

A plan of action in the case of a student's death¹

This is the most challenging moment in a career in international education, and requires preparation, coordination and sensitivity. The most common causes of death for student abroad are traffic accidents and drowning.

A. PREPARATION

1 - Who's Who: the death of a student involves various stakeholders.

→ *On campus:* the Study Abroad Office, along with the International Crisis Management Team (ICMT) which is made up of representatives from different offices on campus ; also: the President, Deans of relevant Departments, Campus police.

→ *U.S. based:* parents, family, friends, insurance company.

→ *On-site:* your program, Embassy/Consulate offices, local police, city morgue, airlines, students, faculty, colleagues, host family, etc.

2 – Insurance: all students should be covered by a comprehensive international insurance plan which includes repatriation (collection and transport of the remains, cremation or embalming, paperwork, etc.), life insurance, etc.

Examples of International Insurance Providers : Ascension Benefits and Insurance Solutions / Compass Benefits / CISI – Cultural Insurance Services international / The Harbour Group / HTH Worldwide / Ingle International / International Student Insurance / ISE Cards (International Student Exchange) / LowerMark Student Insurance / VISIT International Health Insurance.

Notes: Some universities may have a special fund for emergency travels / The student's passport is necessary for repatriation of the body : locate it and pass it the the relevant authority, and try to get a receipt.

B. ACTION/COORDINATION

1 - Key competencies:

→ *Attention to detail:* it is important to record any detail (student's identity, chronology of the circumstances leading to their death, facts, witnesses, contact information, plan of action, inventory of the student's belongings, etc.).

Note: Make sure to respect the student's privacy rights.

→ *Empathy:* It is important to show empathy, provide pastoral care, support and information in the most thoughtful manner. It is always better to inform in person.

→ *Self-care:* the intensity and duration of the process will exhaust you. It is critical to maintain a healthy mind and body, and ask colleagues for help.

1 Sources:

Julie Ann FRIEND, "When a Student Dies Abroad. Prepare for the Ultimate Tragedy", in *International Educator*, 2014, pp.3-18.

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2 - Death notification & Support:

Important: Make sure nothing is made public until the family is notified, bearing in mind that controlling information and the media is almost impossible. Try to keep gossip to a minimum.

a) Institutions:

→ U.S. Embassy: They must be involved ASAP ? protocol requires that a representative of the Embassy notify the next-of-kin.

→ Local police will sometimes notify the family directly, which can lead to issues of miscommunication. It is important to be in contact with them and serve as facilitator/translator.

→ U.S. Campus : Most of the protocols and procedures will be addressed on campus by the ICMT. We as local directors should assist the institution in accordance with their established procedures and legal framework, and provide local support. The campus police should be informed quickly as well.

b) Parents/Families: A common parental response is denial.

Ideally the home university takes the lead with the student's family. They have protocols about student deaths regardless of whether they are at home or abroad.

Family members should be met at the airport by local staff. Make sure they understand that you are here to facilitate their grieving by dealing with any administrative and logistic issues (travel, accommodation, police procedures, etc.). Do not be afraid to show empathy (it is ok to cry). You will have to deal with their anger, confusion and impatience (it can take several weeks to repatriate the body).

Gather information: religious customs and funeral procedures, how and when to disclose information about the death (parents' typical first reaction is to forbid any disclosure but eventually they come to understand that the student's peers need information as well), etc.

c) *Students from the program:* They will require information : be specific (what is known and what is not; if they are in danger themselves or not; how has the family been informed and what the program and other institutions are doing, etc.).

Provide counseling (contacts of counselors, group discussions, memorial, your direct contact information).

Help on-campus services and family identify peer groups that will need to be informed.

d) *Faculty/Staff:* It is important to inform any person that has had contact with the student (professors, advisers, internship supervisor, housing family, etc.)

C. AFTERMATH - FOLLOW-UP

→ Make plans to attend the deceased student's funeral.

→ Make sure the deceased student's belongings are properly returned.

→ Maintain contact with the family.

→ Take time for self-care.

→ Write a report based on the notes taken throughout the process.