

RUTGERS

University Behavioral
Health Care

Behavioral Research and Training Institute
Traumatic Loss Coalitions for Youth Phone: 732-235-2810 Fax: 732-235-9861
<http://ubhc.rutgers.edu/brti/TLC>

SAMPLE LETTER FOR PARENTS

Suicide is Confirmed (There is permission from the family to talk openly about cause of death)

Dear Parents,

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

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 can be 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 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.

Counselors will be available over the coming days and weeks to provide services as needed to students. Please contact the school office if you feel your child is in need of assistance.

As you know, older children, 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. We would like to recommend that you monitor your child's online use in the coming days and weeks for messages that indicate that your child or a friend is significantly struggling with this death, or with their own mental health issues or suicidal thoughts.

If you find postings from your own child that are worrisome please talk with them about your concern and find out what they are experiencing. If you find a posting from your child's peer indicating they may be struggling or at risk, please contact that child's parent or other caring adult in their life immediately. Please contact us as well so we can follow up.

Suicidal thoughts or behaviors are an emergency and need immediate assessment. I am including information about school and community resources for youth 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