

SAMPLE LETTER FOR PARENTS OF ALUMNI
(Following the Confirmed Suicide of a Student, and there is
permission from the family to talk openly about cause of
death)

Dear Parents,

We at _____ High School are so very saddened about the suicide death of one of our graduates, _____ . Our thoughts and sympathies are with his family and friends at this most difficult time.

This death has affected our recent students, and we are just as concerned about the impact on those that graduated with _____ .

It is important to understand that the great majority of those who take their life are suffering the effects of a mental health problem at the time of their death and are in a great deal of psychological pain. This pain is so profound that it impairs thinking, and it leads a person to erroneously believe that suicide is the only way to stop it. Understanding this can help us to suspend harsh judgment and respond to those that are left behind with the sympathy and compassion they so need and deserve.

Research has helped to launch a greater understanding about the causes of suicide. The following information is from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP.org):

- *Over 90 percent of suicide victims have a significant psychiatric illness at the time of their death. These are often undiagnosed, untreated, or both. Mood disorders such as depression, and substance abuse are the two most common.*
- *When both mood disorders and substance abuse are present together, the risk for suicide is much greater, particularly for adolescents and young adults.*
- *The cause of an individual suicide is invariably more complicated than a recent painful event such as the break-up of a relationship or the loss of a job. An individual suicide cannot be adequately explained as the understandable response to an individual's stressful occupation, or an individual's membership in a group encountering discrimination. Social conditions alone do not explain a suicide. People who appear to become suicidal in response to such events, generally have significant underlying mental health problems, though they may be well-hidden.*

We have been consulting with the Traumatic Loss Coalitions for Youth Program (TLC), a program through the NJ Department of Children and Families and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care. They have provided us with information to assist you in talking with your adult child about suicide. Accurate information about suicide is important to dispel myths, prevent further suicides, and assist those who may be suffering in silence to get help.

We would like to provide an opportunity for our alumni who graduated with _____ to come together to process this tragic death. We will be opening up the school on _____ evening (DATE)____. This will give our out of town alumni who are home the opportunity to come together with their peers to talk, grieve and be comforted. We will provide refreshments and have counselors available to speak with the young adults in groups or individually. Please encourage your adult child to attend.

As you know, teenagers, and young adults use social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, etc to communicate, and it is likely they will use these sites to communicate about _____'s death. If you find postings from your adult child that are worrisome, please talk with them about your concern and find out what they are experiencing.

Suicidal thoughts or behaviors are an emergency and need immediate assessment. I am including information about school and community resources for youth and young adults who are in need of additional assistance.

In addition, please find information about three wonderful crisis lines that can be helpful during difficult times:

2NDFLOOR a 24/7 confidential and anonymous helpline for New Jersey's youth and young adults ages 13-24. They are here to help youth find solutions to the problems they may be facing. The contact information is: 888-222-2228 – www.2ndfloor.org

NJ Hopeline, a 24/7 confidential helpline for all ages. Their contact number is 855-654-6735

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Two other great web resources for information and inspirational stories of hope, help and strength and overcoming difficult times are:

[Reach Out.com](http://ReachOut.com) and Jerseyvoice.net

Please do not hesitate to contact me or one of the counselors with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Principal

11.19.13

