

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION MEMO

(Sample of what could be used for a student death)

Date:

To: All staff

From: School Principal/Administration

Regarding: Student notification of the recent death of: _____
(student's name)

Message: Please make the following announcement at _____, or during your
(time)
_____ hour class. "On _____ _____ died.
(date) (student's name)

This is what we know at this time about his/her death:

After making the aforementioned announcement teachers should continue on by addressing their student's reaction to the announcement. For example:

"I know that many of you are very surprised to hear this news and may already have some questions and bad feelings about this. Because I know that you probably do have questions I would like for us to talk about this. But I'm not asking that all of you talk about this here and now. So if any of you are not comfortable talking about it that's okay with me."

Allow students the time to freely ask questions and talk as a class about this is event. Those who are silent, but attentive, can benefit from discussion that includes questions they may have but are not verbalizing.

It may be helpful to refer to the attached *Classroom Discussion Guide for Teachers* for additional guidance.

Classroom Discussion Guide for Teachers

While it is desirable to minimize any disruption to the usual class routine, if the event was highly tragic or seems to have impacted many students it may be necessary to have a class discussion about it. The following are some thoughts to keep in mind when choosing to discuss the event with your class:

1. Remain relaxed and calm. Be confident about your role as the discussion leader. Present the facts given out by administration about the event. (If you feel unable to do this consider a request to have a member of the support staff attend and lead the discussion.)
2. If disturbed feelings are expressed after your announcements maintain an atmosphere of control and reassurance. Be authoritative and genuine in your efforts to offer reassurance to your students. Talking about how you personally feel about the event and how you positively cope with such feelings can be very helpful and valuable to students who look to you for guidance or as a role model. Teachers care about their students and form attachments to them, so it normal and appropriate to outwardly and moderately express feelings relative the event or situation. However bear in mind that a teacher who is feeling something intensely and is unable to remain composed that their affect and words could increase student anxiety, sadness, or anger to a level that may be too difficult to manage.
3. Allow students to express concerns and feelings but do not probe for thoughts and feelings from individual students. Keep the discussion general. Acknowledge that a wide variety of feelings are normal and that their intensity may vary among students. Refer students showing excessively negative, distraught or dramatic behavior to the support staff or the designated student support area as soon as possible.
4. Based on the known facts try, as much as possible, to provide a credible or reasonable explanation for the event without being moralistic or judgmental. Within this context, it is important for students to be able to maintain a positive view of the world and a positive view of themselves.
5. When it appears that most of the students seem ready to return to an academic focus (and there are no more questions being asked about the event) either direct them to what was already planned for the day or consider guiding the class toward a positive and appropriate learning activity associated with the event. A good way for teachers to measure how their students are doing could be ascertained by an in-class or homework assignment asking students to describe what happened, why they think it happened and how they plan to cope with their thoughts and feelings about the event. It may help to consult with a crisis team member for additional guidance on a recommended assignment for the class. When returning to the academic tasks planned before the event consider modifying the due date for homework or avoid giving homework for a reasonable period of time.
6. Encourage students to talk about the event with their parents, school counselor, or other trusted adult. If one or two students do not seem able or willing to return to the normal class assignment or routine at this point refer them to the support staff or support area.

For the remainder of the first day you may observe in your students concentration difficulties or what seems to be a relative or expected level of sadness or anxiety. However, if you become concerned at any time about a student's adjustment to the event do not hesitate to consult with your support staff.

Source: Ciffone, J., Wallon, L., Bauman, R., and Samples, C., *Crisis Team Manual* © Copyright 1988-2012 School District U-46 Press, Elgin, IL.