



Best Practices: Workplace Tragedy

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to support organizations in the Homeless Youth Continuum (HYC) with their crisis response process for when a tragedy has occurred. Tragedy, for this project, is defined as the death of a youth participant or staff member of the HYC. It might also include death of an elder, volunteer or someone important to the HYC community*. Components of plan may also apply to other tragic events that occur outside of the HYC community.

A trauma informed response should be consistent and predictable. This set of best practices is meant to be used as a tool for organizations to use in developing their crisis response plan. It is divided along a timeline with suggestions for response efforts occurring: before the tragedy happens, immediate response, the first week, the first month, and longer term.

* 'Community' is however we identify it. This may look different at each agency and in each tragedy. This plan is flexible to involve elders and community members as it makes sense.

Structure

This document has been structured to be easy to navigate in times of crisis. The sections have been laid out according to 5 "phases" of tragedy response, providing easily accessible guidelines for both agency-level and HYC collaboration activities. These guidelines include a timeline of activities that should be completed as well as appendices of detailed checklists that can be referred to by Tragedy Response Teams (TRT's), Agency Directors, Supervisors and Staff. The links below will provide easy access to materials for each of the phases of tragedy response. Please note that some phases are overlapping, so some may begin before the prior phase is complete.

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Background

The Homeless Youth Continuum (HYC) agreed to come together to document agreements and plans to provide a coordinated response to tragedies that impact the HYC.

Components of a trauma informed care Tragedy Response Plan were drafted by Trauma Informed Oregon.

A task force, with representation from the four HYC partner agencies and Multnomah County, was created to edit and complete a plan documenting agreements for communication and planning coordination.

As part of this process, the partners agree that HYC coordination shall include:

- 1) Key staff contacts identified at each agency for ongoing cross agency tragedy response coordination
- 2) Key agency staff communicating with one another as soon as a tragedy is confirmed and coordinated communication about the tragedy in the weeks that follow, including:
 - a. Program Directors or other key staff notifies a Program Directors or other key staff at partner agencies by phone
 - b. Communication and planning coordination centralized to a few leadership representatives at each organization to support timely decision making and consideration for supportive staff notifications. This communication shall include:
 - i. Confirming HYC contacts for coordination of the tragedy (Lead and Sub-Lead)
 - ii. When and what information/message about the tragedy is able to be shared
 - iii. Coordination of youth process/support session(s)
 - iv. Notification e-mail and flyer reviewed by partners before being sent (include information of youth process/support sessions when applicable)
 - v. Coordination of memorial planning (who will host and scheduling)
- 3) Ideally staff notification occurs before youth notification
- 4) Multiple organizations may host youth process/support session(s)
- 5) A single remembrance/memorial ceremony will be organized for the HYC at a time that works for all partner agencies

In addition to the plan detail, a series of checklists with supporting forms may be developed to help ensure smooth coordination during times of crisis.

The result of this effort is included in this document.

Tragedy Response Team

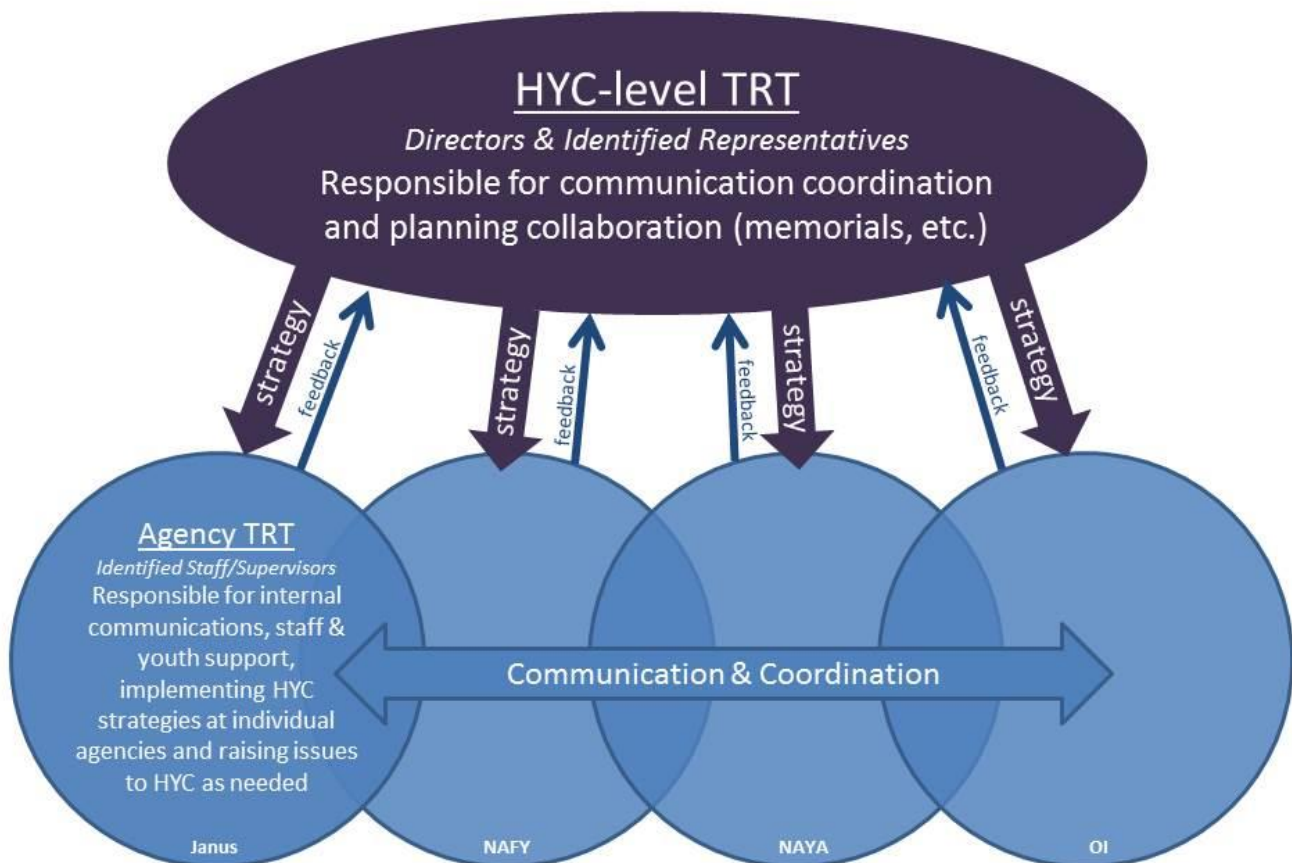
In order to effectively develop and implement a plan, it is recommended that each organization develop an internal Tragedy Response Team (TRT) or at minimum identify lead staff contacts for tragedy response. Due to the stress of tragedy response work, a team or small group response to tragedy is recommended over having one person who is responsible for coordinating agency activities in the event of a tragedy.

The (TRT) are responsible for creating, updating, implementing, and maintaining their organization's response plan and for following Continuum agreements. TRTs can be comprised of administrators, line staff, supervisors, and staff who are able to work effectively under pressure with compassion and empathy. It is recommended that each agency TRT be between 5-6 people, but more members can be added if determined necessary. The team should have a designated leader and sub-leader. Agency-level teams may include people from outside the agency such as mental health professionals.

In response to tragedies, the HYC will activate a high-level tragedy response team (HYC-TRT), consisting of agency directors and Agency TRT Leads (or appointed TRT members) as needed. The intent of this team is to ensure a coordinated and consistent response to addressing a traumatic event across the HYC Member Agencies. The high level TRT will work with agency TRTs to implement a response strategy, including monitoring the wellbeing of staff, coordinating communication/information to be shared with staff and with youth, and providing assistance to staff in working with youth. After a death, many actions need to be coordinated in a very short space of time. Needs for coordination continue in the weeks and months that follow.

For a visual of the structure, please see the diagram below:

Diagram 1: Multi-layer TRT Coordination



Recommended Timelines

Grief management is a difficult task. While the immediate shock of a tragedy/death can subside within a few days, it often takes longer to recover. This section includes an outline of what to expect as well as some recommended timelines of activities to help support staff and client grieving processes.

The first week

- Restore the organization to its regular routine
- Organize regular staff meetings, to ensure they are provided with up to date information
- Monitor youth for risks and changes in behavior (isolation, withdrawal, escalation of behaviors)
- Monitor staff wellbeing and provide opportunities for debriefing
- Collect all the belongings of the deceased youth or staff
- Provide time and support for staff to complete final documentation of services to deceased client (if applicable)

The first month

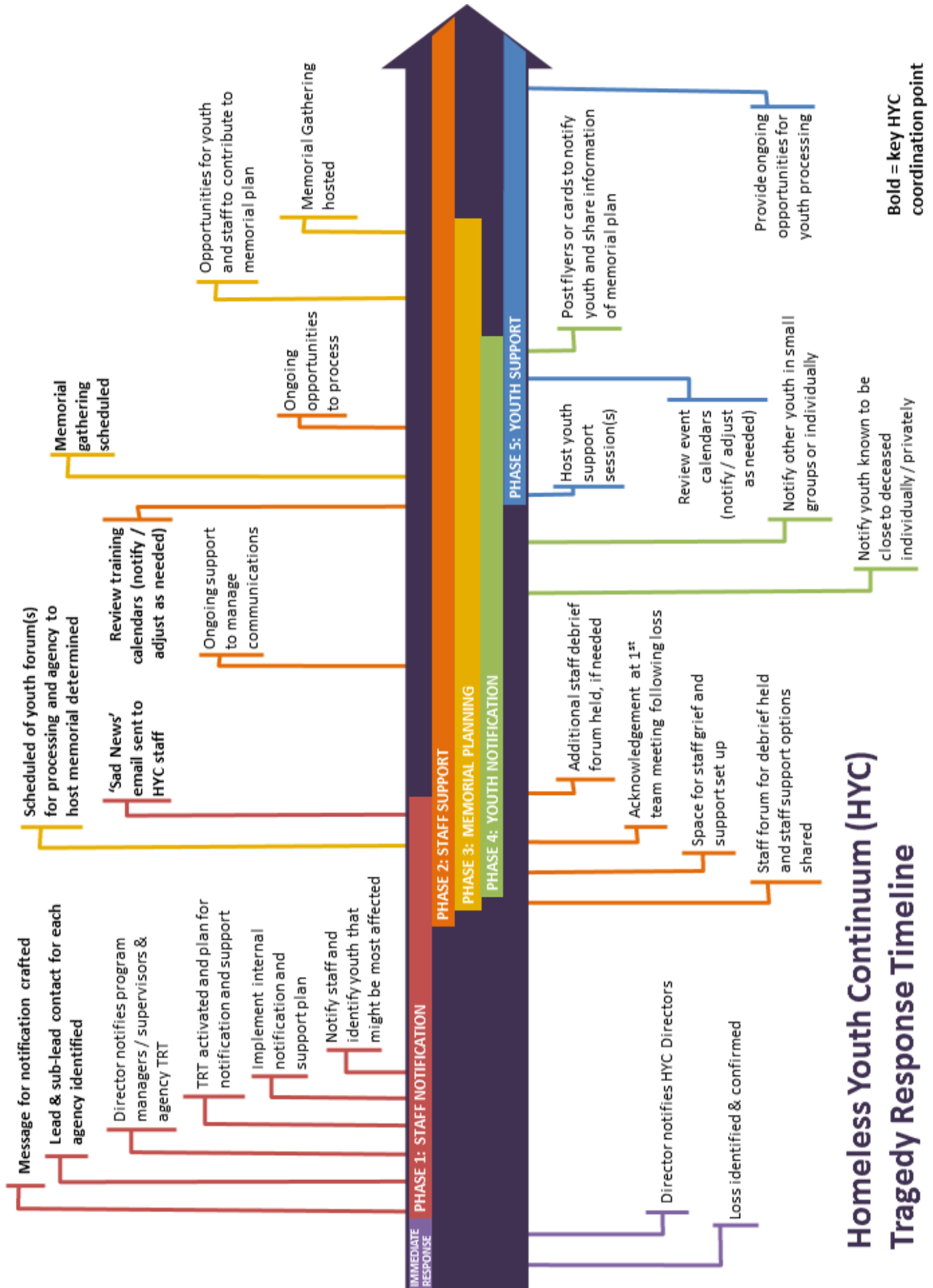
- Monitor staff and youth wellbeing
- Plan for relevant events that will be held by the organization that may be triggering to other youth or staff (e.g., OD Response Training following an overdose death, or attending a theater event with violent content following a violent incident)
- Gather information from staff that is relevant for a critical incident review
- Conduct a critical incident review

Longer term

- Continue to support and monitor youth and staff wellbeing
- Keep staff and youth informed of grief supports
- Be alert for changes in behaviors related to anniversaries, birthdays and other significant events
- Provide opportunity to recognize past losses (staff and youth driven)
- Implement the recommendations of the critical incident review
- Include your organization's crisis response plan in its staff induction process

The timeline on the following page breaks down the activities in the first few weeks following a tragedy into five specific phases. It also outlines the key activities that need to be completed by both the HYC TRT and individual agency TRTs to ensure both staff and clients are supported during the initial shock and processing of the event. It is intended to serve as a roadmap to support and provide context for the more detailed explanations that follow.

Diagram 2: Key activity timeline



While the timeline above is a roadmap for what to do following a tragedy, there are also a few things to consider before a tragedy occurs. Below is an outline of things to consider prior to Phase 1 (Staff Notification) to set the stage for a successful tragedy response.

Pre-tragedy Planning

Since it is impossible to predict when a tragedy will occur, it is important to be prepared to respond at any time.

Things for HYC agencies to consider prior to a tragedy occurring are:

- Contracting with a mental health specialist/vicarious trauma therapist who can be called in for support on short notice
 - Neutral person
 - Someone who knows the agency
 - Develop relationship before tragedy hits
- Gather information about community support resources, such as the Dougy Center
- Dedicating a section of staff orientation about grief and managing grief, including orientation to the Tragedy Response Plan
- Training staff on first aid and CPR
- Collecting and maintaining a list of staff members and how they prefer to be notified in the event of a tragedy

Immediate Response

In the event that the tragedy has occurred in an HYC space, an immediate response will be required to ensure the safety of bystanders and other witnesses of the event. (For helpful checklists and forms to support immediate response, see Appendix A.)

Below is a list of things to consider:

- If the incident has happened at an HYC location: Ensure the immediate safety of staff and youth (e.g. provide first aid, call ambulance and police)
- If the incident has happened away from an HYC property, find out as many of the facts and circumstances as possible. Do not ignore rumors – investigate them immediately
- Ensure those affected (youth/staff) are not left alone
- Inform the relevant HYC representatives (HYC-TRT) of confirmed incident/tragedy: Program Directors from each HYC agency (those that attend Continuum Planning Meeting) or their designee

Mental Health Agency Support

- Contact the relevant mental health agency, if applicable. Their role is to
 - Provide immediate counseling to the affected participants
 - Identify other vulnerable youth
 - Screen youth at risk
 - Take referrals from staff

Phase 1: Staff Notification

In times of crisis, it is especially important to ensure that staff members are notified in an appropriate and timely manner. Due to the complexity of the HYC structure, it is especially difficult to ensure that staff members at all agencies receive the information at the same time and in a supportive/compassionate way. It is also difficult to gauge the impact that a death/tragedy will have on each individual. As such, it is important to follow an agreed-upon strategy and maintain discretion until a public notification is made. (For helpful forms and checklists, please refer to Appendix B.)

Below is a timeline of responsibilities for the Staff Notification Phase of Tragedy Response (refer to diagram 1 for context as needed). The steps below follow the immediate response preparations outlined above.

As a reminder, the following items should be completed prior to initiating the staff notification phase of tragedy response:

- Agency identifies loss/tragedy
- Agency confirms loss/tragedy
- Agency director notifies all other directors – after confirmation of death/tragedy

Ideal overarching philosophy / approach for Phase 1

- Virtually convene the HYC representatives to
 - Identify staff notification timeline (~24-48 hours)
 - Identify youth notification timeline
 - 1st Notification – verbal notification (~48-72 hours – following staff timeline when possible)
 - Develop the basic ‘script’ to begin in-person notifications to youth
 - 2nd Notification – flyer notification & youth process/support session(s) (~24hours from verbal notification)
 - Identify which agency/agencies will host a youth process/support session(s)
 - Schedule a youth process/support session(s)
 - Identify who will develop the notification flyer
 - Develop notification flyer
 - Email notification flyer (~48-72 hours)
 - 3rd Notification – remembrance ceremony (as applicable) (~2 weeks from youth notification):
 - Identify which agency will host a remembrance/memorial gathering – only one centralized event
 - Schedule the remembrance ceremony at a time that all 4 agencies can attend (*as applicable*)
 - Identify who will facilitate remembrance ceremony
 - Identify who will develop the remembrance flyer
 - Identify who will send out/e-mail flyer

- Tragedy Response Team (TRT) within each organization will plan the following steps:
 - Contact the relevant mental health agency to support staff and youth, as applicable
 - Identify and plan support for staff and youth who are most affected and/or whose wellbeing is at risk
 - Set up a youth support room/space in the organization
 - Set up a staff support space in the organization
 - Inform staff: give them a script explaining what has happened, so that all staff are giving youth the same consistent message
- Agency director notifies program managers/supervisors and other members of their TRT
- Agency identifies central point of contact key staff for HYC coordination: a lead and sub-lead
- Each agency identifies the TRT folks and who are options for staff support
- TRT and Supervisors implement internal staff notification plan
 - Consider staff who are able to do the notification based on:
 - availability (schedule)
 - their own impact (who is more/less affected)
 - strength of skills needed (e.g., grief counseling experience, prior experience providing staff notification, emotional availability, positive relationship with the staff)
 - Consider staff preferences obtained previously regarding notification
 - Plan for timeline for notification – within 24-48 hours
 - Identify goal and variables – why it might be shorter or longer
 - Consideration of external factors – for example if public (youth know) or not yet able to be public (family not yet notified)
 - Notify everyone (don't underestimate impact – even if someone didn't know the individual, they might be impacted)
 - Notify staff in private spaces – not hallways, stairwells, etc.
 - Track who has been notified by whom
 - Consideration for staff working across agencies: peers, etc.
 - How to coordinate communication timelines between agencies
 - Prioritize timely communication of Peer Mentors and a support plan for these staff
 - Staff guidelines about not sharing information with reminders for supervisors that we centralize and coordinate communication. Since notification happens over time –
 - Be sensitive to how you introduce the conversation – give heads up about content of conversation, 'sad news' to share
 - staff are directed to not send any group e-mails with information about the tragedy
 - staff should never post about tragedy on Social Media, including vague references
 - provide staff information about who is sending information out to all Continuum
 - Consider ex-staff notification
 - Consider calendar of upcoming events (trainings, public/youth events, for impact and consideration)
 - Anticipate a variety of responses and plan follow-up: plan/predict that some staff may find out in non-ideal ways which may be traumatic and they may experience anger about process

- Do not leave directly affected staff alone to work without support
 - Identify safe and secure places where crisis support can be provided
- Get staff from other programs to fill in for staff directly affected
- The leader of the TRT should brief non-TRT staff about:
 - The facts of the situation. If death is not confirmed as suicide, then refer to it as a participant “death” at this stage
 - The members of the TRT and their roles
 - The response plan for the day, in particular changes to responsibilities or routines
 - How phone inquiries are to be managed
 - Any media inquiries should be routed to the agency Director responsible for communications
 - Plan for contact/notification of staff who were absent at that time or who are on leave
 - Relevant information about roles and special procedures should also be displayed in a space that is widely used by staff, such as a kitchen or break room
 - Communication plan, including directive to not send out group e-mails related to tragedy while notifications in process
 - Reminder that confidentiality still applies after death

Details for Staff Notification

- Informing staff: think about how, when, where, and who
 - Make a plan for informing staff
 - Think about all staff that could be affected
 - As time allows, quickly review documentation/records and make a list of all staff that documented providing services to the youth as a means of prioritizing staff notifications.
 - Utilize the [Notification Planning Worksheet](#) to identify priority individuals for notification: staff with the most contact with the client should be notified first. Be aware that those who worked the most closely with the client may not necessarily be impacted the most. Grief situations impact everyone differently.
 - What to share with staff closest to youth
 - Situation and the facts as you know them
 - Offer all options for support available, then ask them if there is anything additional they need for support
 - Have options for taking leave
 - Do not have a blanket policy
 - Staff choice of leaving work or staying-keep in mind that in the moment we don't always know what we need, so staff who stay will need to be monitored for signs of increased stress
 - Offer sick time/leave off when possible
 - If the staff person wants to stay, consider temporarily removing them from high stress job responsibilities

- Give them low-stress, low-risk work, such as office support, cleaning, organizing, etc.
 - Monitor extended absence- stay in touch with staff
 - Encourage use of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resources
 - Be prepared to provide details to staff for how to use EAP
 - Review how responsibilities will be covered for the next few days
 - Prioritize program services for staff and consider reassigning people to maintain function of core services, if needed
 - Provide ongoing support. Support/check-ins need to be ongoing over a period of weeks and possibly, months
 - Consider the use of a crisis debriefing team
- All staff should be given
 - Sources of support they can access for themselves
 - The option of not being involved in informing youth, if they feel this will put their own wellbeing at risk
- How to best notify staff who are not currently at work
 - Upon hire ask staff about their preference for notification and review episodically
 - ASAP, on phone if not at work
 - On phone prior to next shift (afternoon or evening before)
 - Wait until back in the office (in person only)
- Anyone can trigger a tragedy response process
 - if we find out about a past death, we can implement components for the staff that might be affected
- Consider ex-staff notification for purpose of attending a memorial
- When to inform
 - Ideally, staff should meet at the beginning and end of the working day following the incident. This allows for ongoing communication about decisions made by the TRT, while also providing space for staff feedback and support
 - Staff should be notified in a private setting (away from the youth) when possible
 - Have water and healthy snacks available
 - Try to limit processed sugar (however see note about chocolate below)
 - Nutrients that reduce stress
 - Vitamin C- lowers cortisol (stress hormone) and blood pressure in high anxiety situations
 - Food choices: oranges or strawberries
 - Complex carbohydrates- increases serotonin and stabilizes blood pressure
 - Food choices: whole grain pretzels or crackers, fruit
 - Omega-3 fatty acids- reduce surges of stress hormones
 - Food choices: almonds, walnuts, pistachios

- Other food ideas
 - Dark chocolate- helps relieve stress
 - Oatmeal - lowers cortisol and increases serotonin
 - Tea (especially chamomile and mint) - relieves stress and induces calmness
- Have someone contain the space - but open it up for staff to speak or sit in silence
 - Facilitator share structure for session, including predicting that there will be a time for sharing and that there may be silence

Phase 2: Staff Support

Staff set the tone for youth in times of tragedy; therefore, it is especially important for agencies (via the TRT) to support staff in their own grieving process so staff is, in turn, able to support youth once the tragedy is communicated more broadly. This is a time that people may need to be more flexible to support those who are most affected by the tragedy.

- Staff have time to process – consider staff needs to process & not do direct youth support/service
- Share information about key staff identified for support (TRT +)
- Supervisors coordinate regarding program coverage needs
- Hospitality food/support – key location people know about
 - Space and standards for offering
 - Times open
- Staff forum for debrief
 - Food and drink available
 - Tissues
 - Something to do with hands (coloring, play dough, pipe cleaners, etc.)
- Acknowledge the impact of loss extends beyond a week
- Acknowledge that the loss can bring up other previous losses
- Pay attention to trainings people are attending – (for example Overdose Response/Naloxone training following overdose)
- Plan to support routine – keeping things going
- Follow-up acknowledgement at 1st team meeting following loss
 - Plan to check in or not at team meeting
 - Be transparent about plan
 - Option to opt out if people don't choose to participate
 - Identify other options to create space
- Staff Debrief/Process – Outline for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
 - Summarize information available – 'public' message
 - Staff share info, thoughts, feelings (if they choose)
 - Summarize with next steps for timeline, what to anticipate
- Things to Share – Things not to Share (to allow for trauma informed staff notifications)

- Only designated staff may communicate with Media (Communication Director)
- Email is not the space to process
- Key agency contacts share info via e-mail
- Do not broadcast letters and messages to HYC
 - For example not sending letters from family or friends that may trigger people

After the initial shock, staff will need ongoing support to ensure they are present for youth who are also struggling. Below is a list of actions that will support the staff grieving process over time:

The first week

- Restore the agency to its regular routine
 - After approximately three days
 - Routine is important to recovery
- Organize regular staff meetings, to ensure people are provided with up to date information.
 - Staff should meet regularly during the first week
 - First staff meeting
 - Conducted by the TRT leader or supervisor
 - Held as soon as possible
 - Goals
 - Introduce TRT members
 - Share accurate information about the death
 - Allow staff an opportunity to express their own reactions and grief
 - Provide staff with scripted statement to use when informing youth of the death
 - Prepare for youth reactions and questions by discussing the issue with staff
 - At each meeting staff should share any information, concerns or observations which they consider important
 - TRT mental health rep should attend the staff meeting to support staff and stay updated on any at-risk youth
 - Discuss participants of concern and activities of concern
- Avoid engaging in speculation conversations
 - Provide support for staff to complete documentation of client services to be able to close out record

The first month

- Monitor staff and participant wellbeing
 - Look for staff and participant distress
- Plan for the impact this incident could have on all relevant events that will be held by the agency
- Gather information from staff that is relevant for a critical incident review

- Conduct a critical incident review
 - Allow staff to contribute their views on how the agency has managed the crisis
 - Anonymous, written survey
 - Collate responses and incorporate them into policy and planning
 - Important to also highlight what was done well
- Consider offering staff information sessions with a mental health agency
 - General training on signs of suicide risk
 - Current research on building resilience
 - Understanding grief and loss
- Continue documentation of all the agency's actions and decisions
 - 12 months
- Check in with staff at staff meetings and supervision
 - Ask if staff want to check in about tragedy and move on if they do not
 - Avoid open-ended questions because they can be experienced as overwhelming rather than supportive.
 - Sample check-ins could include:
 - Check in with Red light, Yellow light, Green light to take the read of the room.
 - Summarize that people can identify their light status without explaining. Offer support: ask if there is anything the team can offer to move from red to yellow, or yellow to green.
 - Predict what the meeting is going to look like/agenda, including framing that we will do a check in that is optional and then move on with agenda because moving forward is important.
 - Acknowledge that something has happened, and then explain that the meeting will move forward with agenda for the first 30 minutes and then have time at the end for more focused processing/debrief (which is optional to share).
 - Related to supervision: check in to see what might be left over – plan time for note or other documentation that needs to be completed, decide if you want to clear out phone contacts, and acknowledge that there may be other data requests that could arise in the coming months.
- Staff get together time - e.g. “Monthly Breakfast” or “Self-Care group”
 - Support and build community
- Begin implementing critical incident review

Longer Term

- Continue to support and monitor participants and staff
 - Participants
 - Reminder that there is no right way to remember or grieve the loss of a friend and to be kind to each other and respect their differences
 - Staff
 - Consider additional personnel support
- Keep staff and participants informed

- Regular and relevant communication
- Plan for anniversaries, birthdays and other significant events
 - Be aware that anniversaries can bring people back to the early stages of grief
 - Discourage large group memorials
 - Small groups, with staff supervision if possible
 - Let youth and staff know it's normal to re-experience grief and sadness at significant times, and tell them things will get easier over time
 - Suggest activities which make the youth/staff feel good and which remind them of the good times they shared with the person they have lost
 - Encourage them to contact sources of support rather than spending their days alone
 - Remind them that there is no 'right' way to mark an anniversary, and help them find a way of coping which they feel comfortable with
 - Acknowledge that newer traumatic experiences connect with past trauma
 - Help them connect with counselors or other support services if they are feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope in the lead-up to the event
- Complete the recommendations of the critical incident review
- Include your agency's tragedy plan in its staff induction process

Phase 3: Memorial Planning

In order to support staff and youth in their grief, it is important to have a well-coordinated opportunity for collective grieving. This includes coordinating a memorial service as well as a space for youth to process the tragedy in a supported and compassionate manner.

- Memorial plan – coordinated among all 4 partners

Memorialization

- Collect all the belongings of the deceased participant
 - Do not allow youth to be present for this
 - An empty space could be a distressing symbol so it is appropriate to forewarn them when this is going to happen
 - Be thoughtful about cleaning up where client names are on lists, such as the shelter list
- Determine the agency's involvement in the funeral.
 - Participants and staff may wish to hold a memorial/remembrance service at the agency
 - Only hold one memorial
 - Large numbers of participants is not recommended
 - Consider using the support room for reflective activities with small groups
 - Treat all deaths in the same way (structure consistent), while also being respectful and representative of individual identities
 - Identify opportunities for youth involvement

- Meet with closest youth to work out a meaningful and safe way of acknowledging the loss
 - Youth may want to prepare something to share at memorial (writing, music, etc.)
- Have a mental health professional on site post-service
- Consider cultural identities when planning memorials
- Spontaneous Acknowledgments (acknowledgment prior to the ceremony, if applicable)
 - Identify location where flowers and memories/condolences can be shared
 - Set some limits around the material, the content, the location and the length of time
 - For example, set up poster paper for youth to write messages but set posters up in an area that may be avoided by those who do not wish to participate. Monitor for messages that are inappropriate. After a few days (2-5) remove posters and give to staff or close youth
- Consider adopting a ritual as a standard part of practice when a participant dies.
 - Each agency designs their own remembrance ceremony guide/practice that they utilize when they host the ceremony.
 - Be cautious of use of silent meditation, as it can be anxiety producing for some.
 - Predict silence and that it will be limited.
 - Consider having photos (Facebook capture or offered by family) available for people to take with them.
- Staff involvement
 - Remind staff about their roles at a memorial
 - Staff facilitator(s)
 - Some staff attend with focus on supporting youth
 - Some staff may attend as mourners
 - Trauma Response Teams member available at memorial to offer support to staff in deep grief

Phase 4: Youth Notification

In recognition of the vulnerability of the population we serve, it is important to be mindful in the way that we communicate the news of a tragedy to the youth. In order to support staff and youth in their grief, it is important to have a well-coordinated opportunity for collective grieving. This includes coordinating a memorial service as well as a space for youth to process the tragedy in a supported and compassionate manner.

- Supporting staff in informing youth
 - Staff should be provided with
 - A script which they should follow to inform participants
 - Information on how to offer support, how to manage discussion about death, signs to watch out in youth, and information on grief
 - Offer to allow staff to work in pairs for support when informing youth
- Inform youth via a script. Do this in individually or in small groups, not at a whole organization meeting
- Internal notification plans for youth

- Staff talk with individual and small groups of youth
- Post flyer of notification (e-mail to staff/HYC public)
- Youth forum for debrief
 - Food/support
- Consider cultural differences in grief
- Intentionally weave harm reduction conversation into discussions with youth
 - Remind youth that they are important
 - Encourage them to think about how they might want to contribute at a remembrance ceremony
 - Be aware of possible escalation in behaviors
 - Increased use
 - Increased violence
 - Increased trauma responses
- Informing participants: think about how, when, where, and who
 - Make a plan for informing:
 - Start with the friends closest to the participant and other participants identified as vulnerable
 - Speak to them individually or in small groups.
 - Provide them with immediate support and information about where they can receive continuing assistance
 - Inform the rest of the program in small groups, not at a whole agency meeting.
 - Whole agency discussions are not recommended because participant reactions are more difficult to manage in this environment and it is harder to support individuals there.
 - Recognize their close association with the participant, their anticipated desire for more information, and their different need for support.
 - Use a script.
 - Consider what is public information that can be shared (not confidential) in creating the script.
 - This is an important way of supporting staff who find the task of informing participants stressful
 - It also ensures that accurate and consistent information is provided to participants
 - Use different scripts for participants who were close to the participant and all other participants
 - Avoid engaging in speculation conversations.
 - If it is a suicide, do not describe the method
 - Ask anyone you inform not to spread sensitive information
 - Be thoughtful about where and how long flyers are posted
 - Get youth feedback about where and how long posted
 - Keep posters up for limited period (~2-4 weeks)
 - Be prepared to support youth who come in weeks after the tragedy and learn of it for the first time.
- As part of agency practice, notification may involve staff, youth, community, and elders as part of larger group if part of organizational tradition.

Phase 5: Youth Support

As with staff, youth will process grief in different ways and each participant may need unique supports following a tragedy / death. This section includes recommendations that will provide a safe and supportive environment for youth to engage with their own grief.

The first week

- Restore the agency to its regular routine
 - After approximately three days
 - Routine is important to recovery
- Monitor participants and, in collaboration with the relevant mental health agency, begin assessments of participants identified as being at risk
 - In the first 24 hours the closest friends and associates of the participants and anyone who witnessed the death should be provided with immediate support
 - Develop a plan to support people who are most affected or who have been identified by staff as at particular risk
- Set up a participant support space in the agency
 - Should be a safe, supervised location
 - Participants' grief and needs can be expressed, responded to and monitored
 - An appropriate staff member must supervise the room at all times
 - The room's door should be left ajar rather than shut
 - The support room should be quiet and out of the way
 - Provide something to do with hands (coloring, play dough, pipe cleaners, etc.)
 - Keep a sign-in sheet, so you can monitor which participants are using the room and may be at increased risk
 - Allow distressed participants access to this room for several days after the incident
 - Predict how long the room will be available and options for support after the space is no longer available
- Plan for the impact this incident could have on scheduled participant activities, and if necessary upcoming activities hosted by community partners

The first month

- Monitor participant wellbeing and be aware of signs of participant distress
- Consider offering staff information sessions with a mental health agency
 - General training on signs of suicide risk
 - Current research on building resilience
 - Understanding grief and loss

Longer Term

- Continue to support and monitor participants
 - Reminders that there is no right way to remember or grieve the loss of a friend the importance of kindness and empathy as people express their grief in different ways

- Keep participants informed
 - Regular and relevant communication
- Be available to support youth around anniversaries, birthdays and other significant events
 - Be aware that anniversaries can bring people back to the early stages of grief
 - Support youth to attend annual homeless memorial ceremonies
 - Let youth and staff know it's normal to re-experience grief and sadness at significant times, and predict that people do find things get easier over time
 - Suggest activities which make the youth feel good and which celebrate the person they loss or otherwise remind them of the good times they shared
 - Encourage them to contact sources of support rather than spending their days alone
 - Remind them that there is no 'right' way to mark an anniversary, and help them find a way of coping which they feel comfortable with
 - Help them connect with counselors or other support services if they are feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope in the lead-up to an anniversary

Additional Considerations

Sometimes the response to a death or other tragedy will need to be adjusted due to its circumstances.

Specific tasks that will need to be completed and concerns that will need to be addressed for unique circumstances are below:

- **If housing/death on-site**
 - Gather cards of the police, Emergency Responders, and Detectives that respond to the incident (so that we have information for follow-up contact).
 - Confirm designated staff member to be in contact with the Medical Examiner, as we should not release info about the incident until the family has been notified by Medical Examiner.
 - Identify staff as central point of contact for emergency responders (preferably a Supervisor/Manager).
 - Identify staff who can wait with emergency responders and/or police who may secure the space to communicate with staff or participants in the area. Two designated responders are helpful so that one can take on operational needs while the other can manage information flow and support with the emergency responders.
 - This can take hours.
 - Call in additional staff as needed (definitely after hours). Assume this will happen because it is likely that you will be sending staff on shift home.
 - If needed, provide a 'loaner' set of keys so they may use elevator and access relevant areas (contractor keys).
 - If needed, identify space where Police/Detectives can meet with staff and youth to conduct interviews and/or complete their documentation.
 - Consider if there are changes in program hours that need to be implemented.
 - Closing early, change in hours to allow for debriefing or other process of notification, etc.
 - Clearing areas to reduce people hanging around at sensitive times.
 - Consider how to clean up and reset the space. Identify a biohazard clean up company, as needed, to assist.

- **If in another Continuum space**

- Staff in another program may be significantly impacted and staff in other programs may need to provide individual support to participants.
- We can offer help or support to the Continuum partner.
 - Sometimes an e-mail, call of sympathy/support, or flowers are sent.
 - Sometimes we may coordinate schedules so a program can close to do youth and/or staff notifications.
- Youth may share details before staff receive official information. Youth retelling of events may be based in both fact and rumor. Please share information you are hearing with your supervisor so they can follow-up with the other Continuum partners.
- Staff may have information that cannot be shared publically. It is important to confirm what the message is that can be shared with youth and with staff.
- If information sharing is limited due to the process of 'next of kin' notification or other reasons:
 - we can acknowledge 'something happened' and it is tough to not have more information,
 - we will share information if and when we can,
 - your co-workers might have information that you do not have yet. We understand that is awkward.
 - confidentiality still applies after someone dies, and we guide our 'message' based on the 'public information'— content available in the media, approved by family/next of kin, or official cause of death from the Medical Examiner.

- **If violent death**

- If it is in the news and graphic details are being shared, staff should not repeat graphic details in messaging with participants or staff discussions in public spaces.
 - Encourage youth to discuss only in private spaces.
- If suspect not in custody, consider safety planning and information that can be shared with participants.
 - Address any discussions of possible retaliation and plan to prevent any potential increased harassment and possible bullying.
- If a participant is the suspect, consider messaging that addresses both privacy and concerns.
 - Supervisors confirm plan and share information about how to handle if individual is on site/in contact and there is an active warrant for their arrest.

- **If rental supported by Agency**

- Landlord communication and coordination is important. Plan for:
 - Clean out,
 - Dealing with belongings,
 - Return copies of keys if we have them, and
 - Considerations if rehousing someone in the unit.

- **Considerations for youth that passed previously**

- Staff responses to death notifications vary
- If staff find out about a death months after the loss, follow the same sensitivities around notifying other staff. Do not underestimate how people might be affected.
- If only a few staff are affected by the loss (someone most people did not know/the community grieving is smaller), offer the same supports even if on a smaller scale.

Appendix A: Immediate Response Check List

Immediate response refers to a timeframe from the moment of the incident to 48 hours later.

Location

- Onsite Incidents
 - Ensure no other participants or staff are in immediate danger
 - Administer first aid when necessary
 - Call 911 for emergency services
 - Alert your Director and the Tragedy Response Team for assistance
 - Have staff help witnesses move to safe locations
 - Isolate the site of the incident and do everything possible to protect others from viewing the site
 - Get cards / names of first responders (police/emergency responders) and detectives (if involved)

- Offsite Incidents
 - Do not ignore rumors
 - If true, find out as many of the facts and circumstances as possible
 - Reports of death should be confirmed with/by medical examiner, police, or hospital staff

Participants

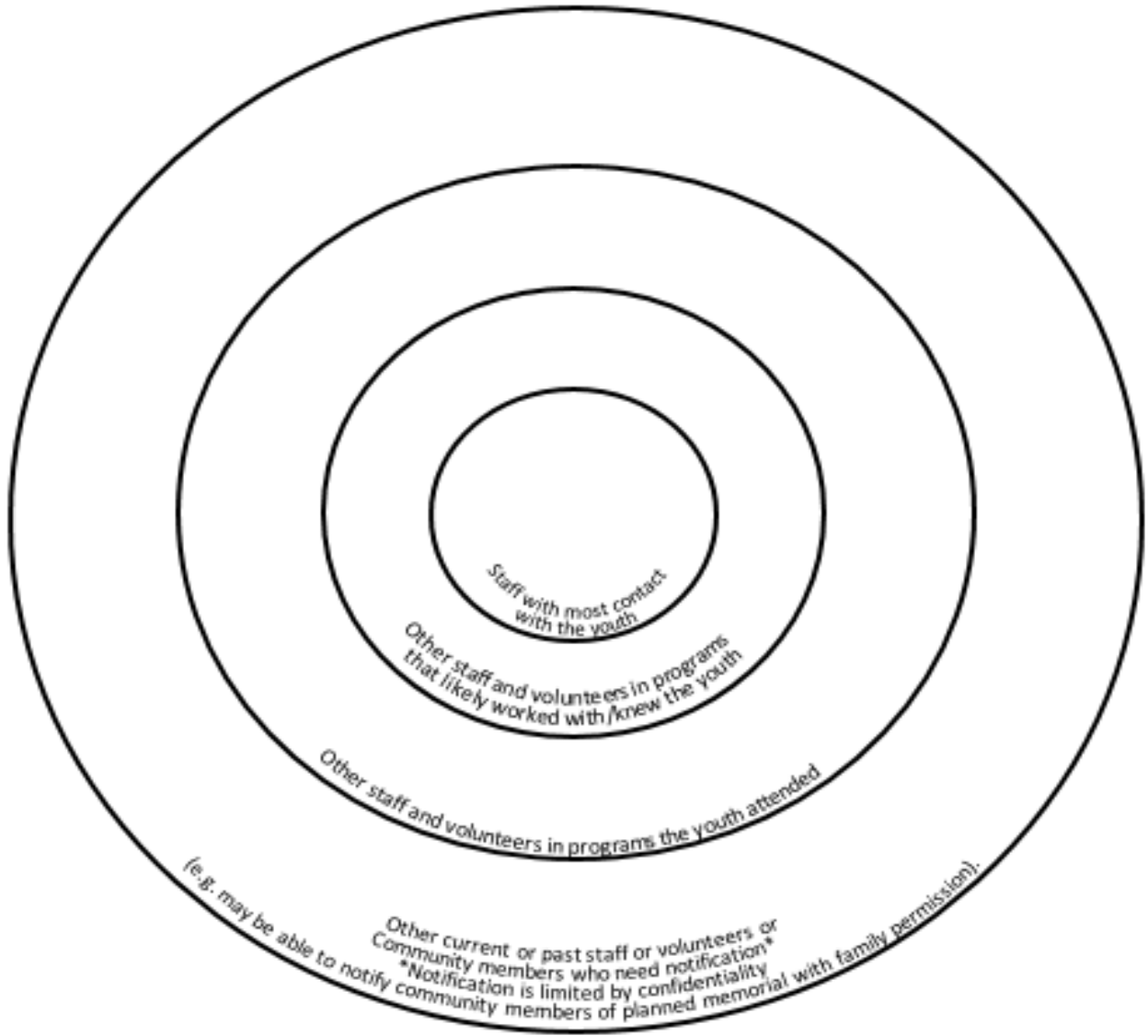
- Do not leave directly affected participants alone
 - Identify safe and secure places where crisis support can be provided

Immediate Response Activities

- Inform your supervisor and ensure the other HYC Program Directors (that participate in Continuum Planning Meeting) are notified as soon as possible
- Within each HYC organization, supervisors track when and how staff prefer to be notified (immediately, afternoon/evening before next shift, upon arrival for next shift)
- Supervisors track list of youth who might be most affected by death.
- Supervisors consider when the HYC e-mail notification will be sent and the staff preferences when notifying
- HYC Program Directors coordinate regarding when HYC e-mail will be sent, with consideration for agencies doing internal notifications and the need to share information regarding youth support groups and memorials
- Have a plan for referring media enquiries

Planning for: _____

Date: _____



Priority youth for notification:

Appendix B: Staff Notification Checklist & Sample Email Script

Grief Support Resources:

- Identify safe and secure places where crisis support can be provided
- Get staff from other programs to fill in for staff directly affected

Communication Briefing Content:

The leader of the TRT should brief non-TRT staff about:

- The basic facts of the situation, referencing the 'death' or 'loss'
- The members of the TRT and their roles
- The response plan for the day, in particular changes to responsibilities or routines
- How phone inquiries are to be managed (any media inquiries should be routed to the agency Director responsible for communications)
- Contact being made with staff who were absent at that time or who are on leave. Relevant information about roles and special procedures should also be displayed in a space that is widely used by staff, such as a kitchen or break room
- When Continuum e-mail is sent, use 'Sad News' in the subject line. This reference now indicates a loss and staff who work in the HYC can anticipate what type of information they will encounter
- Remind staff not to broadcast letters or messages to the HYC (ex. Do not send letters from family or friends that may trigger people, do not send news reports with details of criminal investigation/autopsy, etc.)

Example Script:

It is with sadness that I share information of the death of a Continuum participant, _____ (*youth's full name*).

(If applicable) The confirmation of _____'s (*youth's first name*) death is public: [include link to public information.](#)

Youth support spaces have will be offered at _____ (*locations*) on _____ (*date/time*).

_____ (*Youth Organization Name*) will host a remembrance ceremony. The HYC partners will coordinate and details will be sent out once it is scheduled.

Thank you for supporting one another and our youth as we grieve this tragic loss.

Establishing a Safe Place for Staff to Process:

- Identify safe place within agency
- Include location in All Staff email notification about youth death
- Stock location with healthy food and water
 - Recommended Foods: fruit, nuts, whole grain snacks, dark chocolate, oatmeal
 - Recommend Beverages: water, tea
- Identify staff member or crisis support worker to provide support to grieving staff

Resources around Grief and Loss:

- Information on agency's EAP Program*
- List of clinical resources and links to grief support*

Reestablishing Routine:

- Return to normal operations after 3 days
- Check in with staff at next staff meeting following tragedy
- Utilize supervision as a time to check in with staff around loss

Critical Incident Review:Sample Questions

1. What was most helpful about the agency's response to our most recent loss?
2. What could have been done different to provide better support to staff?
3. What could have been done different to provide better support to youth?
4. Identify needed changes to provide a higher level of support
5. What, if any, follow up steps need to be taken to provide closure?

Appendix D: Memorial Planning Checklist

Coordinate Schedule of HYC Hosted Memorials

- Identify HYC agency hosting Memorial
- HYC TRT Leads confer to identify time that works for all HYC partners
 - Memorial scheduled for 1 hour
- Hosting agency develops Memorial notification flyer
- Hosting agency e-mails Memorial flyer to HYC partners via Continuum list serve (if HYC Staff Notification completed) or HYC TRT Leads (if HYC Staff Notification still in process)

Memorial Event

- Host agency follows basic structure/format for Memorial events at their site
- Consider cultural identity and preferences in components included in ceremony
- Offer opportunity for youth and staff to participate in event planning

Standard Supplies for Memorials:

- Memorial Program (handout) with
 - name and photos of individual,
 - date of Memorial event, and
 - basic agenda (optional)
- Tissues
- PA or sound system if needed for the space
- Candles, candle holders, and matches, if part of event
- Photos, drawings, notes of remembrance and condolence (on poster board or other display) if put together for event
- Flowers or other objects which help to center the space for the Memorial

Staff Role at Memorials:

- Identify staff members attending memorial as supports for youth
- Facilitator identified who, at minimum, will:
 - Welcome people in attendance and review structure of memorial
 - Invite people to share memories (voluntary and optional for people to share)
 - Facilitate closure of the gathering
- Identify staff who will work with family members of other community contacts attending the event

Appendix E: Youth Notification Checklist

Grief Support Resources:

- Identify safe and secure places where crisis support can be provided
- Get staff from other programs to fill in for staff directly affected

Communication Briefing Content:

The leader of the TRT should brief non-TRT staff about

- The basic facts of the situation, referencing the 'death' or 'loss'

Appendix F: Youth Support Checklist

Establishing Safe Places for Youth to Process:

- Identify appropriate staff members to provide support and consul to grieving youth
- Identify location within agency to hold space for youth
- Coordinate with other agencies to provide multiple opportunities for support, as necessary
- Provide youth with clear information about the times and locations of support spaces
- Stock location with healthy food and water
 - Recommended Foods: fruit, nuts, whole grain snacks, dark chocolate, oatmeal
 - Recommend Beverages: water, tea
- Provide materials for youth to process loss
 - Paper and writing utensils
 - Fidget toys
 - Markers and drawing paper

Resources on Grief and Loss Support:

- List of clinical resources about providing support to folks experiencing loss*
- Identify staff members within agency and HYC who are willing and able to connect one-on-one with in need of more intensive support
- List of outside mental health providers that provide support around loss – information on providing referrals (ex. Dougy Center?)*

Engaging Youth in Memorial Planning:

- Identify and reach out to youth who may benefit form participation in memorial planning
- Identify areas for youth input that complement agency's established Memorial routine

Appendix G: Overview of Trauma Informed Care & Grief

Grief is a part of our response to tragedy. People will experience grief in their own way, which varies with each situation. Some ideas to consider related to trauma informed care and grief include:

- You are going to have a ton of feelings, and none of them are wrong.
- You will continue feeling things.
- Trauma connects to trauma. When someone dies, it might make you think of everybody else you have lost or other bad things that have happened, both at work and in your personal life.
- Listen to yourself. Pay attention to your needs first and foremost. Know when you are able to come to work and be present for people, and know when you need to step away.
- Working through a tragedy at work can feel very lonely once you go home for the day. It can affect you in ways you do not expect. You may feel isolated from your community and have a hard time explaining the impact of the loss.
- Sometimes after a death, instead of pain and sadness, you may feel mostly numb and distant. You may feel unaffected by a death. Sometimes your heart and your brain need distance from things. That is okay too.
- The feelings that come with grief are how we honor the person that is gone. We get to remember their art, their dreams, and their funny moments. Sometimes grief is just a measurement of how awesome somebody was and how they were loved.
- There is not a right or wrong way to grieve. Please seek out resources that support you in your experience through grief.

Citations & Acknowledgements

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