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# Macleans College - POLICIES & DIRECTIVES

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SECTION NO: <b>1100</b>	POLICY NO: <b>1102</b>	ISSUE DATE: 06/2010
		LAST REVIEW 18/10/16
TITLE: <b>SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES</b>		ISSUE NO: 3
		PAGE: 1 OF 9

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## **Traumatic Incident Response Policy and Plan** (including International Student Traumatic Incident and Response Plan) Appendix includes the Immediate Action Communication Guide for all students and International students

### **RATIONALE:**

Why the need?

A traumatic event in a school, such as a death by suicide, death after an illness, sudden death by motor accident, causes shock and grief in a community - a young person's death in a school community can cause great harm to other young people if not dealt with swiftly and sensitively.

The response plan should involve all staff and make provision for inclusion of students, parents and support agencies from outside the school, as appropriate. The plan should not depend upon any single person but be able to be implemented by the staff available at the time. It should also avoid placing any particular staff member in "the hot seat", but rather promote the co-ordinated responsibility of a team of people who can support each other.

- Many people feel uncomfortable with death and dying.
- A plan allows quick reaction and appropriate reaction to a situation. There will be no time to develop a plan when an incident occurs.
- It is hoped this can minimise the shock waves and their effect among the students, ie cluster suicides is the extreme reaction.

### **TRAUMATIC INCIDENT:**

This is a relatively short period - perhaps two days - but it is a crucial time when

- routine
- a support system
- safety

are of great importance to the school at large.

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---

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ISSUE DATE: 06/2010

LAST REVIEW 18/10/16

TITLE: **SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES**

ISSUE NO: 3

PAGE: 2 OF 9

---

## **PURPOSE:**

This school has always accepted a definite role in acknowledging a past or present student's or staff member's death.

Five objectives:

- In the case of suicide, to ensure that the response is conducted in a manner which avoids glorifying the suicide victim(s) and minimises sensationalism.
- The whole school community learn of the event in appropriate ways.
- A return to normality within the school.
- A collective process to grieve the losing of a school member.
- An educational process to help students understand death and dying.
- Acknowledgement that the management of the situation does not depend on any one person. There is a collective responsibility and response.

If so, what is it that we want the students to understand? What is the school's emphasis?

## **PROCEDURES:**

### **A Key Tasks**

#### **1 Traumatic Incident Team**

- a) Principal notified by whomever is contacted about the situation.
- b) The Principal acknowledges the traumatic incident and the team of key personnel meets.

#### **2 Family**

- a) Contact of family by Principal.
- b) Establish family wishes, ie what information family will allow to be released and what responses from school are appropriate.

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---

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		LAST REVIEW 18/10/16
TITLE: <b>SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES</b>		ISSUE NO: 3
		PAGE: 3 OF 9

---

- c) Time spent with family by Principal, house leader, form teacher, etc as appropriate and a contact person established by the school eg. house leader or colleague (in case of a staff member).
- d) Representatives of school - staff and students - at funeral service.
- e) Appropriate message or letter from school to family.

### **3 Staff**

Staff meetings to explain situation, give support, plan strategy and review progress.

### **4 Whanau**

House acknowledgement of grieving process and need for support of grieving member at house assembly.

### **5 Form**

Form support for individual member of the class.

### **6 Designation of a “safe place”** over crisis time, available for anyone in need, eg Retreat and Auditorium.

### **7 School**

At assembly, a reference in prayer or a brief address by the Principal on the student's contribution to the school.

### **8 Follow-up**

Informal house leader/form teacher/guidance counsellor monitoring of situation and follow up with friends.

### **9 Outside people available**, eg churchmen and agencies, and Special Education Services (SES) Traumatic Instance Team are often involved first and they contact the school - invaluable help.

### **10 Education process** to help students understand death and dying.

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---

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		LAST REVIEW 18/10/16
TITLE: <b>SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES</b>		ISSUE NO: 3
		PAGE: 4 OF 9

---

## **B Plan for Coping Over a Crisis Period**

Co-ordination and communication.

Action plan for teachers.

Working with the students.

Long term intervention.

### **1 Co-ordination and Communication**

- a) Principal informed of event. All members of team contacted.
- b) Crisis team make up:
  - i) For student

At least two of the Senior Management Team, guidance counsellor, house leader, form teacher and a teacher to whom the student relates well, eg sports coach, etc.
  - ii) For staff member

Two Senior Management Team, Guidance Counsellor, House Leader, Faculty Head or co-curricular colleague and another staff member who was a close friend.
- c) Team meets - determines most appropriate approach for the school to take. Important to identify a person who knew the student involved well and can assess the needs and advise how to proceed. This may be to be aware of religious, family, ethnic values which need to be respected.
- d) Phone tree set up to inform all staff.
- e) Consultation with family by appropriate team member and decision on what information to be shared by school (see attached key questions).
- f) Decision on media - requests to be dealt with by the Principal.
- g) Key staff relieved of teaching duties eg House Leader and traumatised staff given relief.

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## **Macleans College - POLICIES & DIRECTIVES**

---

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		LAST REVIEW 18/10/16
TITLE: <b>SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES</b>		ISSUE NO: 3
		PAGE: 5 OF 9

---

- h) Staff meeting as soon as possible to explain situation, respond to questions and plan strategy - Principal or associate Principal. Written statement to be given out to all Form Teachers to read to form class.
- i) Contact established with other schools attended by siblings - one of Senior Management Team.
- j) Make up a list of all close friends. Decision on meeting or contact with the deceased's friends. Information on signs of distress etc - House Leader, Form Teacher or other teacher/Guidance Counsellor. Concerns of parents to be fielded by House Leader/Guidance Counsellor.
- k) Check on counsellor availability and resources for back up to allow counsellor to be available for the form class a retreat room for supervision.
- j) Community resource professionals identified and contacted, eg SES Traumatic Instance team – useful for consultation.
- m) Retreat rooms identified and set up with flowers, candles, a message book and refreshments.

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---

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		LAST REVIEW 18/10/16
TITLE: <b>SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES</b>		ISSUE NO: 3
		PAGE: 6 OF 9

---

## **2 Action Plan for Teachers**

### **Morning Staff Meeting**

- a) Reassurance - many expectations, especially on Form Teacher, sports coach, subject teachers of friends.
- b) Time needed for teaching staff to express feelings and gain support from each other.
- c) Updates and current information needed for staff so they can cope with questions and accurate information. Helps counter destructive rumours.
- d) Written statement giving factual information given to all staff for explaining situation to form classes.
- e) Staff meeting at end of first day for these purposes. Check on use of “safe” area, Retreat or Drama Room. Staff to be informed this place is available and manned by someone unobtrusively nearby. Possibly available in evening manned by Guidance Counsellor/House Leader.

### **Early in Day**

- f) Crisis team meet with staff closely involved, with friends and any other staff member who chooses to come - preparation for talking with students to counter feelings of anger, despair, shock, etc.

Also information on discussion about suicide - signs to watch out for amongst students (see resource sheet).

## **3 Working with Students**

### **Aims**

Provide support during grief process by providing a safe environment for them to explore feelings.

Teachers to read and discuss statement with form class. Classes all informed of “safe” places, ie Retreat, and support available in school as well.

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---

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		LAST REVIEW 18/10/16
TITLE: <b>SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES</b>		ISSUE NO: 3
		PAGE: 7 OF 9

---

Best friends need to be identified, informed and counselled by Guidance Counsellor or a well liked teacher.

Friends counselled about family's wishes for support and contact, what is appropriate, ie card, phone calls, visits, etc.

School activities continue as normally as possible - gives security.

Assembly - prayer or appropriate reading to draw school together for mutual support. Cultural awareness important.

Duty at interval and lunchtime - very important that extra staff are around and visible. Perhaps some duty relief for staff personally involved. House Leader to check with all subject teachers that name be removed immediately from roll to avoid distressing situations. Also teacher to be alerted to handing back work which includes the deceased's name.

Form teacher or member of crisis team could monitor deceased's timetable by checking with subject teachers for signs of distress in friends. Guidance counsellor to be available.

More intensive work with deceased's class:

- Considerable time (one period initially with Guidance Counsellor and Form Teacher present) allowed for talking about person, ways of expressing feelings and general support to one another.
- Session on understanding grief and accepting feelings of guilt, anger, sadness, etc.
- In the case of a suicide, students need to realise suicide was a choice, but a poor choice, so that deceased is not romanticised or develops as a heroic figure.
- A follow up period, possibly taken by an outsider or an active period of:
  - a) Card making.
  - b) A collage of class's review of term including the deceased.

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LAST REVIEW 18/10/16

TITLE: **SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES**

ISSUE NO: 3

PAGE: 8 OF 9

---

c) Eulogy for house assembly.

- Funeral - students given opportunity to attend in school uniform if family agree. Emotional time, so as many adults as possible too. Notes from parents to give permission.
- A member of the church or marae or family invited beforehand to explain aspects of the service or protocol - may be unfamiliar.
- Students encouraged to send messages to the family, individually or as a class effort, if this is in accordance with family wishes.

## **Crisis End**

The funeral probably sees a lessening of tension because it signifies a finality in some ways to students. It is now 2-4 days since the event and many structures have been in place to help the school through.

The emphasis now needs to be a gradual return to normality but an awareness of support for each other's needs.

Aftershock can last for weeks or months. Staff and guidance department need to be aware of this. In the case of suicide, others may try the same thing to solve their problems.



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---

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		LAST REVIEW 18/10/16
TITLE: <b>SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES</b>		ISSUE NO: 3
		PAGE: 9 OF 9

---

## **5 Review (week after funeral)**

- a) Once the event has been managed, debrief key staff.
- b) Review the plan and arrange for the necessary approval for the revised plan.
- c) Review staff within the management team.
- d) Identify staff training needs and arrange training if necessary.
- e) Report to staff about the outcome and advise any improvements to the plan.
- f) Revised plan approved by Board of Trustees.

## **6 Annual Review**

- a) Key members of the response team meet to discuss roles. SMT to initiate and to manage.
- b) Plan to be reviewed annually.
- c) All staff reminded of the plan at the beginning of the year.
- d) Staff responsible for media contact are trained.
- e) Traumatic Incident Crisis Response Plan and contact list to be updated annually or as and when staff personnel leave or are replaced.