

## F. A Case Example

### Background

On Thursday, April 10, 2003, at approximately 2:00 AM, three students were killed on a rural highway in upstate New York. The students were returning home from a party at a nearby college. The students were seniors at Kaufman University. One of the students was an athlete, one an editor of the campus newspaper, and one, the vice president of a popular sorority.

### The Intervention

The first person to become aware of this situation was a dormitory resident, Jerry, who resided with two of the students in the same residence hall. One of the students in the accident was able to use his cell phone to call Jerry who then dialed 911. As word began to spread in the dormitory regarding the tragedy, the Residence Assistant who lived on the hallway became aware of the incident. The Director of Residence Life, Mr. James Nobles, was contacted at home and began calling his colleagues as directed by the Emergency Contact List.

The first person contacted was the Director of Student Affairs, Mr. Jennings, who in turn, called the University President, Dr. Jerry Mayberger. Dr. Mayberger called senior administration officials. Mr. Jennings began to collect details of the accident. He contacted the local police department who were able to provide some details about the accident. Dr. Mayberger and Mr. Jennings contacted the Director of the Campus Counseling Center, Dr. Perker, and, in consultation with Mr. Nobles, decided to have the University Crisis Response Team (CRT) meet in the University Library at 7:00 AM the next morning.

Importantly, action had to be taken prior to the morning meeting of the CRT. At this point, Dr. Perker and Mr. Nobles acknowledged the emergent psychological needs of the dormitory residents who lived with these students. The decision was made to bring counseling staff to the affected dormitories and, following the principles of Acute Traumatic Stress Management (ATSM), students were assisted. Once support staff introduced themselves and why they were in the dormitory, some of the facts about the accident were discussed. An emphasis was placed on helping the students focus on what they knew about the situation, allowing them to "tell their story" of how they found out about the tragedy and what he or she did upon hearing the news. As the meeting proceeded, it was explained to the students that it would be quite "normal" to feel intense sadness, anger, anxiety and possibly remorse for what happened. Counseling appointments were made available to the students at the Counseling Center the next day.

As Mr. Jennings continued to gather details surrounding the event, he was told by the local police department that they had been able to notify the parents of the students. The next morning, Mr. Jennings contacted the parents of the deceased

students to determine some of the events surrounding the accident, ascertained how much information the parents wanted disclosed to the campus community, and offered support to the family during this extremely difficult time.

The CRT assembled and included Dr. Mayberger, Mr. Jennings, James Nobles, Dr. Perker, Bill Sawyer, Chief of University Police, Dr. Jones, Director of University Health Services, Sharon Hennessy, Director of Media Relations, Father Clarence O'Reilly, a respected member of the clergy, and Professor Robert Thomson, a Political Science professor who was an advisor for many activities on campus and well-known to many students. Facts surrounding the accident were discussed. The manner in which notification to staff, students, and faculty was determined. The team planned their response with a meeting set for the next day to process and modify their efforts.

Individual and group counseling took place throughout the day at the Counseling Center. Students were informed of the availability of support by memorandum placed in their mailboxes in the dormitories. All students also received e-mail notification. In an effort to minimize rumors, with the students' families' permission, some of the details of the event were included in the memorandum and e-mail including the date, time, and location of the accident.

The University website had a link on its homepage about support services available on-campus and off-campus. The location of the Counseling Center was shown as well as emergency phone numbers to call after hours. The phone number for Clergy was also posted. One of the students, the newspaper editor, was very involved with a Christian Outreach Group on campus. As expected, many of the personnel involved with this group were deeply affected by the loss. On the website, information regarding grieving and bereavement as well as an explanation about the difference between expected responses to traumatic loss and maladaptive reactions (e.g., suicidal feelings) were also presented. Helpful coping strategies were presented on-line as well.

Mr. Nobles with Dr. Perker made arrangements for sorority alumni who lived nearby to return to campus and offer support to the members of the sorority who were feeling the loss of "one of their own." Support services were provided to sorority members campuswide.

The Director of the Athletic Department, Tim Heward, was offered the support of staff from the Counseling Center. The option of having outside counseling personnel was also presented. The needs of the teammates needed to be prioritized as these individuals recovered from the loss of a teammate and friend.

Mr. Jennings and his staff examined the class schedules of the deceased and made arrangements to inform professors of the students. Chairpersons of the associated departments were informed of the details of the incident. They were told that many students knew these students and to be alert for students showing distress in class.

A list of appropriate grieving reactions was forwarded to them as well as some suggestions regarding how to talk to students about the event if questioned. The option to cancel the class was left up to the discretion of the individual professors.

Mr. Jennings and other members of the CRT monitored the responses of faculty and staff that were affected by this tragedy. The availability of support staff for all those desiring assistance was posted on the University website home page, e-mailed to faculty, and announced on the campus radio station.

University police monitored the buildings where the deceased students attended class as well as their dormitories where makeshift memorials were starting to arise. The Director of Media Relations, Sharon Hennessy, in consultation with university administration and the family of the deceased, prepared a statement. As anticipated, local news stations began to enter the campus. Campus police directed them to Ms. Hennessy's office for comments regarding the accident and the University's response to the incident.

The next day the Crisis Response Team conducted a debriefing, which permitted a review of the events that unfolded over the previous day. This also provided an opportunity for members of the CRT to express their own thoughts and emotions surrounding the situation and their response to the event.

With the consent of the family of the deceased, members of the CRT developed a plan as to who would be "on call" after hours. The manner in which the team planned to be available for students before and after funeral services was also decided. A follow-up strategy for the students determined to be closest to the deceased was developed. On-going counseling was to be provided in small groups at the Counseling Center under the supervision of Dr. Perker.

Several weeks later, a memorial fund was established in the three students' name. Outside of the dormitories, three trees were planted. At the end of the semester, a small plaque bearing the students' names was affixed to the base of the trees. The campus newspaper dedicated an entire issue to the memory of the beloved editor and fellow befallen classmates.