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Sample Letter for Parents After an Alumni Death

Suicide is confirmed and there is permission from the family to talk openly about the cause of death.

Dear Parents,

We at *(insert school)* are so very saddened about the suicide death of one of our graduates, *(insert student name)*. Our thoughts and sympathies are with his family and friends at this most difficult time. *(Insert student name)*'s death has affected our current students, and we are just as concerned about the impact on those that graduated with *(insert student name)*.

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 their thinking and can lead a person to erroneously believe that suicide is the only way to stop it. Understanding this can help us to suspend harsh judgement and respond to those that are left behind with the sympathy and compassion they so need and deserve.

Research has helped us to understand more about the causes of suicide. The following information is from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:

There's no single cause for suicide. Over 90% of people who die by suicide have a significant mental health problem at the time of their death. Suicide most often occurs when stressors and health issues converge to create an experience of hopelessness and despair. Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide, and it is often undiagnosed or untreated. Conditions like depression, anxiety, and substance problems, especially when unaddressed, increase risk for suicide. Yet it's important to note that most people who actively manage their mental health conditions go on to engage in life.

We have been consulting with the Traumatic Loss Coalition 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 future suicides, and assist those who may be suffering in silence to get help.

We would like to provide an opportunity for alumni who graduated with *(insert student name)* to come together to process this tragic death. We will be opening the school on *(insert date and time)* to give our alumni an opportunity to come together with their peers to talk, grieve and receive support. We will provide refreshments and have counselors available to speak individually and in small groups. Please encourage your child to attend.



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It is likely that social media sites will be used to communicate about (*insert student name*)'s death. If you find postings 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 who need additional assistance.

Crisis Supports

A crisis line is a service that provides free, confidential support and resources for people in emotional distress. The service is provided by a trained crisis counselor on the phone and in some cases by text and/or chat. You can call or text for help with someone you're worried about or for yourself. In addition to the resources listed below, some states have their own crisis lines with phone, text, and/or chat services.

- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741-741
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988. Chat available at 988lifeline.org
- **2NDFLOOR:** The Youth Helpline of New Jersey. Call or text 888-222-2228
- **The Trevor Project:** Text START to 678-678 or call 1-866-488-7386
- **Prevent Suicide New Jersey:** Resources are available at preventsuicidenj.org

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

Sincerely,

Principal