

Commentary...

# Support for youth in time of tragic loss

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Correspondent

Following the tragic deaths on two consecutive weeks involving Sisters teens, support for young people grappling with the losses is vital. In the midst of COVID-19, access to resources is a bit more challenging, but help is available.

In a letter sent out Friday, high school principal Joe Hosang said, "The primary reason for this message is to let you know that we are here to support our students, staff and families through the grieving process."

Counselors from all three schools in Sisters, along with administrators and other support personnel, met last Friday morning to formulate a response for the school community, following the news of two seniors killed in a crash on Road 15 Thursday evening, which happened just a week after a 2020 graduate died in a single car accident.

The initial work for this group was to ascertain some basic facts, assess needs, and to gather resource information to share with students and families.

Normally, if students had been attending in-school classes, the Tri-County Crisis team, a collection of trained

counselors and support personnel, would have been on site at the high school to assist with supporting staff and students, as well as helping with communication and action plans surrounding the circumstance. Without students present the team was not called in immediately, but one member stayed in contact throughout the day to provide guidance to Sisters school staff.

Members of the Crisis Team were scheduled to be at Sisters High School Monday, October 5 to provide further support to staff and students.

The death of young people, especially when it happens unexpectedly, can be very challenging for anyone affected by the loss. Initial reactions of shock and disbelief may be followed by a range of other emotions and reactions including anger, overwhelming sorrow, blame, confusion, and more. There is no magic recipe for coping with such situations, but there are some guidelines, pulled from a variety of sources, including Sources of Strength, that can be helpful, which include:

- Find someone you trust to talk with. Be willing to let others help you.
- Give yourself permission to grieve in your own way and have grace

for those who grieve differently than you do.

- Remember it is not only okay, but good to talk about those who have died.
  - Understand you may feel distracted, unmotivated, or confused, so be willing to give yourself a break. Don't expect to be at your best.
  - Let your family know how you are doing
  - Get physically active—exercise, yoga, running, kick-boxing, punching a pillow, walking in nature or anything else that will get you moving.
  - Don't be surprised if this loss stirs up emotions from previous losses.
  - Write, journal, draw, create, listen to music.
  - Pray or meditate.
  - Find ways to do good self-care regarding eating and sleeping. Grieving can be exhausting.
  - Remember that grief has no timeline or "stages."
  - Seek professional help if the feeling of being overwhelmed persists for long.
- Locally, school counselors in all three buildings are available to assist students. Sisters High School counselor Lindy Weddel said, "We are here to help in any way we can, including providing direct support or to refer students to other resources."

Individual students might discover they are in need of ongoing support and parents may be seeking resources on how to best care for their kids. Given that students are currently conducting most of their school lives at a distance due to COVID-19, parents may feel more need than ever to provide support for their kids.

According to Cheri Lovre, founder of Crisis Management Institute, parents being emotionally available for their kids is crucial.

She said, "Parents may feel like they need to 'make it all better' or be tempted to turn what happened into a lesson of some sort. What kids most need is to know you are there to listen."

Some high school students organized a gathering Friday evening to remember the young people who died, which is an example of why Sisters is a community well known for pulling together to face challenges.

This is certainly one of those times.

Some resources for students, parents and educators include:

- Partners in Care, which serves the entire Central Oregon region with sites in both Bend and Redmond, provides a number of options for kids experiencing grief,

including in-school grief groups, "My Friend's House" (for families); individual support; and a summer program called "Camp Courage." See <https://www.partnersbend.org/bend-hospice-services/childrens-grief-support> for information.

- Deschutes County Mental-Behavioral Health, including the crisis line, 541-322-7500, [www.deschutes.org/health](http://www.deschutes.org/health). Referral forms are available at Sisters Schools.

- The Dougy Center (<https://www.dougy.org>), which is based in Portland, has extensive resources for parents and kids.

- Website: <http://www.griefspeaks.com>.

- Crisis Management Institute, <https://cmionline.com>, has resources for educators, counselors, and parents.

- Private practitioners who specialize in grief.

- Clergy well versed in grief support.

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