

**Aftermath intervention and
psychological support on
crisis incidents in kindergartens**
(Applicable to injury or death of students and staff)

Reference Book

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Contents

<u>Preface</u>	3
<u>Chapter One: Introduction</u>	4
Definition of a Crisis	4
Assessing the Impact of the Crisis Incident on Staff and Students	4
Basic Principles of Crisis Management and Psychological Support	5
<u>Chapter Two: The School Crisis Management Team</u>	6
Objectives of the School Crisis Management Team	6
Roles and Duties of School Crisis Management Team Members	6
Preparatory Work for School Crisis Management	9
<u>Chapter Three: School Crisis Management and Support</u>	10
Coordination and Division of Work in Crisis Management	10
Flow of Crisis Management and Support	10
1. Verifying Information	10
2. Convening a School Crisis Management Team Meeting	10
3. Liaising with Supporting Agencies	12
4. Convening a Staff Meeting	12
5. Communication and Support for Parents	13
6. Support for Students	14
7. Handling the Media	15
8. Evaluation of Crisis Management	16
<u>Bibliography</u>	17

Annexes	18-39
Annex 1a: <u>Common Initial Post-crisis Reactions of Adults</u>	20
Annex 1b: <u>Common Initial Post-crisis Reactions of Children</u>	21
Annex 1c: <u>Continuous and/or Serious Reactions Triggered by Crisis Incident</u>	23
Annex 2: <u>Telephone Directory of Support and Services</u>	24
Annex 3: <u>Venue Arrangement</u>	25
Annex 4: <u>Coping Strategies</u>	26
Annex 5: <u>Relaxation Exercise</u>	27
Annex 6: <u>Special Notice to Parents (Sample 1)</u>	28
Annex 7: <u>Special Notice to Parents (Sample 2)</u>	29
Annex 8: <u>Frequently Asked Questions on How Parents Can Help their Children Handle Emotions</u>	30
Annex 9: <u>Content of Parent Meeting</u>	32
Annex 10: <u>How Should Teachers Respond to Students' Possible Reactions</u>	33
Annex 11: <u>How to Explain the Concept of Death to Students</u>	35
Annex 12: <u>Press Release (Sample 1)</u>	38
Annex 13: <u>Press Release (Sample 2)</u>	39

Preface

Crisis management is a highly challenging task. Only when precautions are taken can we stay calm amid a crisis.

This reference book sets out the intervention measures and psychological support for crisis situations. It aims to enable kindergartens (KGs) (including KGs, KG-cum-child care centres and schools with KG classes) to render appropriate intervention and psychological support for students, staff (e.g. teachers, staff of school general office and janitors), parents and KGs according to their needs in the wake of crisis to help them overcome the situation and help KGs resume normal operation. For the emergency handling of accidents, suspected child abuse cases or crisis situations, please refer to the relevant chapters of the Kindergarten Administration Guide and the Education Bureau Circular No. 9/2015 on [Handling Emergency Situations in Schools](#).

KGs are encouraged to read and make appropriate modifications and adjustments to this reference book according to school-based needs to formulate support plans for various types of crisis. They should also get familiar with the intervention and support procedures, as well as points to note for actual operation before the occurrence of crises.

Chapter One: Introduction

Definition of a Crisis

In the face of a crisis, an individual's responsiveness is compromised in a way that the usual problem solving strategies are inadequate to cope with the current special situation.

Incidents that might precipitate a crisis in KGs include accidental death, critical injury, suicidal or self-harm behaviours of students and/or staff (e.g. teachers, staff of school general office and janitors), violent incidents (e.g. child abuse) and natural disasters. These incidents may, inter alia, bring chaos to KGs, undermine their safety and stability and make their staff and students feel threatened, lost, insecure and helpless. When a crisis occurs, the KG concerned is required to take action as soon as practicable to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding and minimise the negative impact of the crisis on staff and students. Moreover, the KG will normally have to account for the incident to different members of the media. All these may induce great pressure on the school administration system. Under such circumstances, the KG concerned should take different levels of contingency measures to minimise the negative impacts of the incident.

Assessing the Impact of the Crisis Incident on Staff and Students

It is the interaction effects of various factors rather than a single factor that determine the impact of a crisis incident on staff and students. Such factors mainly include: (a) the characteristics of the crisis incident and (b) personal risk factors. We also need to understand the responses of staff and students to assess the impact of the crisis incident on them.

The characteristics of a crisis incident can include its predictability, duration, intensity and consequences. Generally speaking, incidents that happen suddenly and unexpectedly, cause serious injury / death and persist for a long time may have more serious impact on staff and students. Personal risk factors include physical proximity, emotional proximity and personal vulnerabilities. In general, individuals who are present at the scene of the crisis, have a close relationship with the victim of the crisis, have mental health problems, lack social support or have weak coping skills are more susceptible to the impact of a crisis. KGs are advised to assess the psychological and emotional impact of the incident on staff and students to determine the intervention or support measures for them (see [Chapter Three](#) for details).

Basic Principles of Crisis Management and Psychological Support

When facing a crisis, it is common for students or staff to have physiological, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social reactions, e.g. feeling upset, having difficulties concentrating, feeling fatigued and having poor appetite (see [Annex 1a](#) and [Annex 1b](#)). In most cases, such reactions will subside after a few days or weeks as a process of natural recovery. In the initial stage after the crisis, we should provide basic support to the affected staff by helping them understand the basic facts of the incident and cope with the impact that follows. Appropriate psychoeducation should be provided by, for example, informing them of the possible emotional reactions and teaching them coping strategies. As for students, the basic support is to provide a stable and safe environment.

However, some staff and students may be more severely affected. They may experience persistent difficulty in falling asleep, frequent nightmares, or repeated flashbacks of the incident to the extent that their daily life is affected (see [Annex 1c](#)). As such, we should maintain communication with them to learn about their needs and arrange for appropriate counselling services or professional support accordingly.

There are multiple factors determining the impact of a crisis incident on staff and students, including the nature of the incident, their relationship with the victim and their coping skills. Hence, the severity of the impact of a crisis on people varies among individuals. Inappropriate intervention may impede their recovery mechanism. On the contrary, the lack of timely/appropriate support to those in need may delay their recovery process. It is thus of paramount importance that KGs assess the possible impact of a crisis on individual staff and students to identify those in need and provide them with appropriate support.

In addition, KGs should note that the impact of a crisis on staff and students may change over time. Hence, they should continue to observe and assess the needs of individual staff and students at different stages (e.g. a few hours, a few days and a few weeks after the crisis incident) and arrange appropriate support accordingly.

With adequate advance preparation, KGs will be able to assess the possible impact of a crisis on their staff and students, so that timely and appropriate intervention and support can be rendered in time of a crisis.

Chapter Two: The School Crisis Management Team

Objectives of the School Crisis Management Team

KGs should set up a School Crisis Management Team (SCMT), establish a crisis management mechanism and formulate relevant procedures and contingency plans for various crises and emergency situations. The objectives of the SCMT are as follows:

- **Safety:** to ensure the safety of all students and staff (e.g. teachers, staff of school general office and janitors).
- **Stability:** to re-establish stability of the KG routines as soon as possible.
- **Information Dissemination:** to ensure the consistency of information disseminated to curb the spread of rumours.
- **Identification:** to identify affected staff and students for referral to appropriate counselling and follow-up services to prevent the deterioration of distress.
- **Emotional Support:** to provide emotional support to staff and students in distress and help them readapt to their lives.
- **Empowerment:** to facilitate the personal growth of staff and students through effective emergency response.

Roles and Duties of School Crisis Management Team Members

KGs may refer to the recommendations below to assign, in the light of their manpower and expertise of staff, the roles and duties of SCMT members. KGs should encourage SCMT members to familiarise themselves with their own roles and those of other members for better coordination in crisis management, so that appropriate intervention and support can be effectively provided.

Member	Roles	Duties
Team Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead members to formulate a crisis management support plan• Make important decisions relating to crisis management with school management• Oversee and coordinate crisis management issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Verify information (e.g. number of casualties, severity of injuries or condition of students) with relevant parties• Discuss with school management important decisions relating to crisis management• Seek support from the Education Bureau (EDB) and/or relevant government departments/other organisations• Convene members and activate crisis management procedures

Member	Roles	Duties
		<p>and lead them to discuss relevant support measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preside over staff meetings • Coordinate responses to media; assign a spokesperson to disseminate information and answer enquiries • Evaluate the support plan after the crisis is settled
Staff Liaison In-charge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate support for staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a phone contact group with staff for prompt dissemination of information after a crisis (e.g. basic information of the incident and arrangements for emergency meetings) • Arrange and assist the team leader in conducting staff meetings • Keep staff posted of the information of the incident • Prepare and disseminate to staff information on support for students (See related parts on “Support for Students” in Section 6 of Chapter Three)
Parents Liaison In-charge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate support for the victim’s family • Coordinate communication with other parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact and offer support to the victim’s family • Contact parents of students affected by the incident • Prepare and disseminate circulars and relevant information to parents • Make arrangements to answer parents’ enquiries and organise parent meetings if necessary
Community Liaison In-charge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate external resources to provide support for KGs, staff and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an updated list of community resources, including a telephone directory of support services (Annex 2) • Get familiar with the referral procedures and services offered by different organisations in the community

Member	Roles	Duties
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with staff liaison-in-charge, parent liaison-in-charge and guidance personnel to ascertain the need for external support • Make/assist in making referrals for students, staff or parents in need to appropriate external support services • Keep contact with the relevant organisations after referrals, to provide appropriate follow-up support in school
Guidance Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional advice and support on school crisis management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional advice and support to KGs on impact assessment of the crisis incident, formulation of a support plan and external communication • Work together with external support personnel to arrange counselling services for staff and students in need, or make referrals for appropriate follow-up services when necessary • Provide support for parents
Other Team Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the duties in rendering support related to crisis management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make appropriate arrangements for venues and inform the staff concerned (Annex 3) • Get familiar with all the work procedures and the locations of relevant information/forms required to facilitate their prompt delivery to members when necessary • Provide secretarial support, e.g. taking minutes, collecting and compiling relevant information, and drafting letters and circulars • Assist other team members with their duties when necessary

Preparatory Work for School Crisis Management

In addition to setting up an SCMT, KGs should also prepare and update regularly the documents related to crisis management. KGs may refer to the templates and forms provided in this Reference Book and make amendments according to school-based needs:

Preparation of School Crisis Management Team

[Annex 2: Telephone Directory of Support and Services](#)

[Annex 3: Venue Arrangement](#)

Communication and Support for Parents

[Annex 6: Special Notice to Parents \(Sample 1\)](#)

[Annex 7: Special Notice to Parents \(Sample 2\)](#)

[Annex 9: Content of Parent Meeting](#)

Handling the Media

[Annex 12: Press Release \(Sample 1\)](#)

[Annex 13: Press Release \(Sample 2\)](#)

Chapter Three: School Crisis Management and Support

Coordination and Division of Work in Crisis Management

Systematic coordination and flexible deployment of manpower can foster mutual collaboration among staff (e.g. teachers, staff of school general office and janitors), thereby achieving more efficient and effective school crisis management.

Flow of Crisis Management and Support

KGs should make suitable judgement and decisions and arrange appropriate support, in the light of the characteristics, severity and actual circumstances of individual incident.

The safety of staff and students comes first in crisis management. For example, KGs should provide a safe environment for staff and students, and if necessary, arrange for them to leave the scene to avoid being harmed, provide them with food/water to meet their basic needs, and arrange for them the necessary medical care according to individual circumstances.

Once the safety of staff and students is ensured, KGs should handle the following things as necessary:

1. Verifying Information

When a KG is informed of a crisis incident, the KG should gather basic information (e.g. the persons involved, the time and place) of the incident from reliable sources such as parents of the students concerned, medical or police officers. The KG must verify the accuracy of the information, which will serve as the basis for making the initial assessment on the impact of the crisis and the reference for follow-up actions.

2. Convening a School Crisis Management Team Meeting

In the wake of a crisis incident, the KG should convene an SCMT meeting as soon as possible to discuss the following matters, among others:

- Assess the impact of the crisis incident on the KG
 - The KG should collect information about the crisis incident before the meeting is convened, which should include the basic information of the victim (e.g. the class that the victim is going to/ teaching and the persons that the victim has frequent contacts with at school), and that of the crisis incident (e.g. the details and media coverage of the incident). This would facilitate the KG in understanding the impact of the incident.
 - The KG may consider the following factors when assessing the impact of the crisis incident:

Characteristics of the Crisis Incident	Make an initial impact assessment of the crisis incident on the KG by giving comprehensive consideration to the four characteristics, namely predictability, duration, intensity and consequences, of the crisis incident.
Personal Risk Factors	<p><u>By considering the following four major factors, identify the at-risk staff and students:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Proximity: The closer a person stays at the scene of the incident, the higher the risk of having a serious negative impact. For instance, if a student witnessed a car accident or was present at the scene of the car accident, it is more likely that the incident may have a greater impact on him/her. • Emotional Proximity: The closer the relationship the person has with the victim, e.g. being their best friends or family members, or having an unsatisfactory relationship with the victim, the higher the risk of having a serious negative impact. For instance, if the victim is a beloved person in the school, it is more likely that the incident may have a greater impact on the staff and students. • Personal Vulnerabilities: The more vulnerability factors a person has (e.g. having mental health problems, lacking social/family support or having serious family problems), the higher the risk of having a serious negative impact. • Crisis Reactions: If students or staff exhibit excessive and intense physiological, cognitive, emotional, behavioural or social reactions, it indicates that the crisis incident may have a greater impact on them (Annex 1a, Annex 1b and Annex 1c).

- Devising the crisis management support plan
 - The KG may determine the scale, scope, target groups and persons-in-charge of the following items of crisis management work, having regard to the impact of the crisis incident:
 - Staff meeting ([see Section 4 of Chapter Three - Convening a Staff Meeting](#))

- Support for parents ([see Section 5 of Chapter Three - Communication and Support for Parents](#))
- Support for students ([see Section 6 of Chapter Three - Support for Students](#))
- Handling the media ([see Section 7 of Chapter Three - Handling the Media](#))
- Handling enquiries from the police
- Handling enquiries from parents and the public
 - including preparing scripts for staff to respond to enquiries from the public
 - arrangements on venue(s), time and person(s)-in-charge ([Annex 3](#))

3. Liaising with Supporting Agencies

When faced with a crisis incident, the KG should seek assistance from guidance personnel (e.g. social worker) to provide counselling services to staff and students and/or parents in need. When necessary, the KG may contact the School Development Section of the Regional Education Office or the Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres under the EDB for appropriate advice and/or support. If, after assessment, the KG believes that the crisis incident may have widespread impact on staff and students, they may seek additional on-site support from outside agencies (e.g. assistance from other social workers and guidance personnel from the school sponsoring bodies or those of the serving agencies/organisations; and psychological services provided by social service agencies) or make referrals for appropriate follow-up services where necessary. KGs should get to know about the services offered by relevant agencies/organisations in advance, maintain a telephone directory of the support services available ([Annex 2](#)) and update the information regularly.

4. Convening a Staff Meeting

After a crisis incident has taken place, the KG may convene a staff meeting when necessary. The agenda of the staff meeting should include the following items:

- To inform all staff of the situation; to clarify the accuracy of the information obtained; to answer questions from staff about the incident; explain and discuss the support plan;
- To finalise the implementation details of the support plan, explain the content and key points of the support work (see [Section 5 - Communication and Support for Parents](#), [Section 6 - Support for Students](#) and [Section 7 - Handling the Media of Chapter Three](#)) and distribute the relevant documents;
- To provide staff with appropriate psychoeducation including the possible emotional reactions they may exhibit ([Annex 1a](#)) and the appropriate coping strategies ([Annex 4](#) and [Annex 5](#)), and show understanding on their emotional reactions.

If staff members are found to be emotionally distressed, the school principal may, having regards to their needs, consider assigning other staff members to take up their duties.

The KG needs to observe their reactions continuously and seek follow-up counselling services from outside agencies if deemed necessary.

5. Communication and Support for Parents

Notification to Parents

The KG should inform parents concerned about the crisis incident as necessary and let them know about the support being provided or to be offered by school. The KG should also encourage parents to pay close attention to their children. When necessary, parents may discuss with school how to support their children. Under normal circumstances, parents are advised not to talk about the crisis incident with children if they are not affected by it to avoid causing them unnecessary traumas or emotional reactions.

The KG may refer to the guidelines below and draft a special notice ([Annex 6](#) and [Annex 7](#)) to parents on the day of the incident if parents are to be informed about the incident:

- Respect privacy. Do not disclose personally identifiable information, especially the data of the victim;
- Report only facts and avoid making any speculations or assumptions;
- Inform parents of the appropriate measures taken by the KG to support students and staff concerned;
- Attach a translation of the notice for non-native speaking parents;
- As parents may call or enquire in person after receiving the notice of the incident, the KG should arrange for staff to answer the enquiries from them.

Moreover, reference materials ([Annex 1b](#), [Annex 1c](#) and [Annex 8](#)) in the form of an attachment to the special notice may be provided as necessary.

Parent Meeting

If a crisis incident has far-reaching psychological and emotional impacts on students, KGs may need to arrange a Parent Meeting ([Annex 9](#)) to allay parents' concerns. KGs may inform parents of the meeting arrangements in the special notice.

The parent meeting should reserve adequate time to answer parents' enquiries. If necessary, the KG may liaise with the guidance personnel (e.g. other social workers and guidance personnel from the school sponsoring body or the organisation/association to which the school social worker belongs; and social service organisations providing psychological services) beforehand to line up sufficient manpower to provide counselling to parents.

Expressing Sympathy to the Family of the Victim

In the event of a crisis incident, the principal or representatives of the KG, together with guidance personnel and the class teacher of the victim, may visit the victim and/or the family of the victim to express their care, and help to arrange for the support required. If needed, the KG may provide the family with contact information of counselling organisations. The KG should ensure that all visitors are emotionally stable to conduct the visit and may arrange for other appropriate staff to be representatives if necessary.

6. Support for Students

KGs should analyse the needs of students based on the characteristics and actual circumstances of individual incidents, so as to evaluate the extent of impacts on students and provide them with appropriate support measures.

In general, reinforcing the social support network for students is the essential direction of support. Therefore, KGs should let staff and parents know about the initial reactions that students may have towards the crisis incident, and the ways to help students handle different emotions and reactions. Staff and parents should also continue to observe and gauge students' reactions at different points of time after the crisis (immediately afterwards or a few days/weeks afterwards), so as to provide appropriate support to them at different stages.

The principles for student support after a crisis incident are set out as follows:

Keep Track of, Observe and Evaluate Students' Reactions and Needs

- Children may have different physiological, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social reactions towards a crisis incident, some of which are common reactions after a crisis incident. Staff may refer to [Annex 1b](#) to get a grasp of students' common initial post-crisis reactions. As for how teachers should respond accordingly, please refer to [Annex 10](#). Should students express doubts towards death, staff may explain the concept of death to students in need with reference to [Annex 11](#).
- Since students are at a formative stage of language development, they would normally express their thoughts, feelings or needs in non-verbal ways or through games relating to the crisis incident. However, students' reactions towards crises may not necessarily have a clear link with the incident itself. Therefore, staff should closely observe their behaviours and the way they play games in order to understand the impacts the crisis incident has on them.
- Given that students' reactions towards the crisis incident may change over time, the KG needs to maintain communication with parents to keep track of, observe and evaluate the impact of the crisis incident on students.
- In most circumstances, with the support from families, teachers and friends, students' common reactions will subside after a few days or weeks.

Providing a Stable and Safe Environment for Students

- A stable and safe environment lays the foundation for helping students cope with the crisis incident.
- The KG should:
 - prevent students from witnessing the details relating to the crisis incident (such as the performance of first aid) as far as possible.
 - keep students away from information relating to the crisis incident, such as images, video clips or news coverage.
 - create an accommodating and inclusive classroom environment.
 - understand and accept students' possible reactions to the crisis incident.
 - express care for students in verbal (e.g. responding with empathy) or non-verbal (e.g. hugging or holding hands) ways.
 - seek to maintain or resume normal routine operations as soon as possible and allow students to engage in different kinds of activities or take on familiar and easy tasks.

Providing Appropriate Support for Highly Affected Students

- The KG should, through continuous observation, try to understand students' post-crisis physiological, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social reactions and evaluate the extent of impact of the crisis incident on them. If students are found to have serious reactions ([Annex 1c](#)), the KG should communicate with parents about the students' condition as soon as possible and seek parents' consent for arranging counselling or professional support for students. For example:
 - To provide individual counselling for students to strengthen their abilities to cope with the immediate difficulties brought about by the crisis.
 - To refer students to counseling services or mental health professionals. After the referral, the KG should maintain good communication with the related organisations for necessary arrangements and support in school.

7. Handling the Media

After a crisis incident, KGs could disseminate the information through press releases ([Annex 12](#) and [Annex 13](#)) or press conferences as appropriate.

When handling the media, KGs are advised to make the following arrangements:

- Assign a spokesperson: The spokesperson should have a full understanding of the incident and the KG's stance. He/she should also be clear-headed and articulate to answer enquires from the media. The KG should ensure all staff knows who will be the spokesperson, and that all media questions should be referred to him/her.

- Disseminate information: If considered necessary to release information to the media after the crisis incident, the KG should determine its stance on the incident as soon as possible, collect information about the incident or the person involved and work out a succinct statement to affirm the nature of the incident. The KG may also issue a press release to give a brief account of the incident and the follow up work of the KG.
- Designate specific venue and time for media interview: If the KG decides to accept interviews, it has to designate an appropriate venue and time to meet the media. The responsible person should advise staff how to handle media's enquiries and refer all media enquiries to the spokesperson. The KG may take the initiative to request the press to respect the privacy of the staff, students and parents and take care of their feelings.
- Read the news reported by the media in details: If the media reported inaccurate or misleading information, the KG may correct or clarify when appropriate.
- Request and anticipate questions from the press: Before an interview, the KG may request reporters to provide a set of questions, as well as their concerns in advance. The KG should also anticipate other possible questions from the reporters in order to prepare the answers in advance.
- Allow the spokesperson adequate time for preparation: Before meeting the media, the spokesperson should give himself/herself sufficient time to think over any possible questions that may be raised by the press, for example, whether there is a human negligence; if there are any remedial measures or measures in place to prevent recurrence of similar incidents.
- Respect the privacy of those involved in the incident and that of their families: The KG should remind staff and parents to respect the privacy of those involved in the incident and that of their families, and should not disclose information about them. All media enquiries, if any, should be referred to the KG's spokesperson.

8. Evaluation of Crisis Management

Evaluation Meeting

KGs should call staff meetings to evaluate the crisis management arrangements, difficulties encountered and areas of improvement. Staff concerned may report students' reactions to the crisis incident at the meeting. The staff should be advised of the signs of being emotionally disturbed to facilitate identification of students in need of additional support. The meeting should also discuss the short-term follow up plans, such as arranging substitute teachers or providing support for staff, and work out a long-term follow up plan on crisis management with their staff, such as arranging whole school educational activities on life and death education, hygiene and safety.

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Annex 5:	<u>Relaxation Exercise</u>	27
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Annex 7:	<u>Special Notice to Parents (Sample 2)</u>	29
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Annex 13:	<u>Press Release (Sample 2)</u>	39

Common Initial Post-crisis Reactions of Adults

It is common for adults (including parents and staff) to have the following physiological, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social reactions towards a crisis incident. Under most of the circumstances, with the support from family members, colleagues and friends, these commonly seen reactions will abate gradually in a few days or a few weeks. If they feel or notice peers having excessively intense and continuous reactions (e.g. depression, intense self-blaming or grievances) ([Annex 1c](#)), they should seek counselling or professional support.

Physiological	Cognitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somatic complaints (e.g. headaches, upset stomach) • Change of appetite (e.g. suddenly eating much more or less than usual) • Sleep disturbance • Fatigue or loss of energy • Nervousness (e.g. rapid heartbeat, sweating and muscle tension) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impaired concentration, confusion, impaired ability to make judgements and decisions • Repeated flashbacks of the traumatic scene • Forgetfulness or memory impairment • Nightmares • Self-blaming and feeling worried
Emotional	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling sad (e.g. sullen, being uncommunicative) • Feeling panicked and insecure • Feeling shocked, angry, disappointed and guilty • Being emotionally unstable, with more ups and downs than usual (e.g. becoming irritable, annoyed, tearful and emotional) • Feeling emotionally numb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding places, people, and activities that are related to the traumatic incident • Aggressive language and behaviour • Decline in work performance, avoid going to work
Social	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alienation, not willing to interact with others • Feeling lonely, rejected or isolated by others • Increased interpersonal conflict 	

Common Initial Post-crisis Reactions of Children

It is common for children to have the following physiological, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social reactions towards a crisis incident. Since pre-school children are at a formative stage of language development, they would normally express their reactions in non-verbal ways. Staff or parents may closely observe their behaviours and the way they play to gain an understanding of the impact of a crisis incident on them. Under most of the circumstances, with the support from family members, teachers and friends, these commonly seen reactions will abate gradually in a few days or a few weeks.

Physiological	Cognitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somatic complaints (e.g. headaches, upset stomach) • Loss of appetite • Sleep disturbance • Fatigue or loss of energy • Nervousness, such as rapid heartbeat, sweating, muscle tension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impaired concentration • Repeated flashbacks of the traumatic scene • Nightmares • Self-blaming and feeling worried • Do not understand the concept of death (e.g. believe that the deceased will come back or not aware that all living things will die) • Having magical thinking*
Emotional	Behavioural / Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling sad, sullen or being uncommunicative • Feeling panicked, insecure or fearful (e.g. fear of darkness, monster and strangers) • Feeling angry, disappointed, numb, guilty and helpless • Being emotionally unstable, irritable and annoyed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More dependent behaviour than usual (e.g. being clingy to parents or carers, having separation anxiety) • Alienation and opposition (e.g. being uncooperative, showing more frequent temper tantrum, excessive crying, screaming and showing aggressive behaviour) • Being withdrawn, unwilling to play or talk with other people • Prone to cry and get emotional • Talking about/ Repeatedly asking about death • Repetitive behaviour, e.g. re-enact the traumatic incident in play, talk about the traumatic incident repeatedly • Regression in behaviour and exhibiting behaviour that are not age-appropriate (e.g. bed wetting, soiling, finger sucking and difficulty in speaking)

**Note: Pre-school children tend to understand the cause and effect of incidents in a magical thinking mode (i.e. illogical thinking). When confronted with a crisis incident/death, they may exhibit magical thinking more often. For example,*

- *Believing that their feelings or thoughts will lead to someone's death*
- *Wishing on a star to bring back the deceased*
- *Believing that their elder sister's car accident was related to a toy car they bought on the day she died*

Continuous and/or Serious Reactions Triggered by Crisis Incident

KGs should continuously evaluate the extent of impact of the crisis incident on staff and students to identify, at different stages, those who are in need of assistance and to provide them with appropriate support. If students or staff are found to have the following serious reactions, counselling or professional support should be sought.

- **Reactions seriously disrupting their daily functioning** (e.g. suffering from serious insomnia, refusal to go to school or work, being emotionally numb or detached, losing interest in most activities and losing appetite)
- **Reactions intensifying over time** (e.g. hypervigilance, experiencing higher level of fear and anxiety, excessive self-blaming, feeling helpless, somatic complaints)
- **Reactions being excessively intense** (e.g. being extremely frightened and angry) or even showing signs of mental problems (e.g. having delusions, hallucinations, not age-appropriate bizarre thoughts and images, being seriously depressed and unable to recognise familiar people)
- **Demonstrating maladaptive coping behaviour** (e.g. serious oppositional behaviour, defying authority, ideation or behaviour of hurting oneself/others/animals/ objects)

Telephone Directory of Support and Services

Agency	Name	Post	Telephone no.
_____ District School Development Section/Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres, Education Bureau			
_____Section, Social Welfare Department			
_____ District Police Station			
Ambulance Service			
Social Services Organisations			
_____ District Fire Station			
_____ District Hospital			

In case of emergency (e.g. someone gets seriously injured or is in a life-threatening/critical situation which warrants immediate medical support), KGs should call 999 for emergency services.

Venue Arrangement

Purpose	Venue(s)	Time	Person(s)-in-charge
Staff meeting			
Media reception			
Parent reception			
Parent meeting			

Coping Strategies

Appropriate coping strategies can help reduce the feeling of anxiety and help staff face the stress and distress brought by the crisis incident. Some examples of adaptive and maladaptive strategies are listed below for reference. If staff members exhibit excessive and intense reactions that could not be relieved by adaptive strategies, professional support should be sought.

Adaptive Coping Strategies	Maladaptive Coping Strategies
Seeking social support	Avoiding social activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Talking to someone (e.g. family members, friends and guidance personnel) for necessary support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Withdrawing from social activities ✗ Avoiding contact with family members and friends
Healthy Lifestyle	Unhealthy Lifestyle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Getting adequate sleep and maintaining a structured work and rest schedule ✓ Maintaining a balanced diet ✓ Doing appropriate amount of exercise ✓ Engaging in mind and body wellness activities (e.g. doing sports, listening to music, reading) ✓ Doing relaxation exercises to keep calm and relaxed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Working excessively long hours ✗ Using alcohol or drugs ✗ Spending excessive time on electronic screen products (e.g. computer, television, smart phone) ✗ Overeating or undereating ✗ Sleeping too much or too little ✗ Having an imbalanced diet ✗ Lack of exercise
Others	Others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Gathering necessary information about the incident to reduce doubts ✓ Allowing oneself to feel upset for a while 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Expressing anger in violent ways ✗ Engaging in high-risk or dangerous activities

Relaxation Exercise

(I) Belly Breathing			
Step 1: Sit on a chair and feel the back of the chair supporting you.	Step 2: Inhale deeply to let your abdomen gradually expand and keep your whole body relaxed.	Step 3: Exhale slowly to let your abdomen contract and resume to the original level.	Step 4: Repeat the breathing exercise until your heart rate and breathing slow down and you feel calm.
(II) Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise			
Hands and Arms			
Step 1: Clench your fists.	Step 2: Bend your arms with your fists as close to your shoulders as possible.	Step 3: Put your hands down slowly and relax.	
Head			
Step 1: Tilt your head backwards as far as possible.	Step 2: Resume the original head position slowly and relax.	Step 3: Tilt your head down and move your chin as close to your chest as possible.	Step 4: Resume the original head position slowly and relax.
Mouth			
Step 1: Clench your jaw as tight as possible.	Step 2: Press your lips as tight as possible.	Step 3: Stretch your chest as wide as possible.	Step 4: Relax your jaw, lips and chest.
Shoulders			
1st set of exercise			
Step 1: Lift your shoulders up and make it as close to your ears as possible	Step 2: Lower your shoulders slowly and relax		
2nd set of exercise			
Step 1: Pull your shoulders back and stretch your chest.	Step 2: Relax gradually.		
Legs			
Step 1: Stretch your legs and lift them up.	Step 2: Point your toes.	Step 3: Flex your feet.	Step 4: Relax gradually

Special Notice to Parents (Sample 1)

Date: _____

Dear Parents,

It is with deep regret and sorrow that I inform you of the death of (name), teacher of Class XX who passed away on (date). All teachers and students are deeply saddened and sorry for the loss.

Our school has immediately activated the School Crisis Management Team and discussed the support measures for students. Teachers have also been reminded to pay continuous attention to students' emotional response. We will offer further support to students in need.

We hope that you will give particular attention to your children during these few days (e.g. whether they have become more dependent, flustered, or tend to cry more easily than usual). Please spend more time with your children, take heed of their expression of feelings through different means such as games, role-play activities or drawings, and give them proper comfort. If needed, you are welcome to seek assistance from me, our senior teachers, the class teacher or school social worker, or contact the school general office (Tel: xxxx xxxx).

Yours faithfully,

XXX

Principal,
XXX Kindergarten**Helplines***

Social Welfare Department:	2343 2255
Suicide Prevention Services:	2382 0000
The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong:	2389 2223
The Samaritans:	2896 0000 (Multilingual services)
Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre – 24-hour Crisis Hotline:	18288
Serving organisation of the school social worker:	
Social welfare organisations within school district:	

** Schools may provide parents with helplines and information of relevant social service organisations based on the nature of the incident and location of the school.*

Special Notice to Parents (Sample 2)

Date: _____

Dear Parents,

The school is saddened to learn that a few of our K2 students were critically injured in a traffic accident on their way to school this morning. They have been sent to the hospital and are now in stable condition. We have expressed our concerns and offered assistance to their families. The police are investigating the incident at the moment, therefore it is not appropriate to make any speculation or judgement on the incident at this stage.

Following this injury incident, the school has immediately activated the School Crisis Management Team and discussed student support measures. We will pay close attention to the injured students and all other students in school. Follow-up arrangements and support will be provided when necessary.

We hope that you will give particular attention to your children during these few days (e.g. whether they have become more dependent, flustered or tend to cry more easily than usual). Please spend more time with your children, listen to them and take heed of their expression of feelings in different means such as games, role-play activities or drawings, and give them proper comfort. If needed, you are welcome to contact me, our senior teachers, the class teacher or school social worker (Tel: xxxx xxxx). The school will try our utmost to help.

Yours faithfully,

XXX

Principal
XXX Kindergarten**Helplines***

Social Welfare Department:	2343 2255
Suicide Prevention Services:	2382 0000
The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong:	2389 2223
The Samaritans:	2896 0000 (Multilingual services)
Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre – 24-hour Crisis Hotline:	18288
Serving organisation of the school social worker:	
Social welfare organisations within school district:	

** Schools may provide parents with helplines and information of relevant social service organisations based on the nature of the incident and location of the school.*

Frequently Asked Questions on How Parents Can Help their Children Handle Emotions

1. What to watch out for when helping children handle their emotions?

A crisis incident may make your children sad, angry, anxious or fearful. These are common reactions. The views and emotional responses of adults towards the incident may have an impact on children, and therefore you can help your children handle emotions by doing the following:

Give them a sense of security and support

- Stay calm and handle your emotions properly.
- Spend more time with your children, pay more attention to them and give them more physical contact (e.g. hugging them and holding their hands) to strengthen their sense of security.
- Do not hide facts from your children (e.g. you should not tell your children that the deceased teacher has changed school).
- Avoid spreading rumours. Impart accurate information to your children, screen media reports of the incident appropriately for children as necessary and refrain from repeatedly viewing or reading related news reports or browsing for them online.
- Be aware of any behavioural or emotional changes in your children.
- If your children have a close relationship with the deceased and you want them to attend the memorial service, you should make sure that they are well prepared (e.g. explaining the arrangements and procedures of the event in a language that your children understand, telling them what to expect and how to cope with it). If your children prefer not to attend the event, you should respect their decision and allow them to express their condolences to the families of the deceased in other ways (e.g. sending a letter or drawing of condolence).

Listen to your children actively

- Encourage your children to express their feelings and understand facts in different ways (e.g. by telling/reading stories, through drawings, games, role-play activities), and accept the emotions and thoughts expressed by them.
- Tell your children that their feelings are normal so as to dispel their anxiety.
- Do not tell your children “to stop talking” or “not to mention the incident again”. Avoiding discussions of the incident or suppressing their uneasy feelings may cause lasting harm to your children.
- Avoid giving unsolicited advice. Offer opportunities for your children to share their feelings, listen to them with patience and comfort them.

Provide a stable environment

- Encourage your children to resume normal routines and activities as soon as possible (e.g. keeping their daily sleep-wake schedules, diet, learning and playing routines).
- Allow your children to play and have fun as usual, which is a part of their daily lives.
- Arrange activities good for physical and mental health (e.g. listening to music and doing exercises) to help your children relax and focus on other matters.

2. What should I do if my children are feeling terrified (e.g. having nightmares, fear of darkness or fear of going out)?

Studies show that after crisis incidents, children will be relatively vulnerable initially, and therefore parents should take great care of their children and listen to them actively. Parents should not blame their children or deny their fear by saying, e.g. “there is nothing to be afraid of” or “boys should not be afraid”. Instead, parents should encourage their children

to express their feelings in different ways (e.g. by telling/reading stories, drawing, playing games or engage in role-play activities), and give them support, comfort and help (e.g. by saying, “I can stay here with you if you are afraid of sleeping alone”). Parents may also teach their children to do some light exercises or take deep breaths to calm down.

3. What should I do if my children do not show any strong reactions?

If your children behave as usual and stick to their daily routines without disruption, it may be because they do not understand the crisis incident or do not know the victim personally. It does not necessarily mean that they are being indifferent or unsympathetic. Parents should continue to observe their children’s reactions and ask them to seek help from you or teachers when needed.

4. How should I respond to the doubts raised by my children about death?

Parents may make reference to the following principles when they talk to their children about death:

- Explain the concept of death in a calm and honest manner comprehensible for your children’s level of cognitive and emotional developments by saying, for example:
 - “When people die, they don’t come back, that means their bodies are dead. They will no longer breathe, move or have a heartbeat”.
 - “Dead people are not the same as living people. They don’t feel cold or hot or hungry”.
- Explain death using such words as “dead” or “death” directly instead of ambiguous phrases such as “gone to sleep” or “gone to a faraway place”.
- Encourage your children to express their thoughts and feelings; accept their thoughts and feelings; and respond patiently to their questions. Develop ways of relieving emotions with your children when necessary (e.g. taking deep breaths, engaging in musical activities and doing exercises). For example:
 - If your child asked you, “He (the deceased) made a promise to me, but he could not keep it now. Why did he lie to me?”. Please understand that your child may feel angry, disappointed or upset when certain plans have to be scrapped due to the sudden death of the deceased. You may encourage your child to tell you what the deceased has promised to do and whether he/she is willing to complete the task with other people. If yes, you may talk about how to do it.
- Give consistent responses to questions raised by your children about death as far as practicable. If you are not sure about the answers, you may respond honestly with, “I don’t know”.
- Help your children understand the concept of death with examples from everyday life, such as the withering of plants, death of little animals. You may also explain to your children the meaning of death according to your own religious belief if you have a religion.

5. My family is under some pressure, what should I do?

- Stay positive and take good care of yourself.
- Confide in your relatives and friends.
- Seek help from others, e.g. guidance personnel, Social Welfare Department and Non-Governmental Organisations.

6. When and how should I seek help?

You should observe the reactions of your children continuously. If your children’s reactions intensify over time, become excessively intense or have seriously disrupted their daily functioning, you should seek help from professionals. If you have doubts about your children’s behaviour or need to seek help, please contact the principal, teachers or guidance personnel.

Content of Parent Meeting

1. To give information specific to the crisis incident.
2. Explain what contingency plans and arrangements have been made by the KG in response to the crisis incident.
3. Let parents know what measures will be taken by the KG to avoid similar incidents in the future.
4. Highlight the key points in the reference materials for parents to let them know how to observe the reactions of their children in the wake of the crisis incident and how to help their children deal with the incident and handle their emotions ([Annex 1b](#), [Annex 1c](#) and [Annex 8](#)).
5. Emphasise the importance of parents' support to children.
6. Emphasise the importance of home-school collaboration.
7. To give information about organisations or personnel offering support.
8. Arrange counselling for parents in need.

How Should Teachers Respond to Students' Possible Reactions

Guiding principles:

- Listening:**
- Teachers should listen to students, allow them to express their emotions and accept their different feelings and thoughts
- Understanding:**
- Students may not be able to understand the crisis incident
 - It is common for students to feel afraid, guilty, angry or sad towards unusual situations
 - Some students may not want to talk about the crisis incident
- Responding:**
- Use clear and simple language
 - Explain to students that it is normal for them to have different emotional reactions
 - Make efforts to answer students' every question. If teachers do not know the answer to some questions, e.g. "Why did those bad guys do this?", they can frankly reply by saying, "I do not know"
- Observing:**
- Observe students' reactions continuously; if the students' reaction intensify over time, become excessively intense or have seriously disrupted their daily functioning, further support should be given or professional assistance should be sought

Responding to the possible reactions of students:

Reactions of Students	Words or Acts of Students	Advice to Teachers
No particular reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the KG activities as usual • Display the same emotion and behaviour as usual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that some students may have no particular reaction to the crisis incident simply because they do not understand it or they do not know the persons involved in it • Do not misunderstand that students are being indifferent and unsympathetic • Tell students that they may seek help from teachers or parents when necessary
Feeling incredulous, puzzled, confused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "He can't be in the hospital. He promised me that he would come to the birthday party tomorrow!" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that the incident is incredulous and that it takes time to accept the truth • Recognise that students may have complicated feelings and it is normal for them to feel confused or even be at a loss

Reactions of Students	Words or Acts of Students	Advice to Teachers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell students that they may seek help from teachers or parents when necessary
Feeling scared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear that similar things will happen to oneself • Fear of being separated from teachers or parents • Fear of being alone • Fear of the dark • Fear of ghosts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point out it is normal to feel afraid and panic • Understand that students may find it hard to concentrate, may refuse to take afternoon nap or may have nightmares • Point out that the KG is a safe place • Explore calming strategies with the students
Feeling sad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying • Miss the deceased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point out that it is normal to feel sad • Let students express their sadness; there is no need to stop them from crying
Feeling angry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaming others (e.g. parents and teachers) for failing to prevent the incident from happening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that it is common for students to feel angry in the wake of an unfortunate incident • There is no need to argue over who is responsible for the incident
Feeling guilty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking that he/she has some responsibility for the death in the incident • “If I had played with him, he would not have.....” • “I was bad, that’s why he.....” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that it is a common emotional reaction for students to feel that they had not done enough/well and/or think they have responsibility for the incident • Express appreciation for students’ concern for the victim • If someone died in the incident, on the premise of showing respect for the deceased and his/her relatives, briefly explain the cause of death to the students directly (see Annex 11) to alleviate their unnecessary guilt
Showing disrespect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being playful or not serious • Asking for playtime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not focus on the disrespectful behaviour of the students • Recognise that some students may not be able to understand or accept the truth for the moment, and they may be hiding their emotions unconsciously by being disrespectful • Make efforts to maintain daily routines, including playtime. Understand that playing is a part of their daily life and a way to express emotions

How to Explain the Concept of Death to Students

A preschooler's grief reactions to the death of someone they know well can be very different from those of adults. Death is an abstract concept to them. They find it difficult to comprehend that death is the end of life. Instead, they usually regard death as temporary and reversible, which is similar to the scene when a cartoon character rises from the dead. They are rather egocentric and may apply "magical thinking"* that defies logic when confronted with death. It is precisely because preschoolers do not fully comprehend the concept of death that they are prone to the fear of death. Helping them develop a correct concept of death can alleviate their anxiety and uneasiness about death.

**Note: Pre-school children tend to understand the cause and effect of incidents in a magical thinking mode (i.e. illogical thinking). When confronted with a crisis incident/death, they may exhibit magical thinking more often. For example,*

- *Believing that their feelings or thoughts will lead to someone's death*
- *Wishing on a star to bring back the deceased*
- *Believing that their elder sister's car accident was related to a toy car they bought on the day she died*

The significance of understanding the concept of death:

Components	Definition	Why should we explain the concept of death?
Universality	Death is a natural phenomenon. All living things are bound to die eventually.	If children believe that death is not a natural phenomenon, they may see death as a punishment to them from the deceased. This will lead to guilty feeling and shamefulness.
Irreversibility	Once a person dies, he cannot live again.	If children see death as reversible (e.g. believing that the deceased is only sleeping or is travelling abroad), they may find it difficult to handle their sorrowful emotion properly because they cannot detach from the relationship with the deceased in a gradual manner.
Non-functionality	Once a person dies, his body can no longer be functional, nor can it engage in any activities, such as breathing and heart beating; the body can no longer perform eating or moving, thinking or speaking functions; and it won't have any feeling.	If children believe that the body of the deceased is still functional after death, they will think that the deceased may have to continue to suffer physically, and this perception may affect the emotion of children negatively.

Components	Definition	Why should we explain the concept of death?
The causality of death	Death has a cause, there are both external causes (e.g. accident) and internal causes (e.g. sickness).	Children tend to associate death with external causes and ignore internal causes. If children do not have a clear understanding as to the causes of death, they may think that they have caused the death of other people and feel guilty about it.

Principles for explaining the concept of death:

- Explain the key points of the concept of death in a calm and honest manner comprehensible for your students' level of cognitive and emotional developments.
- Explain death using such words as “dead” or “death” directly instead of ambiguous phrases such as “gone to sleep” or “gone to a faraway place”.
- Encourage students to express their thoughts and respond patiently to their questions.
- When responding to students' questions about death,
 - Give consistent answers as far as practicable.
 - If you are not sure about the answer, respond honestly with “I don't know”.
- Accept the feelings expressed by your students. If necessary, develop ways of relieving emotions with your students (e.g. taking deep breaths, engaging in musical activities and doing exercise).
- Use examples from everyday life (e.g. plants withering and animals dying) to help students understand the concept of death.

Preschoolers' common questions about death:

1. “Where do dead people go?”

- Explain the concept of death repeatedly, e.g. telling students that ‘When people die, it means that their bodies are dead. They will no longer breathe, move or have a heartbeat’.
- As for what the world will be like after death, this can be explained according to the religious background of the KG. If the KG does not have any religious affiliation, it may let students know that there is no definite answer. Tell students that different people have different views, teachers can share their own views or ask students to share theirs.

2. “Do dead people feel cold or hungry? Will they come back?”

- Explain repeatedly to students what death is. For example, tell them that “dead people are not the same as living people; they don't feel cold or hot or hungry”.

- You can tell students that a dead person will not come back, but the memories of that person will remain in our hearts.
3. **“Is it true that I will see the people who have died when I die?”**
 - Recognise students’ pining for the deceased.
 - Try to understand the motive of the student. If the student has self-harming thoughts, explain to him/her: “I don’t know if I can see other people who have died when I die, but I am sure that those who are alive and care about me, like my parents, teachers and classmates will feel very sad if I die”.
 - Work together with your students for different ways to express their yearning for the deceased (e.g. looking through photo albums and drawing pictures).
 - Keep an eye on the student’s reactions and arrange counselling or follow-up if necessary.
 4. **“Has he (the deceased) abandoned us? Is it because I was not good (behaved badly)?”**
 - Explain the cause of death of the deceased (e.g. illness and accident)
 - Assure students that they are not to be blamed for the death of the deceased
 - Students may feel abandoned and think that the deceased no longer loves them because of the sudden death of the deceased. School staff may reminisce about the deceased together with the students to make them understand that although the deceased has passed away, the love and memories of him/her will remain in their hearts and stay with them forever.
 5. **“He (the deceased) made a promise to me, but he could not keep it now. Why did he lie to me?”**
 - Recognise that students may feel angry, disappointed or upset when certain plans have to be scrapped due to the sudden death of the deceased.
 - Encourage students to tell you what the deceased has promised to do and ask if they are willing to complete it with other people. If yes, you may talk about how to do it.
 6. **“Why did such misfortune happen to me? Why do people die?”**
 - Acknowledge the feelings of the student (e.g. anger, sadness and helplessness).
 - Explain to students repeatedly the concept of death, e.g. by telling them, “All living things, like plants and animals, will die one day”, “There are different factors that may lead to death, such as ageing, illness and accidents”.
 - May respond frankly with “I do not know”. This is to help students understand that sometimes there may not be a reasonable explanation for why a person encounter misfortune.

Date: _____

Press Release (Sample 1)

XXX Kindergarten

Press Release on the Death of a Student

The school was informed on (date) that a student of our school has sadly passed away.

Our staff and students are deeply saddened and grieved by the tragic news. We have extended our deepest sympathies to the family of the student concerned and provided assistance accordingly. The incident is currently under police investigation and it is not appropriate to make any speculation or give comments at this stage.

The school has activated the School Crisis Management Team immediately to explore support measures for students. Staff are advised to pay attention to the emotional reactions of students and provide them with follow-up and support services when necessary. The school has also issued a letter to invite parents to keep a watchful eye on the needs of their children and maintain communication with us so that timely assistance can be provided to students in distress.

For enquiries, please contact the principal/senior teacher at _____.

Principal,
XXX Kindergarten

Date: _____

Press Release (Sample 2)

XXX Kindergarten

Press Release on the Death of a Teacher

The school was informed on (date) that a teacher of our school has sadly passed away.

Our staff and students are deeply saddened and grieved by the tragic news. We have extended our deepest sympathies to the family of the teacher concerned and provided assistance accordingly. The incident is currently under police investigation and it is not appropriate to make any speculation or give comments at this stage.

The school has activated the School Crisis Management Team immediately to explore support measures for students. Staff are advised to pay attention to the emotional reactions of students and provide them with further support when necessary.

In addition, we have issued a letter to parents and contacted the parents of individual students who have shown emotional distress, inviting them to keep a watchful eye on the needs of their children and give appropriate care to them. Meanwhile, parents are advised to maintain communication with the school so that timely support can be provided to students in need.

For enquiries, please contact the principal/senior teacher at _____.

Principal,
XXX Kindergarten