



AVOCA

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Central School District



Stephen Saxton, Superintendent
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Dear Parents and Guardians;

The recent tragedy is sure to raise many emotions, concerns, and questions for our entire school, especially our students. This may be a difficult time for you and your child, as well as the Avoca community as a whole.

Please encourage your student to respect the privacy and needs of the families both in the community and on social media. We encourage you to listen carefully to your student's thoughts and emotions and share any information you think the school should be aware of. We have enclosed some resources that may be useful to you in helping your child at home as you process our community's loss.

If you would like additional resources or need assistance during school hours, please do not hesitate to contact your child's school counselor:

- High School Guidance Office: 607-566-3000 ext. 1135
- High/Middle School Main Office: 607-566-3000 ext. 1125
- Elementary School Main Office: 607-566-3000 ext. 1121

If over the weekend you find yourself or your young adult overwhelmed, please utilize the resources included below.

Sincerely,

Stephen Saxton
Superintendent of Schools

The following resources are available 24/7:

Steuben County Mental Health

(M-F) 607-664-2255

After hours Crisis Hotline – 607-937-7800

Noyes Mental Health – 1-585-335-4316

8-4 Daily Walk-In Hours

Grief Helpline – 1-800-445-4808

Will provide links to resources in this community

National Crisis TEXT line – 741741

Every texter is connected with a Crisis Counselor, a real-life human being trained to bring texters from a hot moment to a cool calm through active listening and collaborative problem solving.

For Immediate Assistance call 911

Tips for Parents of Students Who Are Experiencing Crisis

- Keep your child informed and updated, keeping in mind the developmental and cognitive level of the child. Children need to feel involved and as in control as much as possible.
- Watch for signs of distress. Loss of appetite, aggression, acting out, being withdrawn, sleeping disorders, and other behavior changes can indicate problems.
- Send your child to school if possible. The stability and routine of a familiar situation will help young people feel more secure.
- Remember that everyone reacts to stress and/or grief in different ways. There is no one-way to act in a crisis situation.
- Allow children the opportunity to express feelings. It is important to validate these feelings.
- A good diet and plenty of exercise are important for children who are under stress. Encourage your child to eat well and get plenty of exercise.
- Be honest about your own concerns but stress your and your child's ability to cope with the situation.
- Respect a child's need to grieve.
- Provide somewhere private and quiet for your child to go.
- Be available and listen to your child.
- Remember to take care of yourself.
- Obtain outside help if necessary.

Young People and Grief

The grieving process is a normal, natural, and healing result of loss and pain is to be expected. Young people of all ages exhibit grief and reactions to grief. Guilt, anxiety, anger, fear and sadness may be universal, and the expressions of these emotions may vary from day to day. Helping a young person and yourself through this difficult time may often feel overwhelming; however, knowledge of common reactions to loss may help you recognize behavior for what it is: grieving.

Possible Grief Reactions:

- Anger
- Aggression/acting out: starting fights, outbursts of temper, drop in grades, change of peer affiliation
- Explosive emotions: gentle tears, wrenching sobs, extremes in behavior
- Physiological changes: fatigue, trouble sleeping, lack of appetite, headaches, and stomach pains
- Idealization of the deceased
- Sadness/emptiness/withdrawal: overwhelmed by feelings of loss when realizes person is not coming back; feels extremely vulnerable
- Guilt/self-blame: “If only...” “Why didn’t I...?” Feels responsible for the loss; seeks self-punishment
- Disorganization: restless, unable to concentrate, uncontrollable tears, difficulty focusing
- Lack of feelings: denial; protection from pain; can be a form of numbness; may be difficult to admit and may generate guilt

How to Help a Young Person Experiencing Grief:

Use the terms “died/dead/death: rather than phrases like “passed away,” or “taken from us.” Give an honest age appropriate explanation for the person’s death, avoiding clichés or easy answers. Straightforward, gentle use of the words helps a person confront the reality of the death.

Explain and accept that everyone has different reactions to death at different times. The reaction might not hit until the funeral or weeks later.

Reassure the young person that his/her grief feelings are normal. There is no “right” way to react to a loss. Give permission to cry. Let them know it’s OK not to cry if the young person does not typically react in that way.

Permit or encourage the young person to talk about the person who has died. This is a vital part of the healing process, both at the moment of loss, but especially after the funeral.

Do not attempt to minimize the loss or take the pain away. Phrases like “Don’t worry, it will be OK,” “He/she had a good life,” or “He/she is out of pain.” are not helpful. Grief is painful. There must be pain before there can be acceptance and healing. It is very difficult to do, but most helpful to acknowledge the person’s pain and permit them to live with it without trying to take it away or make it “better.”

Encourage the young person to talk about his or her feelings. Encourage communication first with family, but also be aware of other support people such as clergy, trusted adult friends, and trusted peers.

LISTEN. Listen with your heart. Listening to the feelings of the young person is most important. Listen through the silences. Just being present, showing you care by your listening, is more important than knowing what to say or even saying anything at all.

Help the young person decide about attending the funeral. The funeral can be a way to say goodbye but abide by the young person's wish and express understanding if he/she chooses not to go.

A Grieving Person's Needs:

To cry

To be held

To talk

To be listened to

To feel caring around them, to be with people they care about

To understand how others may react