



The TIG Network is uniquely positioned to support coping and recovery. The current context of the global pandemic is unprecedented, leading some of us to experience feeling a lack confidence in skills or knowledge to apply; being frozen or unsure of our actions. This is uncharted territory, however, what we know about crisis response can be applied with thoughtful planning to meet needs in the current context.

Extending Best Practices

Guidance for TIG Leaders in Response to a Major Incident: Responding to Grief and Loss

This document provides guidance for TIG/Crisis Response Teams to inform dialogue and planning for anticipated losses due to COVID-19 or other circumstances during school closure. Please revert to typical processes and procedures once school has returned to session.

Communication about Loss: While school is on hiatus, familial, relational or community networks will likely assume the role of sharing that a loss has occurred. This may be a change from what is typical when losses have impacted your district before.

In Typical TIG Circumstances	Considerations of Current Context
School Staff is made aware of a loss	This may not occur in the same way. While school is on hiatus the district may not be the primary center of communication and support.
Staff confirm the loss has occurred	Can include typical family contact, other sources may include community/relational networks or newspaper notices.
Family Liaison is assigned to coordinate wishes and supports	Outreach via phone or virtual options. Respect that the impacted family member may not see the same urgency to coordinate with school during closure.
School communicates news based on Circle of Impact Planning	Should be carefully considered within scenario of modified school role, precedent setting if multiple losses are anticipated, and the ability to provide in-person monitoring or supports is delayed.
School monitors and delivers 1:1 or group supports as needed	Must shift to virtual formats. Natural supports within the family and community should also be recognized and empowered.

- Recognize that with school not being in session students, families may not communicate important news immediately, if at all.
- Determine what role in communication loss/losses your district will play. **Guidance for TIG Leaders in Response to a Major Incident: Communication** can assist your planning.
- Manage expectations through proactive communication. Please share with others how you anticipate communication about loss will occur through the hiatus. Contextualize within hope, care and concern, yet also identify how communication may look or feel differently and what they can expect upon return to school.

Most individuals have the capacity to recover even from the most critical of incidents.

Considerations for Response and Support

Until the outbreak has stabilized, actions taken will align with Crisis Management strategies rather than Response and Recovery. Recognize you may play a more limited but critical role in support and recovery in the interim. Being active in ways that are available to you now will lay the foundation for positive outcomes while a planned response can be enhanced with return to school.

If notified of any loss/losses: Follow your protocol for convening your crisis team.

- **Determine a Family Liaison and begin warm outreach.** The Family Liaison can help assess need and readiness for support from school. In the first call, you may only establish a warm connection, and suggestion that you will follow up in the coming days and are available to them, even in the hiatus. If the opportunity arises, you may share how this may look during school hiatus.
- **Mail/Email materials:** Empower the family/caregiver/loved one with resources to support their needs. Help them understand their role in promoting coping and recovery. Handouts and resources available from the TIG Grief Module can assist you.
- **Foster supportive relationships.** Universality, the idea that one is “not alone” is a healing factor. A unique aspect to this experience is that no family/loved will be alone in their experience of loss. Families and loved ones can be connected to one another to find support and promote recovery. Support groups, virtual or otherwise may emerge.
- **Provide 1:1 Support.** Group responses will be limited in their use during this time. However, use of phone or virtual technologies to maintain connection is possible. If need arises, school mental health or TIG Trained staff may be able to deliver virtual support to a student or loved one. Ongoing connection can help monitor to determine if the individual is coping with current supports or if referral is needed. Can also be used to teach/reinforce positive coping at home.
- **Refer to community supports:** if warranted. The TIG Resource from the Grief Module entitled *Wellness Tips* can remind your team members about grief responses by developmental stage.
- **Document.** Maintain tracking of individuals or groups who may need monitoring for additional support on return to school. This may also include Family Liaisons checking in prior to school return to learn current needs, preferences, and status.

Assessing Needs: Humans are remarkably predictable in responses. Employing the knowledge you have about grief and loss to assess for the need of additional support remains an essential part of this process -whether done virtually or upon the return to school. Reviewing materials from the TIG Grief Module generally can provide a helpful refresh. Considerations given this context can include:

- **Individual or Group?** Depending on the levels and experience of loss within your school or district there may be merit in considering group supports over individual approaches upon return. A variety of planned options can be helpful in meeting a broad spectrum of preferences.
- **Traumatic Grief vs. Grief.** Not all death is traumatic. There will be individual responses even if there are multiple losses due to the same cause of death. Look for the hallmark emotion to guide you – in grief this is sadness, in trauma this is fear/lack of safety. If an individual is experiencing a loss as Traumatic Grief, remember to provide support around trauma first, then develop grief supports as needed once trauma reactivity is reduced.

Most individuals have the capacity to recover even from the most critical of incidents.

Helpful Reminder: *Natural and community efforts will also support students, staff and families that experience loss during this time. As a result of sharing this profound experience, it is likely that new and helpful community recognition of loss and its impact will emerge. Schools and school staff can be one of many important partners and resources in this system of support.*

Commemorations and Memorials: Refer to your current Guidelines* and Process for any necessary modifications if circumstances result in multiple losses. The principles to guide such decisions will remain the same -to meet the needs of the moment, the needs of the many and the needs over time. Necessary modifications may include:

- Reminding all stakeholders of the process and contact for memorial requests
- Make accommodations within your process and communications that requests will be fully reviewed and finalized upon return to school
- Assess circumstances at that time. Should there be multiple requests consider if there is merit for a shared memorial (of type acceptable per your district guidance) vs. multiple individual memorials

Helpful Reminder: *Schools are not the only location where memorials and commemorations may occur. Should your community experience significant loss there will likely be activity around memorials outside of school. It may be most healing to encourage loved ones to participate in a community-based commemoration rather than school-based.*

*If you do not have Commemoration or Memorial Guidelines, a stakeholder team may be convened virtually to address and define. TIG Coordinators and TIG Facilitators are available to share samples and clarify best practice related to School-Based memorials.

Most individuals have the capacity to recover even from the most critical of incidents.