



Huntingdon Area School District



SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Mr. Travis R. Lee,
Secondary Principal

Huntingdon Area Middle School

Mr. Zachary R. Treece, Assistant Principal
2500 Cassady Avenue, Huntingdon, PA 16652
(814)643-2900

Huntingdon Area High School

Mr. Nicholas A. Payne, Assistant Principal
2400 Cassady Avenue, Suite 1, Huntingdon, PA 16652
(814)643-1080

April 8, 2018

Dear Parents and Guardians,

On Friday evening, April 6, 2018, one of our learners, Mitchell Smith, died unexpectedly. A young person's death is always tragic, and a sudden loss like this can have a profound effect on surviving learners.

It is important for you to talk with your children about their feelings concerning death. Death is often difficult to talk about. However, a loss can elicit deep emotions in teens and pre-teens, and speaking with them, and letting them know that you are available to listen to their problems or concerns, can help with processing these feelings. A document about adolescent grief is included with this letter to help with these discussions.

The school has arranged for mental health counselors and faith-based groups to be available on Monday, April 9, to speak with learners about normal responses to grief and to receive the necessary supports. A message will be shared with all learners during homeroom about Mitchell's passing, and the procedures for seeking help during the day. Some learners may need additional guidance, and they can be seen individually or in small groups, and ongoing support can be available as necessary. The parents or guardians of any learner that seeks out support from our school and partnering professionals will receive a phone call about their participation. In addition, if you have any concerns for your learners, please contact the HS Office so that arrangements can be made to speak to a counselor. Please know that we have our Student Assistance Program (SAP) which can provide additional supports to learners as needed. If emergency concerns arise after school hours, please see the resources listed at the end of this letter.

On behalf of the Huntingdon Area School District, we extend our sincere condolences to the family of Mitchell Smith during this sad occasion. They will need our continued support.

We appreciate your understanding regarding this sensitive issues and ask that you respect the family. If you have an questions, please call the HS Office at (814)643-1080.

With Sympathy,

Travis R. Lee,
Secondary Principal

Community Resources

Tri-County Crisis: 1-800-929-9583

JC Blair Memorial Hospital: (814)-643-2290

Meadow Psychiatric Center: 1-800-641-7529

Adolescent Grief

Through the teen years, adolescents are in the process of examining the beliefs and values they learned as children while trying to define their own beliefs and values. They struggle with questions, such as “Who am I?”, “How does the world work and what is my place in it?”.

Coping and experiencing grief during this stage in development can cause further challenges and struggles with these questions because they are torn between wanting to be independent and needing support from family and friends. Their feelings may be conflicting and intense. They may hide their grief because they do not want to be pitied or viewed as weak or being different. Thus, their sense of isolation is heightened.

Loss is: Any event that changes the way things have been

Grief: An INNER, complicated emotional experience

Mourning: An OUTER process of dealing with feelings of grief

Signs of Teen Grief

- Lack of concentration
- Disbelief
- Anger: This is a normal response
- Guilt
- Declining grades
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Over activity, acting too busy
- Wanting to be alone all the time
- Changes in relationships
- Deep sadness
- Drug/alcohol use
- Eating too much or not eating at all
- Risk taking behavior
- Self-destructive, anti-social, or criminal behavior
- Promiscuity
- Thinking about attempting suicide

We encourage you to do the following when speaking to children or students:

- Be honest
- Talk openly about feelings
- Encourage them to journal or draw
- Let the students tell you what they need