POLICY SECTION: SCHOOLS

SUB-SECTION:

POLICY NAME: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING

POLICY NO: S. 03

Date Approved:	**Date of Next Review:**	**Dates of Amendments:**
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Cross References:
S.17 Suspected Child Abuse Reporting
Ministries of Children and Youth Services, and Education, Open Minds, Healthy Minds, 2011
Government of Ontario, Moving On Mental Health: A System that makes sense for children and youth, 2011.

Appendix A- Mental Health Response Guidelines
Appendix B- Suicide Intervention Guidelines
Appendix C- Mental Health Crisis Response Guidelines

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Purpose:

This policy affirms the TCDSB's commitment to build awareness about mental health concerns affecting students, and to guide the response to critical mental health issues impacting students. The care and support of our students is the collective responsibility of all members of our Catholic community.

Scope and Responsibility:

The policy extends to staff members, students and their families while in attendance at school or engaged at other TCDSB events. The Director of Education, with the assistance of Supervisory Officers and Principals, is responsible for this policy.

Alignment with MYSP:

Living Our Catholic values

Strengthening Public Confidence

Fostering Student Achievement and Well-Being

POLICY SECTION: **SCHOOLS**

SUB-SECTION:

POLICY NAME: **MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING**

POLICY NO: **S. 03**

Policy:

Employees of the Toronto Catholic District School Board shall refer any students with identifiable mental health concerns to the school's local mental health response staff as per the Mental Health Response Guidelines (Appendix A). In the event that the mental health concern involves suicidal ideation, employees shall implement the Suicide Intervention Guidelines. (Appendix B). **In the event of a mental health crisis occurrence, employees of the Toronto Catholic District School Board shall implement the Mental Health Crisis Response Guidelines (Appendix C) .**

Regulations:

1. Mental Health Response Guidelines and Suicide Intervention Guidelines have been developed for the TCDSB. All staff members shall use these guidelines when dealing with students presenting mental health concerns.

2. **Mental Health Crisis Response Guidelines have been developed for the TCDSB. All staff shall use these guidelines when dealing with a mental health crisis occurrence** .

3. The TCDSB shall provide ongoing professional learning for all employees about the types of mental health concerns impacting students

4. To sustain awareness about mental health concerns, all employees will annually review the Mental Health Response Guidelines ~~and~~ **,** Suicide Intervention Guidelines, **and Mental Health Crisis Response Guidelines**.

5. The dignity and privacy of the student experiencing mental health concerns will be respected in all circumstances.

6. The Director of Education is empowered to modify the guidelines as required, and will notify the Board of Trustees of any changes made to the guidelines.

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POLICY SECTION: **SCHOOLS**

SUB-SECTION:

POLICY NAME: **MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING**

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Definitions:

Mental Health Concern

Includes, but is not limited to, any concerns of a psychological or social –emotional nature as outlined in the Mental Health Response Guidelines and the Suicide Intervention Guidelines.

Mental Health Response Staff

Staff includes administrators, social workers, psychology staff, and/or guidance counselors, as outlined in the Mental Health Response Guidelines.

Mental Health Crisis Occurrence

Includes, but is not limited to, any occurrence that results in a negative mental health impact for the school or students. For example, the aftermath of a violent / traumatic incident at the school /in the community, serious illness of student/ staff, death of student or staff member (e.g. illness, accident, suicide).

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Evaluation and Metrics:

The effectiveness of the policy will be determined by measuring the following:

1. TCDSB staff will consult with other Catholic school boards in Ontario with respect to their implementation of mental health policies and procedures.

2. Special Services personnel will annually review the Mental Health Response Guidelines ~~and~~ , the Suicide Intervention Guidelines, **and the Mental health Crisis Response Guidelines** and assess their effectiveness.

APPENDIX A

Toronto Catholic District School Board

Mental Health Crisis Response Guidelines

2014

APPROVED

Toronto Catholic District School Board

SPECIAL SERVICES

Mental Health Crisis Response Guidelines 2014

TORONTO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
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MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE GUIDELINES

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." (John 14:1)

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Executive Summary

The ***TCDSB Mental Health Crisis Response Guidelines*** are intended to help promote mentally healthy schools for all students. Crisis Response exists along a continuum of mental health care and support for all TCDSB students. It is grounded in our Catholic Faith and promotes positive contributors to our community. The Ministry of Education has encouraged School Boards to develop Crisis Response Guidelines to address Mental Health Crisis situations. Crisis Response Guidelines are intended to support and guide school board staff as they respond to crisis incidents of a serious nature which have a significantly distressing impact to staff, students, and school community. The following guidelines have been developed with board staff, consultation with local school boards, as well as the inclusion of evidence based practices from current research. The following guidelines align with the TCDSB Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy (**S.03**), and include an overview of key considerations, general guidelines for responding, best practices, and templates. Crisis response provides opportunities for grief support, maintaining a focus on normal activities, and providing supports to students and staff.

Nature of Crisis Occurrences (may include)

- Aftermath of a violent/traumatic incident at school/community.
- Serious illness of student, or staff member
- Death of student or staff member (e.g. illness, accident, or suicide)

Mental Health Response Team

According to the TCDSB Mental Health Response Guidelines ***(included in the TCDSB Mental Health and Well-being Policy S.03),*** the Mental Health Response Team includes: Principal (or designate), Vice Principal, Guidance Counsellors, Social Work, and School Psychology Staff assigned to your school.

- The Mental Health Response Team may also be assisted by members of other groups or disciplines as determined by the Mental Health Response Team (e.g. Chaplains, CYWs, Teachers)

- The Mental Health Response Team is available to assist school administration in supporting students and staff through a crisis incident of a serious nature by: responding ***immediately*** to the request, initiating the healing process within the school community, recommending and assisting with necessary tasks, discussing delegation of responsibilities, providing emotional support to students, identify students at risk, and suggesting community resources.

Principles that have guided the development of the TCDSB Mental Health Crisis Response Guidelines include the following:

- Schools should strive to treat all student deaths in the same way. Having one approach for a student who dies of cancer (for example) and another for a student who dies by other means reinforces the potential for unfortunate stigma.

- Help is available for ***any*** student who may be struggling with mental health issues or suicidal thoughts, rising from one's reaction to trauma or a crisis incident.

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CRISIS RESPONSE PROCEDURES[1]

Please note: The following steps are recommended. As most crisis situations are unique, some may apply, while others may not.

- ❒ The principal/designate recognizes or is advised of a crisis incident.

- ❒ The principal/designate *ensures immediate management of the situation* (i.e. calls the police, ambulance etc.) and proceeds to gather and verify facts surrounding the incident as quickly as possible.

- ❒ The principal/designate immediately notifies superintendent of the crisis incident. **The school superintendent informs the local Trustee of the crisis incident.**

- ❒ *The Principal, in consultation with their local superintendent and the Communications Department, prepare procedures for responding to the media*, as well as the appointment of a media spokesperson as needed. (See Dealing with the Media section pg. 16.)

- ❒ The principal designate ***contacts the Mental Health Response Team***.

- ❒ **In the case of an injury/death, the principal or designate contacts the family of the deceased/injured.**
  - Find out if the deceased /injured has any siblings enrolled in other schools. If so, then notify the principals of those schools.

  - Obtain permission to release the cause of death (where applicable) from the parents or family of deceased. If the parents do not give permission to release the cause of death, respect for their wishes should be maintained **(see special consideration when speaking with family of deceased in Appendix A). The principal may take the opportunity to establish who would be the most suitable person for the school to communicate with during this time of grieving (the family may designate a specific family friend or family member).**

The Principal, superintendent or designate contacts the school Mental Health Response Team (i. e., school social worker, psychologist, and guidance) who meets to *develop a plan of action*. Roles and responsibilities are clarified and defined. ***(See Crisis Response Action Plan for details)***

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[1] **Taken from "Guidelines for a Crisis Response 1995 (Chapter 4, page 5) and "School Based Youth Suicide Prevention GUIDE USF.**

Crisis Response Action Plan

Scope of Crisis Events and Intervention Phases

Several points should be highlighted related to the crisis incident. Actions taken and communication of information should be guided by the developmental age/special needs of the students involved. Clearly, the scope of the event (major school wide crisis as contrasted with small group or individual crisis) profoundly shapes how many staff members are needed during the various phases of the crisis. Also, the time frame involved is a consideration. Difficulties that must be dealt with during the crisis itself raise many problems that are quite distinct from those arising in the immediate aftermath and in the days and weeks following the event (e.g., hysteria and fear as contrasted with grief reactions and post-traumatic stress).

- ❒ ***Schedule a time and place to notify school staff members.*** This meeting should be arranged as soon as possible. (See page 12 for sample staff meeting agenda)

- ❒ Develop a ***brief written communication for*** **students** summarizing the facts of the incident and including a prayer. **(Refer to Appendices C, D, E,)** In preparation of the communication to all students, consider information that may have circulated via social media. Meet with students in classrooms if needed (avoid assemblies). Prepared communication should be read by the classroom teacher to all students. Assistance in reading the communication can be provided by administration, or members of the Mental Health Response Staff. Consider if there is a need for Mental Health Response Staff to prioritise or attend the deceased/victim's classes, or the classes of any other vulnerable students or groups.

- ❒ ***Establish support/counselling rooms in the school and ensure that students and staff know where they are.***

- ❒ ***Prepare a communication for all parents (*****Refer to samples in APPENDIX F, G, H, I, J,)**

- ❒ ***Principal or designate gathers information pertaining to any funeral arrangements.*** Share information with staff, students, and parents, with the permission of the deceased's family. **(See Appendix A)**

- ❒ ***Principal to debrief school staff at the end of the day*** Mental Health Response Team to be present.

- ❒ Principal, or designate and Mental Health Response Team reconvene to evaluate progress of the action plan and determine if further service is required by the Mental Health Response team. Consider debrief opportunities for the next 5 days (if appropriate). Identify and distribute any available information/ support for staff.

- ❒ Arrange for an opportunity for members of the Mental Health Response Team to debrief their personal experience following the crisis response

Crisis Response Contacts

This page can be completed as much as possible at the beginning of each school year.

Mental Health Response Team Members	Title	Cell Phone #	Voice Mail
1.	Social Worker		
2.	Psychology		
3.	Guidance		
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

Other Useful Contacts:

Child and Youth Worker

_____

Chaplaincy Leader (secondary)/Central Religious and Family Life Department (elementary)

_____

Police Contact Person

_____

Fire Department Contact Person

_____

School Board Media Person

_____

Trustee

_____

Parish Priest

_____

CSAC Chair

_____

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Best Practices Following a Crisis Occurrence

Consider

- ✓ **Refer to Crisis Response Procedures Section**
- ✓ Addressing blaming, scapegoating, or rumours
- ✓ Continually monitoring the school's emotional climate (Has there been an increase in fights or school delinquency following the crisis occurrence?)
- ✓ Identifying and reaching out to at-risk students who stopped attending school following the crisis occurrence

Avoid

Glamorizing, romanticizing, minimizing, or sensationalizing any death (e.g. "he will be with his girlfriend who predeceased him", "Now that he is gone, people will take notice of what he was experiencing", "It is like Romeo and Juliet", "He/she are just like (*insert famous celebrity name.*")

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Memorialization

"Blessed are those who mourn, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Mathew 5:4)

Key Considerations

It is very important that schools strive to treat all deaths in the same way. This approach helps minimize stigma, possible glamorization of the death and shows sensitivity to the grieving family members and friends of the deceased. Our primary intent is to support students and avoid further potential harm.

Wherever possible, schools should both meet with the student's friends and coordinate with the family, in the interest of identifying a meaningful, safe approach to acknowledging the loss.

Funeral, Memorial Services, and Visitations

It is strongly advised that a funeral service/funeral mass NOT be held on school grounds. School administrators are urged to focus on maintaining a regular schedule, structure and routine.

In situations where school personnel are able to collaborate with the family regarding the funeral service/funeral mass, and/or visitation arrangements, it is strongly suggested that the service be held outside of school hours. This would allow students to attend with their parent(s). In the event that the funeral service or funeral mass, or visitation occurs during school hours, students can be excused from classes to attend ONLY with parental permission. Schools are discouraged from arranging transportation to such services.

Spontaneous Memorials/Permanent Memorials/Scholarships

Permanent memorials can prove to be upsetting reminders to some bereaved students, and therefore disruptive to the school's goal of maintaining a regular routine. It is recommended that they be established off school grounds. Moreover, the school should bear in mind that once it plants a tree, puts up a plaque, installs a park bench, or establishes a named scholarship for one deceased student, it should be prepared to do so for others, which can become quite difficult to sustain over time. The school's goal should be to balance the students' need to grieve with the goal of limiting the risk of inadvertently glamorizing the death.

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It is recommended that schools discourage requests to create and distribute t-shirts and buttons bearing images of the deceased by explaining that, while these items may be comforting to some students, they may be quite upsetting to others.

The emptiness of the deceased student's chair can be unsettling, after approximately five days (or after the funeral), seat assignments may be re-arranged to create a new environment. Teachers should explain in advance that the intention is to strike a balance between compassionately honouring the student who has died while at the same time returning the focus back to the classroom curriculum.

It is NOT recommended that flags be flown at half-mast (refer to TCDSB Policy S.06 Policy Regarding National Flag, The flag is flown at half-mast at the discretion of the Director of Education).

If there is a tradition of including a tribute to deceased students who would have graduated with the class, schools may wish to include a brief statement acknowledging and naming those students from the graduating class who have died. Final decisions about what to include in such tributes should be made by an adult.

Events Dedicated to the Deceased

The student's classmates may wish to dedicate an event (such as a dance performance, poetry reading, or sporting event) to the memory of their friend.
An appropriate way in which to acknowledge and remember the deceased student may be through a dedicated school mass.

It can be helpful for schools in consultation with their school's Mental Health Response Team, to proactively suggest a meeting with the student's close friends to talk about the type and timing of any memorialization. This can provide an important opportunity for the students to be heard and for the school to sensitively explain its rationale for permitting certain kinds of activities and not others.

Some Suggestions May Include:

- Memorial mass at the parish
- Raising funds to help the family defray their funeral expenses
- Making a book available in the school (e.g. in school chapel, or in an area which is not located in a high traffic zone, but easily monitored by school staff) for a week or so in which students can write messages to the family, share memories of the deceased, or offer condolences; the book can then be presented to the family on behalf of the school community.

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Notifications to Staff, Students, and Parents

**Avoid using the school PA system for announcements where possible.*

Informing Staff

- The ideal is to have a "face to face" emergency staff meeting as soon as possible (e.g., in the morning before school, at recess, lunch)
- If possible, have one or more Mental Health Response Team members present at the staff meeting to provide support
- The goal of the meeting is to share accurate, factual information about the incident/death, provide teachers with resources to deal with students, and to share the school's specific plan for crisis response.

Sample Agenda for Initial Staff Meeting

- Share accurate information about the incident/death.
- Introduce the school's Mental Health Response Team members.
- Explain the school's crisis response Action Plan for the day, including:
  - ✓ Where support staff will be located in the school
  - ✓ Throughout the day students may need to partake in the available counselling, this should be permitted. Where possible continue to deliver curriculum to maintain the routine of the class.
  - ✓ Who will talk to the students about the incident
  - ✓ What message will be given to the students and parents
  - ✓ Information regarding any formal notifications being sent to parents
- Have the Mental Health Response Team discuss with teachers what signs or behaviours in students may be concerning and be indicative that the student is in need of support.
- Remind teachers to keep an accurate record of attendance. They should follow the same system of providing passes to leave the classroom or of alerting the office of student absences as they normally would.
- Offer staff assistance with notification to students in the case that the staff member is not comfortable or is otherwise unable to notify their students.
- Let teachers know, that if the teacher is comfortable doing so, the teacher can facilitate a class discussion about the crisis incident.
- Provide teachers with information about resources that they can access if they feel that they need support (e.g. Benefit packages provided from TSU/TECT which may include Member Assistance Programs.)
- Allow time for teacher questions about the crisis response plan or procedures
- Provide information to teachers about any follow-up debrief meetings that will be held at a later time.

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Sample Agenda for Follow-up Staff Debrief

- Thank staff for their cooperation and support during the day.
- Remind staff to care for themselves and once again provide information regarding supports and resources available to them (e.g. benefit packages provided from TSU / TECT which may include Member Assistance Programs.)
- Allow time for teacher questions about the crisis response plan or procedures.
- Discuss the plans for the next day or few days including, where appropriate, information about funeral arrangements, staff coverage, ongoing resources and support for students.

Samples for Informing/Talking to Teachers about Incident/Death

- See "Informing the Students and Staff" (See Appendix B)
- See sample death notifications in Appendix C,D,E

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Notifying Students

- Ideally, students should be notified formally following notification to teachers (face to face meeting with teachers as discussed above)
- Depending on the nature of the incident/death, the Principal may choose to notify students through one or more of the following ways:
  - ✓ Provide Information Directly to Individual Classes: this may be appropriate in situations where the incident/death primarily impacts only a small portion of the school community and where the information provided may be of a sensitive nature.
  - ✓ Assembly of a Subset of the Student Population: this may be appropriate in situations where the incident/death primarily impacts a portion of the school community (e.g., only 2 classes or a few grades).
  - ✓ General PA Announcement: ideally this should be used in situations that impact the entire school body, taking into account the varying age of the students and the sensitivity of the information (i.e., some information that is suitable for intermediate students may not be suitable for kindergarten students); the information provided should be direct, informative, and calm. If using PA announcement, consider the inclusion of scripture/prayer. PA announcement as a method of notification is generally not recommended.
- The Principal may wish to have the Mental Health Response Team support him/her in notifying students directly or indirectly.

Samples for Informing/Talking to Students about Incident/Death

- See "Informing the Students and Staff" (Appendix B, C, D, E)
- See “Sample Death Notification Statement for Students” (Appendix C)

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Notifying Parents

- If the incident/death impacts the entire school community, then formal parent notification is necessary for the entire student body.
- If the death or incident only impacts a particular classroom, a notification may be sent to parents of impacted classrooms only.
- Formal notification to parents should be done in consultation with the Mental Health Response Team and in high profile media involved situations the principal may wish to review with the Board's Communications Department.
- In the case of the death of a student, formal notification to parents should be done in consultation with the parents of the deceased.
- Principals should avoid notifying parents via voicemail messages or "robo-calling" whenever possible, particularly when the information is of a sensitive nature. Written communication (e.g., letters or emails) is preferred.
- See "Sample Letter to Send Home" (See Appendixes G, H, I, J)

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Dealing with the Media

In high profile, media involved situations, the principal and superintendent will consult the TCDSB Communications Department, who will prepare an appropriate statement for the media and designate a media spokesperson.

In these situations principals should advise school staff not to speak with media. Remember that personal information about students, parents and staff **cannot** be legally disclosed without consent.

Dealing with Social Media

Many students, particularly in secondary school, now receive rapid notice of information such as a school crisis via texts, twitter, Facebook or some other form of social media. Schools may consider monitoring social media sites for rumours, derogatory/bully messages, and comments by students at risk. Appropriate responses might include posting comments that dispel rumours, and sharing resources for support. It is important to remind students to refrain from speculation on social media.

Taken from: Guidelines for a Crisis Response: After a Suicide Toolkit; Youth Suicide Prevention Guide: Responding to Crisis at a School from the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, Consultation with TCDSB Communications Dept.

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Acknowledgements

The current TCDSB Crisis Response Guidelines are based on the foundational work contained in "*Metropolitan Separate School Board Guidelines for a Crisis Response"* (1994). The TCDSB Crisis Response Guidelines Committee would also like to acknowledge the work of the TCDSB Social Work Department contained in "*Guidelines for a Crisis Response*" 2002, a compendium of relevant resources and tools. The current revisions would not have been possible without the support of our Superintendent of Student Achievement and Wellbeing – Special Services, Frank Piddisi, and the guidance of our Chief Social Worker, John Wilhelm, and Chief Psychologist Dr. Maria Kokai.

TCDSB Crisis Response Guideline writing team:

Chair: Patricia Marra-Stapleton	Mental Health Leader
Mina Addesa-Salustri	Social Worker
Maria Cruz	Social Worker
Dr. Rosalina De Sa Maini	Psychologist
Iwona Kaczmarzyk-Kozlowski	Psychological Associate
Grace Labao-Martins	Psychological Associate
Jazmine Orprecio	Psychological Associate
Sandra Pereira	Social Worker
Gisella Ragno	Social Worker

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