MESSAGE TO PARENTS

Dear Parents,

Unfortunately, we have very sad news to share with you this evening. A member of our community, grade GRADE student STUDENT NAME, died by an unintentional drug overdose this morning. We have been given permission by the family to share this information with you.

The District Critical Response Team is at the school, and will be on site next week to provide additional counselling support for students. Staff will share the information with classes during first period on Monday, and the script is included below. Please talk to your kids about the information, and reach out to the school if you feel your child will need additional support. We have also included some handouts that may be helpful as you debrief with your family. Staff will also be given resources to support students and identify people who may be struggling.

We will host a memory event for NAME later in the week and we will send more information home early next week.

Thank you for your continued care.

**Script to be read to students Monday morning:**

We have sad news that I need to share with you.

STUDENT NAME , a grade GRADE student ,who attended SCHOOL NAME, died by unintentional drug overdose Friday morning. His parents have given us permission to share this information with you, and we have let your families know that we are sharing this news at school.

When something like this happens, it can affect people in many different ways. Some of you may not feel very different at all. Some of you may feel sad, angry, shocked, or even scared. These are all usual reactions to hearing news like this and they are usually temporary. It is important to treat each other with respect and compassion today as each of you deals with this news in your own way.

If you are feeling like you need a place to talk about this, share feelings, draw or make cards, or just sit quietly by yourself, you can go to the QUIET ROOM LOCATION. It will be open all day today, just let your teacher know that’s where you are going. Remember if you choose to go there that you are expected to be respectful and responsible and that we want you to come back and be part of the class as soon as you are able.

In order to respect NAME memory and his family, we ask that you avoid speculation either in person or by social media. As you look out for each other, please let any staff know if there are students that you think need particular support right now. There are extra counsellors at the school to provide support.

We do expect to have a memory event for NAME to allow our school community to say good-bye, and will share more information in the next few days. Today is a day for us to be our best selves, and support each other, as we process this sad news.

Parent/Guardian Resource-Supporting Children in Grief/Loss

Helping Secondary Youth Deal with Grief and Loss

Here are some things that parents/guardians can do to support youth dealing with death.

CHECK FACTS:

* Give accurate information about what happened. Tell only what you know to be confirmed.
* Answer questions honestly, providing only as much detail as requested.
* Be aware that repeated viewing of the media coverage of the death can be traumatizing.
* Check out what has been heard about the death and correct any misinformation or rumours. “Tell me what you have heard . . .” is a good conversation opener. Be aware of the kind of information exchange happening through social media.

CHECK FEELINGS:

* Ask your youth how he/she is feeling.
* Tell him/her that feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, fear, relief are all common.
* Be aware that this kind of news and these strong feelings can lead to: nightmares, irritability, stomach aches, loss of appetite, lack of interest in normal activities, desire to be alone. Self-criticism, displaced anger, decline in school performance, and participation in at-risk behaviours may also occur. These are all common reactions under these circumstances and are usually temporary.

EMPOWER:

* Encourage your youth to attend school.
* Invite your youth to talk about the person that he/she has lost.
* Help your youth identify what he/she has done in tough or sad situations before and how it has helped.
* Remind him/her that you know he/she is strong and has coped with difficult situations in the past.
* Facilitate opportunities for him/her to engage in healing activities such as: talking to friends or relatives, getting together with peers, writing in a journal, drawing or painting, listening to music, participating in sports, going to a memorial service, making a memory book or collage, planting a flower or tree. Follow his/her lead.

MONITOR:

* Monitor chat line/msn/Facebook, etc. use.
* Monitor risk-taking behaviour such as use of alcohol and drugs, violence, delinquency, and self-harm.
* Watch for signs that your child may need professional help to cope with this loss:
	+ Normal living patterns do not resume over time
	+ A continuation of nightmares or need to talk about the death.
	+ A continuation of feelings of anxiety, insecurity and/or fear
* Seek support from your Family Doctor, Living and Learning Through Loss (250 413-3114), Victoria Hospice (250 370-8715), Child and Youth Mental Health, or school or community counsellors.

REMEMBER THAT CHILDREN ARE REMARKABLY RESILIENT.

WITH LOVE AND SUPPORT THEY DO RECOVER FROM THE VERY SAD AND TRAGIC EVENTS THAT LIFE CAN THROW THEIR WAY.

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Secondary Student Self-Care

Taking Care of Yourself

It is important for each of you to take care of yourself and each other during this very difficult time.

Be Aware That:

* It is common to have feelings such as: shock, sadness, anger, guilt, fear.
* You might experience nightmares, irritability, stomach aches, loss of appetite, fatigue.
* You may want to talk about this a lot, you may not.
* You may remember other losses or difficult times in your life and some of the feelings may return.
* Grief is different for everyone. It is okay for it to take a long time or a short time.
* It is okay for friends and family to see that you are struggling to deal with this loss.
* Drugs and alcohol can intensify feelings and make it more difficult for you to cope.

Know What Helps:

* Look after yourself. Drink lots of water, eat healthy food, and get as much sleep as you need.
* Connect with the people who are the “rocks” in your life (family members, friends).
* It’s also okay to spend time alone, if that is what helps.
* Make time for activities that help when you are troubled or stressed: journaling, reading, hanging out with friends, playing sports, listening to music.
* Trust yourself. We generally know what we need to do to take care of ourselves; we just don’t always do it.

Seek Help If Needed:

* You can get more help from:
	+ - School Counsellors
		- Living and Learning Through Loss: 250 413-3114
		- Need Crisis Line 250 386-6323
		- Community Counsellors

THIS IS A TIME TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF AND EACH OTHER.

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