Annex 13

# Content of Group Counselling for Students

* + - 1. Introduce content of the group counselling
* Self-introduction by the guidance personnel;
* Briefly introduce the purposes and ground rules (including the principles of confidentiality and mutual respect) of the group.

2. Provide concise information about the incident

* Report the verified facts gathered by the school;
* Clarify news that are untrue, e.g. information from newspapers;
* If the crisis involves suicide, the guidance personnel should explain that the incident is under police investigation, and it is inappropriate to make any speculation. The guidance personnel should also point out that suicide is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple interacting factors and causal pathways. No single cause or stressor is sufficient to explain a suicidal act in most circumstances. At the same time, the guidance personnel should encourage the students to seek help when needed.

3. Answer students’ queries

* Let students ask questions. Avoid describing unnecessary or disturbing details when answering the questions;
* Only provide verified basic information and facts;
* Answer students' questions as far as possible. If teachers are uncertain or do not know the answers of the questions instantly, clarify and get back to the students later.

4. Encourage students to talk about their emotional, cognitive, physiological, social and behavioural reactions

* Understand their reactions by asking the following (sample) questions:

1. “How is your sleep quality recently? How is your appetite?”
2. “Can you focus on your work recently?”
3. “What are your thoughts and feelings now?”
4. “How are you feeling now?”

* Encourage students to talk about their thoughts and feelings **at the present moment.**  Do not ask them to narrate or recall the process of the incident that they personally experienced;
* If the students start to talk about disturbing details, the guidance personnel should guide them to focus on sharing their reactions **at the present moment**;
* Help them to understand that unsettling emotions such as sadness, guilt, anger are common reactions;
* Help them realise that other people might also have similar experiences and reactions. They are not alone and they can offer mutual support (if applicable);
* Remind students to seek help when they have enduring or excessively intense reactions (Reference 1D).

5. Share appropriate coping strategies after crisis

* Share appropriate coping strategies (Reference 3);
* Practise relaxation techniques (Reference 4) and other adaptive coping strategies if appropriate;
* If the crisis incident involves suicidal behaviours, emphasise that committing suicide is not an appropriate coping strategy to solve problems.

6. Learn about students’ social support network and ensure that they receive appropriate support

* Understand their social support network by asking the following (sample) questions:
  1. “How did your family react to this incident?”
  2. “How did they talk about it with you?”
  3. “What do you usually do to help yourself when you feel disturbed?”
  4. “If your negative emotions persist, whom would you talk to? How would you seek help?”
* Ensure that they can receive appropriate support
* Tell students that you are willing to render support
* Help students identify their social support network, e.g. family members, friends, school social worker/ guidance personnel, etc. so that they know where they can get help;
* Encourage students to support each other and seek help from teachers or school social workers when they encounter difficulties or experience emotional disturbance. If their peers are experiencing emotional distress, students should also inform the teachers and school social workers;
* Introduce community resources (e.g. mental health information and counseling services, etc.);
* Identify students who are lack of social support for further follow-up.

7. Understand and observe students’ reactions, identify students in need of additional follow-up and support

* Identify students who show excessively intense emotional or behavioural reactions (e.g. depressed mood, anger, blaming of self or others);
* If the crisis incident involves suicide, be aware if there are students who identify with the suicidal behaviour of the deceased;
* Observe reactions of students who have close relationship with the victim (good friends, boyfriend/girlfriend, siblings or peers with unsatisfactory relationship with the victim);
* Refer those students with intense emotional reactions to the school social worker and guidance teachers;
* Teachers can refer to Reference 2 for suggestions for responding to students’ emotional reactions towards a crisis incident.