

Bereavement Resources

Unfortunately, many communities are having to reckon with the loss of a community member, communicating the loss to the rest of the community, supporting the family's needs, and providing space to acknowledge and process what happened and how they feel. Communication from the school might be part of a gathering supported with the presence of loved ones and supporting closeness and connection at a distance. The inability to come together in person makes this all the more difficult and painful given that we must go against our natural human desires for personal connection and keep a physical distance in line with broader public health guidelines.

In this guide, you will find sections on:

- **Preparing Educators** to respond to grief and loss in the community
- **Initial Communications** for guidance on initial communications
- **Resources and Processes** for reminders relevant to resources beyond initial communications
- **Future Looking** for considerations beyond our current normal

Preparing Educators

Unfortunately, there is a "normal" cadence of loss in any school community, so the prep that you've already done will be relevant and necessary. Currently, institutions are dealing with a swift increase in numbers of community members falling ill and passing, as well as navigating how to provide support and resources at a distance.

It is necessary to prepare educators to address bereavement within the school's internal team, and the families they work with, at a quicker pace and in increased numbers. Whatever resources are normally referenced and provided should be highlighted, with special attention given to the possible increase in use and adaptations for the virtual space. Proactively sharing resources for staff and external community members, including Employer Assistance Programs (EAP) or other existing supports enables educators to be prepared to support themselves and others in this difficult time.

Initial Communications

At this time, you may only know of educator or staff deaths since family incidents may take time to surface; however, these reminders are relevant for any initial communications on loss and grief within the context of your community.

- Communicate personally and individually.
 - While an video call may be used, consider blockers like the planning that might need to go into settt up, the availability of resources for families, and the

possible "on video" personas (who we feel we "ought" to be when we have a camera on us) that might get in the way of honoring the moment and allowing for individual experiences. A phone call allows for both the intimacy of the situation and the distance some may need.

- This is [FirstLine's phone script for this communication](#)
- Provide clear and honest details.
 - This will vary by your own policy, but the unknown is often an exasperator of anxiety. Of course, you must also respect the privacy of all members of your community.
- Resource availability.
 - Resources available should include immediately actionable items with clear methods of engagement, such as the onsite counseling team the community already knows or availability of community resources (outside organizations). Engagement methods can be emails, phone numbers, Google forms to track requests for communication and ensure response, and any already established methods (e.g. LMS internal messaging).
- Invitation to contact.
 - As it may take time to process, the initial communication should provide an invitation to contact free of any parameters (i.e. instead of "contact if/to", consider "feel free to reach out for any reason").

Resources and Processes

After the initial communication, the process and scope of resources can include call-in support lines, community partners, individual family health, and wellness services. No matter the options, some important reminders are that there should be clear protocols for access (schedules, "call in hours"), assurance that needs are being met (logging of need and record of contact to ensure support), and explicit scope (resources are for bereavement and *not* for general emergencies, "please call 911").

These explicit and self-initiated resources can be supplemented by the community by "random acts of kindness," such as sending family care packages/meals, creating online donations if feasible/needed, Google doc or shared collaborative card with love from staff and peers, and digital attendance of services.

There are [shared resources](#) others are using in their communities with specific examples of their communications and resources. Sort "Scope" by "Bereavement Resources" to see them.

Future Looking

We will not always have to be so far apart from one another. Once our communities can return and occupy our spaces, consider offering a physical place and time to honor with presence any community member that was lost.

Understand that this will bring back to the present the thoughts and emotions surrounding the loss, so the structure and resources stood up previously may be needed again. These specific losses will be further complicated and entangled with the transition of normalcy as well.

Final Word

Of all the challenges our educational communities are facing, this is likely the most difficult because it is so fundamental to our practice of supporting people and community. The key components will be the preparation of those who will support the community, the mindful processes to connect individuals and groups with resources, the continued engagement with our communities, and the knowledge that we will come together again.



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