7 March 2016

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community. A student who had recently left school, one of our Year 12 students, died by suicide over the weekend.

Our thoughts are with the student’s family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about your son or daughter’s reaction or expression of feelings about this news. These reactions and feelings may be part of the grieving process.

Many students will wish to talk with their parents, so I have attached some general information which may assist you in those conversations. I also encourage you to let your son/daughter know that you are aware of this incident and that you will listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them.

Staying connected and engaged with your son/daughter is one of the best ways to support them. When talking about the issue of suicide, try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems.

Two important messages to promote are that all of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable, and that young people should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend hurting themselves.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come. If your son/daughter is already using the services of a mental health professional, you should ensure this information is passed on to them.

Please feel free to contact the school office on 4645 8100 for information about the school’s support plan, or if you have any concerns about your son or daughter. Contacting the school is an important way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns.

[Signature]

Ms Karen Young
Principal
This is a very sad and traumatic event for all students, school staff, parents and the wider school community. Below is some information that may be helpful in assisting you and your child to manage during this difficult time.

**Young people respond to suicide in unique ways, and a wide range of reactions is possible**

Your child’s response will be influenced by their personality, their relationship with the deceased person, what is happening in their life and their ability to adjust to change.

Whatever age your child is they will need to find safe ways of expressing their feelings. They may feel:
- confusion
- anger
- aggression
- withdrawal
- fear
- guilt
- denial
- blame
- betrayal
- abandonment
- hurt
- sadness.

Parental understanding, reassurance and attention are very important at this time. Be guided by your child’s need to talk, and make it clear to them that you will be available whenever they need you.

**Young people who have experienced other stressful situations in their lives may find it harder to cope**

These experiences may include the separation/divorce of parents, the death of a relative/pet and moving house/school. They may become upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns, even if they had appeared to be coping. If your child is already using the services of a psychologist or psychiatrist, make them aware of the suicide.

**Your child may have a lot of questions**

They may want to know exactly what happened. The school will have provided your child with information about the incident. Details about the way a suicide occurred will not be given to students, as this information is potentially harmful to their wellbeing. As parents, it is important to steer discussion towards the positive “help-seeking” actions which young people can take. This includes talking to a trusted adult, such as a parent, counsellor, teacher, relative or friend.
Suicide in schools: Information for parents

“Tell an adult if you are worried about a friend”
This is an important message to share with your child, in any discussion about suicide. Adolescents sometimes share their feelings about death with friends – in conversations, letters, emails, text messages and on the internet. If they suspect a friend may be about to hurt themselves, they should tell an adult immediately.

Be aware that you or your child may be affected by the media’s responses to the event
You may decide to protect your family against certain coverage. You may choose to watch the news together, so you can discuss any concerns that are raised and ensure your child feels supported. Hopefully, media reporting of specific youth suicides will not occur. However, if it does, be aware that it can contribute to young people’s vulnerability.

Some reactions can happen weeks, months or a year after an event
If you are concerned about your child’s reaction and behaviour (such as changes in their socialising or school work), it is important to speak to the principal or student counsellor at their school or a GP. This may result in a referral to a counsellor for a mental health and/or risk assessment.

Be aware that school staff will also be affected
While everyone will be working towards normalising school routines, some staff will be managing difficult emotions. Through the Department of Education and other relevant bodies adult counselling support is available to all school staff through a process outside the school.

Respond to community concern with respect
When you speak with other members of the community, reinforce that the best approach is to:
- Respect the bereaved/affected family;
- Avoid glamourising/sensationalising suicide; and
- Encourage help-seeking actions in young people.
Young people should also encourage help-seeking in any friends they have concerns about.

Where can parents and young people get more information and help?
headspace centres provide support, information and advice to young people aged 12 to 25. For locations and other information, go to headspeacre.org.au
headspace School Support is a service which supports schools following a suicide. More information is available on the headspeacre School Support website headspeacre.org.au/schoolsupport
eheadspeacre provides online counselling and telephone support to young people aged 12 to 25. Its services are available at eheadspeacre.org.au and on 1800 650 890

Other resources
beyondblue’s youth program, Youthspearetvblue, promotes the message that it’s acceptable to talk about depression. It encourages young people, their families and friends to look out for each other and to get help when it is needed. A set of youth fact sheets can be downloaded from youthispearetvblue.com
Reach Out! is a web based service that encourages young people to help themselves through tough times. The service aims to improve young people’s mental health and wellbeing by providing support, information and referrals in a format designed for young people. You can find them at au.reachout.com
Kids Helpline is a 24-hour telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25. They can be contacted on 1800 55 1800 and at kidshelpline.com.au.
Lifeline (13 11 14) is a 24-hour telephone counselling service. lifeline.org.au has other online information and referral services.

Acknowledgements:
South Australia Department of Education and Children’s Services, Catholic Education South Australia and Association of Independent Schools, (2010). Suicide Postvention Guidelines: a framework to assist staff in supporting their school communities in responding to suspected, attempted or completed suicide. South Australia: Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children’s Services.

Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be used and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspeacre makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any