

CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Purpose

To guide schools in providing compassionate support to students and the school community following a critical incident or traumatic event. Tragic events, such as the loss of a member of the school community, require a thoughtful and coordinated response.

Procedures

1. Crisis/Trauma Response

- 1.1 The Director of Education or designate is to ensure that the Critical Incident and Traumatic Events response procedures are kept current and updated on a regular basis.
- 1.2 The principal is to inform staff members and School Community Council members of the purpose and function of the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team, which is comprised of trained CISM members and Division Counsellors and Psychologists. The CISM team's role is to provide short term, compassionate support to those who may have been faced with and impacted by a critical incident or traumatic event. An established, multidimensional and immediate response with trained professionals and resources can provide comfort and help ease the aftermath of such events.

2. Memorial Services

- 2.1 As schools are places designed to support learning, school buildings should not serve as the main venue for the memorializing of students or staff. Although some students and/or community members have contributed greatly to the school, trauma and loss research confirms that vulnerable people may be inadvertently placed at risk by either "glorifying death" or by having students and staff faced with a constant reminder.

3. Shrines

- 3.1 Best practices outlined by the National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children recommend the establishment of only temporary school memorials that are removed immediately after the funeral or memorial service
- 3.2 Current research indicates permanent memorials in schools or on school property are not advised. Schools should not initiate permanent memorials such as pictures, benches, plaques or trees. If students identify a need to express their feelings of loss during the traumatic

response process, school and division staff will work with them to create temporary memorials that suit the needs of students.

- 3.3 The deceased student should not receive greater mention in graduation ceremonies or the yearbook than would be given to any other student.
- 3.4 Research into trauma and loss recommends that memorials should be in the community where they can be easily accessed by those who need their comfort and benefits, while also easily avoided by those who are activated by the “reminders”.
- 3.5 Community memorials provide the same benefits as school memorials while avoiding the many conflicts and challenges created when erected in closed environments such as schools.

Reference: Traumatic Events System Training
National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children
International Critical Incident Stress Foundation
Alberta Critical Incident Advisory Council

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