

{School Letterhead}

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This letter is sadly to inform you that a student, *Jane Doe*, passed away on Monday, May 14th. The family has reported the cause of death to be a completed suicide.

We have shared this information with our students so that they are aware of what has happened. We had additional counselors on campus yesterday to help meet the emotional needs of students and staff who have been upset by this tragedy. Counselors, teachers and other support personnel will continue to be on hand to assist our students, staff and parents as long as needed. Please call the school if you would like assistance.

I urge you to discuss this event with your child and explain that suicide is not a positive response to life's challenges. Please explain that experts tell us most people who attempt or complete suicide have many emotional problems for which there is help available. Emphasize the importance of people seeking help when needed.

The death of a peer may affect children in a variety of ways, depending upon how well they knew Jane as well as their prior experiences with death and loss. Please see the attached information sheet for more information regarding suicide loss. This is an important time to listen to your child intently. If your teen seems to need to talk, answer their questions simply, honestly, and repeatedly, if necessary.

Included on the information sheet are local resources that are available should this event trigger any extreme reactions to your child or someone else you know. Please advise us if you have serious concerns about the effect this event is having on your child or any of your child's friends. This is a time we must be ears and eyes for each other as we seek to nurture and protect the children in our midst and teach them how to seek help when it is needed.

Please join us in mourning the loss of Jane, while not glamorizing, and thereby positively reinforcing, the method by which she died. We will be utilizing this tragic event as a teachable moment and will therefore be having an assembly tomorrow morning with all students in order to discuss this event, normal grief reactions as well as how to help friends and peers that may be experiencing depression and/or suicidal thoughts. We must reinforce positive options our children can employ when life is difficult as well as how they can access these options.

I am including information about suicide and some talking points that can be helpful to you in discussing this issue with your child. I am also including a list of community resources should you feel that your child would benefit from additional assistance. If you need immediate assistance, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Our thoughts are with the family and friends of Jane.

Sincerely,

School Principal

Source: Erbacher, T.A. (2013). *Lending a Helping Hand: Suicide in Schools: Empowering School Districts*. Booklet published by the Delaware County Intermediate Unit, Morton, PA.