

Sample Letter for Families 1:

(DATE)

Dear Parents and Caregivers:

I am sorry to inform you that a student/staff person/friend, (NAME), at (SCHOOL NAME) has died (Day/Date). *(Insert what information can be shared about the cause and circumstances of the death.)*

Today, at school each teacher read a short message about (NAME) to the class. Our counselor and school psychologist were available throughout the day to talk with any student that may have had a difficult time dealing with the news.

Death can be difficult for us to understand, especially when it is sudden. All of us will be feeling a variety of emotions: shock, sadness, or confusion. What is most important is that we care for and support each other.

The Psychological First Aid (PFA) Team has made plans to respond to the emotional needs of the students. *(Identify what is being done: grief counseling, classroom debriefing, referrals to support service staff.)*

If your family has experienced a death or similar loss recently, the death of (NAME) may bring up feelings about that death. This is a normal experience. Please let your child's teacher or counselor know if there is any additional information the school should be aware of so we can provide the support your child needs.

Any time death touches us, it is stressful. This sudden death may be disturbing to you as well as to your child. It is for this reason that we especially want you to know of our care and support.

Sincerely,

(PRINCIPAL'S NAME)

Sample Letter for Families 2:

(DATE)

Dear Parents and Caregivers:

This morning, prior to school, there was an accident involving a school bus and car. There were known injuries to the passengers of the car. The children on Bus # _____ witnessed the aftermath of the accident but were not involved in it.

When they arrived at school the children from the bus involved in the accident were taken to the library by the counselor and administration. The children were asked if they were injured in

any way and all parents were contacted. Your child, _____, because of being on Bus #_____ may show delayed reaction to the accident. Please be alert over the next several days to symptoms of delayed reaction, including: desire to be alone or unusually quiet, loss of appetite, problems sleeping/nightmares, difficulty concentrating, crying, angry outbursts, headaches, upset stomach, depressed or sad.

If your child exhibits some physical complaints, please contact (PRINCIPAL'S NAME) to fill out an accident report. The school will be offering support services for students needing help dealing with the accident. Please don't hesitate to call if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

(PRINCIPAL'S NAME)

Sample Letter for Staff:

(DATE)

Dear Staff,

There are times when it is necessary to communicate news that is painful for all of us. During those times we must be prepared to support each other as we deal with the many feelings that we begin to experience. I am sorry to inform you that (NAME OF PERSON) at (SCHOOL BUILDING) has died.

Death can be difficult for us to understand, especially when it is sudden. We will all begin to feel different emotions: shock, sadness, confusion, or even anger. What is most important is that we care for and support each other.

Students are affected by the death of someone important to them, and they may need to express their feelings. Please contact the counselor, administrator, or PFA team member if you notice a student who appears to be having significant difficulty with his or her feelings.

You will be updated as more information is given to us at school.

Sincerely,

(PRINCIPAL'S NAME)

Family notification messages for Suicide:

Option 1 – When the Death Has Been Ruled a Suicide

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with [HIS/HER] family and friends.

All of the students were given the news of the death by their teacher in [ADVISORY/HOMEROOM] this morning. I have included a copy of the announcement that was read to them.

The cause of death was suicide. Suicide is a very complicated act. Although we may never know why [NAME] ended [HIS/HER] life, we do know that suicide has multiple causes. In many cases, a mental health condition is part of it. But these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you or your child are not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option. I am including some information that may be helpful to you in discussing suicide with your child.

Members of our Crisis Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance. Note that children who are already vulnerable may be at greater risk due to exposure to the suicide of a peer. If you or your child needs help right away, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), call 911, or take your child to the nearest crisis center or emergency department.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school.

The school will be hosting a meeting for parents and others in the community at [DATE/TIME/LOCATION]. Members of our Crisis Response Team [OR NAME SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS] will be present to provide information about common reactions following a suicide and how adults can help youth cope. They will also provide information about suicide and mental illness in adolescents, including risk factors and warning signs of suicide, and will address attendees' questions and concerns.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or one of the school mental health professionals. We can be reached by calling [PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION].

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

Option 2 – When the Cause of Death Is Unconfirmed

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with [HIS/HER] family and friends.

All of the students were given the news of the death by their teacher in [ADVISORY/HOMEROOM] this morning. I have included a copy of the announcement that was read to them.

The cause of death has not yet been determined by the authorities. We are aware there has been some talk that this might have been a suicide death. Rumors may begin to circulate, and we have asked the students not to spread them since they may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful and unfair to [NAME] and [HIS/HER] family and friends. We will do our best to give you accurate information as it becomes known to us.

Members of our Crisis Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today, as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance. If you or your child needs help right away, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), call 911, or take your child to the nearest crisis center or emergency department.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or one of the school mental health professionals. We can be reached by calling [PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION].

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]

Option 3 – When the Family Has Requested That the Cause of Death Not Be Disclosed

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our students, [NAME], has died. Our thoughts and sympathies are with [HIS/HER] family and friends.

All of the students were given the news of the death by their teacher in [ADVISORY/HOMEROOM] this morning. I have included a copy of the announcement that was read to them.

The family has requested that information about the cause of death not be shared at this time. We are aware there have been rumors that this was a suicide death. Since the subject has been raised, we want to take this opportunity to remind our community that suicide, when it does occur, is a very complicated act. No one single thing causes it. But in many cases, a mental health condition is part of it, and these conditions are treatable. It's really important if you or your child is not feeling well in any way to reach out for help. Suicide should not be an option. I am including some information that may be helpful to you in discussing suicide with your child.

Members of our Crisis Response Team are available to meet with students individually and in groups today, as well as over the coming days and weeks. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of additional assistance. Note that children who are already vulnerable may be at greater risk due to exposure to the death of a peer. If you or your child needs help right away, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), call 911, or take your child to the nearest crisis center or emergency department.

Information about the funeral service will be made available as soon as we have it. If your child wishes to attend, we strongly encourage you to accompany him or her to the service. If the funeral is scheduled during school hours, students who wish to attend will need parental permission to be released from school.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or the school mental health professionals. We can be reached by calling [PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION].

Sincerely,

[PRINCIPAL'S NAME]