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Bowen, Gracie L. *A Literature Review of Adolescent Death, Grief and the School's Response.*

Abstract

In 2008 there were 12,407 teenagers who died between the ages of 15-19, which averaged out to 58 deaths per 100,000 teens in the United States. When a student dies their death reverberates across the student body, impacting their surviving friends and classmates.

Adolescent death often occurs unexpectedly and in tragic forms including accidents, suicide, homicide or sudden/terminal illnesses. As professional school counselors, it is inevitable that we will experience the loss of one or multiple students throughout the course of our careers. It is our ethical responsibility to be prepared for these tragic occurrences in order to help students grieve and cope with their loss.

This literature review addresses adolescent reactions to the death of a peer, and what school counselors need to understand about the range of feelings and experiences associated with adolescent grief. Additionally, this literature review discusses the range of responses a school should have in place to be prepared to handle unexpected student deaths. Recommendations for future research will also be identified.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In October, 2011, one male student, age 15, was killed in an accidental shooting by a friend when they were playing with a gun at home. The student attended Chisago Lakes Area High School, MN (Croman, 2012). In December, 2011, tragedy struck the Eleva-Strum School District, WI when two males, ages 14 and 15, and one female, age 13, died from injuries sustained in a single-car accident (Artus, 2011). In February, 2012, three female students ages 15, 16 and 17 attending Campbellsport High School, WI were killed in a single-car accident. The students were members of the Campbellsport High School soccer team (Docter & Handelman, 2012). In March 2012, two female students age 16 were killed in a single-car accident. These students attended Preble High School, WI (Schlicht, 2012). Although these nine student deaths occurred in the mid-western states of Wisconsin and Minnesota, these tragic events are only a snapshot of the adolescent deaths that occur on a daily basis across the United States. When an adolescent's life is cut short the impact is felt across the community and specifically within the school the student attended.

According to the Child Trends Data Bank (2012A), it is more likely for a child to die within their first year of life than it is for them to die later in childhood. In 2007, children less than one year of age passed away at a rate ten times higher than the second highest group who were children ages 15-19 (Child Trends Data Bank, 2012A). In 2008, according to the Kids Count Data Center (2012A), in the United States alone there were 12,407 teenagers who died between the ages of 15-19, which averaged out to 58 deaths per 100,000 teens. According to Kids Count Data Center (2012B), 9,240 of these teens died from an accident, homicide or suicide; which averaged to be 43 deaths per 100,000 teens across the United States.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics (2011), in 2007 the leading causes of death of individuals between the ages of 15-24 were injuries sustained from accidents, followed by homicide, suicide, cancer and heart disease. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics (2011) reported accidents accounted for nearly half of all deaths between the ages of 15-24, and in 2007, the majority of those deaths were caused by injuries sustained from automobile accidents. According to the Child Trends Data Bank (2012B) in 2007, automobile crashes resulted in nearly one-third of all teen deaths, while one-fourth of these automobile-related deaths were influenced by alcohol. According to the Child Trends Data Bank (2012C), the second leading cause of death in 2007 was homicide, and the third leading cause of death was suicide, followed by cancer and heart disease.

The loss of life is an inevitable part of our world and there is no escaping it. Oftentimes we do not believe that a young person can or will die, but as statistics show, death does not discriminate based on age. In an instant a student who was an active member on the speech team, a college-bound basketball player or the class president, dies, and their death reverberates across the student body. As professional school counselors, it is inevitable that we will experience the loss of one, or multiple students, throughout the course of our careers. Rather than simply avoiding the possibility of death, we need to acknowledge that no one is guaranteed tomorrow.

Schools need to be prepared for what may occur so that they are able to effectively support their students throughout the grieving processes that accompany death. When classmates learn of a student's death, they will begin to experience grief. Some will display immense sadness and others will go on with their day-to-day lives. Managing grief is difficult because there is not a "one size fits all" experience for grief. How an individual grieves and copes with

their loss is truly dependent on the individual (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011; Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005; McIntosh, 2007).

Several decades ago, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) introduced five stages of grief to explain the grieving process (denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance). She originally identified the stages to explain the grieving process of terminally ill individuals. She documented a step-by-step procedure, where the dying moved through each stage as they neared death. However, the stages of grief now encompass not only the feelings and experiences of the dying but the grieving processes for those who have lost someone close to them.

Additionally, Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) noted that individuals are no longer expected to go through the stages of grief in a specific order and they are not expected to transition through every stage. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) suggest that the stages are only meant to serve as a guide to how one might experience grief. McIntosh (2007) supported this view by noting that although there are common responses to grief like denial, anger and sadness, everyone who suffers a loss will experience their grief differently. According to Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) when an adolescent experiences a loss, the way they grieve and the time it takes for them to process through it varies from one individual to the next.

When a student dies, the impact of that death is felt throughout the school and into the community. Each student in the school will be impacted by the death, and their reactions will vary. The student's death will not only impact the students they had close relationships with, but it will also affect those who were only distantly associated with them (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011). It is important for school professionals to acknowledge the student's death and provide support to meet the needs of grieving friends, classmates and other students within the school. The types of support that schools can utilize to assist their students through the processes that

accompany death vary. For instance, in order for schools to be prepared for a student death, the school should have a plan set in place on how to address the student's death. It is also important for schools to provide school-based counseling services to students and information to families about the student's death and the grieving processes that their child may experience (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011; Haviland, 2008; Piechowski, 2012).

After reviewing the current literature, the researcher found several articles that discussed adolescent grief and school's response to student death. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), conducted a literature review on adolescent grief and how to support grieving students at school. Piechowski (2012) discussed three stages of response that a school should implement before and after a student death: pre-planning, protocol implementation and post implementation. Haviland (2008) reported a firsthand account from a school district that experienced several student deaths in a very short time period. Within this article the school shared their response to the student deaths, along with suggestions for other schools. Although there have been discussions on the impact of a student's death and the school's response, further investigation is required in order to fully gauge schools' preparedness for student death.

Statement of the Problem

Though the loss of life is an inevitable part of our world, there is a different and greater sense of loss that is felt when a young person dies. Adolescent death can come unexpectedly and in tragic forms including accidents, suicide, homicide or sudden/terminal illnesses. As school counselors, it is critical to be prepared for these tragic occurrences in order to help students grieve and cope with their loss. Therefore, the research questions are: What do we know about adolescent reactions to the death of a peer? What do school counselors need to understand about the basic feelings and experiences associated with adolescent grief related to peer deaths? What

is the range of responses a school should have in place in order to be fully equipped to handle unexpected student deaths?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate what we know about adolescent reactions to the death of a peer and what school counselors need to understand about the basic feelings and experiences associated with adolescent grief related to peer deaths. Additionally, this study will explore the range of responses a school should have in place in order to be fully equipped to handle unexpected student deaths. A literature review will be conducted at UW-Stout during the 2012 fall semester.

For purposes of this literature review, the focus will only be on deaths as a result of accidents, illnesses and homicide. Suicide deaths will not be specifically addressed within this literature review because of the unique implications and successive peer-reactions that have been previously documented.

Objectives of the Study

Three objectives were addressed in this literature review:

1. What do we know about adolescent reactions to the death of a peer?
2. What do school counselors need to understand about the basic feelings and experiences associated with adolescent grief related to peer deaths?
3. What is the range of responses a school should have in place in order to be fully equipped to handle unexpected student deaths?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

One assumption of this study is that students, teachers and school counselors are often not prepared for a student's death. There may also be a lack of awareness surrounding adolescent grief and how to support students through the grieving process. The second assumption is that grief and loss are not always planned for and openly discussed within schools. One limitation of this study is that because this is only a literature review, there will be no new or additional research being completed, rather, only an overview of past research. Additionally, there may be literature about school response plans and resources that are being used by schools, but that literature is not published.

Definition of Terms

Grief. A healthy response to the loss of a significant person, place or thing, encompassing a broad range of emotions and behaviors (McIntosh, 2007).

Adolescent. Individual between the ages of 12 to 18 (Berger, 2009).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Adolescent death is an all too common occurrence across the United States. With adolescent death comes the devastation it has on the deceased student's family, school, and the community. Within the school itself the deceased student's friends, classmates and teachers may be impacted by the student's death. In the aftermath of the student's death, those who knew the student will begin to grieve, and a need for a response by the school will be heightened. The school, and in particular the school counselor, must be prepared to assist the grieving students through the aftermath of the student's death. This review of the current literature will examine adolescent response to death, particularly the death of peers; what schools and school counselors need to know about adolescent grief, and will review the school's response to a student death.

Grief in Adolescents

According to Webb (2008), it has been commonly mistaken that losing a family member is the only significant loss and cause of grief that an adolescent might experience. However, according to the International Work Group (1999), McIntosh (2007) and Webb (2008) the reality is a young person may experience many types of loss. The types of loss an adolescent might experience can vary from their parents' divorce, a move to a new town or school, death of a pet, death of a neighbor, death of an extended family member, the end of a relationship or friendship and the death of a peer (International Work Group, 1999; McIntosh, 2007; Webb, 2008).

According to the International Work Group (1999) it is crucial to understand that adolescents may react to death differently than the way an adult might, but this should not minimize their grief. Oftentimes an adolescent's first reaction to the news of a death may be delayed or may not be as observable as an adult's grief. In contrast, Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) noted that an adolescent's reaction to a death might be displayed in intense and

unexpected forms. According to the International Work Group (1999) and Webb (2008), when a grieving adolescent is not able to express their feelings, talk about their loss, and gain closure, they may develop anxiety. When an adolescent feels that it is inappropriate to express their grief, they might also avoid or suppress it. As a result of suppressing or avoiding grief, one can experience both emotional and physical reactions that can appear within days, weeks, months or years following the loss (International Work Group, 1999; Webb, 2008). In summary, the literature on adolescent grief indicates that adolescents may experience many forms and feelings associated with grief. Adolescents also need to be able to express their grief in order to effectively cope with their loss.

According to Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) the death of an adolescent is not an expected or anticipated event like receiving a driver's license, graduating from high school, going to college, or getting a job. When a student dies, the death is not considered a "normal" adolescent experience for the deceased student's peers. However, as statistics show, adolescent death does occur and it impacts the deceased student's family, friends, peers, their school and community. According to the International Work Group (1999), McIntosh (2007) and Webb (2008) it is important not to undermine the impact a loss can have on an adolescent. A student's grief is their own personal grief and it may be displayed in a variety of ways, but it should not be overlooked or tossed aside (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

What School Counselors Need to Understand About Adolescent Grief

Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) indicated that the death of a peer might affect a surviving adolescent physically, cognitively, behaviorally, emotionally, interpersonally and spiritually. McIntosh (2007) suggests that a student's grief might be displayed in such forms as irritability,

forgetfulness, restlessness, inappropriate and boisterous behaviors, loss of interest in spending time with other peers and oppositional or defiant behavior.

A peer's death may trigger physical reactions such as crying, shaking, loss of appetite, the development of abnormal sleep patterns, headaches and fatigue (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011). The authors noted that on a cognitive level, an adolescent's mind might be bombarded with thoughts, details, images and questions about the student's death. Oftentimes adolescents will wonder what death was like and what it means. They may also struggle with feelings of guilt and seek out someone or something to blame for their loss (Balk, Zaengle & Corr; 2011).

Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) suggest that if adolescents do not possess coping skills to help them through their loss they might begin to show behavioral difficulties after a peer has died. A grieving adolescent may become restless, agitated and may have difficulty following their normal daily routines. According to Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) and the International Work Group (1999) feelings that are associated with grief are truly dependent on the individual and may range from anxiety, guilt, sadness, fear and anger, to isolation, loneliness, confusion and even relief.

On an interpersonal level, Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) suggest that an adolescent may experience feelings of loneliness and may believe that no one knows what they are going through. These feelings may lead to isolation and withdrawal. The authors also noted that when an adolescent dies, surviving peers may begin to ask questions related to their spirituality, for example: "Why would God let something like this happen?" or "What happens after death?".

The International Work Group (1999) also noted that an individual's grieving process can be influenced by individual, environmental and situational variables. Individual variables such as age, gender, developmental stage, life experiences, cognitive functioning, personality factors and

emotional development may impact an adolescent's grieving processes. Environmental variables include the adolescent's family support system and communication styles, culture, religion and exposure to the media and may influence the way they grieve. Lastly, situational variables include the adolescent's relationship with the individual who died, the circumstances surrounding the death, and the adolescent's participation in the dying process, funeral or other memorial services.

Servaty-Seib and Pistole's (2006) study suggests that when looking at death from an adolescent's perspective, adolescents reported more heightened feelings of grief when they lost a friend when compared to the feelings associated with other losses like the death of a grandparent. The researchers suggest this might be due to the fact that adolescents interact with their friends in their day-to-day life at school, thus making it difficult for the adolescents when they return to school to be reminded of their friend who died.

It is clear that an adolescent death can have a significant impact on their surviving friends, classmates and other students within the school. When a student dies, those impacted by the deceased student will begin to grieve. Many students will be affected by the loss, and will grieve in a variety of ways; it is imperative that schools and school professionals are prepared to respond to and support these students.

School Response to a Student's Death

According to Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008) and Piechowski (2012), it is critical for schools to have a plan set in place for effectively addressing and responding to the student's death. Upon news of a student death, Haviland (2008) and Piechowski (2012) explained that key staff members such as the superintendent, the principal and pupil service professionals should meet and discuss how the school will respond to the death.

Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008) and Piechowski (2012) all believe that schools have a duty to provide support to the deceased student's family and to the remaining students and staff at the school. Piechowski (2012) and Reep (2003) highlighted how critical it is for schools to communicate the news of a student's death in an official and effective manner to the school's staff, the surviving students and their families in order to avoid miscommunications.

In the event of a student death, Piechowski (2012) discussed three stages a school should implement before and after a student has died. These stages are: pre-planning phase, protocol implementation and post implementation follow-up. Within the pre-planning phase, Piechowski (2012) recommends that schools have a crisis team set in place before a student death occurs. According to the author, a crisis team can be composed of school counselors, school administrators, school psychologists and social workers. However, the composition of the crisis team may vary depending on the school.

Piechowski (2012) suggests that the school should designate one member from the crisis team to serve as the "crisis team leader". The crisis team leader should coordinate support for students and staff following the adolescent's death. The crisis team leader should also identify the individuals who had close relationships with the student in order to provide them the extra support that they may need (Piechowski, 2012). Prior to a student death, the author also suggests that the school should take the time to plan and distribute a phone tree to staff members so that timely and effective communication can occur in the event of a death. Additionally, Piechowski (2012) recommends holding meetings yearly to review the schools pre-planned response.

According to Piechowski (2012) when a student dies, the school transitions into the protocol implementation stage. Within this stage, the author recommends that schools should first and foremost verify the facts about the student's death to avoid the spread of false

information. When the principal becomes aware of a death, he or she should contact the school's crisis team and together they can gauge the impact that death will have on the school.

Piechowski (2012) also suggests that the school should use the pre-designed phone tree to notify staff about the death. The author recommends that before the school day begins following news of the death, the school should hold a meeting to inform staff members about the school's response.

Following a student's death, Piechowski (2012) recommends that the school should determine if the student had any siblings in the district, as it is critical that those schools are also notified about the student's death immediately. The school should prepare a statement to be read to students about the student's death and have a counseling area set in place for students who may need support. After the first day following the student's death, school staff members should meet, debrief and plan for the days to follow.

The post implementation stage occurs after the student's funeral. In this stage the school crisis team should meet to debrief. Piechowski (2012) suggests that the school gauge the effectiveness of their response to the student's death by acquiring feedback from the crisis team. According to the author, this can be done through asking the crisis team questions to determine what went well and what could be improved. Based on this feedback schools should modify their response plan for future reference.

Haviland (2008) made several recommendations regarding the schools' response to a student death based on personal accounts from school personnel who experienced several student deaths over a short period of time. Haviland (2008) encouraged schools to meet as a team in order to plan and respond to a student death. Following a student's death, schools are recommended to notify their staff and meet with them to discuss the school's response to the

death as soon as possible. Additionally, schools should send a letter home to student's parents notifying them about the death. Haviland (2008) also stressed the importance of putting both immediate and ongoing support in place for students following a death.

Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) also provide recommendations to schools regarding communication, information and counseling. The authors note it is crucial that schools reach out to the student's family and keep open lines of communication with them about what they want shared about their child's death. It is also important for schools to provide information about the adolescent's death to the parents and guardians of surviving student's within the school. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) also recommend that schools provide support to both students and staff following a student's death.

Informing staff about a student's death.

Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008), Piechowski (2012) all agree that notifying school staff members, students and their parents as soon as possible following a student's death is critical. However, before students and parents are notified, it is recommended that a staff-wide meeting should be held to inform staff members about the student's death and how the school will respond to it. It is crucial for the school to notify staff members as soon as possible. Additionally when a student dies, it is crucial for the school to work with the student's family to decide how they will address the students and staff regarding the student's death. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) and Haviland (2008) advised that the school should have a discussion with the deceased student's parents surrounding what information the parents want shared and what information they want kept private regarding their child's death.

When informing staff members about a student's death, Reep (2003) suggests that schools should distribute a uniformed letter to school staff members about the death, to maintain

consistency in the information that is shared. The author recommends that the letter should include a statement about the deceased student and their accomplishments and impact on the school. Information about the death including the date and cause of death should also be addressed. Within the letter, the school should include details surrounding funeral arrangements. Reep (2003) also recommends including information about availability of counseling services for students and staff members.

Informing students.

After the school has been in contact with the deceased student's family about how the information is to be shared about their child's death, the next step is to inform the student's friends and classmates. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) suggest that when this information is shared, it should be delivered personally by a familiar person and should take place in a small classroom or group setting, and not through a public announcement system. The authors recommend when students are told about their peer's death, the discussion should be brief and factual to avoid rumors and uphold the deceased's family's wishes. Depending on the deceased student's family's wishes, the news of the student's death may also only be disclosed to individual students, rather than the class as a whole.

In contrast, Piechowski (2012) states it is important for the school to prepare an announcement about the student's death and that it be given over the school's announcement system by the principal, in order to deliver the message in a consistent and familiar fashion. However, when the death occurs in an elementary school setting, Piechowski (2012) recommends having teachers share the news individually within their classrooms.

According to Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) classroom discussions about a student's death must be approached tactfully and with caution. The authors emphasize the fact that

although many students will experience the loss when a student dies, all students will respond differently to the loss. If the deceased student's death is addressed in the classroom, sharing feelings associated with the student's death might make some students feel uncomfortable because of the differences in their reactions to the death. Thus it is important to address a student's death in a sensitive manner that allows students to learn about their classmate's death while educating them on how to cope with their loss. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008) and Piechowski (2012) recommend that schools have immediate and ongoing support for students set in place including access to school and community resources.

Informing parents.

Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008) and Piechowski (2012) encourage schools to notify the parents of all surviving students when a student dies, due to the fact that teens may not disclose to their parents what has happened. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008) and Piechowski (2012) suggest that this can be done through sending a letter, email, or by posting information on the school's website informing parents about the student's death. This will inform the parents about the student's death, which may provide them with an opportunity to discuss the tragedy with their child and support their child through this difficult time.

As noted earlier, both Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) and Haviland (2008) emphasize the importance of upholding the deceased student's parents' wishes about how the information about their child's death is shared, which may include to whom the letter is sent and whether or not identifying information is included. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) and Piechowski (2012) recommend that the letter include information on grief and how a classmate's death may impact the surviving students. The letter should also provide information on available school and

community resources. Haviland (2008) also suggests that schools include information about services such as a wake, funeral and memorial service within the letter to parents.

Reep (2003) concurs that schools send a letter to parents and guardians of surviving students about the death. This letter should include information about the deceased and their impact on the school, along with the date and cause of death. However, Reep (2003) suggests schools not include family services within the letter to parent's and guardians, instead schools should inform parents and guardians about counseling services that are available for students affected by the death.

In summary, there seems to be consensus within the available research on schools' response to a student death and what that response should look like. There is agreement that schools should have a plan in place and a plan needs to be discussed before a student death occurs (Balk, Zaengle & Corr; 2011, Haviland; 2008, Piechowski; 2012). Additionally, schools are encouraged to inform staff and students about a student's death immediately (Balk, Zaengle & Corr; 2011, Haviland; 2008, Piechowski; 2012, Reep; 2003). However, there were some differences in opinions on how to inform and disseminate information to staff, students and their parents about the student's death (Balk, Zaengle & Corr; 2011, Piechowski; 2012, Reep; 2003).

Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis and Recommendations

The following chapter will summarize the findings of this literature review on the three objectives that were identified: grief in adolescents, what school counselors need to understand about adolescent grief, and the school response to a student's death. This chapter will also discuss the author's critical analysis of these issues based on the literature that was reviewed, and provide recommendations for future researchers.

Summary

The research questions that were addressed in this study were: What do we know about adolescent reactions to the death of a peer? What do school counselors need to understand about the basic feelings and experiences associated with adolescent grief related to peer deaths? What is the range of responses a school should have in place in order to be fully equipped to handle unexpected student deaths?

After reviewing the literature surrounding adolescent reactions to the death of a peer, the researcher found that it has been commonly mistaken that losing a family member is the only cause of grief that an adolescent might experience (Webb, 2008). However, according to the International Work Group (1999), McIntosh (2007) and Webb (2008), the reality is a young person may experience many types of loss throughout their adolescent years, including the death of a peer. According to the literature, the way adolescents respond to the loss of a peer appears differently based on the individual. An adolescent's grief could be portrayed in intense or unexpected forms, or it could be delayed and not as observable. The reality is, the way an adolescent responds to the loss of a peer will truly depend on the individual (International Work Group, 1999; Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011).

The literature on adolescent grief also found that when a grieving adolescent is not able to effectively cope with their loss, they may develop emotional and physical manifestations of grief (International Work Group, 1999; Webb, 2008). When working with adolescents who are grieving, it is imperative that we do not underestimate the impact a loss can have on an adolescent (International Work Group, 1999; McIntosh, 2007; Webb, 2008). In conclusion, within the literature on adolescent grief, it was found that adolescents do experience loss during this period of their lives and it can significantly impact them. In regard to an adolescent's reactions to the death of a peer, the literature indicates that adolescents may experience many forms and feelings associated with grief. In order to effectively cope with their loss, adolescents also need to be able to express their grief.

After reviewing the literature on what school counselors need to understand about the basic feelings and experiences associated with adolescent grief related to peer deaths, the researcher found several important aspects of adolescent grief that are noteworthy. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) indicated that the death of a peer might affect a surviving adolescent physically, cognitively, behaviorally, emotionally, interpersonally and spiritually, all of which can significantly impact a student's overall well-being. The International Work Group (1999) also noted that an individual's grieving process can be influenced by individual, environmental and situational variables which vary from one individual to the next depending on their background and life experiences.

According to the discussions within the literature surrounding feelings associated with adolescent grief, several authors noted that the feelings that are associated with grief are truly dependent on the individual. These feelings may take the form as: anxiety, guilt, sadness, fear, anger, isolation, loneliness, confusion, relief, irritability, forgetfulness, restlessness, inappropriate

and boisterous behaviors, withdrawal from peers and oppositional or defiant behavior (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011; International Work Group, 1999; McIntosh, 2007). It is clear that an adolescent's death can have a significant impact on their surviving friends, classmates and other students within the school. Because many students will be affected by the loss, and will grieve in a variety of ways, it is imperative that schools and school professionals are prepared to respond to and support these students.

The literature surrounding the range of responses a school should have in place in order to be fully equipped to handle unexpected student deaths were similar. Most sources believed that is critical for schools to have a plan set in place for effectively addressing and responding to the student's death (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011, Haviland, 2008; Piechowski, 2012). The authors also believe that schools have a duty to provide support to the deceased student's family and to the surviving students and staff at the school (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011; Haviland, 2008; Piechowski, 2012). It is also critical for schools to communicate the news of a student's death in an official and effective manner to the school's staff, the surviving students and their families in order to avoid miscommunications (Piechowski, 2012; Reep, 2003).

In regard to the school's response to a student death, Piechowski (2012) discussed three stages that a school should implement before and after a student has died: pre-planning phase, protocol implementation and post implementation follow-up. Within the pre-planning phase, Piechowski (2012) recommends that schools have a crisis team set in place before a student death occurs and meetings should be held yearly to review the school's pre-planned response. When a student dies, the school transitions into the protocol implementation stage. The post implementation stage occurs after the student's funeral. In this stage the school crisis team should meet to debrief regarding their response.

Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008), Piechowski (2012) concur that it is critical to notify school staff members, students and their parents as soon as possible following a student's death. However, before students and parents are notified, Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008), Piechowski (2012) recommend holding a staff-wide meeting to inform staff members about the student's death and to discuss how the school will respond to it. Additionally, when a student dies, it is crucial for the school to work with the student's family to decide how they will address the students and staff regarding the student's death. After staff is notified, the next step is to inform the student's friends and classmates.

Within the literature, there were differences in opinions when it came to alerting surviving students of their classmate's death. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) suggest that when informing adolescents, it should be delivered by a familiar person and should take place in a small classroom or group setting, and not through a public announcement system. In contrast, in order to deliver the message in a consistent and familiar fashion, Piechowski (2012) recommends that the school should inform students about the death over the school's announcement system by the principal. Additionally, Reep (2003) recommended notifying staff, students and their families through a uniformed letter.

Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008), Piechowski (2012) and Reep (2003) also encourage schools to notify the parents of all students when a student dies. The authors suggest that this can be done through sending a letter, email, or by posting information on the school's website informing parents about the student's death. Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011) and Piechowski (2012) recommend that the letter should include information on grief and how a classmate's death may impact the surviving students, and should also provide information on available school and community resources. Haviland (2008) also suggests that schools include

information about services such as a wake, funeral and memorial service within the letter to parents, while Reep (2003) urged against it.

In summary, Balk, Zaengle and Corr (2011), Haviland (2008), Piechowski (2012) agreed that schools should have a response plan in place before a student dies. Additionally, schools are recommended to inform staff and students about a student's death immediately (Balk, Zaengle & Corr; 2011, Haviland; 2008, Piechowski; 2012, Reep; 2003). However, there were some differences in opinions regarding on how to inform and disseminate information to staff, students and their parents about the student's death (Balk, Zaengle & Corr; 2011, Piechowski; 2012, Reep; 2003).

Critical Analysis

As school counselors it is imperative that we are not only a part of the school's crisis team, but that we also act as advocates for the school community to make sure there is a plan in place that will effectively address a student's death and support the grieving students within the school. According to the American School Counseling Association, part of a school counselor's role is to provide crisis response services to support students and staff following a crisis situation (American School Counselor Association, 2012). It is also important the school counselor uses their knowledge of community resources to connect students and staff with resources that are available within the community to help them work through their grief (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011; Piechowski, 2012).

Although the discussion of death is a difficult conversation to have, it is critical for schools to discuss what their response plan would be if a student or multiple students were to die. It is important for schools to have a plan to react to a death and for them to know how they will support students and staff following the loss. Piechowski (2012) suggested a three stage plan for

a school's response to encompass the before, during and after stages of a school's response to a student death, which is crucial in order to effectively respond to a student's death. It is also critical that schools respond to a student's death in an organized and efficient way in order to effectively support surviving students through the grieving process (Balk, Zaengle & Corr 2011; Haviland, 2008; Piechowski, 2012).

Schools not only need to have a plan set in place, but it is also critical that schools meet with their staff at least once a year (Piechowski, 2012), if not more routinely to discuss how they will respond to a student's death. Schools should also have a crisis team of individuals who assist in the process of planning the school's response prior to a death and serve as resources and guides when a student dies. These individuals can consist of school counselors, school administrators, school psychologists and social workers. It is important to note that the composition of the school's crisis team will vary depending on the school (Piechowski, 2012).

Recommendations

Future research surrounding adolescent grief reactions to a peer death is critical in order for school counselors to be adequately prepared to fulfill their expected role as counselors. It is important for school counselors to be aware of the variety of implications a student's death may have on the surviving students. It is important for counselors to note the impact a peer's death might have on an adolescent's physical, cognitive, behavior, emotional, interpersonal and spiritual well-being (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011). Additionally, school counselors need to be aware of individual, environmental and situational variables that may influence adolescents' response to a peer death (International Work Group, 1999).

Because this literature review determined the importance of having a plan in place prior to student deaths, future research should investigate the K-12 school systems across the United

States to determine whether or not schools have a plan in place. Other factors to investigate would be whether or not schools actively meet to discuss what their response to a student death would be. Another area where more information is needed relates to clarification about the best method for dissemination of information to students, staff and the community by schools when a student dies. Due to the fact that there seems to be variation among schools, future research should also investigate whether or not schools have used their response plans and gauge their personal opinions on the effectiveness of their response. Within our role as school counselors, it is entirely possible that one or multiple students will pass away, thus it is critical that further information be gathered in order to gauge the full scope of, and recommendations for a school's response when a student dies.

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