
Responding to a Student's Death by Suicide – Next Steps for School Administrators

Overall Approach:

1. Initial Communication: Confirm with parents exactly what story is (an accident? Intentional?) and then how to speak about it (the family are the ones who get to decide what they want to publicize, and we stick to that): and don't focus too much on the story after initial acknowledgment as fact with staff, parents, and students.

- **Blame should be avoided entirely.** We don't want to cause people to take emotional responsibility. At the same time providing education for prevention moving forward (potential bullying, etc.) is necessary, but it should never sound like blame.

2. Create a conversation within the first few days where staff, parents and students are spoken to. This can be asap over zoom, and with a MH professional who can address:

- Keep eye on kids for trauma symptoms and MH symptoms that can be affecting them.
- Look out for contagion effect either by observing people directly talking about suicide (it being "an option"...), or those MH symptoms indicating a mental shift: changing in energy affect, appetite...
- Sustain emotional regulation through these discussions.
- Whether it is an accidental death or suicide, we follow the family's request regarding disseminating information.
 - *Either way it's a hard time and we need to be focused on taking care of ourselves.*
 - *Notice our peers/students/children if they seem to not be doing well.*
- Sometimes symptoms can arise even 30 days later, so monitoring the first month is critical.
- Offer additional help for parents or children with therapists and case managers.
- What does normal grief look like vs abnormal.

3. Consider in the next few weeks: Perhaps a memorial or tributes down the road and maybe a night of awareness with students and parents (www.amudim.org).
4. Consider longer term: SEL curriculum (www.darcheinu.org and www.ourpathsel.org)

Immediate Next Steps:

5. Reach out to Amudim for case-specific questions and how to handle those.
6. To facilitate the initial crisis response including the above points: Chai Lifeline (Rabbi Fox) and Ohel (Norman Blumenthal) are 2 examples of resources to utilize.
 - And if the school has MH staff internally, they can be best suited to give basic MH points and mostly listening and observing regarding who needs the support the most together with follow up.
 - *They can also best keep track of those students for the first month.*
 - Even if it occurs in HS, it is prudent to speak to the MH professionals in ES and MS as well. At least for them to understand and observe.