

HUNTINGDON AREA HIGH SCHOOL

2400 Cassady Avenue, Suite 1 Huntingdon, PA 16652
Phone: (814)643-1080 Fax: (814)643-3800 Website: <http://huntsd.org>

Mr. Travis R. Lee,
Principal

Mrs. Kristen C. Streightiff,
Assistant Principal

“ALL LEARNERS, ALL FUTURES”

September 5, 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

On early Sunday evening, September 4, 2022, one of our students, Hope Benson, a senior at HAHS, passed away at home due to a medical emergency. We ask that you respect the family’s privacy during this difficult time, while recognizing that our school community is here to support all students and Hope’s family. We also want to recognize Hope as a member of HAHS’s inaugural school unified bocce team.

The sudden loss of a student is always tragic, and we know that this can impact surviving students in varying ways, especially in light of the fact that we have faced the passing of two students recently. We are sharing information below, much of what was shared recently, to help in speaking with your children. 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.

Mental health counselors will be available at school tomorrow, Tuesday September 6, to speak with students about normal responses to grief and to receive the necessary support. A message will be shared with all students during homeroom about Hope’s passing, and the procedures for seeking help during the day. Some students 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 student 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 students, 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 support to students as needed. If emergency concerns arise after school hours, please see the resources listed at the end of this letter, which also include resources for mental health.

On behalf of the Huntingdon Area School District, we extend our sincere condolences to the family of Hope Benson during this sad occasion. They will need our continued support. If you have any questions, please call the HS Office at (814)643-1080.

With Sympathy,

Travis R. Lee,
HAHS Principal

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

Community Resources

Juniata Valley Crisis

Center for Community Resources

Call  **1-800-929-9583**

Text  **63288**

Chat  **CCRINFO.ORG**

DOWNLOAD THE FREE APP **VISIT THE WEBSITE** **CALL THE HOTLINE**
WWW.SAFE2SAYPA.ORG **1-844-723-2729**



CALL THE HOTLINE
1-844-SAF2SAY

NATIONAL
SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
suicidepreventionlifeline.org



988
SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

JC Blair Memorial Hospital: (814)-643-2290
Meadow Psychiatric Center: 1-800-641-7529