



Handling Grief, Loss & Crises *In the Church & Children's Ministry Settings*

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In order to be effectively prepared to handle grief and loss issues and crises in the church, it is wise to establish a “Crisis Team” which includes an appointed Crisis Team Leader. The Team Leader could be the Children’s Pastor or other person of authority in the church who is also someone who could easily be connected to information pertaining to the situation and the family or families involved. This will also be the designated person that the family contacts when they have updates – thus eliminating the need for the family to make or receive multiple calls from the church. The Crisis Team will be composed of adults in your children’s ministry who feel comfortable stepping up to the plate in the midst of crisis and grief. These will be the folks who will disseminate information, field questions, and ultimately become the “go to” people. This team could organize and get the family’s permission (when the time is appropriate) such things as: communication, meal deliveries, child care, transportation, house cleaning, etc. Also, a “Crisis Team Group” should be organized for efficient communication to Team members via text or email.

Keep in mind that sometimes those closest to the situation may not be the most effective Crisis Team members because of their own emotional involvement and grief.

When the Crisis Affects the Children in Your Ministry

The following suggestions can be adapted and used both prior to and after the death has occurred with regard to communication to the children at church.

[If it is known ahead of time that a death is imminent, the children can be talked to **prior to** the actual death occurring, with plans for continued updates as appropriate.]

- **Facts** - as soon as possible, a clear explanation of what is/has occurred should be given to the children. This should be done as honestly as possible, using real words – NO EUPHEMISMS.
- A statement should be prepared by the Crisis Team Leader which clearly explains the facts. This statement should first be relayed to the children’s parents via phone calls or in a written statement that is either mailed, e-mailed or given to the parents at church. This statement can then be read to the children by Crisis Team Members, Pastoral Staff, Sunday School teachers or other designated adults, so that consistency is assured. (This also takes into consideration the emotional state of the adults involved; it is much easier to read a prepared statement than speak ‘off the cuff.’)
- **Questions** - a time for the asking/answering of questions must be set aside ASAP, preferably with a Crisis Team member present.

- **Continued Updates** - as soon as new information is learned, that needs to be passed along to the children as well (i.e., new facts, funeral information, the church's response, etc.)
- **Participation** – the children should be given the opportunity to participate where appropriate
 - attending funeral/memorial services (obviously this is up to each child's parents)
 - helping to plan a way for the church to honor the child who has died as well as the child's family (paying special attention to any surviving siblings)
- **Sharing** - follow-up with the children who wish to talk about their feelings, etc. (can be formal or informal; timing is no issue)

A similar outline should be followed for any adults directly involved in this crisis, such as the Sunday School teachers who will be working directly with those children most impacted by the crisis:

- **Facts**
- **Questions**
- **Continued Updates**
- **Participation**
- **Sharing/Debriefing**

Perhaps an expanded group is established in order to keep these individuals informed via text or email.