

IF A DISASTER BEFALLS THE SCHOOL

Coping with disasters in an educational setting

Ine Spee

Third revised edition



KPC Groep

If a disaster befalls the school

This completely revised version has been compiled by Ine Spee.
It is based on the original version of this publication, written in collaboration with Heleen Schoots and Riet Fiddelaers-Jaspers.

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Accountability

After this book was first published in 2000, KPC Groep set up a Disaster Team in 2001. This free service assists primary schools, secondary schools, and institutions for vocational education in coping with disasters.

Since its inception the Disaster Team has been regularly consulted for advice. These requests have been primarily related to events such as suicide, violence at school, road traffic accidents, the death of seriously ill pupils, sexual violence perpetrated at school by teachers or by pupils, and the disappearance or murder of pupils. We were able to assist on many occasions, by referring to sample letters, procedures, publications that we have written about these themes, or to our website. In cooperation with the Impact Foundation (the national knowledge centre for post-disaster psychosocial care), we have compiled a range of background information and reference material for lessons on distressing situations that take place at school. This information can be found at: www.kpcgroep.nl/calamiteiten.

Over the past few years, the types of questions that schools have submitted to us have changed. The majority of schools now have procedures and/or a crisis team in place and their partnerships with local support organizations are often more structured. This is a favourable development.

The help that schools are offered in the initial phase has increased. Local support should always be given priority: familiar faces and/or telephone numbers, as well as continuity in counselling, are more likely if local organizations are involved in assisting the school.

The Disaster Team is being contacted more often about situations in which 'normal' school life seems to have resumed and yet the healing process is still incomplete. The aftermath of a tragic event often takes considerable time and may be at odds with the school's requirement to get back to the business of education and the future. In addition, different people at the school invariably have different needs. After all, going through the same experience does not automatically imply that every person feels and experiences an event in the same way.

In this third and completely revised edition, there was a need to bring the text up to date and to add new insights: national and international experience with disasters has grown since the last edition and new studies have also been carried out from which we can all benefit.

Ine Spee

1 Introduction

The reports of violence and accidents that occur on an almost daily basis illustrate how peaceful school life can suddenly be disturbed by traumatic events. The murders of a number of pupils in the Netherlands, including Sabine Jansons and Marianne Vaatstra, the murder of an assistant head at a school in The Hague, the upheaval in schools after the firework disaster in Enschede and the New Year's fire in Volendam that scarred many young people for life remain forever etched in our hearts and minds. Even when an incident does not take place at school, the effects are clearly perceptible. School leaders and teachers are often expected to make efforts in a totally different league to those involved in their daily workload. These situations involve increased levels of stress and emotion and this can significantly undermine their ability to act effectively. Moreover, the press is also watching and the school may experience such media interest as a nuisance.

Traumatic events often have a long aftermath for those involved. Schools that have experienced such dramatic events, point without exception to the need to be prepared in some shape or form. Despite the fact that a sense of dismay and powerlessness usually prevails at the time a crisis occurs, the way in which such a situation is dealt with requires precision. No one enjoys preparing themselves for a dangerous situation. Nevertheless, the school is responsible for the well-being of teachers and pupils. Preparation for traumatic events is part of that responsibility. The human suffering that is caused by catastrophes cannot be prevented. However, the way in which the school responds before, during and after a traumatic event can have a major impact on the way in which people respond, come to terms with a trauma and return to daily life.

This publication provides information about traumatic events and the way in which the school can respond. It offers guidance on compiling a scenario book. The information contained in this publication is based on professional literature about traumatic events; on the experiences of school managers, teachers and social workers in the Netherlands who have had to cope with similar events at their schools; and in addition, on the experiences of schools in other countries.

Chapter 2 provides working definitions for the terms 'disaster' and 'catastrophe'. The consecutive phases during a disaster or catastrophe are also described.

Chapter 3 focuses on safety and the pedagogical climate at school and also focuses on the role of the family and external social services.

Chapter 4 examines the need for a scenario book and the importance of a well-functioning crisis team. Chapter 5 describes the actual events that may take place, followed in chapter 6 by a look at the action taken immediately after the event.

The transition to recovery and aftercare is dealt with in chapter 7.

Relevant literature has also been included.

Practical materials have been added in the appendices. A 'Disaster Checklist' has also been included for use when compiling a scenario book.

In addition, there are sample letters and information bulletins for tragic events, a sample 'invitation letter' for a parent evening (concerning sexual violence at a primary school), and a list of important addresses and websites.

2 Disasters and catastrophes

2.1 Definition

A *disaster* or *catastrophe* is an unexpected and acute situation (that is or may become life threatening), involving a relatively large group of people, which disrupts the daily routine and calls for the extraordinary efforts of teachers, school managers and emergency workers. (Source: Van der Velden et al., Utrecht, 1997).

2.2 The four stages of disaster

Van der Velden et al. identify four stages of disaster:

- 1 The precursory stage: sometimes this stage never arises or the signs are not recognized.
"He sat on the same bench every day and we spoke to each other regularly; I didn't notice any signs of depression and I still can't explain his suicide now."
- 2 The actual event stage: characteristics are confusion, attempts to get a grip on the situation, and a lack of and need for information. (What exactly happened?)
*"When the pupils heard that their classmate had been murdered, the boys in particular became quite aggressive. They started kicking doors and their school bags.
We opened up the gym and let them kick a ball around to blow off steam."*
- 3 The initial overview and realization: the reality of what has happened sinks in. People need support and provisions for care are set in motion.
"We drew up a priority list at the time. Our immediate concerns were for the pupils who were sitting their finals. We decided to assign two or three teachers to certain groups so that they could discuss this terrible event with pupils."
- 4 The transition to recovery stage: concrete measures are taken to restore the normal daily routine. This is also the stage in which emotions are come to terms with; this stage may take some time and is never predictable.
"The infants played out the accident over and over again in the play corner. They crashed cars into each other and repeated the funeral endlessly. And then suddenly it was all over."

Deciding on a definition and description for these stages is important because they can point the way to the type of action that is necessary.

3 The school and safety

We have regularly been shocked in the past by dramatic, violent incidents in schools. In 1999 the world was horrified by a shooting incident at the Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, when two boys opened fire on their schoolmates and teachers, killing 15 people. This was the first in a series of shooting incidents at schools in America and also later in Europe.

The preventative safety measures quickly expanded to include metal detectors, video cameras, security guards or schools without corners and recesses where anyone with a gun might be able to hide. The discussion heated up after the massacre in the Columbine High School. However, cameras and detectors only create an illusion of safety. Dr. Robert Stevenson (1999), a recognized expert in trauma and violence in schools, commented as follows: "If we are not even able to rid our heavily-guarded prisons of weapons and drugs then how can we expect to achieve this in schools?"

3.1 Risky behaviour and adolescents

When the risky behaviour of adolescents was examined, it was noted that adolescents in the company of other adolescents became involved in almost twice as many dangerous situations than they would do if they were alone. In addition, adolescents make decisions far more impulsively than adults, who approach the process more deliberately and adopt a clear plan. The impulsive behaviour of adolescents is primarily driven by peer pressure.

Researchers concluded that risky behaviour among adolescents is strongly defined by social cognitions and in particular by the way in which adolescents consider themselves to be judged by the peer group (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). It is precisely during this period, between the ages of fifteen and twenty, that they develop the skills to resist peer pressure that are necessary to take an independent stance. It is worth noting that this is the precise period in which many adolescents think that they are already adults who are sufficiently capable of making up their own minds independently. In reality, they make decisions without having weighed up all the potential consequences in a responsible way (Jelle Jollis, EducationInnovation, March 2007).

Based on these cognitive neurological insights, the role of adults at home and in education is vital in creating an environment that optimizes mental development. Guidance from adults, particularly in the process of making decisions and learning to see the consequences, merits special attention. Adults can help adolescents to discover the balance between rational, well-considered decisions and ones that are emotional and rashly made. Talking to them often and asking their opinions about certain subjects encourages them to think about things rationally and to weigh up the pros and cons.

3.2 Pedagogical climate

National and international experts advocate that prevention should be focused on creating a good pedagogical climate. A short study by Roede (2007) describes the qualities of teachers who are effective in social formation:

- attitude: interest in and respect for adolescents, brave enough to show their vulnerability or change their working method;
- skills: capable of pointing out problems;
- knowledge: youth culture, cultural diversity and social and moral development among adolescents;

- preconditions: the creation of an open climate, boundaries and social competencies of the teacher.

The way in which pupils and teachers interact, as well as written and unwritten rules, are the basis that forms the climate at school during a catastrophe. Family values also apply in schools: where there is an atmosphere of trust, in which adolescents are allowed to show their vulnerability and make mistakes, and there is respect and time for each other, there is a good chance that a school community will gain strength from working through a tragic event together.

However, if an appeal is made to skills, standards and values that have never been made explicit or observed in school, a crisis will make this more visible. In this type of situation, a traumatic event may seriously damage the school, its pupils and the management team. A team that does not feel free to show their emotions, to discuss feelings of guilt, or to approach one another for help, will experience far more difficulty in coming to terms with an incident than a team in which such behaviour is normal.

In addition, the way in which teachers deal with a crisis serves as a role model for their pupils. Acting as if showing your vulnerability or asking for help is not acceptable and that emotions should be kept under wraps is a lost opportunity when it comes to teaching effective coping strategies.

Good safety policy is defined and laid down in scenario books and protocols.

However, this only represents part of good safety policy. It is the keystone of a process in which a team discusses and considers aspects such as pedagogical climate, dealing with differences, addressing socio-emotional development, communication. Although this should ultimately be established in a set of rules and regulations, the climate of a school is especially noticeable during the breaks and in the staffroom and corridors.

3.3 The four pillars of safety policy

Good safety policy comprises four interdependent pillars form a mutual basis for preventative safety policy and as such, are able to create a safe school climate that enables a school to cope with disasters and catastrophes more adequately.

The SAFE model (SLOA - Integral Safety, 2008) defines the different areas of safety at school: *Schoolcultuur* (School culture), *Aantrekkelijk onderwijs* (Attractive education), *Fysieke omgeving* (Physical environment), *Externe samenwerking* (External partnership).

Pillar 1 - School culture

A school with a good culture addresses socio-emotional development and the development of standards and values, where children are allowed to learn from their mistakes, and are not dismissed, but are spoken to about their behaviour by adults who exemplify good behaviour.

Pillar 2 - Attractive education

Children are committed to the school and what they are learning. Teachers have an eye for the differences between pupils and the education is in keeping with pupils' perception of their environment (tailored education). Attention is also given to the development of talent.

Pillar 3 - Physical environment

A range of measures have been taken within the school in order to make the physical environment in and around the school more safe and to prevent injury. Agreements are recorded in protocols and regulations and procedures and policies are characterized by transparency and openness.

Pillar 4 - External partnership

This pillar puts the educative partnership with parents first. Clear agreements and adequate expertise are also present to ensure that problems are signalled early on and to promote good partnerships and agreements with external partners, as well as taking advantage of expertise.

3.4 Restorative justice as pedagogical intervention

One way of pre-emptively and curatively teaching pupils to better cope with conflicts and to learn to take responsibility for their behaviour is *restorative justice*. Restorative justice is based on a judicial model that is more focused on restoring the damage done and restoring the relationship than on punishing the perpetrators. It is derived from the method that the Maori people of New Zealand used to resolve conflicts within the group before the Western system of judgement and passing sentence was imposed on their society. It offers an alternative mental framework for dealing with offenders and victims.

In the Netherlands, restorative justice is referred to as 'herstelrecht'. A number of schools are either implementing the model or are already working with it. The first priority is to restore the mental and physical damage that the perpetrator has caused the victim and his environment, which has equally been damaged. In this climate, instead of the use of sanctions, the restoration of mutual relationships plays a key role. In the Netherlands, the principles of restorative justice have been practically translated into education.

Although the name restorative justice suggests that there is something to restore and that a response is involved, for example during a conflict, the model basically goes much further. When fully implemented, it is the basis of all pedagogical and didactic responses in schools. This also makes it a proactive and preventative model. Restorative justice also has a curative effect on repeated problems of serious behaviour, the causes of which may partly lie outside the school. An overview of the options:

Pre-emptive effect of restorative justice (Prevention is better than cure)

- Creates a healthy environment for interaction, in which teachers and pupils carry joint responsibility for their own development, their relationships with others and concern for the learning environment, based on mutual respect.
- Promotes mutual communication and feedback on difficult situations and events, among others through discussion groups.
- Stimulates self-reflection on learning achievements, providing teachers with a coaching instrument that can be used for progress interviews.

Reactive effect of restorative justice (Restorative practices)

- Ranges from an informal (friendly warning) to highly formal intervention (restorative justice conferences).
- Group restorative discussions using question cards for the 'perpetrator' and 'victim'.
- Restorative discussions among small groups of individual pupils using question cards.
- Discussing conflicts and seeking win-win solutions.

Curative effect of restorative justice (Working with non-contracts)

- Formulation of non-contracts by pupils with specific problem behaviour.
- Gets to the root of the underlying cry for help and the underlying need.
- Seeks solution-oriented sanctions instead of repressive punishment measures.

Repressive effect of restorative justice (Suspension or removal)

- In the event of a serious breach of rules, suspension may be justified. Intended to give pupils an opportunity to think about what has happened, to become aware of their own responsibilities and serves as preparation for attending a restorative conference. The intention is always to restore what has taken place.
- By disregarding the above-mentioned opportunities, a pupil is ultimately choosing a school without restorative justice. This means that such pupils leave the school of their own volition. They are not removed, but leave of their own free will.

See Ruigrok & Oostrik, 2007.

3.5 The role of the family

Although the school is able to contribute to the emotional well-being of children, the responsibility for this lies with their families. Families who adopt an active coping style for dealing with situations involving loss, provide children confronted with catastrophes more support and security than families in which a passive coping style prevails. Families also have unspoken rules; 'messages' about how members treat each other, what they discuss, whether they are allowed to express sadness or vulnerability and the level of support they can rely on. These messages are sometimes conveyed explicitly and at others implicitly; nevertheless children are acutely aware of them or are corrected if they break any rules. Certain messages related to coping with adversity, such as 'don't let things get you down' or 'we don't cry in this house', can make coping with a trauma even more difficult.

It is vital that adolescents who are struggling to find their place in life feel acknowledgement for the fact that what has happened to them is awful and that it will take time for them to learn to cope with it. They especially need this acknowledgement from their parents as well as the important people in their everyday surroundings: the fellow pupils and teachers at their school.

3.6 External aid

Willingness to help is often the greatest during times of distress. Schools are inundated with offers of help from aid organizations and are sometimes unable to see the wood for the trees. The local health authority, social services, the police, mental health authority, private agencies: all offer their help. The main objective is to remain in charge, as pupils may have an increased sense of insecurity if the school is manned by large numbers of unfamiliar aid workers.

There is a better chance that schools with well-functioning care teams already have good contacts with external aid organizations. This can be invaluable during a disaster: lines of communication are short, faces are familiar and people know what they can expect from one another.

Sometimes, international contacts are also made for the purpose of exchanging expertise: in order to provide care for the many Volendam victims, contact was made with Stockholm, where people were trapped in a large discotheque during a fire that also resulted in the deaths of many adolescents or disfigured victims.

Sometimes school managers who have experience in catastrophes, seek out their colleagues who are involved in a catastrophe elsewhere in the country.

Schools often experience the solidarity of other schools as heart-warming, for example the cards sent by fellow schools offering help and words of encouragement.

4 Disaster scenario book

"Because a dramatic event results in a strong call for action, there is a greater risk of an uncoordinated, parallel and sometimes conflicting response, especially during the confusion of the first few days." (Wolters, 1999)

A pupil has gone missing and the police start a nationwide search. Within a few hours, people start to dread the worst. The editorial team from a TV news programme call the headmaster of the school, because they are running a feature on the missing pupil and require information.

A shooting took place inside the school and the perpetrator is on the run. There is panic among pupils and teaching staff. Parents are calling the school. How do you prevent the situation from escalating? What information do you give and what do you withhold?

A pupil goes to the headmaster with a report of sexual abuse by a teacher. In consultation with the board, the incident is reported to the police. The headmaster does not want the man to remain in the school any longer and a group of colleagues are showing their support for the teacher.

During these types of acute situations people rack their brains as to how they should respond. Every situation is different and sometimes the dilemmas are so great that hardly any meaningful answers can be given. Learning from the experiences of others can prevent situations from escalating and causing additional suffering. Schools that have a scenario book do at least have something to go by, even though the scenario book does not provide a solution for every situation and is often created much later after an event. During the first few hours it is important to bring everyone to safety and it is then that intuitive and instinctual action is usually taken. Some school managers have accomplished extraordinary feats. It is not until later, when the initial panic has been diffused, that time is available for the scenario book. The book has usually been developed during quiet periods when there are no problems or on the basis of an event that has taken place.

Developing a scenario book for potential catastrophes is an important activity because while it is being created a basis is being laid that will provide support and a certain sense of security, as well as making responses during a disaster more effective and thereby preventing any upheaval. A scenario book cannot prevent emotional reactions. These are part and parcel of a disaster and are an integral part of coming to terms with a traumatic event.

4.1 Compiling a scenario book

It is better to compile a scenario book in a small working group. Members might include a member of school management, a mentor, a parent and a specialized external aid worker.

A scenario book should contain clear descriptions of procedures. The details should be as complete as possible. Any people who need to be warned about a disaster must be listed in the scenario book by name, surname and telephone number. The list should also include any important websites.

A scenario book should contain the following items:

- In the event of a disaster, who is in charge (name, address and telephone numbers, including home and mobile numbers)?
- Who are the members of the crisis team?

- What are the duties of the crisis team?
- Which external aid agencies should be called upon?
- How should initial care and reception be provided?
- What information should be communicated to teachers, pupils and parents and how?
- Who is responsible for coordinating public relations and speaking to the press?
- How is aftercare arranged?
- How are disasters that take place during external school activities, such as accidents during school trips and project weeks, dealt with?

Appendix 1 includes a disaster checklist. This checklist can be used by each school to develop their own scenario book.

The scenario book must be present at school, where there should preferably be more than one copy. If the school has more than one location, multiple copies should be available for perusal at each location and/or the scenario book should be made available to all those involved on the school website. Everyone should be aware about the scenario book and the place where it can be found. The scenario book should be taken on excursions and school trips. An up-to-date list of pupils should always be available at school and accompany the scenario book on excursions.

4.1.1 Evaluating a scenario book

The scenario book should be regularly evaluated regularly and amended if necessary: reality is always more unpredictable than one might imagine. It is vital that all names, addresses and telephone numbers are verified. This also applies to the details of external aid workers. Evaluation of an event that has taken place may also result in amendments to the scenario book. Amendments may also include new ideas and experiences from other schools. The task of keeping the scenario book up to date can best be assigned to a small group.

4.2 The crisis team

Depending on the type of crisis, a crisis team will be deployed at municipal or school level. In certain instances, the school is only one of the organizations involved and responsibilities and authorities lie at local and even at national level. In the event of a serious crisis, the school may even be taken over and lose its position of authority. Often, in schools where a disaster has taken place, a crisis team is appointed to direct the coordination of assistance and to identify the potential effects. This crisis team works in close collaboration with the external aid workers, police and any other care providers. A crisis team of this nature cannot function properly if it is not set up until after the disaster has taken place.

Properly functioning crisis teams are first convened when there is no crisis and plenty of time to consider aspects such as organization and objectives. A crisis team is not set up for the purpose of arranging what is already functioning well. A crisis team works in a methodical way, based on a scenario book, thereby reducing the risk of overlooking something and ensuring that members operate from a single point of collective wisdom.

Each crisis situation is unique and calls for a different answer. It is the task of the crisis team to implement the instructions contained in the scenario book and to make any amendments, since every situation requires a different approach.

Before a team can function well, certain aspects should be voiced and a number of steps should be taken. First of all, it is important to ask what the objective of the crisis team is. A crisis team that is in the process of being set up should provide answers to questions such as:

- For which situations should a crisis team be deployed?
- Will the crisis team also be convened if a parent dies?
- Will the crisis team be convened if a pupil dies after a long illness or totally unexpectedly?
- Is a crisis something that will disrupt the school and if the answer is yes, what are the implications?

In other words: what is the crisis team's definition of a crisis?

In addition, it is necessary to discuss the objective or mission of the crisis team?

- For example, is the objective to respond in order to minimize the emotional impact of the crisis on victims and their parents?
- Or has the crisis team been set up to ensure that help and safety is quickly made available to those involved?
- Does it involve providing assistance to those concerned in the short or long term?

These objectives will ensure that the activities of the team are determined and will identify which activities are unnecessary. For instance, a school crisis team should define the boundaries for aid workers:

- For which part is the school responsible, and for which part are parents responsible?
- How does the school provide care for its staff? Should this be part of its responsibility?

Working with case histories can often provide a better idea of all the answers to these questions. Obviously, these answers will differ for each school and crisis team.

4.2.1 Crisis team configuration and task assignment

When the objective is clear, it will also be clear who the members of the crisis team should be. Is enough authority represented in the team? In other words:

- Does it include members who have the authority to take action?
- What logistical capabilities are necessary?
- Who has a good insight into the well-being and needs of pupils and their teachers?
- Who would be a good media spokesperson?

Crisis teams will be different in every school, depending on the school culture and the internal and external competencies available.

The other preparatory work still remains:

- Which materials, handouts and related materials are necessary and what is already available at school?
- Which reference books are present at school or need to be purchased?

In addition, the crisis team should find out which external connections may be supportive during a time of crisis:

- Which other schools or school governors?
- Which supportive institutions?
- What options are available through agencies such as the Municipal Health Services and Victim Support?

These questions may give rise to a social map. Also, it can be examined whether training is necessary in order to ensure better preparation for what may happen (for example, by acting out case studies). This can also reveal that everything is well organized; good communication between the different members is particularly important. The disaster exercises that have been conducted during the past few years in the Netherlands have all shown this.

Furthermore, the tasks are allocated and decisions such as who will head the crisis team and who will brief the press are have already been made. Tasks may be allocated differently during different types of crises.

An immediate decision should be taken about how everyone should be informed:

- How and by whom will the crisis team be deployed: will a telephone tree be used or will the head call each member?
- How quickly can all the members convene if necessary?

4.2.2 Leadership during a crisis

Managing a crisis demands a great deal, even from school managers who run schools extremely well in their daily school life. The commitment they feel towards their school, colleagues and pupils combined with the sheer volume of arrangements that need to be made, often places them at the mercy of the hundreds of telephone calls and individuals who are firing the next question at them.

Sometimes total chaos can break out at schools: a thousand and one things need to be arranged and all semblance of structure has vanished. All this is added to by an urgent request from the media who need briefing. A crisis team that has already run through the stages mentioned earlier is far better equipped to function during such a period. It may sometimes be desirable to appoint a technical chairman; an external party who is more distant from the school, thereby giving the school head a bit more space, including emotional space.

It can be painful when a well-functioning crisis team fails to get the appreciation it deserves. This is partly because decisions in a crisis team are well considered and time has been taken in the decision-making process. The results of these considerations is usually communicated in short lines with the team of teachers, who do not always feel that their commitment is appreciated. This team may well prefer to discuss whether a certain decision is the best decision. Although a school certainly needs leadership during a time of crisis, communication with the various departments always requires attention. It is vital to communicate well with team members and other parties, such as parents, when informing them why certain things have taken place in certain ways. This keeps people involved and increases the possibility that everyone feels appreciated and satisfied to a greater or lesser degree when reviewing the aftermath of a crisis.

4.3 Flywheel

Investing in the creation of a scenario book and the preventative measure of setting up a crisis team may seem like a heavy load, which may in many cases never be deployed. It is also quite conceivable that smaller schools in particular take the decision to collaborate with other schools and use their combined expertise and competencies.

In addition, it is also understandable that the task of compiling a scenario book is not included on the priority lists of many schools. However, the discussion that is fuelled from the creation of a scenario book and from setting up a crisis team can function as a flywheel for important themes in the school, such as safety, care procedures and pedagogical climate. These foundations for a safe school are greatly relied on in times of crisis and it is at such times that weak spots become painfully visible. Setting up a crisis team addresses the issue of safety in school and thereby creates opportunities to work preventatively towards a safe school.

5 The actual event

Not all disasters are evidenced by a precursory stage.

A bus accident in which pupils are killed or injured cannot be predicted. There may well be precursors to other events, although they are not always recognized. The impending death of a pupil or teacher with a life-threatening illness makes it possible to announce the misfortune that the school is about to suffer. This is often more difficult with suicide or violence after tensions escalate. For this reason, we draw a distinction between these different types of events.

5.1 Life-threatening situation

In the morning, the primary school children in year 6 are waved off by their parents and the rest of the school. They depart by bike, on their way to the farm where school camp will be held to mark the end of their time at primary school. What should have been a wonderful experience, ends in a drama. A motorcyclist loses control and drives into the group of school children, resulting in serious casualties and minor injuries. The school camp is cancelled.

Pupils who are wounded, as well as pupils who see the event happening, run the risk of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD, see also section 7.5). They may become fearful, constantly see the event flashing before their eyes, and experience sleeping problems. Certainly in the situation described, care provided in the long term is important because these school leavers may continue on to various schools of further education where they are not likely to receive similar attention.

Other examples of life-threatening situations include a school hijack, a firearm threat, a shooting or stabbing incident or a fire.

Even if there are no physically injured victims after the event, the inner effects can be enormous and can have a continued impact for a long period of time.

Aftercare is vital in all cases (see Chapter 7).

5.2 Death following an illness

When a pupil or teacher is suffering from a life-threatening illness, people are somewhat prepared for the announcement that he or she has passed away. In that sense, the definition of a catastrophe does not apply here. Nevertheless, there may be circumstances that cause an expected death to turn into a catastrophe.

A message is received that a pupil in the first form has cancer and does not have much longer to live. There is panic in the school, as a pupil in the same class was killed in an accident a few months ago. Moreover, this is the third death within a year for a number of pupils who have come from the same primary school. At the end of the school year, a classmate also died in year 6.

The unexpected is always lurking in the build-up of a sequence of dramatic events. Teachers and pupils wonder when it will ever stop. Dealing with two deaths in a short space of time requires a lot from a form tutor.

Another circumstance that can turn an expected death into a catastrophe, is an event in which a child dies far earlier than expected and the school is unprepared. Pupils may also try to ignore what is about to happen. Teachers regularly inform pupils that a classmate is so ill that his death is imminent, but they try to ignore it and continue as if nothing has happened. The resulting death may come as an unexpected blow to pupils.

During the illness, contact with the child and family is extremely important. It avoids the school overwhelming the family with all kinds of well-meaning, but probably undesirable activities, it is advisable to appoint one person from the school as an intermediary between the family and the school. It is best to record the way in which this person has been appointed in the scenario book.

Waves in the flow of communication are common. In the beginning there may be a slight distance, because many people do not know how to treat someone who has a life-threatening illness. Once this has been overcome, a surge of interest may arise that can prove too much of a good thing for the person who is ill. Interest can also ebb away during the course of a long-term illness. One of the most important tasks of the contact person is to keep the commitment of the school in balance.

There should also be the space and opportunity to talk about feelings that arise as the death approaches. When and in which lessons will pupils be given the opportunity to talk about it? What are the possibilities of organizing this outside classes? The scenario book states who will take the initiative to do this and how it is communicated in school.

Appendix 2 contains a sample letter to parents regarding the death of a pupil after illness.

Appendix 5 contains a sample letter to parents regarding the funeral (general).

5.3 Sudden death

There are no signs whatsoever preceding a sudden death. Pupils and teachers set off to enjoy a week's skiing holiday and the bus is involved in an accident that regretfully results in casualties.

A teacher goes on winter sport during the spring holiday and he and his two children are killed in an avalanche.

A pupil goes missing and turns out to have been murdered.

A fire breaks out in a firework store. An entire estate is destroyed and many are killed, including pupils of the school.

Events such as this cause a huge shock at school.

He was riding to school at six o'clock in the morning. The El Al plane had crashed the night before. He was well prepared. Seventy children from the Blue Line lived in de Kruitberg and Groeneveen: the houses of seven pupils were totally destroyed. On the first day, a list of missing children was drawn up.
(Het Onderwijsblad, March 6, 1999).

Sometimes, in hindsight there were small signals that people either did not realize were so serious or were unable to understand. Two examples:

A disagreement in a family leads to serious conflict. The father and mother split up and the father regularly makes threats. One evening, he tries to kill his children; one of the children dies and the other two are injured. Everyone, including the school, wonders if action should not have been taken earlier.

A group of boys at school are known for being show-offs. To make an impression, they tear about on mopeds and scooters, paying no heed to the rules. One day, they start revving up their engines in front of a closed level crossing, in a competition to see who can pull away first. After the train has passed, the first boy accelerates, unaware that a train is approaching from the other direction. After the fatal accident, people and the school ask why no one had taken action earlier to prevent this constantly risky behaviour.

5.4 Suicide and attempted suicide

When suicide is involved, the warning signals are not always clear. Depression, withdrawn behaviour and social isolation are signals that may be important, but do not always indicate an imminent suicide.

Sometimes, there is no explanation why this particular pupil or teacher has chosen to take their own life. This often makes it especially difficult for all those involved. Over 90% of suicidal individuals have suicidal thoughts as a result of psychiatric problems. These are especially caused by depression, as well as schizophrenia and borderline disorder. The vast majority of suicidal people remain ambivalent: they want to bring an end to their intolerable suffering, which is not the same as choosing to take their own life. Suicidal people fall under the spell of their own desire to die, because they think that death is the only thing that can relieve their suffering.

The risk of this is probably greater for adolescents because they are still in the middle of their mental and emotional development, which makes them more likely to end up in a vicious circle where they may lose sight of reality.

A pupil in year 5 at secondary school threw himself in front of a train; everyone was dumbfounded. She was a lovely, intelligent girl with plenty of friends. The teachers who had known her for years said: "If this pupil was suicidal, then there must be plenty of other depressed pupils walking around that we aren't recognizing..."

When a school is confronted with the suicide of a pupil, a great deal of care is needed for the pupils who were well acquainted with the deceased. In addition, extra care is desirable for so-called risk pupils:

- boyfriends and girlfriends, as well as 'enemies' of a pupil who has taken his or her own life;
- pupils who experience bouts of depression and silent and withdrawn pupils;
- pupils who have previously experienced a suicide or death;
- pupils who have attempted suicide themselves.

In addition, the announcement of the suicide will also place an additionally heavy burden on some teachers.

- Teachers who have already had experience with suicide will be confronted with the reactivation of emotions they felt as a result of the previous event.
- Teachers responsible for contact with the parents of the deceased pupil and for counselling the class are confronted with a difficult task. They are often unable to deal with their own grieving process until they have finished assisting and organizing counselling for pupils.
- Teachers who counselled the deceased pupil before the suicide have sometimes put in an enormous amount of effort already. They may be overwhelmed by feelings of guilt. They may also feel frustration and sadness because all their counselling has been in vain.

In the attention that is given to the enormous sense of sadness, it is important to avoid a situation in which adolescents feel called to commit suicide themselves, as a result of the collective sadness and the attention for the deceased, in the hope of generating similar attention. Attention for the sad circumstances and loneliness and preventing the situation from being romanticized is thereby of great importance.

The hype started in the spring, when a pupil at the Stedelijk Lyceum in Enschede hung himself. Girls between the ages of 12 and 15 then encouraged each other to do the same via chatboxes and SMSes. Four of the dead girl's girlfriends 'drove one other completely mad', according to the psychologist attached to the school. They sent one another messages such as: 'Do you know J? She's going to commit suicide tonight. Who else is game?' Shortly afterwards, a second girl threw herself in front of a train. Timely action on the part of the school, the police and a crisis team of psychologists prevented the situation from escalating even further, but one of the girls was so suicidal that she needed to be admitted into hospital.
(Algemeen Dagblad, August 2006)

Appendix 3 includes a sample letter to parents regarding a student's attempted suicide that has not resulted in death.

Appendix 4 contains examples of information sent to pupils, parents and colleagues after a pupil/teacher has committed suicide.

5.5 Sexual violence

A school that has to cope with sexual violence or the sexual intimidation of pupils by teachers or conversely, is confronted with its own norms regarding this subject. The way in which teachers interact with their pupils and overstep the boundaries of conduct in this area is often not a subject of discussion at schools. There is a vague sense of what is acceptable and what is not: a certain reservation in tackling one other on this. In this sense, the school reflects the culture in which tackling one other about sexual insinuations, undesirable physical contact and inappropriate behaviour is not easy.

For years, colleagues had experienced indefinable feelings about the gym teacher and the way in which he treated children. But no one was brave enough to voice their feelings, afraid that they were wrong. That was until the parents of one of the pupils reported the incident to the police. After that, it quickly became clear that all was not well. The signs had already been there for years but no one had dared to take any action. In the end, the police report led to the suspension and dismissal of the teacher. Some team members felt guilty: could this have been prevented if they had confronted this colleague about his inappropriate behaviour earlier?

If a pupil or ex pupil makes a complaint about a teacher at school, it causes surprise in a number of cases: colleagues and school managers never suspected a thing. However, sometimes there is also recognition, because colleagues already had a vague feeling about the conduct of a certain colleague but had either not voiced it or were afraid to do so. Rumours about this teacher had already been circulating amongst pupils for much longer. After an event of this nature, the discussion between team members about what is acceptable and what is not, what professional teacher conduct is, how to deal with challenges from pupils, and how much risk there is of being unjustly blamed, does not take place often enough. Nevertheless, it is vital that schools make room for such discussions. Teachers often feel uncertain and feel a need to reiterate the rules for interaction with one another. When the exchange regarding professional conduct and boundaries does not take place in a plenary meeting, there is a risk that individual teachers will draw their own conclusions: this may manifest itself later as cynical jokes at the coffee table. Sometimes, the team will be divided between those who remain loyal to the perpetrator (the victim in their eyes) and those who support the victim and disapprove of any transgression in this area.

It is not easy to coordinate this process in school: personnel and management members' own standards and values play a significant role. There is also a great deal of fear among teachers; some feel ostracised.

The discussion about protecting privacy and the rights of colleagues, parents and pupils to information also plays a role that is not entirely relegated to the background, as well as concern about the school's image.

Schools are also confronted with sexual violence among pupils. Sometimes, this has been taking place for a long time without being picked up by team members. This last point is extremely confrontational: teachers often invest a great deal in a safe climate in the class as well as in the school and are suddenly confronted with the fact that there has been a secret world in which they have not been included by pupils. These types of cases call for a great deal of courage from pupils, as well as faith in their teacher.

The law is clear about sexual offences involving children and adolescents and about the duty to report this in schools:

- 1 A person who commits indecencies with his minor child, stepchild or foster child, a ward **or with a minor, a minor servant or subordinate entrusted to his care, instruction or supervision**, is liable to a term of imprisonment of not more than six years or a fine of the fourth category. This punishment is also applicable to:
 - 1° a public servant who commits indecencies with a person submitted to his authority or entrusted or commended to his supervision;
 - 2° the director, physician, **teacher**, public servant, supervisor or employee, in a prison, State workhouse, State institution for the care and protection of children, an orphanage, hospital, or a charitable institution, who commits indecencies with a person admitted to such an institution.

Source: Article 249, Book 2, Title 14 of the Dutch Penal Code

Sexual offence covers a range of abuse and consists of lewd acts (actions of a sexual nature) and/or sexual penetration (including French kissing) and conduct of a sexual nature that is harmful to the sense of shame regarding sexuality without physical contact (e.g. pornographic photos).

It is not important who took the initiative: the individual who exercises responsibility is always punishable where victims under the age of 18 are involved. This is added to by the fact that colleagues who have witnessed criminal conduct or have reason to suspect that this has taken place are obliged to report this to the school management or board.

Teaching staff who **have reason to believe** that a sexual crime has been committed (as stipulated in Title 14 of the Dutch Penal Code) against an underage pupil, are **obliged** to inform the competent authority. If there is reasonable suspicion that a member of staff is guilty of committing a sexual offence against an underage pupil the competent authority is obliged to notify the police or Director of Public Prosecutions.
The competent authority should consult with the trusted inspector prior to notifying the police.

Schools that are confronted with sexual violence are faced with a heavy burden.

- It is vital that there is a transparent attitude towards colleagues, parents and pupils and there must be clarity about the case and the procedure to be followed. Furthermore, rumours and outlandish stories must be prevented.
- Care is needed to protect the privacy of the perpetrator and victim.
- A neutral attitude is desirable where the press is concerned. However, depending on the severity of the event it is sometimes better to make a voluntary announcement and keep a tight reign on the situation, than to wait until the press receives a letter that is targeted at the parents.
- Sometimes, an initial complaint is just the tip of the iceberg and more pupils soon report complaints.

- Care and attention is required for pupils and colleagues who are confronted with sexual violence from their past as a result of this complaint.
- If the complaint is unfounded, a rehabilitation procedure should be implemented to prevent the reputation of the colleague in question from being tarnished for the rest of his or her life - not only as a teacher but also as a private individual.

5.6 Murder

A school that is confronted with a missing or murdered pupil is totally bewildered: pupils and teachers are suddenly confronted with a crime and there is a great deal of anger, sadness and pain. It draws heavily on a school's energy when investigators enter the school, the press is waiting outside the school and the children are not themselves. This requires a huge effort from the team members.

Sometimes, there is additional pressure because there are still no suspects and team members and/or pupils are exposed to questioning as potential suspects.

In these cases, it takes a very long time before the school returns to normal lessons.

If the perpetrator is found, a long period follows in which there are repeated moments when the case rears its head again: the court case, and potential appeal.

This often goes hand in hand with media attention.

Appendix 6 includes examples of information bulletins to pupils in the event of the death of a missing pupil.

5.7 Family murder

Schools that are confronted with family murder undergo an extremely difficult time. One or two children may often be involved and this results in an empty chair in more than one classroom. Furthermore, a family murder causes a great deal of anguish, anger and sadness: it is unthinkable that a parent could kill his or her own children and this is totally at odds with all the values we hold dear as a society. In addition to their own despair and sadness, teachers are also faced with the task of talking to children about the atrocity.

In April, a mother murdered her three children, all of whom attended the same primary school. Although it was difficult for teachers to discuss with children why mothers kill their children, they emphasized that this mother was ill and that parents love their children very much. When a father in the same town murdered his wife and two children, the teachers were confronted with the same task: to convince children that parents love their children.

Children who are exposed to unsafe situations at home (conflict-ridden divorces, restraining orders for fathers, violence in the family) may be particularly frightened: might their father or mother be capable of doing the same? Children want to know about many things and when they feel secure they can ask many concrete questions. Teachers benefit from support: sometimes it is nice to work with a colleague on the first day and it gives a feeling of reassurance if specialists are available in the background who can be consulted. It is important to empower the teachers as much as possible, rather than to place strangers in front of the class. Structure, as well as their own teacher, is extremely important for children during this time. In particular, children who are withdrawn and have poorly developed social and emotional skills may create their own world, in which fear plays a major role. In addition, there are the parents: they experience great horror and often anger as well. The latter can be extremely frightening for children. A good relationship between the school and parents, in which both parties are attuned to one another and give shape to their mutual responsibility for the well-being of children is especially important at this time.

5.8 Violence at school

The school is supposed to be a secure place where parents know that their children are safe. Despite this, not all schools are weapon free: there are schools where the police regularly conduct locker searches and there are incidents in which weapons suddenly resurface at school.

5.8.1 American study of violent incidents in schools

Both at a national and international level, people are involved in reconstructing of signals that preceded an outburst of violence. Most of the experience regarding violence at school has been acquired in the United States. A long list of schools have been involved in shooting incidents: Littleton, Colorado, Springfield, Oregon and so forth. In 2002 a study was published by the US Secret Service and the US Department of Education as a result of 37 incidents that were analysed. The implications for schools were also described. This study resulted in 10 final conclusions. Although American schools are not identical to our schools and violence in Dutch schools is not as prevalent, we can still benefit from these final conclusions.

- 1 Violent incidents are almost never spontaneous, impulsive acts. Nearly every incident is the result of a clear process from an idea to a plan, that is probably observable and which often has a short timespan, whereby a speedy response is vital.
- 2 There are nearly always people who knew about the plan. They were often school friends or brothers and sisters. This information was not usually passed on to adults in the school. Evidently, taking adults into one's confidence is still not easy; in any case, at American schools pupils feel that there are barriers to taking such action or have insufficient faith in the reactions of adults.
- 3 The perpetrators did not usually threaten their victims before the incident. This confirms the importance of being alert and proactive instead of waiting until the actual threat has been carried out.
- 4 There is no precise profile for a pupil who carries out a shooting incident, The profiles of the perpetrator differ by demography, individual, school career and social background. Relying on a potential perpetrator profiles poses two risks: firstly, most of the students who have similarities to the profile will never commit such an act, and secondly, other potential perpetrators who do not match the profile may be overlooked. Instead of focusing on profiles, it is wiser to keep a close watch on pupils' behaviour and the way in which they communicate.
- 5 Most perpetrators had given off signals that things were not going well with them and had displayed behaviour prior to the incident that was experienced by others as disturbing and regarded as a cry for help. They were not usually 'invisible' pupils and gave off signals that were not quite reason enough for the people around them to take action.
- 6 Most of the perpetrators had suffered a great loss in their lives or were forced to cope with personal failure, which they found difficult to deal with.
- 7 Most of the perpetrators felt bullied, threatened or hurt by others. In many cases the perpetrators had been victims of bullying and had suffered unbearable torment as a result. Although not all victims of bullying turn into perpetrators of violence, this does again demonstrate the great importance of dealing with the root of bullying within the school.

- 8 Most of the perpetrators had access to weapons and had already used those weapons before the shooting incident took place.
- 9 Many incidents involved other pupils. The way in which adolescents treat each other and validate or encourage each other certainly plays a role in a perpetrator's ideas and preparations. This means that fellow pupils have an opportunity to prevent serious incidents.
- 10 Despite the fact that the police were quick to arrive at the scene of most incidents, the perpetrators were usually stopped by the intervention of others, after a fairly short time. Being prepared by training and procedures plays an important role when it comes to taking effective action.

When we attempt to translate these outcomes to the Dutch situation, the most striking conclusions are those that concern the pedagogical climate and care in the school. The emphasis in these findings is also on being a good judge of pupils, pointing things out in time, forming networks of people who share their concerns, and making the time to develop a relationship of trust with pupils.

The short-term study by Roede (2007) into the timely signalling of dangerous behaviour at school adds the following:

- systematic and school-wide safety policy;
 - pupil population analysis;
 - registration and analysis of incidents;
 - schooling opportunities;
 - support for teachers;
 - involving parents;
- and at a national level:
- making good analyses of violent incidents;
 - carrying out studies into the effectiveness of primary (prevention aimed at all pupils), secondary (prevention aimed at risk pupils) and tertiary (aimed at pupils who have actually been violent) approaches.

5.8.2 Other forms of violence

There are also other forms of (verbal) violence or threats that can have a considerable impact on a school community and its members. A teacher who has had an angry father storm into his class will find it difficult to experience his classroom as a safe place again. Some teachers have traumatic experiences as a result of violent situations connected with parents or pupils. This usually has an effect on their private lives as well: sometimes there are post-traumatic reactions and at others the effect of the experience is limited to a fear of bumping into the parents or pupil outside school.

For a teacher, a traumatic experience in the class turns a classroom from a safe environment into an unsafe place: every sound and every door that slams can call to mind the earlier experience and cause stress reactions.

It is the task of school management to make the school as safe as possible and to take the event involving the teacher as seriously as possible. Removing a pupil from school is one option, but this is not a satisfactory result for the teacher involved. Certainly, where a smaller community is involved, there is more chance of the teacher and pupil bumping into each other at the supermarket or when out socializing. It is important for this teacher that the conflict is properly evaluated - preferably with the pupil or parent involved - and that possibilities are sought to restore the relationship (see section 3.4).

Some schools opt for measures such as locking school doors and gates. Although these measures create some peace in the short term, the cause of the violence needs to be addressed in the long term, as well as improving the contact in the school with pupils and their parents, to ensure that violence is restricted to a minimum.

It took a long time before it was clear that there was something wrong at school. The truth was finally revealed when one of the teachers was unable to cope any more and was in danger of suffering a mental breakdown. For months, she had been receiving packages from all kinds of mail order companies for orders she had never made. Obviously she could have returned the packages. But not knowing who had done this to her, and being suspicious of everyone she knew, tore her apart. When, in addition to clothing, pizzas and a Chinese meal that she had never ordered were delivered to her door, it was too much for her.

During a consultation with the company doctor, she explained the reason for her breakdown. This set the ball rolling. A number of colleagues turned out to have received correspondence courses that they had not ordered as well as Chinese meals, books and catering. It quickly turned out that the perpetrators were several pupils who had been removed from school the year before. The school management immediately arranged for open communication to take place. The case was treated as extremely serious and was discussed in all honesty. An important part of this experience of intimidation was that people continued to treat each other with respect and did not react by judging one another.

Schools also have to deal with honour-related violence. Honour-related violence is a relatively new phenomenon in our society. Within the culture of certain groups of immigrants the honour and integrity of the family is seen as an important value and family members can violate this honour through certain socially undesirable choices. Ferwerda and Van Leiden (2005) adhere to the following working definition: 'Honour-related violence is any form of mental or physical violence, committed from a collective mentality in response to a (threatening) violation of the honour of a man or woman and therefore that of his or her family, of which the outside world is aware of or may become aware of.'

Schools speak of honour-related behaviour or honour-related issues or of pupils who have a low tolerance for honour.

Knowledge about the concept of honour is important because Dutch society is more of an individual-oriented culture than a group-oriented one. In a group-oriented or "we" culture the family honour is determined by the community and is seen as a concrete possession, akin to a field or cattle.

Examples of reasons for honour-related violence include resistance to an arranged marriage, eloping and divorce. Honour can also be tarnished by contact with boys, courting or a premarital sexual relationship, assault and rape, loss of virginity and infidelity.

It is not only women who are the victims of violence: young men can also be pressured into restoring the honour of the family. In addition, homosexuality can also be a reason for honour-related violence.

A study carried out on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Communities and Integration by Studulski et al. in 2008 revealed that 24 of the 40 vocational and professional training schools studied had been involved in honour-related violence. According to the *Landelijk Expertisecentrum Eergerelateerd Geweld* (Dutch National Expertise Centre for Honour-Related Violence) there are no precise figures for the number of honour-related violence incidents that take place annually in the Netherlands.

It is vital that the school communicates its efforts to develop positive awareness about norms and values and its contribution to the development of social skills. If this exists in an educative partnership with parents it immediately creates more broadly based acceptance.

In addition, other partners (extra-curricular activities, cultural exchanges and similar) can be jointly involved in making norms and values more explicit. The school hereby assists in ensuring that the discussion about a peaceful society does not continue to be limited to the school.

5.9 Disasters during and outside school hours

It is not really important whether a catastrophe occurs just before, during school hours or even happens in the school, or that a calamity takes place outside school hours. There is little time to gather information when events occur just before or during school hours. This places pressure on decisive moments. Despite this, everyone must be informed as quickly as possible. Sometimes, factors such as an important test or exam can affect this. Should they be given priority or should pupils be informed beforehand? Two practical examples follow.

A well-loved teacher sets off from home on Wednesday evening and never returns. On Friday at 8:45 the police call the headmaster: the teacher has been found and has taken his own life. The headmaster immediately visits the teacher's wife. Afterwards, he rushes back to school and discusses what to do with the philosophy teacher and assistant head. During the extended break the headmaster informs teachers. He indicates exactly what they should tell their pupils during the next third hour of lessons. Lessons are not given in the fourth hour and the break can begin after the third hour, but teachers will stay in their classrooms to take care of the class or individual pupils. That is what took place. Only the pupils taking their finals were not told until after the school investigation had taken place that morning. They were informed by several teachers who had made themselves available for the task.

A message is received at school to say that a pupil sitting his final exams in year 5 has taken his own life. The quickly assembled crisis team decides that it is better to wait with the news until after the maths exam that is being taken that morning is over. However, the student grapevine turns out to be faster. Several pupils are aware of what has happened and agitation breaks out among pupils. During the evaluation, the crisis team concludes that they took the wrong decision by withholding the information, as the rumour took on a life of its own and control was lost.

In the first example, everyone is satisfied about the decision. This is not the case in the second example. What the correct decision is depends on the circumstances. In any case, a decision to delay giving information should not be taken lightly. The speed at which we are able to communicate with one another should be borne in mind. Pupils telephone one another and send SMSes. They are often sooner informed than their teachers and school management. Informing pupils quickly and adequately prevents one from losing sight of actions and reactions.

After a shooting incident at a school, the information also reaches other schools in the area within several minutes because pupils alert them. This makes it more difficult to respond with coordinated action, as pupils know more than teachers and school management, causing a great deal of excitement, conflicting reports and media attention.

A great deal of attention is focused on providing care during the initial reactions of disorientation, fear and grief. Parents should be informed by telephone so that they have the opportunity to collect their children and part-timers and colleagues who are ill or on leave should be contacted at home.

If the catastrophe happens after school hours, some staff and pupils are often already aware of the event. In this situation, it is the task of the crisis team to gather information and to decide how it should be communicated at the start of the next school day. It becomes additionally difficult if the event takes place at the weekend or during the holidays.

A pupil dies in a fire in her home. It is the first day of the autumn half-term. The crisis team decides to call her classmates' parents and to inform them so that they can tell their son or daughter and provide the necessary support. At the same time, they are invited to come to the school with their son or daughter. In this way, the parents are included in the situation. The funeral takes place during the autumn half-term. After the holiday the school holds a memorial service to which all pupils are invited.

Probably one of the worst things that can ever happen to a school is that a catastrophe takes place during a school activity: the pupil who sticks his head out of the sunroof of the bus and is killed; the skiing trip that ends in a fatal accident; an accident during school camp; the students on work placement who are killed abroad while touring the area with their work placement tutor. Besides providing information and taking emergency measures, the school also has to cope with the potential question of guilt and feelings of guilt.

6 Responding immediately after the event

During a crisis situation it is imperative that people know where their responsibilities lie and who should take the decisions. Clear instructions play an important part in determining the way in which the crisis situation unfolds.

In addition, it is vital that emotional reactions are dealt with adequately.

6.1 Giving clear instructions

During crisis situations people act instinctively to reduce the risk of an immediate threat to life. When large groups of people carry out these actions at the same time, the risk of a new life-threatening situation arises. The ensuing response is panic, because the actions that are necessary for individuals to come to safety are not possible. A situation such as this can arise when a large group of people want to use an emergency exit at the same time.

Two instructions should be etched in every person's memory:

- 1 Do not panic and stay calm.
- 2 Alert the crisis team.

These two instructions are important because they create time.

Complicated and detailed instructions are of little use, because people in crisis situations usually act impulsively. One consequence of this is that rational instructions do not always sink in. It is better to stress one clear instruction, so that people have the space to come to their senses. After the initial shock, people are generally able to think and act rationally again.

There are a myriad of matters to be dealt with when there is question of a serious fire. However, the advice given by the Brandwondenstichting (Dutch Burns Foundation) concentrates on the most important aspect under the motto: 'Eerst water, de rest komt later' (Think WATER before anything else).

A list with the most important dos and don'ts is easy to have on hand. The list on the next page can be left at strategic places in school or hung up (on a noticeboard, on the desks of management members, trusted persons and pupil counsellors or the caretaker, or placed in staff diaries).

6.2 Convening the crisis team

Reaching the crisis team may be a problem. School managers often attend meetings outside the school, which makes them difficult to reach. Moreover, they also need to be able to be contacted outside school hours in the event of a catastrophe.

Making good agreements in school about being reachable in the event of a catastrophe and potential replacement on holidays and in similar instances is therefore vital.

Dos

Don'ts

DURING THE DISASTER

- After the first notification: maintain secrecy until further orders
- Put together a crisis team that is authorized to take decisions
- Gather information quickly, verify it and inform all those involved as quickly as possible
- Take along a scenario book
- Provide adequate instruction for informing and counselling classes
- Appoint a press spokesperson
- Instruct everyone that only the press spokesperson is to have contact with the media
- Brief colleagues on a daily basis, ensuring that there is structure as well as rules
- Give them the opportunity to express their emotions
- Listen to and take time for one another
- Look after yourself and one another
- Be aware of your limits
- Hasty reactions (panic)
- Individual (well-intended) actions
- Withholding important information to 'protect' pupils, parents and colleagues
- Allowing daily activities, such as tests and the school play, to carry on as usual
- Giving newspaper, radio or TV interviews without thorough consideration
- Building up a bad relationship with the press; seeing the press as an enemy
- Acting in a business-like way, without emotion
- Not taking time for yourself and one another

AFTER THE DISASTER

- Making a new start on 'ordinary' school life with the help of a ritual
- Attention for counter movements in the school
- De-briefing meeting
- See the last four dos in the previous line.
- Acting as if nothing has happened
- Remaining stuck at the grief and doubt stage
- Judging people's behaviour

THE PERIOD AFTERWARDS

- Structured provision of care for colleagues during several months
- Addition care for pupils in the long term
- Evaluation and amendment of the scenario book
- Trivializing problems

6.2.1 Delegating tasks

The crisis team does not carry out all the tasks itself. Delegating to the correct people is one of its most important tasks. For example, people will be present in the school who understand the art of conversing with pupils who need to talk. The crisis team determines what should be included in an information bulletin, for example, while the production and distribution is delegated to others. The crisis team takes the decision to open the school in the evenings for those who need this or to invite parents for a parents' evening. Other people can execute the idea and make the necessary arrangements. However, it is important that the crisis team is kept informed of progress and that new information is reported to them.

6.3 Information and communication

Almost immediately after the incident has taken place and everyone has been brought to safety, there is a need for information, from staff, as well as pupils and parents. The crisis team therefore needs to gather as much information as quickly as possible, in order to create a complete picture. Subsequently, decisions are taken about who and what needs to be communicated. If there is question of a potential crime, consultation with the police and if necessary the judiciary is vital. In any case pupils, staff and parents are given information as quickly as possible, preferably before the first reports appear in the media. Experience shows that high priority should be given to providing good information. When such information is not forthcoming, it heightens feelings of fear, stress and uncertainty.

After getting on her bike to cycle home from school, Martine was never seen again. Months of tortuous uncertainty pass. The press focuses heavily on the missing girl. The school management has an interview with the police: any report that can shed more light on her disappearance or death is announced at school first, before the press is informed.

6.3.1 Briefing

It is imperative that staff are properly informed and instructed. Members of staff can only inform and counsel pupils properly when they have the correct information. They also receive instructions and tips about the manner in which the message should be communicated, about the provision of care in and outside the classroom and about the procedure in the coming days.

It is recommended that a briefing is given each day, in some cases more than once a day, in which all members of staff are given the latest information and where they can go if they have any questions. It is important that every person has the same up-to-date information and that problems which arise during work can be quickly dealt with during the briefing.

6.4 Emotional reactions

Reactions from both staff and pupils can often be particularly emotional. It is important that there is space for this. On the other hand, the shock can be so great that it seems as though people have been untouched in the initial stages. Obviously, this is a defence mechanism to avoid being overwhelmed by the events. The emotional reactions will follow much later.

The blow that everything can be lost from one moment to the next is too great to sink in immediately. Many people have nothing left; everything they had is gone. Do you think that it didn't affect them? I was in the town centre when it happened, not far away, and I must say that it still hasn't sunk in that 'the disaster in Enschede' happened here. You see pictures on the television, but nothing like that ever happens in your own town does it? It is difficult to comprehend and even more so for people who saw things that no one would ever want to see. And they can't wake up, because it isn't a dream.

(J. and D., both 16 years old, Enschede; *Achterwerk*, 23, 2000)

Some teachers are able to cope with emotions better than others. It is therefore important that colleagues support one another and divide tasks so that pupils have the space to express themselves. This is certainly not always by talking. Boys especially often have difficulty talking about what has happened with their classmates in an emotional setting. Teachers do not always find this easy either. There are many other opportunities for coping with emotions that do not involve talking. Creative work such as drawing, making a collage, writing poetry and letters can often provide support. Pupils at a school for consumptive technology baked an alternative wreath made of bread rolls. The mentor of a technical course used the links of a bicycle chain to symbolize the loss.

Sometimes, schools set up bereavement support groups for small groups of pupils, in which feelings of grief are voluntarily shared and come to terms with using creative processes during a number of meetings. Pupils often experience these bereavement support groups as bonding and extremely comforting (see Fiddelaers-Jaspers, 2003). If the event is serious, schools may also decide to call in external disaster relief workers such as voluntary Victim Support workers, a school psychologist, a school doctor, social nurses, a bereavement expert, a school counsellor or a social worker.

Emotional reactions and stress reactions (see below) are normal reactions to abnormal and shocking events such as disasters and catastrophes. Reactions such as these do not imply that coping disorders will arise; that only happens with the minority. Victims are certainly not benefited by the problems resulting from psychosocial causes.

Stress reactions after traumatic events

- Still occupied with the event
- Hardly being able to believe what happened.
- Quickly irritated or fearful
- Avoiding the scene of the event
- Not wanting to think about the event
- Not wanting to talk about the event
- Not having any energy
- Blaming yourself
- Finding it difficult to concentrate
- Feeling nervous and on guard
- Not being able to remember certain moments
- Feeling alone
- Physical complaints (headache, aching muscles, etc.)
- Feeling depressed or sad
- Having nightmares or sleeping badly
- Feeling misunderstood
- Preoccupied with 'why' questions
- Constantly wanting to be with parents
- Playing out the disaster (smaller children)

Source: Van der Velden et al., Utrecht, 2000

It is important for staff and relief works to know that disasters and catastrophes have a disruptive effect on daily life and school life. Chaos, dismay, fear and powerlessness prevail. When the disaster has been brought under control in a technical sense (for instance, the fire has been extinguished and the debris cleared away), those involved are faced with the task of picking up their lives again. However, the disaster often causes a definite rift in a period between before and after the disaster. Those involved will never feel the same again. It is an emotional burden, which is not resolved from one day to the next.

Years ago, a shooting incident took place in the school that had a huge impact on the school community. A great deal of unity and comradeship was present while colleagues coped with the event and a bond grew between the people who worked hard to minimize the effects the event had on pupils. As a result of the ageing staff, the school underwent an enormous change in the team make-up within a few years and a divide arose between those who had experienced 'it' and those who had not.

Stress reaction checklist

DURING THE DISASTER

- Shock, horror, dismay
- Intense sense of powerlessness
- Fear and fear of death
- Physical reactions
- Apathy and numbness
- Hyper alert and adequate response

AFTER THE DISASTER

- Sadness and despondency
- Trembling hands and legs
- Headache, muscle pain and stomach ache
- Anger and aggression
- Looking for the deceased
- Looking for information
- Relief

THE PERIOD AFTERWARDS

- Continuing to be occupied and re-experiencing the event
- Avoidance behaviour
- Always on guard, shock reactions and fears
- Tiredness and sleeping difficulties

Source: Van der Velden et al., Utrecht, 2000

6.5 Care and reception

When in a state of confusion and chaos certain people sometimes surpass their own capabilities or on the contrary prove less decisive than they had imagined. Coming to terms with such an event is a heavy task for a school; staff members and pupils each have their own emotions and sometimes it is no longer clear who the professional is: some pupils suddenly display leadership or are masters at supporting their fellow pupils and teachers.

Cultural aspects also play a role in disaster aftercare. What is experienced as traumatic or the way in which people express themselves in stressful situations is not the same for everyone. This often becomes apparent in the help after an emergency situation. Often, translating material into various languages is not the only way to do justice to these differences. Knowledge of the cultural backgrounds is necessary for this. Sometimes, as a result of their different backgrounds, people also have different reasons for the problems that they encounter after a disaster. Alternatively, the Western methods of dealing with the situation do not conform with the view of the world that certain ethnic groups hold.

This may apply to the Western talking cultures or the interest that is attached to the well-being of an individual versus the interest of the group. (Psychologie Gezondheid, 2008)

6.5.1 Care and reception: pupils

During times of emergency people demonstrate unexpected powers: this is true for both the pupils and staff of a school. There are many known examples of pupils or teachers who have acted decisively and with extreme bravery. There are equally teachers who became paralyzed with fear at the time and subsequently wrestle with the question of whether they could have done more.

Re-experiencing the traumatic event is usually therapeutic in the process of coming to terms with the event, although some may experience nightmares, no longer be able to function properly or even suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Children and adolescents often display a great deal of resilience when confronted with loss and traumatic events. The socio-emotional skills that they possessed before the event play an important role.

After an accident with a train various parents began worrying about their sons who had seen the accident happen. None of the boys wanted to talk about it at home. They just wanted to be left in peace. After a number of signals from parents, the school organized an evening with the parents involved and a bereavement expert. The parents were given the opportunity to talk about the situation. It turned out that the boys had sought one another out on more than one occasion and had regularly visited the scene of the accident, even having met at the graveyard. They always had the photo of their dead friend near them, in the drawer of their desks, on their nightstands or in their diary. They had found their own way of coping with the bereavement, without the intervention of adults. This made the parents feel a lot calmer.

Children who are confronted with disasters, who are used to making use of aid resources in their environment, find it easy to make contact and have a positive self-image, generally manage to cope. Even if they have to go through life handicapped or maimed afterwards.

Children and adolescents with a low self-image, who find asking for help difficult and have a low capacity for problem-solving, find it terribly difficult to carry on and adapt themselves to a new reality, in which they need to give the loss a place. In addition, it is complicated if a child has already had a traumatic experience before.

The age at which a child is confronted with a traumatic event is also important. Young children judge situations and danger less realistically and are more unskilled at dealing with stressful situations. This means that they are more dependent on the relationships they have with adults in their environment, and in particular their parents. This makes them vulnerable.

Finally, feelings of guilt - whether founded or unfounded - may be a risk factor when coming to terms with the event. It is especially important to keep the lines of contact open with young children regarding these feelings of guilt: it is sometimes

necessary to bring them back into proportion without dismissing their feelings. Talking about guilt is not easy, certainly if there is question of genuine guilt. Professional help is often required for learning to deal with this last point.

See also section 7.3.

6.5.2 Care and reception: members of staff and school management

Staff members' energy is drawn on heavily during times of emergency. Some counsellors do fantastic work with pupils and are hard at it, day in, day out. Some school managers invest these hectic weeks in care, crisis consultation, and contact with external relief agencies and government agencies, without ever being asked during this time: "How have you been affected by this enormous tragedy? How are you coping?"

The private lives of some people are put on a back burner during such a period since their work at school only increases. Some school managers and pupil counsellors have insufficient sleep at night and race from one place to the next. It is logical that this takes place during a certain period and cannot be any other way. The question is how these people are when life slowly starts to return to normality.

The period of realization and grief often only comes for the hard workers after all the others are slowly picking up their lives again.

It is important for all the members of the team to meet once in a while and sit down and evaluate what this far-reaching event means to them and to the school. How do they look back on this chaotic period: what are they happy about and what might have been different?

In addition, many of those involved appreciate being able to look back and talk about the event after several months have passed: dramatic events quickly disappear from the memories of onlookers, while those involved can sometimes suddenly become emotional when they talk about that disastrous day.

Old pupils of the primary school in Bovensmilde that was occupied by a group of Moluccans in 1977, remember the event during which they were taken hostage every year. This was reported by the chairman of the Bovensmilde School Foundation on Friday. Last year, for the first time in thirty years a memorial service took place at the scene in Bovensmilde where the school once stood. "We would like to continue commemorating the hijack every year. Not because we want to dramatize it, but just to pause and think about what happened at the time," said Gerards. Twenty old pupils and teachers attended the second memorial ceremony.
(ANP, May 2008)

The aftermath of some disasters remains for a very long time: if there are victims with permanent, visible wounds or court proceedings for criminal offences, a school is repeatedly confronted with the event - sometimes for years afterwards.

See also section 7.4.

6.6 Parents

When a catastrophe has taken place at school, fast, transparent and good communications with parents are vital. The appendices include examples of information letters sent to parents.

A parent evening can also contribute to mutual communication and the need for information. Sometimes, parents' faith in the school is damaged, even though they know rationally that the school cannot be held responsible. In such instances, there is the nagging feeling: 'Is my child still actually safe at school?'

Parents must be given the opportunity to talk about this, also because it is part of the process of coming to terms with what has happened.

The parent evening that is organized soon after the disaster may mainly consist of providing information about the event and the sequence of events at school and answering parents' questions. An informative parent evening can be held later on to provide information about the grieving process of children and adolescents, the possible reactions and the way in which parents can best deal with it. This information can also be about children and sexuality and conduct that oversteps boundaries.

It is advisable to call in an expert for this parents' evening, since he or she can open the subject up for discussion in an objective way. It is vital that school management is present at such an evening in order to provide the correct information; sometimes parents grab the opportunity to ask questions that may be critical of the school. It is preferable that the evening is headed by a professional chairperson.

After the suicide of a pupil, the school organized a parent evening and invited a professional psychologist to give a lecture on the subject. After the introduction, one of the parents stood up and asked some highly critical questions about the way in which the school had dealt with the pupil's problematic situation. Only a few teachers were present and they were unable to prevent the disruption, which resulted in a host of emotional outbursts.

6.7 The bereaved

When there are deaths, missing or injured persons, the first people to be hit are the families involved. By showing its concern the school can make an invaluable contribution to the way in which family members come to terms with the event. In these types of circumstances, personal contact plays a vital role. The most obvious person to take this task on board is the form tutor of the pupil or pupils involved. It is essential that parents are consulted about matters such as how the school might participate or help with the funeral or cremation. The school can also organize its own memorial ceremony for staff and pupils, to which the family is invited. Participation in such an event should be voluntary. Photos or video recordings of the ceremony should be taken so that they can be given to the bereaved at a later date. After the death of a member of staff the headmaster or another school leader is appointed to make a house call and to discuss what the role of the school can be with the family.

By maintaining contact the school can look at what kind of support and attention the family would like. This may change in time. It is important that the expectations of both sides are expressed and agreed: this can avoid painful disappointments.

For example, important moments include:

- the birthdays of deceased pupils (the date of birth);
- the anniversary of the death;
- the year in which the pupil would have passed his or her exams, taken communion, taken part in the première of the school play, and so forth.

Many people experience things differently after the event. Life goes on, but in a different way. This can also result in positive experiences. Some people experience the bonding, warmth and solidarity that is felt after a shocking event as a valuable contribution to their personal development and life.

6.8 The media

One of the most difficult problems that school management is faced with is dealing with the media. When the catastrophe is newsworthy, journalists and camera teams are on the doorstep. School management often has no experience with how the media works and discover the consequences far too late.

In schools where people have experienced a disaster, dealing with journalists is experienced as extremely difficult. During the first hours and days after the events that have shocked everyone, the school has its hands full. This is also the period in which the media wants to report the news. The more serious the event, the greater the media interest. Almost everyone who has ever been involved in a catastrophe at school has experienced the activities of journalists as highly disturbing. Journalists have the task of gathering news and emotional involvement in the event can be an enormous hindrance to this.

On the other side, the media can also make a positive contribution. For example, an article about what a class or school has experienced can make a contribution to the process of coming to terms with the event. A well-written article about senseless violence can play a positive role in the social discussion. A great deal of interest may, certainly in the initial stages, be comforting to those involved. It is not until later that they sometimes feel robbed of their privacy and overwhelmed by the interest.

Media attention for an event such as suicide at school can pave the way to the Werther effect, named after the main character in a novel by Goethe written in 1774. In 'Die Leiden des jungen Werther', the main character shoots himself in the head as a result of unrequited love. Werther's act would have inspired many young man to take the same course of action. It is well known that a lot of media attention can have an epidemic effect on suicides.

6.8.1 Facts versus opinions

Immediately after the event the media try to find out the facts. The school can meet this need (if necessary in consultation with the police and the parents of victims). In addition, the media will probably seek out personal opinions and backgrounds. For example, people will want to focus on what type of person the perpetrator is. This is a difficult period, because all kinds of subjective elements play a role here. The bereaved may quickly experience the personal opinions in the media as exceptionally painful. The principle is that the school only provides facts and no opinions and only communicates about matters that it knows about: education or the pedagogical climate at the school. Statements about all kinds of social problems are inappropriate.

For the media good news is no news and people usually try to look at the case from the most problematic side. The emotional involvement of the journalist is not important; it is the ratings that prevail. Being aware of this can avoid disappointment. Certainly when the school or headmaster has invested a great deal of time in the media and is only shown on screen for 20 seconds making a statement that has been taken out of context.

6.8.2 Tips on dealing with the media

1 *Appoint a press spokesperson*

The crisis team can appoint a press spokesperson from its midst. Often, agreements have already been made about this in advance. This may be the headmaster or a board member. It may also be the case that there is a teacher in the school who is excellently equipped to take on this job. Sometimes, someone from the local authority public information service for example, can take on this task.

2 The press spokesperson is the only one who speaks to the media

The rule that no one else speaks to the media must be adhered to very strictly. It should not be assumed that journalists will not attempt to approach other people either. Approaching pupils or teachers is part of the way in which journalists work. It is vital that pupils are also instructed about this point and reminded of the effects that cooperation may have.

Sometimes, people are placed under pressure when the media cites its right to the free gathering of news that may not be hindered in a democratic society. However, no one is obliged to give the media any information. In our country there is only one type of obligation to report, namely if one is aware that a criminal offence has taken place.

3 Do not allow journalists onto the school grounds

Journalists may only be present at school if they have been invited by school management. There is a good chance that journalists will be waiting outside the school grounds or will attempt to take photos using a telephoto lens.

4 Hold a press conference every day if necessary

This will ensure that the press has information and avoid all sorts of attempts to come by information. One tip is to hold the press conference outside school.

5 Maintain a positive relationship with the press

Journalists should not be treated as enemies. It is important to state boundaries clearly, but it is not advisable to exclude the media. If this happens they will resort to other devious methods of coming by their information.

6 Protect pupils from themselves

Pupils often find it interesting when the media pay attention to them. Being in the limelight and being interviewed are very attractive prospects for some individuals. Being prepared to talk about their sadness, what they have experienced, finding themselves important and wanting to be the centre of attention all play a role. It is important to discuss with pupils what the effects of this media attention might be.

7 Always consult with those involved

If the school decides to cooperate on an article or an interview for radio or TV, prior consultation with the bereaved or those involved is necessary. The consequences of this type of programme can be enormous.

8 Always ask for an interview script for perusal

When promising an interview it is advisable to agree in advance that the script is faxed and that the school is able to make minor changes if necessary. Although journalists will not be the first to bring this up, it is usually possible. It is also important to know that the journalist is interested in receiving a response to the article as soon as possible and that this should not include changes to large chunks of text, but rather that incorrect information or matters that may offend victims or the bereaved will be checked. The headline is usually non-negotiable because this usually relates to someone other than the journalist.

9 Request for a pre-screening

When a documentary is being made an advance viewing is sometimes possible. The tape is then mounted and the individuals concerned can watch the result before it is screened. When no explicit agreement has been made in advance, it is usually not possible to make changes at this stage. In the case of background programmes or news programmes there is usually no scope for this. However, it is often possible to negotiate which questions will be asked.

10 Be aware that an editor is not the interviewer

Prior talks usually take place with an editor and this is a different person to the presenter. Sometimes, interviewees forge a bond with this person and it later turns out that when the interview is broadcast it is done by a person totally unknown to them who, all being well, has been briefed by the editor. This process is so normal for the editor that it is usually not explicitly announced.

11 Create a file in which you save articles

Create an archive. Victims or the bereaved can get copies of these articles if necessary.

7 The transition to recovery and aftercare

In actual fact aftercare starts immediately after the event. The school will need to make time and space free in order to come to terms with what has happened. There are events during which new information becomes available in the first few days, weeks and sometimes even months, for example when a criminal offence is concerned and the perpetrators are still being sought, the case is featured on TV in a crime programme or because the court case is taking place. It is important to communicate with staff, parents and pupils about this. Teachers can do this in their class at the start of the day for example. If information is released during the day it is important to consider if it should be passed on immediately or if it can wait until the following day. For example, when a pupil who has been shot dies in hospital halfway through the day, it is important to inform all those involved at school as quickly and as fully as possible. A statement is drawn up and handed to pupils to take home for their parents. Each time new information becomes available, pupils and teachers are informed and a new statement is given to parents. This can be achieved with an information bulletin. The appendices contains examples of these, which can be changed depending on the situation.

Serious attention from the surrounding environment for those involved is extremely important: people who take the time to listen to the stories of those who were directly involved, and who ask questions about what happened, how they are and what is going to happen without sensation seeking. In short, people show consideration and recognition. Not only during the first few days, but also in the months after the catastrophe. Because after a shocking event life is never the same again.

7.1 Emotional swings at school

Danai Papadatou (1999) developed a useful rating system that she based on work by Stroebe and Schut (1998, 1999). Translated into the school environment, there are people who will focus intently on the event and those who will avert their attention from it. This can create considerable tension at school. 'This is part of your work: pain, sadness and death are part of life' versus 'We aren't psychologists and you'll only make it worse by focusing so much attention on it.'

People who focus on a loss or on the consequences of an act of violence show feelings of sadness, depression, anger and guilt. They are often plagued by repetitive thoughts, want to be involved in everything, take on all kinds of tasks, go on house visits and to the hospital, and attend the funeral.

Those who avert their attention from the loss avoid giving their feelings the upper hand. They keep their feelings under control (I need to be strong), are actively engaged in all kinds of commitments, avoid contact with involved classmates, friends and family members of the pupil and sometimes talk cynically about what happened ('Good riddance to bad rubbish. It just shows that all you get is misery - nothing was lost after all', and similar remarks).

Most people move somewhere in between the two. The problem only exists when there is no movement between the two and people are at one of the extremes: unaffected, unfeeling or on the contrary overwhelmed by emotions. A lack of investment in the situation versus over investment is seen in such situations. Healthy movement between the two, is shown for example by the form tutor who takes care of and supports the class, or the assistant head who remains impartial to the emotions, but does invest in arranging and coordinating things or does an excellent job as a press spokesperson.

It is also important to keep an eye on the unspoken rules that arise. They are often derived from the culture that already existed before the event. Examples of unwritten rules that may start to play an important role are:

- We don't show our feelings to each other here.
- We meet difficulties by adopting cynical humour.
- When people are having a difficult time it should be given priority.
- We help each other to keep everything, including our emotions, under control.
- We don't talk to each other, but we do write letters.
- We report any pupil who we notice is acting strangely so that this doesn't happen to us again.

Rules such as these can determine the atmosphere in the school and have a positive as well as negative effect.

7.2 Coming to terms with the event

The school can take measures to give those involved space to come to terms with the events. In the event of a death the following options exist:

- Saying goodbye to the deceased (if possible).
- Holding a memorial service for a dead pupil or teacher.
- Creating a silent space that is specially arranged to commemorate the deceased.
- Rearranging a room where a violent incident has taken place.
- Attending a funeral or cremation for the deceased.
- Holding an evaluation meeting for staff.
- A meeting in which attention is given to psychoeducation: knowledge about what happens to people when a terrible event has taken place.
- A ritual to re-establish normal school life or to close a certain period. For example, after the Bijlmer Disaster in Amsterdam a tree was planted to commemorate the 18 children who died.
- Creating a memorial place, such as planting a tree, a rock garden with a stone for each of the deceased, a place where photos hang including a symbolic object, a bench with an inscription, are all examples.
- Organizing additional support, both internally and externally. This can be done individually as well as in groups, such as in a bereavement support group.
- Closing the school year, sometimes after several years, remembering the pupil who is no longer there during a diploma ceremony.

7.3 Aftercare for pupils

Aftercare for pupils can be tailored to a number of areas: primary, secondary and tertiary.

Primary care involves integrating pupils in daily education by working preventatively on social and emotional aspects.

Secondary care includes care provided for pupils with social and emotional problems.

Tertiary care is the care provided for pupils when a disaster takes place in the school.

In addition, it is important to give attention to pupils with extra difficulties such as friends of the victim, as well as friends of the perpetrator. Also, attention should also be given to pupils who experience the reactivation of old experiences such as loss and violent crimes.

See also section 6.5.1.

7.4 Aftercare for staff

Teachers, mentors and pupil counsellors often put their entire hearts into performing all kinds of tasks after a serious event at school. This often creates a lot of bonding during the event and sometimes causes an empty feeling when everything is over and life continues as normal again.

Recognizing the efforts made is of great importance: gratitude from parents, a thank you from pupils, a bouquet of flowers from the board: they are all signs of appreciation that can give encouragement during this time.

And where bonding and solidarity have been significant during the initial period, they may change in the course of time. The meaning that people give to a serious event after it has happened often differs.

If people have the same experience, such as a murder, suicide or sexual violence at school, it does not mean to say that they attach the same meaning to it or feel the same. Nor does it mean that school staff all have the same ideas about how things should be dealt with further.

Where dealing with violence is concerned, one person is for zero tolerance (introducing security everywhere) and the other sees a violent incident as an exceptional incident and on the contrary wishes to invest more in the climate at school.

The enormous concern shown by people can lead to other paths or to other efforts, because everyone attaches a different meaning to the event. Paradoxically, these different visions can lead more quickly to a lack of understanding between colleagues.

The idea that shared suffering only leads to more solidarity and connectedness is incorrect, particularly where large numbers are involved, such as at a school. There is often solidarity in the initial stages, but when decisions need to be made in the school the various meanings begin to play a role.

One person will show their commitment to come to terms with the event by giving more attention to his or her private life, while another will invest his or her time in a discussion about norms and values at school. Yet another person would like to see more rules at school and finally, there may be someone who wants to continue acting as a sounding board for the bereaved. These are all ways of coming to terms with the event - expressions of people's commitment to giving this event meaning in their lives. Giving this a place requires a great deal of respect and insight and not immediately applying one's own frame of reference: I think I know how the other person feels and what he or she needs.

Teachers and school leaders often find it extremely pleasant to look back on the event together once in a while. Some of them are probably supported by Victim Support staff or seek professional support to help them come to terms with the event.

Showing continued consideration for the different needs of various staff members is an important task: where one person wants to reflect and evaluate, the other wants to return to normal life and again, someone else is unable to function because they are unable to sleep at night. When methods of doing justice to these different needs are sought, the risk of absence through illness and cancelled classes will be reduced. This requires continuing, personal attention and interest in staff.

See also section 6.5.2.

7.4.1 The healing process

Besides providing information, it is important to give space to the process involved in coming to terms with the event. Pupils and teachers often want to talk about the event with one other. Where pupils or members of staff have died, arranging a special room where people can meet provides a good opportunity for this.

It is also necessary for teachers to be able to talk about their experiences. They dedicate their entire day to pupils and parents and sometimes forget themselves. They too have quite a lot to digest. They can only do their work well if they take care of themselves properly and are taken care of. A special meeting can also be organized fairly quickly after the event. It can be useful to invite an expert to the meeting who can spend time talking about matters such as signals of suicidal tendencies at school or how to deal with grieving pupils. Sometimes, under the guidance of external teachers, it is useful to allow the conversation to include matters such as the guilt-ridden questions teachers sometimes ask themselves about the suicide of a pupil.

Tips for those involved

- Talk about the situation with everyone and don't bottle it up
- Allow yourself to rest and relax
- Be aware of your thoughts and feelings
- Don't pretend to be stronger than you are
- Use as few sleeping tablets or tranquilizers as possible
- Do not overwork
- Avoid difficult discussions about what has happened
- Accept that it takes time to come to terms with what has happened
- Don't cut yourself off from people who are important to you
- Don't be too quick in thinking that people don't understand you

Source: Van der Velden et al., Utrecht, 2000

7.5 Post-traumatic symptoms

Pupils who have physical or mental difficulties during the process of coming to terms with the event need a great deal of attention. Some of them can continue having serious difficulties as a result of multiple stress reactions for longer periods of time. However, the difficult question is when one should start to be concerned. When are the problems so serious that you need to enlist professional help? Section 4 describes how stress reactions are viewed as normal during the first days or weeks, even if they are extremely unpleasant for the person affected and those involved. They are part of the normal process of coming to terms with the event and adjusting to the new situation (Van der Velden et al., 2000).

During the first year it is important to watch for the following symptoms:

- noticeably withdrawn behaviour;
- an increasing need to talk about what has happened;
- quickly changing moods;
- sleeplessness and nightmares;
- concentration and memory disorders;
- feelings of fear, irritation, depression and guilt.

These kinds of symptoms do not need to appear immediately; they often arise after some time has elapsed.

Approximately 20% of those involved may develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is when the process of coming to terms with the event becomes disturbed or stagnant.

The following criteria and symptoms apply (Van der Velden et al., 2000 from DSM-IV):

- a The person affected is exposed to a traumatic experience in which the following applies:

- the person affected is witness to, was confronted with or has experienced one or more events that resulted in actual or threatened death or serious injury, or formed a threat to the physical integrity of the person affected;
- the reactions of the person affected include intense fear, helplessness or horror (in children this can manifest as chaotic or agitated behaviour).
- b The traumatic experience is continually experienced, for example through recurring unpleasant memories or dreams.
- c The persistent avoidance of stimuli that are part of the trauma or a numbness in overall reactivity (not being present for the trauma). This last point should be clear from the presence of three or more of a number of reactions mentioned, such as the avoidance of thoughts, feelings and discussions about the trauma, not being about to remember an important aspect of the trauma, the feeling of a limited future, and so forth.
- d Persistent symptoms of increased sensitivity (not being present for the trauma). Here too, examples are mentioned that include the appearance of two or more of those symptoms.
- e The symptoms in point b, c and d last for longer than a month.
- f The disorder causes evident suffering or impairment to the way in which the person affected functions.

A distinction is made between an acute form (symptoms last for less than three months), chronic form (more than three months) and delayed onset (when the symptoms begin at least six months after the trauma).

A teacher responded very efficiently to a bus accident. He organized the correct relief workers and dealt with the emotional reactions in a way that many would have found difficult. After the event he was able to talk about it fairly calmly and seemed to resume his daily duties automatically. The blow did not come until a year later: sleeplessness and angst-ridden dreams. A few months later the teacher was forced to go on sick leave and to seek professional help.

The degree to which disorders arise differ significantly for each event. Briefly summarized, this is due to the following:

- the more chronic a situation, the more problematic it will be (years of sexual abuse);
- the more an event affects a single individual, the more disorders are likely (less for disasters that involved large numbers of people);
- the more socially charged an event is, the more disorders are likely (e.g. rape).

Sometimes, children and adolescents are more traumatized by the events that follow a terrible incident than by the incident itself, for example when parents or relief workers respond inadequately or panic when scenes are shown again on TV. These cases relate to secondary traumatization.

Despite all this, a minority of people still turn out to be affected by serious problems. And yet there is plenty of attention for trauma disorders. Probably, because we have the feeling that everything in our society should be able to be restored and controlled. But not all problems can be suppressed and avoided. Unpleasant experiences also give children, adolescents and adults opportunities for learning and developing a more effective coping strategy. This can lead to personal growth.

Traumatic experiences are unpleasant and bitter. We live our individual lives by following a structure, and a logical pattern of rules, under the illusion that it can be controlled and predicted. During a disaster, it is precisely these elements that are wiped out. The fundamental certainties of life collapse and with that a traumatic experience abruptly brings the idea of control over one's own life to an end (Kleber, 2000). A person who does not comply with the strict criteria of PTSD can also experience serious problems in coming to terms with the event or serious health problems.

In addition, a host of other symptoms accompany a post-traumatic stress disorder such as depression, chronic pain, impaired intellectual capabilities, self-reproach and feelings of guilt, relationship problems, and long-term illness (Van der Velden et al, 2000).

Besides mental problems, PTSD is also often accompanied by physical complaints: many studies show a clear connection between PTSD and biological reactions in the body that may lead (also much later in life) to illnesses that do not appear to be connected to the trauma (heart and vascular disease, obesity, cancer and similar complaints). In addition to having an effect on the trauma, psychotherapy can also affect health (Miranda Off, NtVP Congress, November 2008).

These chronic symptoms certainly justify the enlistment of professional help. Counselling or providing help amply exceeds the bounds of supporting pupils. This is not to say that teachers, form tutors and counsellors cannot continue to make a contribution. Their presence itself makes them invaluable, as does the care they provide, but treatment should be in the hands of professionals.

Another aspect that can increase the complicated process involved in coming to terms with an event are the secondary losses that arise (Oltjenbruns, 1999b).

We are referring here to a loss of:

- the feeling of safety;
- the normal course of events during the school year;
- the feeling of confidence;
- ideals;
- the idea that the school is a safe place;
- the idea that you make the difference; that you matter.

These secondary losses can be experienced by pupils as well as staff. Attention should be given to them. Those who work at school should be given the opportunity to talk to each other about these losses and about their feelings of sadness and frustration.

This is not enough for some teachers, however. They need more professional help to regain their sense of security and to restore their confidence.

When a 13-year-old pupil took her own life by hanging herself in the loft of a school annex, besides despondency and sadness, there was also a feeling of anger among several teachers. Because the act had happened at school it had robbed them of something: the feeling that their school was a nice place to be.

It is important that all those affected, pupils, teachers and parents are made aware of the fact that symptoms of secondary loss may arise. Moreover, it is necessary to agree what action should be taken if such symptoms arise. It is not always necessary to refer an individual to a professional social worker. A few discussions with a teacher or form tutor who is involved, or for staff a colleague or a school leader, can sometimes be enough.

7.6 Evaluating the event

After a stressful and traumatic experience an evaluation is vital, for the teachers as well as the relief workers and pupils. The key to a good evaluation is to create safety and to examine the traumatic experience. It is also important to experience that you are not alone or abnormal in the way in which you experience and feel things. A good evaluation can mark the beginning of a process in which meaning is given to an event and this can ultimately lead to an experience of hope, unity and empowerment.

If school management has the feeling that the event is still playing a major role in the school after some time has elapsed, it may be worthwhile to ask for an expert's support at the evaluation meeting. A person who is able to take more distance is often better able to see what is happening between people and to act accordingly. It is also important to discuss the fear that many people have about overlooking the signs the next time. Or discussing the fear about entering classrooms with aggressive pupils. Or restoring the faith they have in themselves. The important thing is that this does not remain in people's minds, but that it can be expressed so that colleagues know what is going on with others and can lend their support.

There are circumstances that make it difficult to accept a death. The table below identifies a number of these circumstances.

Reasons that often make it more difficult to accept a death	Brief description
Sudden death	There is no opportunity to say goodbye to the person who dies or to prepare for the loss.
Violent death	The survivors and next of kin are often filled with horror when they think how the last moments of the dead person's life must have been. They have a need to tell their story repeatedly to the police, judiciary and media.
Believing that death could have been prevented	Those who survive are often plagued by questions such as 'Why?' or 'Could I have prevented this?' This often results in self-reproach and anger towards others who the individual thinks may have been able to prevent it.
An event that attracts huge attention	Although plenty of attention may be comforting at a certain level (during a certain period), individuals are often caught unawares by the lack of privacy, media attention and continual reminders of the death of the person they love.
Multiple losses	Double grief does not exist, but people may become overwhelmed when more than one person dies or deaths follow.
Existing or current mental health problems in those bereaved	These individuals potentially lack the coping strategies that are necessary for effectively coming to terms with the loss.
Experiencing a lack of social support after the death.	The concerns of other is one of the factors that is known to contribute positively to reactions of grief in the long term.

Variables that increase the risk of a complicated grieving process
(Source: Kevin Ann Oltjenbruns, 1999a)

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Appendices

- 1 Disaster checklist
- 2 Sample letter to parents regarding the death of a pupil after illness
- 3 Sample letter to parents regarding the attempted suicide of a pupil not resulting in death
- 4 Examples of information for pupils, parents and colleagues regarding the suicide of a teacher or pupil
- 5 Sample letter to parents including information about the funeral
- 6 Examples of information bulletins to pupils after the death of a missing pupil
- 7 Sample letter for parents' evening regarding sexual violence at a primary school
- 8 Important addresses and websites

Appendix 1 – Disaster checklist

It is impossible to draw up a checklist that is a 100% match for all the disasters that a school may have to cope with. This is just an example, which each school can change, add to or remove.

For specific scenario books please refer to the publications in the literature list or on www.kpcgroep.nl/calamiteiten.

PREFACE

- Draft a scenario book.
- Discuss and record the scenario book with staff.
- Decide who should be in charge in the event of a disaster: name, address and mobile telephone number.
- Who are the members of the crisis team?
- What are the duties of the crisis team?
- Appoint a press spokesperson (from the crisis team or an external individual who constantly maintains contact and agreement).
- Decide which external experts can be appealed to: name, address and mobile telephone number.
- Place the scenario book at agreed places and make it digitally available.

DURING THE DISASTER

The news is received

- Make a quick estimate of the severity and scope of the disaster.
- Reporting: who should be told?
- Maintain secrecy until further instructions in order to be able to verify facts and plan initial actions.
- Bring people to safety immediately if necessary.
- Alert the police and emergency services: alarm number 112.
- Provide care for the person who reported the incident and the witnesses.
- In the event of violence, cordon off the area where the perpetrators are active.
- Make sure the school can continue to be reached by telephone.
- Appoint the crisis team and designate authority to make decisions; reach agreements first.
- Gather information; verify information obtained.
- Depending on the disaster, contact key agencies such as the police and local health authority and ask for tips.
- Agree: who should be informed and in which order?
- How should the message be conveyed to the outside world: personally, by telephone, in writing, via an information bulletin?
- Lift the secrecy obligation.

The incident has taken place at school

- The first concern is safety: bring all those affected and bystanders to safety.
- Evacuate the building if necessary.
- Provide first aid.
- Call in the police, emergency services and other agencies: alarm number 112.
- Make sure that if there is no danger pupils remain at school.

Provide information

- Prepare a staff meeting:
 - Who will chair the meeting? Who will provide the information?
 - What exactly will be said?

- Check who is directly involved (parents/brothers/sisters/close friends) and how they should be informed and cared for.
 - Check for whom the news will be additionally shocking and decide what should be done for them.
 - Who will list absent members of staff and inform them?
 - Who will inform pupils, when, where and how?
 - Who will inform pupils, when, where and how?
 - Formulate a text to support the information given to pupils.
 - Make agreements about how to provide further care for pupils.
 - Who will inform the parents, when, where and how?
 - Which people outside the school should be informed and who will do this?
 - Introduce the press spokesperson and emphasize that he or she is the only one who will maintain contact with the press.
 - Who will organize the follow-up meeting, possibly including experts, relief workers and the police? Make sure a list of possible names and telephone numbers is available.
- Hold a staff meeting:
 - The information is given straight to the point: I need to tell you something very serious. Give the most important information and do not get lost in details.
 - Allow space for the first emotional reactions.
 - Allow the opportunity for informative questions.
 - Make agreements about how pupils should be informed and by whom (form tutor or teacher giving the lesson).
 - Hand out an information bulletin.
 - Provide information about which reactions can be expected from pupils and how to deal with them.
 - Instruct pupils not to talk to the press.
 - Provide information about care provision options for pupils (individual and in the group in a separate room).
 - Provide information about care for those other than the pupils involved.
 - Introduce a follow-up staff meeting or a daily briefing at a fixed time.
 - Inform pupils and parents:
 - Pupils should be informed immediately after the staff meeting.
 - Inform close friends of relatives of those involved separately, for example by the pupil counsellor or a member of school management.
 - Prepare a letter to give to pupils before they go home so that they can hand it to their parents.
 - Update the school website with the latest information.

Coming to terms with what has happened

- Form tutors or teachers can support pupils in the classroom; form tutors or pupil counsellors can also be available in an aftercare room.
- Use different methods of working based on pupils needs. They can range from talking together in large or small groups, creative work, blowing off steam in the gym, a group walk through the forest or playing music, watching news or TV reports or looking up information on the internet, question and answer sessions or inviting an expert (e.g. the police) into the classroom to answer questions (can also meet the need of pupils).
- When pupils have gone home, talk to colleagues and see which ideas there are for methods of working the following day.

When a death is concerned: visits, farewell and memorial service

- For example, a member of school management, the form tutor and two pupils should visit the family or families involved.
- If possible, arrange a farewell visit in consultation with parents or family members.

- If a funeral home is involved, arrange visiting times for pupils in consultation with the parents and funeral director.
- Above all, inform pupils about what they can expect (what a funeral home is, how the deceased will look, if the coffin will still be open, what is expected of you and so forth).
- Arrange the farewell supervision well; make sure there is enough care available for the pupils and take care of the refreshments as much as possible.
- Consult with parents and the family about attendance and input at the funeral service.
- Take photos and film the service for handing over to the bereaved at a later date.
- If necessary, appoint an intermediary to arrange the school's input with parents.
- Inform parents and the family about a memorial service at school; do they want to attend or not?
- Rehearse with pupils their input into the funeral service and memorial service.
- Arrange a room for receiving and talking to pupils after the service.

AFTER THE DISASTER

Aftercare

- What can still be done in the class after the funeral, after the missing pupil has been found, or after the perpetrators have been apprehended? Are special lessons or work forms available?
- Extra care for pupils at risk: who is keeping a close watch on who? The above also applies to staff.
- Arrange a parent evening which focuses on the event, provides background information and informs parents about what action was taken, why and what has been learned.
- Hold discussions with the parents involved afterwards.
- Hold an evaluation meeting for members of staff.
- Make agreements with those involved about tidying up the memorial room.

THE PERIOD AFTERWARDS

- Providing care for staff.
- Support from colleagues.
- If necessary, call in a company doctor for talks.
- Offer the option for a course of counselling.
- Offer the option of additional schooling or support to staff who provide care to pupils or colleagues.

Counselling pupils with problems

- Provide individual care through the form tutor, pupil counsellor or trusted person.
- Provide group care, for example by creating a bereavement support group that pupils can attend voluntarily under supervision.

Amend the disaster scenario book

- Evaluate how things are progressing.
- Amend the scenario book on the basis of the evaluation.

Appendix 2 – Sample letter to parents regarding the death of a pupil after illness

Dear Parents or Carers,

Yesterday, Martin, a pupil from class 2G, passed away after a long-term illness. We are deeply shocked and saddened by his death. The form tutor, Mr De Klerk, informed pupils in his class about the sad news. Obviously, we will not be limiting this to a single discussion. We hope that you are able to give your son or daughter the necessary support at home if he or she wishes to talk about the situation.

On behalf of Martijn's parents, we kindly request that you do not contact them at home. However much you may sympathize with what has happened, telephone calls such as these are difficult to bear. Perhaps you can give expression to your sympathy in another way.

You are welcome to contact the school, however. The form tutor, Mr De Klerk will be keeping in touch with the family.

As soon as we know how we will be saying farewell to Martijn with the class and the school we will inform you.

With kind regards,

Mrs P. Bomers
Headmaster

(Based on a sample letter from 'Children with cancer: school and the future' by Marianne C. Naafs-Wilstra (Ed.), 1995).

Appendix 3 – Sample letter to parents regarding the attempted suicide of a pupil not resulting in death

Dear Parents,

In connection with a sad event in class A4d, I would like to draw your attention to the following.

This morning, after consulting with the parents of Johan van de Weg, I informed his class about what has happened to Johan. Since this is sure to have deeply affected your son or daughter, I feel that it is important to inform you as parents about the events that have taken place.

As a result of his problems, Johan could not see a way out and attempted suicide as a solution. His current situation is critical. Like his parents, we are extremely concerned. We hope that Johan will recover and we will continue to work, in as far as we are capable, on offering him a new perspective for the future.

We can well imagine that an incident such as this can also have emotional consequences for the emotional development of our pupils. This aspect of the incident will also be receiving our constant attention. The teachers involved in counselling pupils are completely devoted to helping them come to terms with this announcement. We are prepared to talk to pupils about this at all times.

If you notice that your son or daughter is finding this incident difficult to deal with, it is wise to discuss the subject together at home. If you need any assistance from the school in this area, please feel free to contact not only myself, but also the following colleagues: (names of trusted persons, form tutor, assistant headmaster). Their telephone numbers are listed in our school information guide. In principle, all colleagues can be contacted at school during the day.

Yours faithfully,

B. de Bruin
Headmaster

Appendix 4 – Examples of information for pupils, parents and colleagues regarding the suicide of a teacher or pupil

Example of verbal information given to pupil

Tip: stick to the facts as much as possible: *who, what, where, when* and *how* (in as far as possible and according to the agreement with the family).

I have a sad announcement to make: Mister Jansen died at home yesterday. He brought an end to his life by hanging himself. I understand that there will be a lot of questions about his suicide and why he did it.

Suicide is a cause of death that is difficult to understand: there are all sorts of questions, but the one most frequently asked is 'why?' We can discuss this and perhaps answer a few of the questions.

Sample letter to parents (1)

Dear Parents,

I have a sad announcement to make: Nick Smits, a pupil from VWO-6, has died after committing suicide. We also informed the pupils of this during the first hour of lessons this morning. We hope that you are able to talk about this with your son or daughter.

Suicide is difficult for many of us to accept and understand because it leaves so many unanswered questions. We will never be able to fully understand why someone takes the decision to end his or her life. There were many factors that ultimately led to this act. On occasion, pupils and certainly Nick's friends, will ask themselves if they could have done anything to prevent it.

It is important that pupils are given the opportunity to talk about what has happened and to receive help if necessary. The pupil counsellors, teachers and other members of staff are available for pupils and parents who wish to talk about their thoughts, feelings and concerns. Please contact us at any time if you have any questions or concerns.

Next Thursday there will be a meeting at school at 19:00 hours.

Pupils, parents and staff are invited to attend.

An expert on bereavement support will be giving information about suicide, signals that should be watched for and the possibilities for preventing suicide. We hope that you will make time available for this meeting.

Our thoughts go out to Nick's parents, brother and sisters.

With kind regards,

Headmaster

Sample letter to parents (2)

In the following letter, the school has decided not to inform parents of the cause of death, but to refer to the information that pupils received by word of mouth.

Dear Parents or Carers,

This morning we informed our pupils about the death of one of our students. We think it is important to send you this letter to let you know how we dealt with the situation today and how we plan to deal with it in the coming time.

Yesterday afternoon, as a result of tragic circumstances, ...'s life was brought to an end. This morning, the team observed a moment of silence at 08:00. Afterwards, during their first lesson, all pupils present were informed about ...'s death and the circumstances under which it took place; the teachers involved invited pupils in their lessons to express their thoughts and feelings. For many pupils at school this information came as a great shock. Although we have tried to create space today for the feelings of our pupils, we can imagine that your son or daughter has a dire need to express his or her feelings and thoughts at home.

As from Monday, a quiet room will be arranged in ... (school location), where pupils can spend some quiet time to reflect on ...'s death. On Tuesday evening there will be an opportunity to sign the book of condolence from 19:00 - 19:30 at ... church in The school feels that it is important to pause and reflect on ... 's death with pupils and staff members who feel the need to do so on Tuesday evening, after the condolence register has been signed. We will therefore be holding a memorial ceremony in the school assembly hall at 20:15, to which your son or daughter is invited. Obviously, you are also welcome to attend the memorial ceremony. The funeral ceremony for ... will be held on Wednesday morning. The cremation will take place immediately afterwards.

We would like to give the pupils of class ... and other pupils from ...'s immediate circle of friends and acquaintances the opportunity to attend the funeral service and/or cremation. Pupils who will not be attending class ..., are expected to let their coordinator know on Tuesday.

We are sure that the coming period will prove difficult for a number of pupils. Obviously, we will do our utmost to support your son or daughter come to terms with this event. Should you have any further questions or wish to inform us of anything else, do not hesitate to contact the pupil counsellor, your child's form tutor, the coordinator or the assistant head of the department concerned.

We trust that we have informed you satisfactorily.

With kind regards,

On behalf of all employees of the school community,
Headmaster

Sample letter to teachers

Re: Death of ...

Dear Colleague,

Last Friday, we sent out a letter to the parents and carers of all the pupils in our school community. In addition to this letter, we would like to draw a number of other points to your attention.

As communicated to parents in the letter, a quiet room has been set up as from 12:00 today in room ... in the school. Pupils and teachers are invited to withdraw here during the break between 10:00 and 12:00 in order to reflect on their thoughts and feelings surrounding ...'s death.

There is also the opportunity for them to put these thoughts and feelings on paper there.

A memorial service will be held in the school (location ...) on Tuesday evening from 20:15 to which pupils and their parents are invited. You are also cordially invited to attend.

The funeral service for ... will take place on Wednesday at 12:00, and the cremation will take place at 13:30. We would like to know as soon as possible which teachers wish to attend the funeral ceremony and/or cremation. If you are planning to attend, please let administration know today in room

I would like to close by making a potentially unnecessary comment. It will be clear to each one of us that ...'s death has come as a great shock to everyone in the school. Nevertheless, it is also human - often as a means of self-protection - to go further with the routine of daily life. For this reason, we are emphasizing our request for everyone in the school to be more alert in the coming days and weeks for signs among pupils and colleagues that may indicate their inability to come to terms with the grief. If you think that someone may need additional support, please inform a member of management or a coordinator.

We wish you every strength.

With kind regards,

The School Board

Appendix: letter to parents or carers

Letter to pupils a week after the incident

Dear Pupils,

Last Thursday and Friday respectively, we found ourselves at the centre of a nightmare that unfortunately turned out to be reality and not a dream. We now have to learn to live with that reality.

This is going to take time. For some it will take less time, and for others a great deal of time. The amount of time it takes is not important. What is important, is that in the days, weeks and for some of us months to come, we give each other the time to get used to this new reality.

This will be difficult: the time it takes for everyone to come to terms with such an event is different. It also means that during the time to come the way in which each of us deals with this reality will be different.

Over the past few days the reality was the same for each one of us. This made it more easy to take one another's feelings into consideration. This will prove more difficult in the future.

It may sound strange, but the way that you have treated one another over the past few days has been a heart-warming comfort for ...'s parents and our team.

We hope that we will all be able to keep up this considerate attitude towards one another and to continue treating one another with the same respect with regard to one another's grief as we have done in the past few days.

Nevertheless, we now need to pick up the thread and continue our lives: not as if nothing has happened but with a new place for ... in our hearts and minds.

Over the next few days, try to let go of the thought 'why?'. You are unlikely to receive an answer and if you do, it will probably raise even more new questions. The answer will not help you either.

Try to let go of any feelings of guilt. There is no question of guilt.

Above all, try to remember nice things about ..., however painful it may be. Sharing nice memories about ... with others can help.

In short: carry the light, not the darkness.

In principle, we will be making the quiet room available for use tomorrow and on Friday. After Friday, we will be tidying the room up with several pupils. Soon, we will be handing over the thoughts you wrote down to ...'s parents.

Tomorrow we will try to give and follow 'normal' lessons again.

We hope that you and the school staff can act as a listening ear for one another over the coming time, which each of us will regularly need.

The School Board

Appendix 5 – Sample letter to parents including information about the funeral

Dear Parents or Carers,

As promised in our last letter, we are sending you further information about the funeral of Patrick Jansen.

Patrick's funeral will take place next Friday.

On Thursday afternoon Patrick's classmates and friends will be given the opportunity to bid him farewell in the Phoenix Funeral home. Separate visiting hours have been agreed with Patrick's parents and the funeral director so that we can take the time to say our farewells.

Pupils will depart from school together for the funeral home. Teachers will accompany them in order to supervise them and provide care if necessary. If you do not agree to your son or daughter visiting the funeral home then please contact the form tutor, Mrs Zegers.

The farewell service will take place on Friday morning at 10:30 in St. Jozef's church.

Pupils will depart from school together for the church.

After the service there will be an opportunity to offer condolences in 'De Bongerd' community centre.

After offering their condolences, pupils can assemble and return to school where they can eat and drink something together and have a talk afterwards.

Next Monday at 9:30 a memorial service will be held for Patrick in the school assembly hall. This will give all pupils the opportunity to bid Patrick farewell, including pupils from other classes. Patrick's parents and sister will be present. Pupils are free to decide if they wish to take part in the service. The lessons for all classes on Monday will start at the fourth hour at 11:20.

If you have any questions about the above or have noticed that your son or daughter is finding it difficult to come to terms with the situation, please contact Mrs Zegers.

S. Janssen
Headmaster

Appendix 6 – Examples of information bulletins after the death of a missing pupil

The following bulletins for teachers for the purpose of informing pupils were made available to us by a school. All recognizable details have been changed.

Information bulletin 1

Please address the following in the first hour of your class?

- A Please read out the following.
“The Regional Broadcasting Network reported that a walker discovered some human remains yesterday afternoon in a wooded area between A and B. Based on the clothing they have found, police are assuming that it is the body of 15-year-old Ellen. The girl, who had been missing for several months, is suspected to have been unlawfully killed. A post-mortem will give a definite answer. Until yesterday, extensive searches for the missing girl carried out by the police had not given any results. The walker discovered the physical remains by accident.”
- B Give the class the opportunity to respond.
- C If you feel it is necessary, individual pupils can be sent to the room where care is being offered by pupil counsellors, school management, a psychologist and others.
- D Offer pupils the opportunity to write a letter to the parents if they would like to do so.
- E At 10:05 the headmaster will ask for a minute's silence throughout the entire school.
- F Further information about the funeral will follow.
Classes 4VI and 4V2 will receive special counselling from their form tutors and the pupil counsellor. These classes will also be writing the death notification.
- G Your suggestions are welcome.

Martin van de Plas
Headmaster

Letter to pupils and parents

Dear Pupils, Dear Parents and Carers,

Ellen's death has come as a heavy blow to all of us. We will try to help each other cope with the enormous sadness we all feel. With this goal in mind, we have taken a number of measures as outlined below.

- On the evening of Wednesday 22nd, we informed the staff members and Ellen's classmates by telephone.
- On Thursday 23rd all the other classes were informed and pupils were offered the opportunity of discussing the news with their classmates and teacher. A group of social workers were available for individual pupils and smaller groups.
- On Thursday, we observed a minute's silence.
- On Friday 24th, six of Ellen's girlfriends and two teachers visited the family.
- A notice was published in the newspaper on behalf of us all on Saturday 25th.
- On Monday 27th and Tuesday 28th all pupils are invited to make a *small* financial contribution towards a bouquet of flowers, which will be sent to the parents on the ... of each month during the course of the school year.
- On Monday 27th those who wish to can attend the evening wake at 19:00.
- On Tuesday 28th Ellen's classmates will be travelling to the funeral by bus, accompanied by their form tutors and a pupil counsellor. Farewell letters, flowers and a speech will be used to express our feelings.
- On Tuesday 28th there will also be a short remembrance ceremony in the school assembly hall at 10:00 for all those who will be remaining at school. Parents are also invited to attend if they wish.

Pupils, parents and carers who feel the need to respond further are cordially invited to speak to form tutors, pupil counsellors and school managers.

With kind regards, I remain yours faithfully,

M.J.J. van de Plas
Headmaster

Information bulletin 2

Please address the following in the first hour of your class.

- A Until now, the course of events surrounding Ellen have been conducted in school with dignity. Our thanks to the pupils and all those concerned.
- B Evening wake, funeral and memorial service.
Evening wake on Monday 27th at 19:00. Everyone is welcome.
The funeral service will be held on Tuesday 28th at 10:30 in ... church.
Pupils from 4V1 and 4V2 and the pupil council are invited to attend voluntarily.
This will be a limited group led by the form tutors and the headmaster.
During the funeral service the chairman of the pupils council will give a short speech and farewell letters will be offered to Ellen.
(These have been written by pupils from 4V1 and 4V2).
On Tuesday there will be a brief ceremony for everyone at 10:00 in the school assembly hall.
(Preparations will be made by Mr Sw. and Sm.)
- C Notice in newspaper.
On behalf of all the pupils, staff and management an advert was placed in the regional newspaper on Saturday 25th.
- D On Monday 27th and Tuesday 28th all pupils are invited to hand in a small contribution to administration for flowers. These will be presented to Ellen's parents on the ... of each month until the end of the school year.
- E On Friday 24th, six pupils, the headmaster and the assistant head teacher visited Ellen's parents. The six pupils and the headmaster were invited for coffee.
- F Further announcements for pupils and their parents will follow.
- G Your suggestions are welcome.

Martin van de Plas
Headmaster

Information bulletin 3

Please address the following on Monday in the third hour of lessons.

- A Until now, the course of events surrounding Ellen have been conducted in school with dignity. Particularly the visit to Ellen's parents with six pupils on Friday. My sincere thanks.
- B It is now possible to leave a small contribution at administration for flowers.
- C On Monday evening at 19:00 the evening wake will be held. Everyone is welcome.
- D On Tuesday at 09:45 pupils from 4V1 and 4V2 and their form tutors will be departing by bus for the funeral.
- E On Tuesday at 09:45 all pupils will be asked to go to the school assembly hall for a short memorial service, after which the break will be extended.
- F Letter to parents and pupils will be handed out today. Please show this letter to your parents and carers.
- G Your suggestions are welcome.

Martin van de Plas
Headmaster

Information bulletin 4

Please address the following on Monday in the first hour of lessons.

- A The funeral service for Ellen that was held last Tuesday went successfully, as far as we can speak of as a school . Thanks to pupils and their supervisors, and particularly to both church readers.
- B The memorial service in the assembly hall also went very well on Tuesday. Thanks to pupils and their supervisors, and particularly to the organizers.
- C The school collection has raised €112.60. Administration will arrange for monthly flowers to be sent to Ellen's parents, including flowers on her birthday.
- D I have received praise on all sides for the way in which the school has dealt with Ellen's death. Compliments have been received from the police, the board, other schools, KPC Groep, the local health authority, the school counselling service and parents. I would like to pass these on to all pupils and all members of staff.
- E Among other things, pupils have been writing letters to Ellen's parents. Several pupils will be visiting them. The school management will be visiting Ellen's parents again this year and issuing a report and giving out photos during the memorial service in the assembly hall.
- F If pupils feel the need, Ellen's death can be remembered in class.
- G As soon as we receive more information about the perpetrators we will inform you.

Martin van de Plas
Headmaster

Information bulletin 5 (two months later)

Please address the following on Monday in the first hour of lessons.

- A On Thursday ... a meeting was held at school by pupils from the Care & Welfare department and was also attended by police officials and Ellen's parents. The police are still unable to give any details about the case surrounding the murder. No news has been reported, except for the fact that the police will indeed be travelling abroad to gather more information for their enquiries.
- B Afterwards, Ellen's parents thanked the pupils and school for the sympathy they expressed during this difficult period.
- C There are still a few photos of Ellen still in Mr Van Rijswijk's classroom and photos of her funeral and the memorial service have been put up in the assembly hall. Ellen's parents gave their permission and looked at the photos.

Martin van de Plas
Headmaster

Appendix 7 – Sample letter for parents' evening regarding sexual violence at a primary school

Dear Parents,

We are inviting you to attend a specially arranged parent evening in order to inform you about an incident that recently took place in our school. It involves a report of unwanted, sexually oriented conduct between pupils in groups 4 and 5.

In this letter we would like to briefly explain what happened from the moment the incident was reported to us, what the current status is and the support we will be offering you as a parent.

What happened?

This week we were confronted with the report that one of the children has had unwanted physical contact with other children. This has deeply affected us as a school, just as it has affected the parents and children involved. As a team, we have requested advice and support from the local health authority so that all those involved are able to deal with this situation correctly.

We have decided to inform you because we can imagine that you will have questions or concerns about the welfare of your child and how we are dealing with this situation as a school.

For this reason, we would like to provide as much comprehensive information and support as possible during the meeting. Professional social workers will explain to you how these kinds of situations arise among children, how you can read any potential signs and reactions from your child and how you can support your child - where necessary. Details will also be given about what you should and should not do when talking to your child about this subject.

You will have the opportunity to ask questions afterwards. With a view to respecting the privacy of those involved, not all your questions may be answered. We kindly ask for your understanding.

After the meeting has ended, you can talk personally with the representatives present. If you are unable to attend the meeting, but still wish to ask questions, please contact

In spite of everything, we request that you treat this information with the utmost discretion.

With kind regards,

A Janssen, Headmaster

(From an example provided by The Hague Local Health Authority coordination team Indecency Cases)

Appendix 8 – Important addresses and websites

Landelijke Stichting Rouwverwerking

(Dutch National Foundation for Grief Support)

Funeral Internet Services (UID)

P. Moreelsestraat 30

8932 HS Leeuwarden

Telephone: 058-213 97 07

Fax: 058-216 01 94

Website: www.rouw.nl

E-mail: info@rouw.nl

The Funeral Internet Services (UID) website answers the growing demand for information about bereavement and all associated aspects.

Stichting Achter de Regenboog

(Over the Rainbow Foundation)

Kaap Hoorndreef 38

3563 AV Utrecht

Information and advice: 0900-233 4141 (15 eurocents/minute): Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 09:00-11:00.

Central bureau: 030-236 82 82: Monday - Friday from 09:00 - 13:00.

Website: www.achterderegenboog.nl

E-mail: info@achterderegenboog.nl (office) and vrienden@achterderegenboog.nl (Friends for life)

The *Stichting Achter de Regenboog* is for children and adolescents who have been closely involved in the death of a loved one. The foundation provides services for children aged from 0-18. Studies and requests for help from the information and advice line have revealed a great need for information and support for parents and carers of children aged from 0 - 4. This group is important, particularly for reasons of prevention.

Children of primary school age are welcome to attend our children's weekends, as at this age they are used to the dynamics of their age group.

In addition to children, adolescents and their parents or carers, the foundation also aims to assist teaching staff, social workers and others who are involved with grieving children, whether professionally or out of concern.

Vereniging Ouders, Kinderen en Kanker (VOKK)

(Dutch Association for Parents of Children with Cancer)

Schouwstede 2b

3431 JB Nieuwegein

Telephone: 030-242 29 44

Fax: 030 - 242 29 45

Website: www.vokk.nl

E-mail: bureau@vokk.nl

The aims of the association (VOKK) are:

- to support and counsel parents, brothers and sisters and grandparents of children with cancer, as well as children who have cancer in the period during and after the illness and treatment;
- to improve the position of children with cancer and adults cured of children's cancer;
- to promote the interests of parents, children and ex-patients;
- to promote the quality of care and scientific research.

The VOKK is available for parents/carers, grandchildren, children and adolescents, brosters (brothers and sisters) and ex-patients.

In de Wolken

(In the Clouds)

Spoorlaan 9c

5591 HT Heeze

Telephone: 040 – 226 04 50

Website: www.in-de-wolken.nl

E-mail: info@in-de-wolken.nl

In de Wolken provides support for situations involving a loss after the death of a near loved one. Brochures, books and other materials have been developed for the bereaved. Although *In de Wolken* focuses on all age groups, it is particularly specialised providing support for grieving children and adolescents. For advice, education and training please refer to the *Expertisecentrum Omgaan met Verlies* (Coping with Loss Expertise Centre) run by Riet Fiddelaers-Jaspers, the initiator of *In de Wolken* (www.rietfiddelaers.nl).

Vereniging Ouders van een Overleden Kind

(Association for Parents of a Deceased Child)

Contact address:

Toos Kool

Postbus 418

1400 AK Bussum

Telephone: 0252 – 37 06 04

National helpline number: 0900 – 202 27 23 (5 ct. p.m.); Monday-Friday:

9:00-12:00, 14:00-17:00, 19:00-22:00

Website: www.vook.nl

E-mail: cka@zeelandnet.nl

The *Vereniging Ouders van een Overleden Kind* is a self-help organization for parents who have experienced the death of a child and offers understanding and support for fellow sufferers.

Werkgroep Broers en Zussen (Working Group for Brothers and Sisters)

Vereniging Ouders van een Overleden Kind (Association for Parents of a Deceased Child)

Contact address:

Toos Kool

Postbus 418

1400 AK Bussum

Website: www.broersenzussen.vook.nl

The *Werkgroep Broers en Zussen* is intended for adolescents who have lost a brother or sister. The loss of a brother or sister can make a huge impact in your life: it can tear your world apart. Contact with brothes and sisters who have experienced the same can be very helpful: experiences and feelings can be shared and are understood by fellow sufferers.

Centrum School en Veiligheid

(Centre for School and Safety)

APS

Centre for School and Safety

Postbus 85475

3508 AL Utrecht

Telephone: 030 – 242 29 45

Website: www.schoolenveiligheid.nl

The *Centrum School en Veiligheid* bundles expertise in safety at school:

- practical publications and instruments;
- schooling;
- background information;
- links.

Impact

National expertise and advisory centre for psychosocial care after a disaster

Visiting address:

Meibergdreef 5

1105 AZ Amsterdam

Postal address:

Postbus 78

1110 AB Diemen

Telephone: 020 – 566 21 02

Fax: 020 – 566 93 22

Website: www.impact-kenniscentrum.nl

Impact aims to promote high standards of quality and adequately organized psychosocial care after a disaster. The range of duties carried out by Impact includes bundling experience and scientific knowledge, making this comprehensible and available to a wide range of target groups and promoting cooperation between involved parties.

Instituut voor Psychotrauma (IvP)

(Institute for Psychotrauma)

Nienoord 5

1112 XE Diemen

Postbus 183

1110 AD Diemen

Telephone: 020 – 840 76 00

Fax: 020 – 840 76 01

Website: www.ivp.nl or www.crisisnet.nl

E-mail: info@ivp.nl

The *Instituut voor Psychotrauma* has been studying the impact of shocking disasters, catastrophes, violence and accidents on people and their environment for over 20 years. The *IvP* provides scientifically based practical support to businesses, healthcare institutions, and government and aid agencies, such as the police and fire brigade. Services offered by the institute include the provision of care, therapy, crisis support, education, research, advice and information. These services are aimed at both limiting the consequences of shocking events and at prevention.

Landelijk Psychotraumacentrum voor Kinderen en Jongeren

(National Psychotrauma Centre for Children and Adolescents)

Visiting address:

Wilhelmina Children's Hospital

Lundlaan 6

3584 EA Utrecht

Postal address:

Postbus 85090

3508 AB Utrecht

General telephone number: 088 – 75 555 55

Website: www.umcutrecht.nl/subsite/psychotraumacentrum

The *Landelijk Psychotraumacentrum voor Kinderen en Jongeren*, part of the University Medical Centre Utrecht, located in the Wilhelmina Children's Hospital, is an academic centre specialised in helping children aged from 0-18, their parents and others who are important to the child. Every year, countless children and adolescents in the Netherlands experience a shocking event, such as a serious accident, the sudden death of a loved one or witnessing or being involved in a violent crime. The Psychotrauma Centre aims to help children and adolescents who have had a similar experience. In addition, the centre provides support for all individuals who has had past (or future) involvement with traumatized children, such as child and adolescent doctors, police, aid workers, teaching staff and family guardians.

COT Instituut voor Veiligheids- en Crisismanagement

(COT Institute for Safety and Crisis Management)

Koninginnegracht 26

2514 AB The Hague

Telephone: 070 – 312 20 20

Fax: 070 – 312 20 12

Website: www.cot.nl

E-mail: cot@cot.nl

The *COT Instituut voor Veiligheids- en Crisismanagement* provides support to organizations in the public and private sectors for safety issues and during crisis situations. The COT is an authority in research, advice, training and education in the field of crisis and safety management. The COT assists private and public organizations during times of crisis and with complex safety issues. The COT assists organizations in preparing for inconceivable situations. The COT combines scientific knowledge with a wealth of practical experience.

Landelijke StichtingTegenZinloosGeweld (LSTZG)

(National Foundation Against Senseless Violence)

Visiting address:

Prins Bernhardstraat 88

2202 LR Noordwijk

Postal address:

Postbus 359

2200 AJ Noordwijk

Telephone: 071 – 367 22 00

Fax: 071 – 367 22 01

Website: www.zinloosgeweld.nl

E-mail: stop@zinloosgeweld.nl

The *Landelijke StichtingTegenZinloosGeweld* strives towards a society in which everyone is aware of the consequences of senseless violence (aggression, bullying and violence). To this end, the foundation develops programmes and organizes activities that make adolescents in particular aware of the causes of senseless violence and how they can prevent this among themselves and others.

Project Preventie Seksuele Intimidatie

(Project for the Prevention of Sexual Intimidation)

APS

Postbus 85475

3508 AL Utrecht

Telephone: 030 – 285 67 62 (Monday-Thursday 9:00-13:00)

Website: www.ppsi.nl

E-mail: ppsi@aps.nl

Contact and trusted persons at school are the first point of contact for complaints about sexual intimidation and unwanted behaviour. This site contains advice and tools to help you carry out your job adequately. School leaders and policy makers will also find information here.

Pesten

(Bullying)

Telephone: 0800 – 28 28 28 0 (no charge from landline) or 0900 – 28 28 28 0 (local charge from mobile telephone)

Website: www.pestweb.nl

E-mail: info@pestweb.nl

Information for children aged 7-12 and 12-18 and parents and teaching staff, with links to information about school and safety.

See also: <http://pesten.startpagina.nl>.

Geweld

(Violence)

The KPC Groep website includes information about sexual intimidation, aggression, other forms of violence and the disaster team under the search term 'violence'.

Telephone: 073 – 6247 247

Website: www.kpcgroep.nl

Herstelrecht

(Restorative Justice)

Restorative justice is based on a judicial model that concentrates more on restoring the damage done and on restoring the relationship than on punishing the perpetrators. It is derived from the method that the Maori people of New Zealand used to resolve conflicts within the group before the Western system of judgement and passing sentence was imposed on their society. It offers an alternative mental framework for dealing with offenders and victims. In the Netherlands, restorative justice is referred to as '*herstelrecht*'.

Website: <http://restorativepractices.org>

Schools are increasingly being faced with traumatic incidents that disrupt school life for brief or even longer periods. The KPC Groep has acquired invaluable experience in counselling schools on grief and bereavement and provides a guideline in this publication on how to cope with a disaster or catastrophe. Practical experience has proven that it is both desirable and necessary for every school to have its own 'scenario book' as well as a dedicated crisis team.

What action should the school take when faced with a disaster or catastrophe?

A disaster or catastrophe is an unexpected and acutely traumatic situation that:

- Causes trauma;
- Is or may become life threatening;
- Involves a relatively large group of people;
- Disrupts the daily routine;
- Requires greater effort than usual from emergency personnel.

What are the implications for school leaders when a disaster or catastrophe strikes the school?

DOs: what you should do!

- Prevent panic
- Deploy the crisis team
- Take along the scenario book
- Check all the relevant facts and details in the scenario book and inform and instruct all those involved as quickly as possible
- Appoint a press spokesperson
- Give colleagues and pupils the opportunity to express their emotions

DON'Ts: what you definitely should NOT do!

- Respond hastily
- Take individual action
- Withhold important information in order to spare pupils, parents and teachers
- Allow the daily routine, including activities such as tests, school inspections, school trips or school plays, to go ahead at all costs
- Allow journalists to enter the school grounds or speak to them (only the press spokesperson is authorized to do so!)

At times, when feelings of despondency and powerlessness threaten to overwhelm the school, it can try to soften the pain as much as possible for all those involved by following the above tips.