

Sample
EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION MEMO

Date:

To: All faculty

From: 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)

The following are the facts about his/her death as we know them:

Allowing students time to talk as a class about this event is recommended. (It may be helpful to refer to the attached "General Classroom Discussion Guide For Teachers.") Please note unusual or extreme student reactions and refer those students to the support staff as soon as possible.

GENERAL CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Experience has shown that it is desirable to minimize any disruption to the usual class routine. However, if the event was highly tragic and seems to have impacted most 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. A teacher who is unable to remain composed can unintentionally cause students to feel more anxious, sad or angry.
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.
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 either direct them to what was already planned for the day or consider guiding the class toward a positive and appropriate activity associated with the event. When returning to the academic tasks planned before the event consider modifying or differentiating the academic tasks and avoid giving homework for a reasonable period of time. If one or two students do not seem able or willing to return to the normal routine at this point refer them to the support staff or support area.

You may see overt signs of normal grief for the next few days. For example, concentration difficulties, difficulty getting started with class assignments, or a minor level of sadness, anxiety, negative preoccupation, apathy, or social withdrawal, etc. Other general indicators of adjustment are attendance, academic performance and behavior. If you become concerned about a student's short-term and long-term adjustment to the event consult with your building support staff.

Source: Jerry Ciffone and Linda Wallon, School District U-46, Elgin, IL. Updated 4/07.