

Dell Rapids School District

Member of North Central Association

"Home of the Quarriers"

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February 7, 2013

Dear Middle School Parents:

First and foremost, we want to assure you of our sincere desire and dedication to the physical, emotional, and educational well-being of your child. The DRSD community of caring and supportive adults has as our mission to provide students the tools and support they need to not only manage their grief but to also move forward in a strong and positive way. In doing so, we are striving to maintain as much normalcy in our school day as possible so students have the comfort of knowing that this portion of their world is a constant and reliable force in an uncertain and sometimes confusing world.

The death of an individual in the school community is a traumatic event and one to which the school must respond in a caring and supportive way. When the death of a sibling of a classmate occurs, adolescents want to know how to do the best things they can for their friends. Adolescents who have experienced the death of someone close also need to deal with the memories of their own close relational losses.

Please let me now take a moment to address the current situation. The development of this protocol comes from a belief that schools are a community of people who care for one another. I would like to share with you the ways we are caring for your child...

- We are posting resources for parents and students on our school district webpage (under "News and Bulletins"). There are resources posted there at this time and we will continue to update them as we find additional tools we feel can be of use to our students and their families.
- We have provided students the opportunity to visit with school counselors on staff that are available for students in need. We have reached out to the Dell Rapids Area Ministerial Association, school psychologists, and other trained professionals from the Sioux Falls Area who are here to provide support services to our students and their families. We have set aside an area in the school for students to gather and seek comfort. This has been available all week and will continue to be available through the coming days.
- We are partnering with the HelpLine center to offer students 24-hour personal access to professional trained counseling service via suicide crisis hotline telephone number and texting center. Students are being offered contact information and are being encouraged to reach out as they feel the need. In addition, they are being asked to share this information with their friends in order to spread the word as quickly as possible. If you would like the contact information, it is posted on our school district webpage (under "News and Bulletins").
- We have had teachers meet with their student groups to discuss what has happened. This occurred yesterday (2/6/13) at the end of the day. Here are the contents of the discussion that occurred:

Our Mission: Innovate – Inspire – Improve

Dell Rapids Schools *1216 N. Garfield, Dell Rapids, SD 57022
*(605) 428-5473 *Fax (605) 428-5609 *www.dr-k12.org

Guidelines For Today's Classroom Discussion:

Seeing a friend try to cope with a loss may scare or upset some children who have had little or no experience with death and grieving. Here are some suggestions you can provide to children on how to deal with "secondary" losses.

~ Explain to your class that someone you all care about has lost a very important person in his or her life. If possible tell them when that student will be returning to school (Probably Friday 02-08-13). Share with them that you want to talk as a class about how they feel individually and how their classmate might feel and how they can be helpful when they return.

~ Remind students it is not appropriate to ask questions about details of the death. Students are naturally curious and want to know these details, however please make them aware that asking questions about the specifics of the death (suicide) can make things uncomfortable for the students who experienced this loss.

~ Help them to communicate with their peers by giving students tips on what to say.

<p>~ Appropriate Statements Might Include:</p> <p>"I am so sorry to hear of your loss." "Is there anything I can do to be helpful?" "If you need someone to talk to or just to be with I am here for you." "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know that I care." "Tell me what I can do for you."</p>	<p>~ Avoid Statements Like:</p> <p>"I'm sure you will feel better soon." "At least you still have _____." "Don't upset anyone else or let them see you cry."</p>
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~ Help students anticipate some changes that could occur in their friends' behaviors. It is important for kids to understand that their grieving friend may act differently, may withdraw from their friends for a while, might seem angry or very sad, etc., but that these do not mean long lasting changes.

~ Remind students that their friendships may be an important source of support to their friend or classmate. Even normal social activities such as inviting a friend over to play, going to the park, playing sports, watching movies, etc. are often much needed and help return some sense of normalcy.

~ Be a good listener... Make yourself available to your friend when they are ready to talk.

~ Continue to encourage children who are worried about their friend or classmate to talk with a caring adult. Remind them that they cannot be solely responsible for making their friend feel better.

~ Ask students how they think they could be supportive. Think out loud with them about what they can do and hold classroom discussions if appropriate.

Here are a couple of websites to help parents work through the grief process at home:

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/griefwar.pdf

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/death.html>

http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/children_grief_what_they_know_how_they_feel_how_help

http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/your_childs_emotions/how_to_help_your_child_grieve.aspx

In the weeks to come, please encourage your child to seek out help as needed. School counselors, teachers, and administrators are here to help! We understand the grieving process is different for each person. We desire to help students cope and recover in their own personal way and within their own individual timeline. If you have questions, concerns or information to share with us, please call the middle school office. We look forward to partnering with you as we deal with this sad loss and look expectantly toward a brighter future.

Sincerely,

Fran Ruesink
Dell Rapids Middle School Principal