



# Traumatic Events Response Resource Guide

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# Acknowledgements

## Traumatic Events Response in Grand Erie District School Board

Grand Erie District School Board has a long history of providing outstanding supports to students, staff and families when a crisis or traumatic event occurs. Superintendents, Principals, Vice-Principals, Traumatic Events Response Team and other staff members provide leadership at every level of the system. This resource guide builds on Grand Erie's foundation of excellence and aligns with current research and best practice. It also includes trauma-informed practices and complements other Safe and Inclusive Schools policies and approaches.

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### Assisted by the Traumatic Events Response Committee

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### This resource has been informed by:

Grand Erie District School Board Tragic Events Response Guide, 2014  
Grand Erie District School Board Tragic Events Response Team Guide 2009  
Saskatoon Public Schools Traumatic Response Guide, 2015  
School and Community Protocol for Violence Threat Risk Assessment and Intervention, Grand Erie District School Board and Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board, 2019  
Psychological First Aid, National Child Traumatic Stress Network  
Traumatic Events System Model Training, North American Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response, 2018

## **Background**

This resource guide is designed to provide a proactive, consistent and organized response to events that are traumatic in nature and have an impact on our students, families, staff and communities. It recognizes the roles of staff throughout the system in responding to these events, and the responsibilities of the members of both the System Support Team (SST) and the Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) at the school. The Traumatic Events System model acknowledges that members of the Senior Management team play an integral part in responding to events that occur both at the school and system level.

Grand Erie District School Board is committed to providing safe and inclusive school spaces. We recognize that a trauma-informed approach in our classrooms and our schools can positively mitigate the impact of trauma. A timely and informed response to traumatic events has a direct impact on the longer-term recovery of individuals and schools. Grand Erie shares with the broader community the responsibility of caring for the well-being of our students, families and staff.

The model of Traumatic Events Response recognizes that when events occur that are traumatic in nature, we require the support of our community agencies to assist in the recovery process. Through respectful partnerships and clear communication processes, we can involve our community partners in meaningful ways. This model also honours the role parents, guardians and caregivers have in providing an ongoing natural support system for our students.

In addition, this model recognizes that violence threat risk assessment and traumatic events are inextricably linked. Violence precipitates traumatic response, and traumatic events are known to elevate risk in already vulnerable persons. Through being aware of these possibilities, schools are well positioned to respond to concerning student behaviour and ensure supports are in place for those who require it.

## **Grand Erie's Traumatic Response Definition**

A traumatic event is defined as one that is unexpected and has multiple impact zones. Often during a traumatic event, the system (e.g., the school) that is impacted does not have the necessary resources to respond and must rely upon outside resources and supports to respond to the magnitude of the event.

Grand Erie schools span three geographic areas, in addition to deep connections with both Mississauga's of the Credit and Six Nations of the Grand River when traumatic events occur, we know that there can be a far-reaching impact on our students, families, staff and communities, as well as how these systems function together.

In an age of social media, communication about a traumatic event often spreads quickly. Given this reality, it is important that we act quickly in organizing a timely response to ensure accurate information is shared.

Some traumatic occurrences have wider impact zones, that may include multiple classrooms, schools and communities. These events require a broader and more comprehensive trauma response plan.

Additionally, there are factors that intensify the impact of a traumatic occurrence on individuals, schools and our community. Some of these include:

- The unexpectedness of the event;
- The nature of the event (e.g., violence);
- The relationship of the individual(s) involved with students and staff;
- Family members and close friends attending the school;
- Pre-traumatic functioning of individuals or groups within the impact zone (consider the possibility of multiple impact zones); and
- Cumulative impact of previous or related tragic or traumatic events in the school and community.

## **Definitions**

### Crisis

A crisis event is “contained” within the system it occurs. Typically, in a crisis event, the school can manage the response with its own resources. The broader system is not impacted. The school can function with the support of the school-based Traumatic Events Response Team and requires minimal involvement of the System Support Team. An example would be the death of a parent in the school community.

### Trauma

The definition of trauma is an event or series of events that overwhelms individuals, such as a school or community. It is an unexpected event that requires significant intervention to assist the school, or system, to return to a state of equilibrium. It typically has a broader impact zone than a crisis and requires a broader response. The System Support Team has an ongoing role in supporting schools who are managing and responding to a traumatic event with key responsibilities such as communication, support and safety. An example would be the death of a staff member who worked in several school locations.

### Traumatic Event System Response (TES) Model

The TES Model was developed by the North American Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma response and incorporates system theory and current trauma research into traumatic event assessment and response in schools. This model recognizes that the pre-trauma functioning of an individual, school or system is important in developing a responsive intervention plan. It also aids multi-disciplinary teams in effectively assessing individuals as well as the systems in which they are functioning (i.e., the classroom, school or family). A team approach ensures adequate resources are provided for the response. The TES model has helped to inform this resource for Grand Erie.

### Entitlement

The concept of entitlement as it relates to traumatic events is an important one to understand. Anyone can be impacted by a traumatic event, regardless of their connection to it. It is important to recognize that individuals who have been impacted by loss are vulnerable to re-experiencing symptoms related to previous trauma when an event occurs. Proximity does not predict the grief response.

## Natural Grief

Grief (also called bereavement) is the experience of loss. Many people associate grief with the death of an important person or pet. However, people experience grief after any important loss that affects their life, such as the loss of a job or relationship. Grief after diagnosis of an illness or other health problem is also common.

Individuals experience grief in different ways and experience a wide range of thoughts or feelings during their journey. Some may feel shocked, sad, angry, scared, or anxious. Others feel numb or have a hard time feeling emotions at all. At times, many even feel relief or peace after a loss. Some do not cry or react outwardly. Some do not find talking about the loss helpful. Some have a delayed grief reaction, particularly when they must care for others during or after a traumatic event.

There is no singular way to experience grief. Feelings, thoughts, reactions, and challenges related to grief are very personal. Some people have thoughts or feelings that seem at odds with each other. For example, someone might feel very depressed about their loss but also accept the loss at the same time. Many people find that the intensity of their grief changes significantly over time. For example, anniversaries or holidays can often bring up strong feelings. People work through grief in their own ways.

## Complicated Grief

The term “complicated grief” refers to factors that interfere with the natural healing process. These might range from characteristics of the bereaved person, to the nature of the relationship with the deceased person, to the circumstances of the death, or things that occurred after the death. Individuals with complicated grief know their loved one is gone however they still cannot believe it. They feel that time is moving on, but they are not. They often have strong feelings of yearning or longing for the person who died that do not lessen as time goes on. Thoughts, memories, or images of the deceased person frequently fill their mind, capturing their attention. They might have strong feelings of bitterness or anger related to the death. They find it hard to imagine that life without the deceased person has purpose or meaning. It can seem like joy and satisfaction are gone forever.

## Impact Zone

The impact zone is the geographical or social areas impacted by the traumatic occurrence. An event may have an impact on an initial school location (i.e., where the student was attending school or where staff were employed) and potentially on other school locations (e.g., schools where family members worked, or siblings attended, sports teams, extra curricular, etc.). Traumatic events might affect multiple sites and systems (i.e., schools, families, individuals) but this does not imply that the impact is equal.

*When a traumatic event occurs, it is essential to assess the impact zones and then plan the appropriate response.*

## Critical Periods

There are critical time periods to be aware of, and monitor, when responding to trauma that significantly impact individuals, the school, system or community:

- Critical Period 1 At the time of the incident when staff and students are informed;
- Critical Period 2 Two weeks (post-incident) from the time the media coverage subsides;
- Critical Period 3 One month prior to Christmas;
- Critical Period 4 The anniversary of the incident within the impact zone;
- Critical Period 5 When in the impact zone of another incident; and
- Critical Period 6 Unique to each school and community and linked to their own history.

## Natural or Primary Supports

Natural or primary supports are the relationships that occur in everyday life. They usually involve relationships with family members, friends, groups and neighbours. These supports can be the constant in a person's life and should be the initial focus of the communication and intervention.

## Psychological First Aid

Psychological First Aid is an evidence-informed approach to help children, adolescents, adults and families immediately after a traumatic event or crisis. It is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short- and long-term coping. Research has demonstrated that early, brief and focused intervention can reduce the social and emotional distress of both children and adults after traumatic events. More on this: [Psychological First Aid Manual](#).

## Naturally Open Systems

The healthiest school environment is a naturally open system, which has defined leadership, and where communication flow is multi-dimensional. In this environment, leaders openly share information relevant to each level of the school, (i.e., staff, students, parents) and all levels of the school openly communicate with the leadership. In other words, in naturally open systems, students are more likely to report and share information with staff, parents share information with the school, and, staff share with administrators and vice versa. In a naturally open system, crisis and trauma can be managed with supports from both within and outside the environment, and there is a collaborative relationship between professionals. An open system allows for information and supports to be invited in for the benefit of the system's functioning. A range of emotions and affective states (e.g., fear, sadness, guilt, anger, etc.) is expected and tolerated. This theory can also be applied to family functioning as well as school functioning.

Understanding a school's pre-trauma functioning is an important aspect of responding to traumatic events. Schools that are naturally closed, traumatically closed or traumatically open may require additional internal or external supports to assist them toward functioning in a naturally open way.

## System Traumatic Events Response Plan

As we have learned through experience and training, a traumatic event is not always contained within the school site where it occurs. In fact, it might have multiple impact zones and impact multiple schools and communities.

Following the assessment phase, which involves both system and school-level teams, a planned, coordinated response will assist in providing students and staff with the appropriate supports. These supports are based on individual and school need and will assist in returning the learning community to regular school activities in a timely manner.

This process supports those affected by the event and decreases the potential long-term effects on individuals and the school community. Effective and organized responses will help further build strength and resilience into schools and communities.

In collaboration with the school and system, community agencies will be included as part of the plan to respond and promote recovery. Respectful and clear partnerships will help students, families and staff feel supported during challenging times.

### System Support Team

The System Support Team (SST) provides Board-wide-support during crises or traumatic events that impact schools. The SST includes: Grand Erie's Director of Education, Superintendent of Schools, Superintendent of Safe and Inclusive Schools, Manager of Communications and Public Relations, Mental Health and Well-Being Lead, and Safe and Inclusive Schools Lead. Other staff will be included as required, for example the Manager of Transportation, Superintendent of Business, Manager of Human Resources and Division Manager of Operations and Health and Safety. Team membership will vary depending on the situation and required response.

The responsibility of the SST is primarily to provide leadership through coordinated response and communication to school sites. Through the Family of Schools Superintendent, the SST is notified, and an immediate consultation with the group takes place by phone or in person to share and confirm information and discuss next steps.

A determination will be made by the SST as to the need to mobilize additional supports, including but not limited to, additional administrative support, counselling staff, teaching staff, and/or community agency supports. This decision is made in conjunction with the school-based Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) [see page 13] which is on site and assessing the situation to help make timely decisions.

Members of the SST may be on site or off site, depending on the nature of the situation. Best practice recognizes that it is helpful to have additional staff present when they have a designated role.

The SST is also responsible for decision making regarding system communications, as well as supporting the on-site TERT process. The SST will assist with writing scripts for staff to use in staff meetings, the office and in the classroom, to ensure consistency of messaging during traumatic events.

The Family of Schools Superintendent or designate will communicate decisions of and information from the SST directly with the Principal(s) and/or TERT to ensure one primary line of communication. A system of communicating regular updates throughout the response will be established, as the situation requires.



## Traumatic Events Response Team

Members of the Traumatic Events Response Team (TERT) include staff both within and outside of the school. These staff are trained in responding to traumatic events and work as a multi-disciplinary team. School Social Workers, Child and Youth Workers, Attendance Counsellors, Guidance Teachers, Vice-Principals, Principals and other teachers may be part of a TERT. Each school team is unique. Every member of the TERT has roles and responsibilities in responding to a traumatic event or crisis. Roles are determined in advance of traumatic events occurring. However, at the time of a traumatic event, responsibilities are divided as part of the TERT assessment and planning process. Staff involved in TERT serve as role models for calm and resilience during the response, in addition to working collaboratively with the natural support systems in the school and community (i.e., parents, teachers, federal/union representatives, OPC and other community agencies as necessary).

## Privacy and Information Sharing

Grand Erie District School Board believes that personal information must be respected, especially during traumatic events.

Personal and private information must be shared only on a “need to know” basis. To make decisions on who needs to know, the following must be considered:

- Who from the System Support Team needs to know to provide the best support to the school, the student(s) and staff involved, and to coordinate and support the response required in all school locations?
- Besides the Traumatic Events Response Team in the school, who in the school building needs to know the information to provide the best support to the school, the student(s) and staff?
- Personal information is shared to meet the needs of the individuals who have been affected by loss, tragedy or trauma. The information is intended for those inside of the circle of care.
- What information has the family given permission to share within the school community? While there can often be rumours about traumatic occurrences, it is essential that we respect the family’s privacy and that we only share the confirmed facts with the school community as appropriate.
- The school Principal will keep the Family of Schools Superintendent informed when and with whom personal information is shared.

Broader-scope personal and private information will be shared only after confirmation and permission from the family has been gained. Additionally, the information is shared only with those who will be directly supporting students and staff within the impact zone.

**All communication will be vetted through the Manager of Communications.**

### Guidelines for Communicating with the Family

- Ensure that the Principal or Vice-Principal, and Family of Schools Superintendent have been consulted prior to contacting the family;
- Refer to the student's or staff's electronic file for pertinent information;
- Be aware of the complexities of various family structures, including blended families, separated or divorced families, foster care, faith and cultural communities, etc.;
- Be conscious of the emotions that the family is experiencing;  
Express genuine sympathy on behalf of yourself and school community;
- Maintain follow-up contact with family, as appropriate;
- Obtain information regarding funeral services and family wishes, share condolences of school gathered through a "Memory Box"
- In the case of a staff member provide contact information for their union/federation representation
- Elicit the wishes of the family for sharing information regarding the loss (i.e., who can it be shared with, what specific information can be shared, etc.);

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

All staff involved in responding to a traumatic event are alert to the possibility of a conflict of interest and the reality that they might be affected by a trauma at a personal as well as professional, level. When either of these possibilities occurs, staff will consult with a colleague using their ethical code to guide them about how, or if, they will continue to be involved in the trauma response. In tandem, they will consult with their Supervisor to fully inform about the conflict of interest or influencing personal connection to the traumatic event. Staff are aware that there may be times they are unable to have a role in responding.

Staff are also aware that there may be a need to consider risk assessment for specific individuals and groups, based on the response to the trauma. Sharing of appropriate information among team members is essential for ongoing assessment of risk.

### Principal

The Principal is the leader in the school before, during and after a TERT response. They help to ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff. The Principal is responsible for the functioning of the school building and communication with the SST as events unfold. The Principal will lead staff meetings, as well as assist the TERT co-leads in establishing a school-based intervention plan. The Principal knows the nature of their school community and pre-trauma functioning. This knowledge must be used to help support the work of the TERT in the school and community. The Principal's visibility during a TERT is imperative and helps to re-establish calm after a traumatic event. The Principal can request additional assistance in performing these duties from the SST. (Appendix A)

## Co-leaders of the TERT

School Social Workers and Child and Youth Workers, are responsible for assisting the Principal and team to devise a school-based plan. In addition, the co-leaders assist with, and delegate tasks such as:

a) Staff Meeting Support:

Assisting the Principal in messaging to staff and for providing the outline of a response plan, including resources available both within and outside of school (Appendix B);

b) Classroom Debriefing:

Assisting teachers in the classroom to share information with students (Appendix C, D, E);

c) High-Risk Assessment:

Identifying and assessing students and staff potentially at risk or who might require immediate contact; compiling a list of individuals who might need support and follow-up;

d) Counselling:

Providing individual and small-group support, to both students and staff, as well as contacting parents by phone to follow-up on students or make referrals;

e) Resources:

Providing resources and community agency information to students, staff and families; co-ordinating community agency involvement (Appendix F);

f) Communication:

Identifying who, in addition to the Principal, will communicate with the SST, particularly if there is a broader impact zone; assisting with creating scripts for staff, students and parents; establishing who will connect with the family;

g) Parent Meetings:

Assisting with setting an agenda and participating in parent meeting(s) to provide information and guidance to parents, guardians and families to assist them in supporting their children (Appendix G); and

h) Debriefing:

Assisting with the end-of-day debriefing with staff, as well as arranging other opportunities for those who are interested or request further debriefing; providing feedback to SST. As part of postvention, provide accessible resources for staff (e.g. Life speak, Employee Assistance Program, local crisis services, counselling agencies).

## Teachers

Integral to the overall functioning of schools, especially after a traumatic event has affected individuals or the school itself. Teachers provide nurturing, soothing and responsive care for students. When a traumatic event affects a school, students need to be able to depend on teachers responding to their needs in a consistent fashion, using a calm, open presence. Openness does not

imply sharing personal or private information, or information that could cause unrest in the school building.

Teachers provide consistent care for students under their umbrella of responsibility. At times, individual teachers are identified who require more information about a death or traumatic event to serve individual students in their classroom. Teachers will be provided with the information they need to support their classrooms. (Appendix C, D, E)

Information provided to specific teachers is on a need-to-know basis, typically through the Principal. However, there are occasions when a teacher will be given sensitive information about a death or traumatic event from a student's family member or close friend. When this occurs, it is the teacher's responsibility to inform their Principal immediately.

### Office Staff

Often during the unfolding of a traumatic event, it is the office staff who are fielding calls and questions from concerned parents and community members. Providing a script for office staff, as well as support and guidance for dealing with phone calls, is an important part of the process. It is crucial that a member of the TERT meets with office staff and provides adequate information and preparation so that they can give consistent and clear messaging.

### Parents and Caregivers

Parents, caregivers and families are the natural support systems for our students. It is important to ensure that parents and caregivers are included in the response. Consider ways to support parents through open and timely communication and provide information that will help them support their children. (Appendices F, G)

### Counselling Staff

Trained professionals who are familiar with both systems theory and traumatic events response. They may be members of Support Services or community agency staff. They provide short-term assessment and intervention with individuals who are impacted by the event and assist to connect people with their natural support systems. In situations where the natural support system is not adequate, counsellors assist to make referrals to community-based supports. Counsellors contact parents to follow-up on interventions provided at the school level. For TERT, consent is not required for the initial intervention to occur. Services are offered individually, in small groups, and/or classroom settings.

In concert with the overall traumatic response plan, counsellors may be asked to provide information to certain classes with the classroom teacher. While this intervention occurs at times, it is not always determined to be in the best interest of the students or school team. Thus, Counsellors will work closely with the Principal, Superintendent and SST, to determine when, and if, age-appropriate information is shared in individual classrooms. In most instances the preferred communication plan is that information is shared in an adult-to-adult manner so that parents, caregivers, and guardians can share information in the safety and comfort of their home.

Once the school returns to normalcy and equilibrium, counsellors are involved in following up with students who have been identified as at-risk or significantly affected by the tragedy or trauma. Counsellors often assist with referrals to outside agencies or professionals to support a student's healing process.

## Community Agencies

Provide crisis response services may be involved in the initial response at the school. The role of community agency supports is to enhance the response of the school and provide seamless transition to community-based services. For community agencies to participate in a TERT response, there will be pre-determined partnership agreement(s) that outline the roles and responsibilities of the professionals involved. The SST will assist in making requests from community agencies for support in the school. The Principal and co-leaders of the TERT will be responsible for designating roles and responsibilities at the time of the response and based on the needs of the individuals and school.

## **Traumatic Events Response- System Support Team Process**

### 1. System Support Team Contacted

Family of Schools Superintendent or Designate initiates team through Manager of Communications in response to an event, for example, death, near death, violent incident, threats, accidents (any incident that has a large impact on the school/community)

### 2. System Support Team Convenes

- a. Family of Schools Superintendent or Designate is single point of contact with Principal
- b. Manager of Communications arranges conference (in person or by teleconference)

### 3. System Support Team Includes

- a. Director of Education
  - Gives direction as system leader
- b. Family of Schools Superintendent of Education or Designate
  - Key point of contact with Principal
- c. Superintendent of Safe and Inclusive Schools
  - Advises regarding safety and protocols with Police
- d. Superintendent of Business
  - Advises regarding facilities and transportation
- e. Mental Health and Well-Being Lead
  - Coordination of student support, on site as needed
- f. Safe and Inclusive Schools Lead
  - Coordination of student and community support, on site as needed
- g. Manager of Communications and Community Relations
  - Communication and liaison with Police services
- h. Division Manager of Operations and Health and Safety

### 4. Initial Assessment and Response Plan Determined

- a. Assessment of Scope of Impact Zone - How many schools and communities are impacted and what supports are required? What is the history of the school and community involved?
- b. Coordination of Information with school-based Traumatic Events Team - What additional resources are required based on the needs of the school? How can the SST assist the school? (e.g., delegate communication)
- c. Roles of System Support Team are determined
- d. Communicate with federations/unions and professional associations

5. Communication to Systems
  - a. All messages are created by the Manager of Communications in consultation with the Principal and SST with consent to share
  - b. System - including plan for communicating with Trustees, broader staff, messaging from Principals, scripts for staff
  - c. Families
  - d. Website (if required)
  - e. Social Media (if required)
  - f. Local Media (if required)
6. Reassessment and Revision to Response Plan
  - a. As required, time periods are established to connect with the school-based TERT
  - b. Establish next steps based on reassessment
  - c. Consider longer-term needs for recovery
7. Debrief
  - a. At end of day, debrief and determine next steps
  - b. Arrange a debrief for one week after the incident

## **Traumatic Events Response Planning- School Level**

### 1. Initial Assessment and Response Plan Devised

Meeting with Principal/Vice Principal and co-leaders of Traumatic Events Response Team and System Support Team (Appendix A-Checklist for Principals)

Determine the Following:

- a. Number of TERT members needed on site
  - b. Where counselling team is to be located (e.g., Student Services, library, etc.)
  - c. Space for students who need support, and staff who need support (should be two separate spaces)
  - d. Who will contact family to obtain permission to inform staff, students and system and what information the family would like shared (if Principal has not)?
  - e. Community partners who could be accessed and/or notified to help support students and staff
- ### 2. Communication with Staff
- a. A staff meeting should be arranged before classes start to inform staff of traumatic event and plan for the day
  - b. Most affected and vulnerable staff should be identified and informed privately, where possible
  - c. There may be circumstances where alternate means of notifying staff may need to be considered (e.g.; notifying by phone or email)
  - d. Support should be offered, and decisions made about whether the staff member is able to manage in the classroom or needs to be relieved
  - e. Office staff require a script for answering calls from the community.
  - f. Whereby the event occurs during the school day, an email will be sent to alert staff about meeting, or sharing information
  - g. Ensure that staff that are away are contacted (occasional staff, staff on field trips, etc.)

- h. Memo in mailbox if no other option to inform
- i. Provide staff with resource on talking with the class (Appendix E)

### 3. Communication with Students

- a. Where possible, students who will be most affected should be removed from class and advised privately
- b. Give classroom teachers a written script containing information and guidelines for classroom discussion
- c. During staff meeting members of TERT should offer support to classroom teachers
- d. Consider students who are absent that may need to be contacted

### 4. Communication with Families

- a. Contact Manager of Communications regarding messaging to be sent to parents
- b. Parents of students most affected by the traumatic event should be contacted by phone if possible
- c. Provide information to parents about the TERT team and where to get support in community
- d. In consultation with SST, consider hosting a meeting for families to offer information, support and guidance

### 5. Reassessment and Revision of Support Plan

- a. School-based TERT will meet to review plan and determine next steps
- b. SST and school-based TERT will communicate to share information and determine next steps
- c. Consider longer-term needs for recovery

### 6. Debrief

- a. At the end of the school day, a mandatory staff meeting will be held to inform, answer questions, and discuss next steps.
- b. Follow-up support meetings can be provided on a voluntary basis for staff who are interested, in conjunction with TERT and community agencies
- c. Findings from debrief shared with SST for continuous improvement

### Other Considerations in the Event of Death

- 1. School Flag- Consult with Manager of Communications regarding lowering of the flag
- 2. Classroom and School presence- the student's desk/locker and personal belongings should be left until after the funeral or a natural break
- 3. Consider a way for staff and students to express condolences, such as a "Memory Box" or book for writing condolences and messages to the bereaved family. This will need to be reviewed before giving it to the family
- 4. Notification Systems and Absences - ensure that these systems are disabled, where necessary
- 5. School memorial services and on-site permanent memorials at the school are not recommended. Instead, help the school community find other ways to honour the individual

6. Funeral Arrangements - wishes of the family concerning the school's involvement and student attendance need to be determined and shared with the school as appropriate. The school should determine who will be representing the school at the visitation and funeral
7. Expression of sympathy on behalf of school - as appropriate. Express condolences on behalf of the school to the family of the deceased taking into consideration the religious/cultural beliefs and family wishes



# Traumatic Events System Response in Grand Erie System Support Team Response

Traumatic Incident Occurs



Site Contacts Family of Schools Superintendent of Education



System Support Team Notified (Manager of Communications)



Initial Assessment and Response Plan Devised with Administration  
[Communication with School-Based Traumatic Events Response Team]  
(TERT)



Communication to System as Required

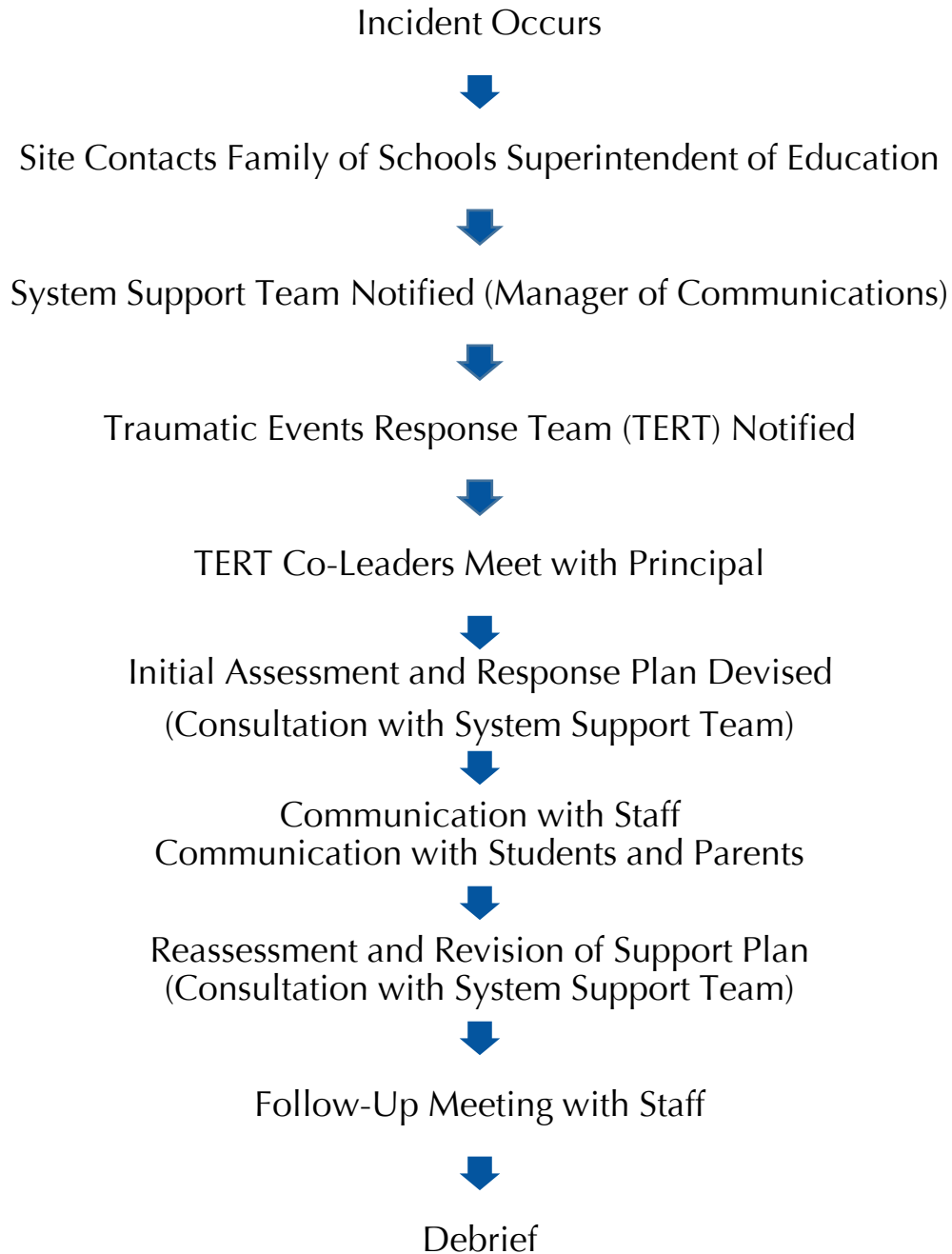


Reassessment and Revision of Response Plan  
(Consultation with School-Based TERT)



Debrief

# Traumatic Events Response Team – School-Level Response



# Appendix A: Checklist for Principals

In the event of a death or traumatic event:

1. Contact Family of Schools Superintendent;
2. Contact family (this may be delegated to a member of the System Support Team)
  - a. offer condolences
  - b. Confirm accuracy of information
  - c. Request permission to inform staff and students
  - d. Ask family what they would like shared
  - e. Request permission to release photos for memory table;
3. Contact police if required- e.g. if police investigation is pending and/or to confirm information;
4. Identify staff and students who will likely be most affected and inform privately;
5. Staff meeting before or after school day begins;
6. Inform affected staff, students or support staff who may not be at the meeting or in the school that day (e.g. field trips, sick days, leave of absence, etc.);
7. Consider need for classroom coverage for teachers and educational assistants;
8. Prepare staff to inform students of event (Appendix B) and provide scripts as appropriate;
9. Share process for monitoring students who may wish to leave the class, go home, or speak with a member of the TERT;
10. Caution staff against rumours, posting comments on social media, or having contact with the media;
11. Determine if other schools or individuals in the system will be affected by the event (e.g. child's elementary school, staff in other schools). Share this information with the System Support Team;
12. Consider how to inform parent community in conjunction with the Manager of Communications;
13. Determine space for TERT to see students;
14. Consult with Manger of Communications regarding lowering the flag;
15. Ensure the deceased child's name is removed from the automated attendance phone system and class lists;
16. In the event of a staff member, contact the individual's union to ensure supports have been offered;
17. Provide office staff with script to manage incoming calls from parents and community;
18. Be aware of your own reactions and feelings, seek support and look after yourself;
19. Keep the student or staff belongings until after the funeral or at family's request (e.g. locker contents, desk contents);
20. Arrange staff de-brief for end of day (staff meeting);
21. Obtain information about funeral arrangements and share as permitted;

22. Discuss with family their wishes regarding student's and staff's attendance at the funeral;
23. Consult Board Policy regarding bereavement and leaves of absence (Appendix H) and have TERT members available to support staff and students on the day of the funeral; and
24. Consider longer term needs for recovery for the school community, consult with school based TERT and System Support Team.

## **Appendix B: Guidelines for Staff Meetings**

1. Introduce TERT members.
2. Give staff most recent accurate information about the incident.
3. Advise staff where team will be located and how to access support:
  - a. Individual counseling for staff and students, group support
  - b. Classroom intervention, discussion and support
  - c. Assessment for at-risk students
  - d. Home/school liaison for students and parents most affected
  - e. Reporting information received from students or parents
  - f. Offer support of TERT members in talking to classes about the traumatic event
4. Important information to share with staff regarding expectations for the day:
  - a. Expect that people will react in all different ways (e.g. sad, angry, shock, inappropriate humour);
  - b. Reinforce importance of modelling calmness;
  - c. Anticipate that vulnerable or highly anxious people will likely react even if they did not know the individual- you could expect behaviour increase;
  - d. Focus on well-being not curriculum, delay tests or other challenging academic tasks;
  - e. Identify vulnerable people;
  - f. Connect vulnerable people with guidance staff, administration or TERT team members;
  - g. Know the whereabouts of vulnerable people and report to administration if they leave school premises;
  - h. Remember that grief triggers other grief- you may be thinking about losses you have experienced;
  - i. Discuss issue of rumours, how they can be hurtful to families, and how to manage rumours;
  - j. Remind staff to be aware of their own reactions and feelings, take care of themselves and seek support (e.g. Employee Assistance Program, Lifespeak);
  - k. Invite staff to support one another and their students;
  - l. Consider reaching out to colleagues beyond the school day; and
  - m. Ask staff to help identify school, support staff or staff who have moved or retired that might need to be informed.
5. Discuss how to share information about the traumatic event:
  - a. Give only information confirmed to be true;
  - b. Answer questions honestly- It is ok to say we don't know;
  - c. Set some boundaries around discussion- It is normal to want details, but this is not always; appropriate- address students who are perpetuating rumours by saying that we will only be discussing what we know to be true, and why rumours are hurtful to those most impacted;

- d. Allow students opportunity to be upset and express their feelings about loss;
  - e. Allow students to leave classroom (following school procedures) to access support; and
  - f. Complete activity with class, such as making cards for the family sharing memories, condolences, messages of support, and
6. Arrange an end of day staff meeting to bring people back together to debrief.

# Appendix C: Helping Children Cope with Loss

Helping Children Cope with Loss, Death, and Grief

## Tips for Teachers and Parents



How school personnel handle distress can help shape the immediate and longer-term grieving process for students, staff and families. Children, in particular, will need the love and support of their teachers and parents to cope with their loss and reach constructive grief resolution.

### Expressions of Grief

Talking to children about death must be geared to their developmental level, respectful of their cultural norms, and sensitive to their capacity to understand the situation. Children will be aware of the reactions of significant adults as they interpret and react to information about death and tragedy. In fact, for primary grade children adult reactions will play an especially important role in shaping their perceptions of the situation. The range of reactions that children display in response to the death of significant others may include:

- ***Emotional shock*** and at times an apparent lack of feelings, which serve to help the child detach from the pain of the moment;
- ***Regressive (immature) behaviors***, such as needing to be rocked or held, difficulty separating from parents or significant others, needing to sleep in parent's bed or an apparent difficulty completing tasks well within the child's ability level;
- ***Explosive emotions and acting out behavior*** that reflect the child's internal feelings of anger, terror, frustration and helplessness. Acting out may reflect insecurity and a way to seek control over a situation for which they have little or no control;
- ***Asking the same questions over and over***, not because they do not understand the facts, but rather because the information is so hard to believe or accept. Repeated questions can help listeners determine if the child is responding to misinformation or the real trauma of the event.

### Helping Children Cope

The following tips will help teachers, parents, and other caregivers support children who have experienced the loss of parents, friends, or loved ones. Some of these recommendations come from Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado.

- ***Allow children to be the teachers about their grief experiences.*** Give children the opportunity to tell their story and be a good listener.

- ***Don't assume that every child in a certain age group understands death in the same way or with the same feelings.*** All children are different, and their view of the world is unique and shaped by different experiences. (Developmental information is provided below.)
- ***Grieving is a process, not an event.*** Parents and schools need to allow adequate time for each child to grieve in the manner that works for that child. Pressing children to resume “normal” activities without the chance to deal with their emotional pain may prompt additional problems or negative reactions.
- ***Don't lie or tell half-truths to children about the tragic event:*** Children are often bright and sensitive. They will see through false information and wonder why you do not trust them with the truth. Lies do not help the child through the healing process or help develop effective coping strategies for life's future tragedies or losses.
- ***Help all children, regardless of age, to understand loss and death:*** Give the child information at the level that he/she can understand. Allow the child to guide adults as to the need for more information or clarification of the information presented. Loss and death are both part of the cycle of life that children need to understand.
- ***Encourage children to ask questions about loss and death:*** Adults need to be less anxious about not knowing all the answers. Treat questions with respect and a willingness to help the child find his or her own answers.
- ***Don't assume that children always grieve in an orderly or predictable way:*** We all grieve in different ways and there is no one “correct” way for people to move through the grieving process.
- ***Let children know that you really want to understand what they are feeling or what they need:*** Sometimes children are upset but they cannot tell you what will be helpful. Giving them the time and encouragement to share their feelings with you may enable them to sort out their feelings.
- ***Children will need long-lasting support:*** The more losses the child or adolescent suffers, the more difficult it will be to recover. This is especially true if they have lost a parent who was their major source of support. Try to develop multiple supports for children who suffer significant losses.
- ***Keep in mind that grief work is hard:*** It is hard work for adults and hard for children as well.
- ***Understand that grief work is complicated:*** Deaths that result from a terrorist act or war can bring forth many issues that are difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend. Grieving may also be complicated by a need for vengeance or justice and by the lack of resolution of the current situation: the conflict may continue, and the nation may still feel at risk. The sudden or violent nature of the death or the fact that some individuals may be considered missing rather than dead can further complicate the grieving process.
- ***Be aware of your own need to grieve.*** Focusing on the children in your care is important, but not at the expense of your emotional needs. Adults who have lost a loved one will be far more able to help children work through their grief if they get help themselves. For some families, it may be important to seek family grief counseling, as well as individual sources of support.



## Developmental Phases in Understanding Death

It is important to recognize that all children are unique in their understanding of death and dying. This understanding depends on their developmental level, cognitive skills, personality characteristics, religious or spiritual beliefs, teachings by parents and significant others, input from the media, and previous experiences with death. Nonetheless, there are some general considerations that will be helpful in understanding how children and adolescents experience and deal with death.

- **Infants and Toddlers:** The youngest children may perceive that adults are sad but have no real understanding of the meaning or significance of death.
- **Preschoolers:** Young children may deny death as a formal event and may see death as reversible. They may interpret death as a separation, not a permanent condition. Preschool and even early elementary children may link certain events and magical thinking with the causes of death. For instance, as a result of the World Trade Center disaster, some children may imagine that going into tall buildings may cause someone's death.
- **Early Elementary School:** Children at this age (approximately 5-9) start to comprehend the finality of death. They begin to understand that certain circumstances may result in death. They can see that, if large planes crash into buildings, people in the planes and buildings will be killed. In case of war images, young children may not be able to differentiate between what they see on television, and what might happen in their own neighborhood. However, they may over-generalize, particularly at ages 5-6 - if jet planes don't fly, then people don't die. At this age, death is perceived as something that happens to others, not to oneself or one's family.
- **Middle School:** Children at this level have the cognitive understanding to comprehend death as a final event that results in the cessation of all bodily functions. They may not fully grasp the abstract concepts discussed by adults or on the TV news but are likely to be guided in their thinking by a concrete understanding of justice. They may experience a variety of feelings and emotions, and their expressions may include acting out or self-injurious behaviors as a means of coping with their anger, vengeance and despair.
- **High School:** Most teens will fully grasp the meaning of death in circumstances such as an automobile accident, illness and even the World Trade Center or Pentagon disasters. They may seek out friends and family for comfort or they may withdraw to deal with their grief. Teens (as well as some younger children) with a history of depression, suicidal behavior and chemical dependency are at particular risk for prolonged and serious grief reactions and may need more careful attention from home and school during these difficult times.

## Tips for Children and Teens with Grieving Friends and Classmates

Seeing a friend try to cope with a loss may scare or upset children who have had little or no experience with death and grieving. Following are some suggestions teachers and parents can provide to children and youth to deal with this "secondary" loss.

- Particularly with younger children, it will be important to help clarify their understanding of death. See tips above under "helping children cope."
- Seeing their classmates' reactions to loss may bring about some fears of losing their own parents or siblings, particularly for students who have family in the military or other risk

related professions. Children need reassurance from caregivers and teachers that their own families are safe. For children who have experienced their own loss (previous death of a parent, grandparent, sibling), observing the grief of a friend can bring back painful memories. These children are at greater risk for developing more serious stress reactions and should be given extra support as needed.

- Children (and many adults) need help in communicating condolence or comfort messages. Provide children with age-appropriate guidance for supporting their peers. Help them decide what to say (e.g., “Steve, I am so sorry about your father. I know you will miss him very much. Let me know if I can help you with your paper route....”) and what to expect (see “expressions of grief” above).
- Help children anticipate some changes in friends’ behavior. It is important that children understand that their grieving friends may act differently, may withdraw from their friends for a while, might seem angry or very sad, etc., but that this does not mean a lasting change in their relationship.
- Explain to children that their “regular” friendship may be an important source of support for friends and classmates. Even normal social activities such as inviting a friend over to play, going to the park, playing sports, watching a movie, or a trip to the mall may offer a much-needed distraction and sense of connection and normalcy.
- Children need to have some options for providing support—it will help them deal with their fears and concerns if they have **some concrete actions that they can take to help**. Suggest making cards, drawing helping with chores or homework, etc. Older teens might offer to help the family with some shopping, cleaning, errands, etc., or with babysitting for younger children.
- Encourage children who are worried about a friend to talk to a caring adult. This can help alleviate their own concern or potential sense of responsibility for making their friend feel better. Children may also share important information about a friend who is at risk of more serious grief reactions.
- Parents and teachers need to be alert to children in their care who may be reacting to a friend’s loss of a loved one. These children will need some extra support to help them deal with the sense of frustration and helplessness that many people are feeling at this time.

### Resources for Grieving and Traumatized Children

At times of severe stress, such as the trauma of war or terrorist attacks, both children and adults need extra support. Children who are physically and emotionally closest to this tragedy may very well experience the most dramatic feelings of fear, anxiety and loss. They may have personally lost a loved one or know of friends and schoolmates who have been devastated by these treacherous acts. Adults need to carefully observe these children for signs of traumatic stress, depression or even suicidal thinking, and seek professional help when necessary.

Resources to help you identify symptoms of severe stress and grief reactions are available at the National Association of School Psychologists' website— [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org). See also:

#### For Caregivers

- Deaton, R.L. & Berkan, W.A. (1995). *Planning and managing death issues in the schools: A handbook*.

Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

- Mister Rogers Website: [www.misterrogers.org](http://www.misterrogers.org) (see booklet on Grieving for children 4-10 years)
- Webb, N.B. (1993). *Helping bereaved children: A handbook for practitioners*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Wolfelt, A. (1983). *Helping children cope with grief*. Bristol, PA: Accelerated Development.
- Wolfelt, A (1997). *Healing the bereaved child: Grief gardening, growth through grief and other touchstones for caregivers*. Ft. Collins, CO: Companion.
- Worden, J.W. (1996). *Children and grief: When a parent dies*. New York: Guilford Press
- Helping Children Cope with Death, The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org).

#### For Children

- Gootman, M.E. (1994). *When a friend dies: A book for teens about grieving and healing*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Greenlee, S. (1992). *When someone dies*. Atlanta: Peachtree Publishing. (Ages 9-12).
- Wolfelt, A. (2001). *Healing your grieving heart for kids*. Ft. Collins, CO: Companion. (See also similar titles for teens and adults)

*Adapted from material first posted on the NASP website after September 11, 2001.*

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# Appendix D: Helping Children and Youth after Tragic Events

## Helping Children and Youth after Tragic Events

After a tragic event has occurred, students will have a lot of questions and parents will have increased worries about the safety of their children. You may notice a range of emotions and reactions in students such as sadness, anxiety, fatigue, isolation and absenteeism. An individual's response to a tragic event will depend on a multitude of factors, including their developmental age, prior traumatic experiences, and their physical proximity and/or emotional connection to the event.

In the days, and sometimes weeks, following a tragic event, varied reactions are not uncommon. Typically, these reactions subside over time as students are reassured they are safe and protected, gain a factual understanding of the event, and are provided opportunities to talk about their thoughts, feelings, and fears.

### There are several ways that you can help support students:

- During times of tragedy, the reaction of adults will set the tone for students.
- Maintain a calm classroom environment, with a measured pace of learning.
- Maintain normal and predictable routines.
- Consider if any sensitive curriculum content needs to be delayed or changed.
- Listen and notice how students are viewing the situation.
- Notice when students are struggling and may require quiet check-in, additional support or dialogue to help alleviate fears.
- Validate feeling of sadness, worry, anger, etc. and understand that it takes time to process tragic events.
- Answer questions but keep explanations of events age-appropriate and factual.
- Where appropriate, help students to notice blessings, heroism, and signs of hope.
- Calm student's worries and fears by reminding them of safety procedures.
- Encourage students to draw on natural supports, faith and self-care skills, and other sources of strength that foster feelings of closeness and security. Help students identify trusted adults they feel comfortable talking to.
- Encourage breaks from news and social media as constant exposure may heighten anxiety and fear.

### Take notice of your own needs and self-care:

- Recognize that you will need an opportunity to process the event, reflect on personal thoughts, feelings and fears, and consider any challenges that could arise while supporting students in your classroom and school.
- Keep regular schedules and routines.
- Remember the importance of self-care such as eating, being hydrated, sleeping, physical activity, exercise and connecting with others.
- Learn and practice positive ways of coping and ask for help, if needed.

Sources: School Mental Health ASSIST, National Association of School Psychologist and MayoClinic.org

# Appendix E- Info Sheet for Educators on Tragic Events

## INFO-SHEET

Mental Health Literacy for Educators

### Helping Children and Youth after Tragic Events



After a tragic incident, it can be difficult to know what to do to support children and youth who have been affected or influenced by these events. You may observe that students appear upset, sad, anxious or tired, and/or you may notice a range of physical complaints. Reactions will vary according to students' development stage, physical or emotional proximity to the event, and prior experience with traumatic circumstances.

In the days, and sometimes weeks, following a tragic event, these reactions are not uncommon, and typically will subside over time as students have an opportunity to talk through feelings, to be reassured that they are safe and protected, and to gain perspective.

*Note - To provide needed support for your students, remember that you need to engage in your own self-care. Tragic events affect individuals in different ways, and you are not immune to the impact of these circumstances. Take time to process your thoughts and emotions with colleagues, friends, family, or using professional mental health assistance as needed, so that you are able to be present and helpful to students.*

#### COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAGIC EVENTS

SADNESS	ANGER OR IRRITABILITY
ANXIETY	SOCIAL DISTANCING
FATIGUE	PHYSICAL COMPLAINTS
LACK OF FOCUS	ABSENTEEISM

As a caring adult in student's lives, there are many ways you can provide support:

#### 1. SUPPORT FOR ALL – Maintain a calm classroom environment

- Maintain a calm classroom environment
- Support students as they work through strong feelings after a tragic event, in the course of daily school life
- Notice when a student is struggling and may require additional support
- Offer classroom accommodations to students struggling with social emotional concerns after a tragic event
- Assist struggling students and their families to access more intensive support, as needed.

- During times of tragedy, the reactions of adults will set the tone for students.
- Set a calm pace for learning, relaxing deadlines as needed.
- Maintain normal, predictable routines.
- Reduce the emphasis on and/or duration of formal lessons.
- Consider if any sensitive curriculum content might need to be delayed/changed.
- Use learning activities that allow you to float and check-in with students.
- Create quiet spaces for student reflection and dialogue within the classroom.
- Encourage students to take breaks from news and social media.



### Support students as they work through strong feelings after a tragic event

- Rather than raising this at a class level, invite students to initiate conversations when the time is right for them.
  - Listen well and notice how your students are viewing the situation.
  - Keep explanations of events age-appropriate and factual.
  - Calm worries, re-affirm safety procedures, and reassure students that they are safe.
  - Validate feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, etc. and note that it may take time to work through these emotions.
  - Encourage students to draw on their faith, natural supports, self-care skills, and other sources of strength.
  - Model compassion, positive coping and self-care skills.
  - Help students to notice blessings, quiet heroes, and signs of hope.
- 2. SUPPORT FOR SOME** – Notice when a student is struggling and may require additional support
- Make a list of students who may be at risk given proximity to the tragic event, prior trauma, etc.
  - Monitor these students more closely, checking in with them each day.
  - Be mindful that there may be students without an obvious link or vulnerability who may experience difficulty.
  - Watch for changes in student behavior and/or emotions that are excessive in duration and intensity.
  - Watch for signs that student behavior and/or emotions is interfering with day to day functioning at school.
  - If you have concerns, record your observations and consult with appropriate staff (e.g., principal, social worker).

- Discuss your concerns with the student in a compassionate and age-appropriate manner.
- Use regular school/class protocols to connect with parents/guardians to discuss your observations and concerns.

**- Offer classroom accommodations to students struggling after a tragic event**

- Welcome students who may be more at risk, in a calm, caring, and intentional way each day.
- Let these students know about available school supports and how to access them.
- Create opportunities for quiet check-ins and dialogue.
- Maintain academic expectations but soften these if a student seems overwhelmed.
- Help students to complete school tasks by chunking assignments, pairing them with another student, etc.
- Offer more time for test and assignment completion, as needed.
- Allow students to cue you if they are struggling and want to talk, or need to step back from a task for a time
- Help these students to engage in activities that may assist with healing (e.g., write a card, make a donation, etc.)

**3. SUPPORT FOR FEW – Assist struggling students and their families to access support**

- Know about available supports at the school, board, and community level.
- Know your local pathway to accessing services.
- Work with the school team to describe available supports to the parent/guardian and/or student.
- With parent/guardian consent, share your observations to assist with referrals and treatment planning.
- Continue to provide classroom accommodations to students struggling after a tragic event.
- Use classroom strategies recommended by the service provider.

### Personal Resiliency and Self-Care

*As noted above, tragic events can be emotionally challenging for us as educators. It is not uncommon for grief reactions in ourselves, and in our students, to last many days or weeks. The following strategies can be helpful to encourage personal resiliency during difficult times.*

- Take the opportunity to process the situation and your feelings with your friends, family and colleagues.
- Keep regular schedules and routines.
- Remember to eat, sleep, play, exercise, and laugh.
- Practice positive ways of coping with sadness, fear, anger, and worry.
- Ask for help. This is not an experience that you have to face alone.



Every Ontario school board has a Mental Health Leader who works to support schools with resources and coaching support. To find the Mental Health Leader for your board, visit [smh-assist.ca](http://smh-assist.ca), and use the pull-down menu to find your board.

School Mental Health ASSIST is a provincial implementation team, working alongside the Ministry of Education, to support Ontario's 72 school boards and four school authorities in their efforts to enhance student mental health and well-being.

Visit us: [smh-assist.ca](http://smh-assist.ca) @SMHASSIST

Sources:

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board;  
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board;  
Peel District School Board;  
Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board;  
Toronto Catholic District School Board;  
Toronto District School Board;  
The Fred Rogers Company;  
the Child Mind Institute;  
PBS Parents;  
National Association of School Psychologists (NASP).



# Appendix F: Handout for Parents

## HANDOUT FOR PARENTS

### COMMON REACTIONS TO STRESS OR TRAUMA

**Having nightmares or trouble sleeping.** When something really scary or upsetting happens, it takes awhile to figure out exactly what happened and what it means. After severe stress or trauma, people tend to keep thinking about what happened in order to digest it, just like your stomach has to work to digest a big meal. Nightmares are one way of digesting what happened.

**Thinking about it all the time.** This is another way to digest what happened. Just like nightmares, thinking about the trauma all the time is a problem because it makes you feel upset. It can be unpleasant.

**Wanting to NOT think or talk about it.** This is natural, since it is upsetting to think about a past stress or trauma, and it can make you feel all sorts of emotions. Avoiding it makes things easier, but only for a little while. It's important to digest what happened sooner or later. So, while avoiding it sometimes makes sense, you have to set aside some time to digest it also.

**Avoiding places, people, or things that make you think about it.** Just like not wanting to talk about or think about the trauma, avoiding situations that remind you of what happened can help you feel better right then. The problem with this, though, is that it keeps you from doing normal things that are an important part of your life.

**Feeling scared for no reason.** Sometimes this happens because you remember what happened to you, or you are thinking about what happened. Other times it happens because your body is so tense all the time that you just start feeling scared.

**Feeling "crazy" or out of control.** If all of these things are problems for you, you can start to feel really out of control or even crazy. Don't worry, though; these problems don't mean that you are going crazy. They are all common reactions to stress or trauma.

**Not being able to remember parts of what happened.** This happens a lot to people. The stressful event can be so awful that your memory doesn't work the way it usually does. Sometimes it gets easier to remember it later on, and sometimes it gets harder. This can be frustrating, but it's really normal.

**Having trouble concentrating at school or at home.** With all the nervousness you are feeling and all the time you are spending thinking about what happened, it can be hard to concentrate on school work or even what your friends or family say to you.

**Being on guard to protect yourself; feeling like something bad is about to happen.** After something bad happens to you, it makes sense to be prepared for another bad thing to happen. The problem with this is that you can spend so much time waiting for the next bad thing to happen that you don't have time or energy for other things in your life. Also, it is scary to think something bad is going to happen all the time.

**Jumping when there is a loud noise.** This is another way to say that your body is prepared for action, in case something else happens.

**Feeling anger.** Sometimes people feel angry about the stress or trauma that happened, or the things that happened afterward. Other times, people just feel angry all the time, at everything and everybody.

**Feeling shame.** Sometimes people are ashamed about what happened to them, or how they acted. Even though it's hard to believe, this gets better the more that you talk about what happened. If you keep it a secret, it's hard for the shame to go away.

**Feeling guilt.** People can feel guilty about what happened or about something they did or did not do. Sometimes you blame yourself for things that you couldn't control. You may also feel guilty for upsetting other people. Guilty feelings can make it hard to talk about what happened.

**Feeling sadness/grief/loss.** Sometimes stress events include losing someone close to you or losing something that is important to you. This make you feel sad and down.

**Feeling bad about yourself.** Sometimes, all this stress can make you feel really bad about yourself, like you're a bad person or that no one likes you. This makes it harder to be friendly and to have fun with others.

**Having physical health problems and complaints.** Stress has an effect on your body as well. People tend to get sick more often and to notice pain and discomfort more often when they have been under stress.

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Adapted from "Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools" by Lisa Jaycox, Ph.D.

# Appendix G: Sample Parent Meeting Agenda

## TEMPLATE ONLY Agenda

- i) Welcome and Introductions
- ii) Context/Why we are here!
- iii) Local School Community Focus – Data Phase
  - o What are your students/children saying?
  - o What else are your children or students talking about? What insights are they giving you?
  - o Where some of you connected in other ways to the car crash (i.e. knew the driver and are struggling to make sense how it could be him etc.)?
- iv) Local School Community Focus – Teaching Phase

Teach some of the aftermath dynamics and common responses to crises and trauma Lessons learned

- Trauma Response Continuum
- Delayed and Denied Responses to Trauma
- Pre-trauma Functioning as a Predictor for Response and Recovery
- Open vs. Closed Family and School Systems
- Polarization
- Entitlement
- The Power of a Meaningful Conversation: Open Communication with Our Students and Children and Each Other. ‘The biggest problem in human communication isn’t that people won’t answer the question(s), it is that we are often too afraid to ask’.

POTENTIAL HIGH-RISK STUDENTS:

**Note: These criteria may be extrapolated and applied to assess struggling staff and parents as well.**

- anyone whose senses were activated by traumatic stimuli (i.e., student who witnesses a school incident)
- immediate family members
- relatives
- close friends
- boyfriend/girlfriend
- team mates
- ex-boyfriend(s)/girlfriend(s)
- classmates
- students with active mental health concerns (i.e., suicidal ideation, severe depression, anxiety disorder...)
- students who abuse drugs and alcohol

- students with a significant emotional tie with the deceased, positive or negative. (This includes any student who was involved in an adversarial relationship with a victim.)
- students that have experienced a recent loss such as death of a parent, sibling, friend
- students with unresolved abuse/trauma
- leaders or over-responsible students who may blame themselves for “not seeing the signs” or not “knowing what to do”

**Individual Trauma Response Continuum**

No Response

- any that you intuitively suspect may be at risk student(s) etc.

<b>INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA RESPONSE CONTINUUM</b>	
No Response	PTS

v) Local School Community Focus – Assessment Phase

1. Considering the Trauma Response Continuum, how would you say the students are doing?
2. How are your staff doing?
3. How are your parents/caregivers doing? NOTES

\* Teach (reference) the BASIC Assessment/Screening Model as a more focused way of assessing self and our children (students):

Changes in Functional Domains (Mild – Moderate – Severe):

- B – Behavioural
- A – Affective
- S – Somatic
- I – Interpersonal
- C – Cognitive

Focusing on these domains is not meant to be a comprehensive assessment it is just a way for the adults to make sense of what changes they are seeing but haven't been able to put words to. Also, the most important qualifier of the assessment is the whether or not the frequency or intensity of the symptoms are actually increasing or decreasing. Many individuals may actually be doing better, and their symptoms are reducing but they don't see it that way because they believe "getting better" means having no symptoms at all.

#### Local School Community Focus – Intervention Phase

- School staff, what do you need the most?
- Parents, what do you need the most?
- Community Professionals – What we can offer!

#### Available Supportive Resources

- Community Professionals – What we need from you?

\* Teach (reference) the BASIC Assessment/Screening Model as a more focused way of assessing self and our children (students):

Changes in Functional Domains (Mild – Moderate – Severe):

- B – Behavioural
- A – Affective
- S – Somatic
- I – Interpersonal
- C – Cognitive

Focusing on these domains is not meant to be a comprehensive assessment it is just a way for the adults to make sense of what changes they are seeing but haven't been able to put words to. Also, the most important qualifier of the assessment is the whether or not the frequency or intensity of the symptoms are actually increasing or decreasing. Many individuals may actually be doing better, and their symptoms are reducing but they don't see it that way because they believe "getting better" means having no symptoms at all.

NOTES:

- \* This can be Mental Health and the other professionals saying:
- 2. We need each school to assign one designate to be our contact person when school consults are being requested or referrals made.
- 3. We need both parents or caregivers (inasmuch as possible) involved in the treatment of their children to create a solid support for the child.
- 4. We need you staff members and parents (just like us counsellors) to be honest with yourselves as well and ask for help when you need it – we are all in this together!

vi) Conclusion/Next Steps

## **Appendix H: Bereavement Policy**

[https://www.granderie.ca/application/files/3615/5907/1683/HR1\\_Bereavements.pdf](https://www.granderie.ca/application/files/3615/5907/1683/HR1_Bereavements.pdf)

# Appendix I: Six Nations Tragic Event Protocol

An updated version will be inserted at a later date.

## TRAGIC EVENT PROTOCOL

BETWEEN:



**SIX NATIONS OF THE GRAND RIVER  
SOCIAL SERVICES**  
15 SUNRISE COURT, P.O. BOX 5001, OSHWEKEN, ON, N0A 1M0  
(519) 445-4050

AND



**THE GRAND ERIE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**  
349 ERIE AVE., BRANTFORD, ON, N3T 5V3  
(519) 756-6301



Developed with the support of  
*Schools and Communities Working Together, Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk*  
Student Support Leadership Initiative

February, 2012



**This protocol outlines the parties, purpose, guiding principles, roles, responsibilities, accountability, and dispute resolution process.**

**Parties:** Six Nations of the Grand River Social Services and Grand Erie District School Board

**Purpose:** Six Nations of the Grand River Social Services\* (Six Nations) and the Grand Erie District School Board (GEDSB) each has Tragic Event Response Teams to support their constituents in times of crisis. Coordination and collaboration of the two Tragic Event Response Teams is advantageous to the people and communities served. The purpose of this protocol is to formalize this coordination and collaboration.

This Tragic Event Protocol addresses:

1. Guiding Principles
2. Involving the Six Nations Tragic Event Response Team
3. Roles
4. Responsibilities
5. Consent and Confidentiality
6. Communication
7. Dispute Resolution

### **1. Guiding Principles**

The Grand Erie District School Board and community partners share some common objectives, including a commitment to:

- Respect for diversity, equity and inclusive practices
- Partnerships that promote sharing of expertise, knowledge and resources
- Recognition of the strengths of the child/adolescent to promote positive outcomes
- Flexibility to meet the needs of the child/adolescent and family
- Value of collaboration between home, school and community partners

\*Staff of Six Nations of the Grand River Social Services must have updated police checks, must wear appropriate identification, and are clinically supervised. Staff is aware that the school principal has ultimate responsibility for students, staff, visitors, and the school.

## **2. Involving the Six Nations Tragic Event Response Team (TERT):**

The Tragic Event Response Teams of the Grand Erie District School Board are coordinated by the School Social Worker. This person is the first contact when a crisis affects a school. The principal and School Social Worker complete an initial assessment and determine the nature and level of support required. If it is determined that the Six Nations of the Grand River Tragic Event Response Team should be involved (e.g. student or family of Six Nations affected), the School Social Worker will contact the Six Nations Supervisor of the Family Support Unit (519-445-4050) who will then contact the Six Nations Supervisor of the Services Coordination Unit who leads the Six Nations Tragic Event Response Team. The School Social Worker and the Six Nations TERT supervisor will determine the most appropriate involvement of Six Nations TERT staff.

A *Tragic Event Response Team Flow Chart* is attached showing the decision making process that is followed (Appendix 1).

## **3. Role Definition:**

Six Nations Tragic Event Response Team members have extensive training and experience in supporting the Six Nations community in times of crisis and trauma. The Six Nations TERT members are also experts in the unique needs of native students. This knowledge and expertise is critical to the delivery of culturally appropriate supports and interventions.

The Grand Erie District School Board has professional staff assigned to each school to support students, families, and staff. Each discipline has a clearly defined role in the school. The School Board staff includes Attendance Counselors, Behaviour Counselors, Child and Youth Workers, Native Counselors, Psychological Services, Social Workers, and Speech and Language professionals who have received tragic events response training. The teams are coordinated by the relevant School Social Worker.

#### **4. Responsibilities:**

One of the most critical aspects of Tragic Event response is having clear leadership and role definition on site. Schools look to the TERT team to help create order out of chaos. It is imperative that the team be well organized and present as a well coordinated team. When Six Nations TERT members are supporting students within Grand Erie schools, the Six Nations TERT members will function as part of the GEDSB Tragic Event Response Team, coordinated by the School Social Worker.

In times of crisis, communication and information sharing is an essential part of a team's functioning. Throughout the Tragic Event, information will be shared with all members of the team including the responders from Six Nations and their supervisor.

Six Nations TERT members have extensive training and experience in crisis response and should be expected to offer a full range of tragic event support including classroom interventions, group and individual support, and short-term ongoing support to students. Such services and supports are always offered with coordination by the School Social Worker and under the direction of the Principal.

#### **5. Consent and Confidentiality:**

Both GEDSB TERT members and Six Nations TERT members are knowledgeable regarding confidentiality expectations. In times of crisis, people can be very vulnerable and may disclose highly personal information. It is imperative that this information is respected and kept confidential. This practice will provide protection for the rights of the family as well as the GEDSB and Six Nations Staff.

If short-term intervention/counseling provided by Six Nations staff is recommended, appropriate informed consent will be obtained prior to the commencement of counseling.

#### **6. Communication and Informing Schools**

It is also important that the Six Nations parent community is aware that the Six Nations TERT staff may be involved at a Grand Erie School during a crisis. Six Nations Social Services will take responsibility for communicating this information to members of the reserve.

All Grand Erie District School Board principals will be informed of this protocol. The Tragic Event Protocol will be made available through the Board's Web site and will also become part of the Tragic Event Response Team Handbook for reference by both Six Nations and Grand Erie staff.

**7. Accountability**

Six Nations Tragic Event Response Team members are accountable to the Supervisor of the Six Nations Family Support Unit and the Director of Six Nations Social Services. Grand Erie Tragic Event Response Team members are accountable to the Executive Supervisor, Student Support Services and the appropriate Superintendent.

**8. Dispute Resolution**

Every effort will be made to resolve concerns or conflicts between the parties. Unresolved matters will be referred to the Superintendent of Education and the Director of Six Nations Social Services.

This protocol is subject to review in three years from date of signing or at any time based on the request of either party.

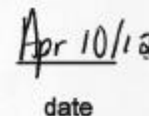
Arliss Skye, Director, Six Nations Social Services

  
signature

  
date

John Forbeck, Director of Education  
Grand Erie District School Board

  
signature

  
date

APPENDIX 1 TRAGIC EVENT RESPONSE TEAM FLOW CHART

