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*Dedicated to Excellence in Catholic Education*

April 22, 2023

**RE: TRAGIC LOSS OF TWO STUDENTS / MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS IN PLACE**

***Permission was granted through the family to share this information. Before you begin reading, the information in this communication may elicit strong emotions. Please take the time and space you need to support your own wellness. Resources are included below should your student require additional mental health support.***

The Kenora Catholic District School Board is heartbroken and grieving the sudden loss of Evan and Callie Joseph, who were in a tragic vehicle accident on Friday, April 21. They have been students at the Kenora Catholic District School Board since Kindergarten and this devastating loss impacts our entire school community and beyond, and they will be deeply missed.

We express our deepest sympathies to the Joseph family, their friends, educators, communities, and everyone connected to the family. Please keep them in your prayers during this incredibly difficult time.

As we journey through the days ahead, we are offering support to our students that includes access to our mental health workers, classroom discussions (as needed), one-to-one talks with caring adults, including our Elder in Residence and Chaplain, extra time with our guidance department, and special consideration for tests and assignments. Grief and sadness are expressed in many different ways. We will be closely monitoring students who are closest to this loss or who have recently experienced loss.

Flags across the Kenora Catholic District School Board will be lowered in honour of the family, this time of grief and incredible loss to our community.

We know that many of our families are processing this news over the weekend, and we offer you support and guidance as you may be having conversations with your child(ren) and preparing for school next week. The attached tip sheets have been developed by our Mental Health Team to support you through conversations during times of grief and tragedy.

**Mental Health Support for Students**

The Kenora Catholic District School Board has a team of regulated Mental Health Professionals who can provide mental health support to students. Please register for support through our Student Referral Process: <https://kcdsb.ontarionow.ca/external-referral/>, or by emailing Sue Devlin, Mental Health Clinical Supervisor at [sdevlin@kcdsb.on.ca](mailto:sdevlin@kcdsb.on.ca).

Our hearts are with all those affected by this loss, and we keep the family foremost in our prayers during this difficult time. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

Yours in Catholic education,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "N. Kurtz".

Nicole Kurtz,  
Director of Education



## First and foremost...

It is normal for your child to feel an variety of emotions such as anger, sadness, guilt, fear, or even lack of emotions.

It is a fact that children grieve differently from adults. Young children may not even understand what death means, or that people who have died won't be coming back. They may worry they have done something to cause the death. On the other hand, they might not seem too concerned about it, or even go from crying one moment to wanting to play the next. It is also normal for a child to feel angry at the person who has died (or someone else entirely). As children get older they may begin to understand more, but will still need help from their parents and other caregivers on how to process and cope with loss.

You do not have to go through this alone. The Mental Health Team is available to help!



## What Parents/Caregivers Can Do:

Don't use euphemisms. Avoid phrases like "passed away," "gone," "we lost him." Kids tend to be very literal, and this kind of fuzzy language leaves them anxious, scared and often confused. Or conversely, it may lead them to believe the deceased will come back and that death is not permanent.

Maintain normal routines as much as possible. Grief takes time but children benefit from the security of regular routines and knowing that life goes on.

Follow their lead. The kinds of questions and concerns that children have can be very different from those of adults. Giving children too much information can overwhelm them. It is better to let them ask questions and then answer in the best (and most developmentally appropriate) way you can. Don't be surprised if young children are mostly concerned about themselves. That is simply how young children are.

Encourage children to express their feelings. Do not try to "protect" or "shelter" children by attempting to hide your own sadness. They will invariably know that something is wrong, but will be left feeling alone and confused. Hiding your own grief can also make children feel like the sadness they may be feeling is bad. However, try not to let children see you at your most upset moments, as they may begin to worry about you or feel insecure.



## Practical Suggestions to Support Your Child

- Maintain your regular household routine, whenever possible.
- Encourage the child to ask questions. Even though it may be upsetting, be open to answering any questions about death or the deceased individual. Especially if children are younger, they may struggle to understand the concept of death.
- Help them to deal with distress in healthy, positive ways. For example, exercise, relaxation exercises and mediation are helpful.
- Make time for fun family activities.
- Show them that you really care for them and are genuinely interested and enjoy being with them.
- Make sure your child is getting enough sleep.
- It is okay to say "I don't know."



## First and foremost...

It is normal for your child to feel a variety of emotions such as anger, sadness, guilt, fear, or even lack of emotions.

Some Typical Reactions Include:

- Avoidance of feelings
- Constantly thinking about the event
- Distancing themselves from friends and family
- Anger or resentment
- Depression and extreme sadness
- Panic and anxiety, including worrying about the future
- Moods swings and irritability
- Changes in appetite and sleep habits
- Academic issues, such as trouble with memory and concentration, or refusing to attend school.
- Participation in risky or illegal behaviour, like drinking alcohol

Let your teen know that what they are experiencing is normal and don't expect or demand that your teen should feel a certain way. Respect where they are at emotionally, even if you disagree.



## What Parents/Caregivers Can Do:

**Open the Door for Discussion:** It's very typical for teens to say they don't want to talk during the grief process. Try to start a conversation while you are doing an activity together, so that the conversation does not feel too intense or confrontational.

**Limit Exposure to Social Media:** Social Media often is a source of misinformation that can be harmful to teens. Talk with your teen about what they are seeing on social media.

**Help Teens Feel Helpful:** Give them small tasks and responsibilities in the household, then praise them for what they have done and how they have handled themselves. Do not overburden teens with too many responsibilities, especially adult-like ones, as that will add to their anxiety.

**Don't Be Afraid to Talk About the Loss:** Teens do not benefit from "not thinking about" or putting it out of their minds.' If a teen thinks a parent is upset about the event they will not talk about it. When your teen brings it up, listen to them, answer questions, and provide comfort and support.

**When to Seek Professional Help:** If your child's behaviour is dangerous, reckless or harmful. If they seem persistently depressed or anxiety or are not showing any signs of recovery, or if you are worried about your teen's safety for any reason.



## Practical Suggestions to Support Your Teenager

- Maintain your regular household routine, whenever possible.
- Try and make sure your teenager eats well, gets enough sleep and keeps up regular exercise.
- Help them to deal with distress in healthy, positive ways. For example, exercise, relaxation exercises and mediation are helpful.
- Make time for fun family activities.
- Show them that you really care for them and are genuinely interested and enjoy being with them.
- Negotiate changes in roles and responsibility during their recovery. Be flexible. Don't try to stick rigidly to the way things were before the event.