment training center. Funeral arrangements are not available at this time. Counselors and community mental health representatives are available to anyone who wishes to talk about _____'s death.

Response to Incoming Calls

The adjustment training center has designated a media spokesperson. Please feel free to contact _____ with your questions and concerns. We would like to respond to your questions in an organized manner. To assist you, _____, will be meeting with concerned members of the media at _____, in _____ (place). At that time we will provide information about the adjustment training center's response to our loss and identify additional resources in the community to support the bereaved.

Notification Letter to Parents or Guardian

To: Parents & Guardians
From: President/CEO
Date:
Re: Person supported/Staff Death

We are writing to inform you of the death of _____, a _____ (person supported/staff member) here at _____. He/She died on _____ as a result of _____. We have prepared the enclosed handouts to assist our persons supported, parents, and staff in dealing with their sense of loss. Information on the grieving process and other reactions is supplied in the handouts.

The visitation for _____ will be on _____ at _____ (am/pm) at _____ (place). Funeral services will be on _____ at _____ (am/pm) at _____ (place). A memorial will be held for persons supported on _____ at _____ (place).

If you feel your person supported is having difficulties dealing with this loss and may benefit from additional support, please feel free to contact _____, the Crisis Team Leader, or myself, so the adjustment training center can be aware of the needs. We are supported by local mental health professionals and can provide you with referrals as needed.

As the community continues to cope with the loss of _____, we invite your participation in the healing process. Please feel free to contact the adjustment training center at any time with questions or concerns.

Media Parameters during a Crisis Situation

To be a hand-out to all media, teachers, support staff, and any other individuals identified by the President/CEO.

The following media parameters shall be in effect during a crisis situation:

1. No persons supported shall be interviewed within the adjustment training center premises.
2. No cameras, video equipment, or recording devices shall be allowed within the adjustment training center buildings.
3. **All** media questions shall be directed to the President/CEO or designee.
4. All official adjustment training center communications shall originate from the President/CEO's office with administrative approval.
5. All members of the media are required to display consideration for the emotional welfare and educational interests of all persons supported and employees by following the media parameters listed above.