

Community crisis gathering

A community crisis gathering is a rapid response to any tragedy that deeply affects the community. It addresses people's questions and provides on-site support and reassurance. Designed for rapid coordination, it is best done within the first 2 days when emotions are high. It can be done on the afternoon prior to an evening candlelight vigil.

The difference between a community crisis gathering and a candlelight vigil is that the gathering invites people to ask questions and release some of the emotional steam, whereas a community vigil provides the place for the community to unite in their mourning.

PURPOSE

- Serve your families and community in times of need
- Provide an opportunity for people to unite
- Helps release emotional steam
- Answers questions
- Provides on-site support

PLAN

1. Secure a community space. A school gym or auditorium works well, especially if the victim(s) are school age. Call the principal and explain that you intend to provide resources and information, and give people an opportunity to ask questions. Also share that other support professionals will be invited to participate. You can also secure public meeting space through the Chamber of Commerce.
2. If the victim(s) were students, ask the school to notify students and invite families. Everyone is welcome, even if they're not a student.

PREPARE

1. Notify local radio and TV stations of the date, time, and location of the event, and ask them to share it.
2. Secure use of 3 mics and speakers or sound system.
3. Prepare a list of local and national support resources including national hotlines, organizations and counseling professionals, etc. Make copies of the list distribute it to people during the gathering.

INVITE SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS TO JOIN YOU

Support comes in all shapes and sizes. Inviting other professionals to join you will strengthen the pipeline of hope for those affected by the loss. Consider inviting the following:

- Therapy dogs
- School counselors
- Crisis teams
- Local grief professionals
- Support group chapter leaders
- Clergy

LEAD

1. Welcome the crowd. Tell them you're glad they came so you can all grieve together. Explain that in a moment, you'll open the floor for people to ask questions and share what's on their heart. Allow the therapy dogs and their handlers to walk among the crowd as you talk.
2. Have two volunteers roam the audience with mics, so people can use them when you open the floor.
3. Invite a local clergy to say an opening prayer.
4. Talk about the grieving process and what to expect.
 - a. Explain that emotions will run high for a while but eventually the rawness they feel will soften.
 - b. Explain that although you're all grieving for the same person(s), everyone will grieve differently. Encourage them not to judge or compare reactions.
 - c. Encourage people to reach out to one another and check in with each other over the coming weeks.
5. Encourage use of local resources and national helplines.
6. Invite the audience to use one of the roaming mics to ask a question or share what they're feeling. Make sure one person doesn't dominate the floor.
7. Share informational resources and encourage use of them.
8. Provide your contact information should anyone have follow-up questions. Be ready to point them in the direction of appropriate resources.
9. Thank them for attending.