

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community. Yesterday one of our Year 8 students died traumatically. Our thoughts are with the student's family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about your child's reaction or expressions of feeling about this sad news. Reactions and feelings vary and are part of a normal response to such events. Let your child know that you are aware of this incident and that you will listen to their concerns at any time. Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them. When talking about traumatic death try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems.

Two important messages to promote are that all of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable and that young people should tell an adult if they are worried about themselves or a friend.

If your child is accessing the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to the service.

I have attached some general information and a list of helpful websites and services that may support you and your child.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

Please feel free to contact the following staff for information about the school's support plan or if you have any concerns about your child. Contacting the nominated staff is an effective way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns.

Ms Sally Shearing on 8327 5200

Mr Bevan Constable on 8327 5200

If visiting the school, please remember to follow our signing in processes.

Please note that information about this incident may already be circulating via social media networks. If you are aware of any insensitive, inappropriate or inaccurate information we would encourage you to contact the school or the network provider to seek to have this content removed.

Yours sincerely

Harry Stassinopoulos

Principal

Seaford Secondary College

## Information for parents following a traumatic event

### When talking with children/young people remember ...

#### **Each child's or young person's response will be unique and a wide range of reactions are possible**

Their reaction will be influenced by their personality, what is happening in their life now and their ability to adjust to change.

Your child, whatever age, needs to find safe ways to express their feelings. They may experience a range of emotions including confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness.

Parental understanding, reassurance and attention are very important at this time. Be guided by your child's need to talk and make it clear to them that you will be available whenever they need you.

#### **Children and young people who have experienced other concerns or losses in their lives may find it harder to cope**

Children and young people who have experienced other concerns or losses, e.g. separation/divorce of parents, death of a relative or pet, moving house/school) may find it harder to cope. They may become upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns, even though they may have appeared to be coping before the event. If your son/daughter is already using the services of a therapist for wellbeing concerns, you should ensure they are made aware of this event.

#### **Children and young people may have many questions. They may want to know exactly what happened**

The school will have provided your child/children with consistent information about the incident. Specific details about a traumatic event are not provided to students as this information can be potentially harmful to students' wellbeing. As parents, it is important to steer discussion towards the positive "help seeking" actions young people can take, such as talking to a trusted adult (e.g. parent, counsellor, teacher, relative or friend), or using the agencies or websites listed at the end of this sheet.

#### **"Tell an adult if you are worried about a friend"**

This is an important message to share with your child/children in any discussion about the issues. Children and young people sometimes share their feelings with friends, e.g. in conversations, letters, emails, text messages, on the internet. If children and young people are aware of friends who they fear may hurt themselves, they should tell an adult immediately.

#### **Monitor the internet and mobile communication tools/social media platforms**

Following a traumatic incident, students will be texting news about the death (both accurate and rumoured), calling for impromptu gatherings (both safe and unsafe), creating online memorials (both moving and risky), and posting messages (both appropriate and hostile) about the deceased. This happens quickly and often to large numbers of people. You can proactively monitor, moderate and influence what and how information is shared between students.

If you are aware of any insensitive, inappropriate or inaccurate information we would encourage you to contact the school or the network provider to seek to have this information removed.

#### **Be aware that you or your child may be affected by possible media responses to the event**

You may decide to protect against certain coverage or watch television news coverage together so that you can discuss any reactions or concerns and ensure your son/daughter feels supported. Be aware that certain types of media reporting can add to a young person's vulnerability.

#### **Some children and young people may show reactions weeks/months/a year after an event**

If you are concerned about your child's reactions—for example, if there are changes to their behaviour at school or at home—it is important to speak to the principal or student counsellor at the school. This may result in a referral to one of the agencies listed below.

#### **Be aware that school staff will also be affected**

Some staff may also be managing difficult emotions. Adult counselling support is provided to all our school staff through a process outside the school.

**Respond to community concern with respect**

When speaking with other members in the community, respect the affected family and avoid sensationalising the tragedy. Encourage young people to seek help for their own wellbeing and when they have concerns about their friends.

## Where can parents and young people get more information and help?

General Practitioner

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) 8236 1234 (9am-5pm)

Parent helpline 1300 364 100

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

beyondblue 1300 22 4636 [www.youthbeyondblue.com/home](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/home)

eheadspace 1800 650 890 [www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au)

reachout <http://au.reachout.com/>

Women's and Children's Hospital 8161 7000 [www.wch.sa.gov.au/](http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/)

CAMHS trauma information <http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/divisions/mentalhealth/traumainf/index.html>