

# Before a crisis

## Activities for Building Organized Resilience

### Crisis Preparation Checklist

**Use this checklist to prepare your team for times of crisis.**

**ENHANCE PLAYER INTERACTIONS WITH CLUB AND OTHER SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS**

- Encourage players, former players, and staff to interact regularly with support professionals.
- Develop and strengthen relationships with local mental health professionals and clergy.

**PROMOTE RESILIENCE AND WELLNESS AMONG PLAYERS, STAFF, AND FAMILIES**

- Provide regular training for players, former players, staff, and their families on topics related to life skills and mental wellness.
- Designate individuals to periodically review wellness information and resources with the team.

**FOSTER PEER LEADERSHIP**

- Cultivate “peer supports” to assist in times of crisis.

**DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM**

- Assemble a Crisis Management Team.
- Define the Crisis Management Team members’ responsibilities.
- Conduct a comprehensive risk analysis and discuss mitigation approaches.
- Hold regular Crisis Management Team meetings.
- Create clear crisis response protocols.
- Instruct all members of the Crisis Management Team to formulate a personal self-care plan to follow in the event of a crisis.

**CREATE A COMMUNICATIONS RESPONSE PLAN**

- Establish a communications plan and maintain a list of internal and external contacts.

**ADOPT MEMORIALIZATION PLAN**

- Adopt policies for memorializing the lives of deceased team members.
- Prepare to treat all deaths the same way.
- Be ready to meet with the close colleagues and family of the deceased.
- Plan safe memorial activities.

Appropriately managing a crisis requires significant planning and preparation. Crisis situations, such as a death or the emotional crisis of a player, former player, or staff member, can have profound effects on individuals, the club, and the community at large. Deliberate and thoughtful preparation will make crisis response more effective and minimize potential negative effects. Review the following steps to help your organization prepare for a crisis and build organizational resilience.

### **ENHANCE PLAYER INTERACTIONS WITH CLUB AND OTHER SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS**

- ✓ Encourage players, former players, and staff to interact regularly with support professionals including clergy, mental health clinicians, Transition Coaches, and the Director of Player Engagement. Support services should be embedded into the organization's fabric and culture.
- ✓ Develop and strengthen relationships with local mental health professionals and clergy. These professionals typically have training and expertise in promoting positive coping skills ("psychological resilience"), encouraging organizational mental health, and managing mental health crises.

### **PROMOTE RESILIENCE AND WELLNESS AMONG PLAYERS, STAFF, AND FAMILIES**

- ✓ Provide regular training for players, former players, staff, and their families on topics related to life skills and mental wellness. Topics might include: financial planning and management, healthy relationships, parenting, coping with stress, caring for and supporting extended family, preventing domestic violence, and treating substance abuse.

- ✓ Designate individuals, including members of the Crisis Management Team, to periodically review with players, former players, and team staff the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges commonly experienced by those in professional sports, as well as local and NFL resources available to help address these issues.

### **FOSTER PEER LEADERSHIP**

- ✓ Cultivate "peer supports" to assist in times of crisis. Peer supports should be players who are well-respected by their teammates, embody total wellness, and commit to serving as role models to their peers.

### **DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM**

- ✓ Assemble a Crisis Management Team to include the Director of Player Engagement, General Manager, peer supports, clergy, mental health professionals, and representatives from key departments such as Communications/Public Relations, Security, and Human Resources (*see Appendix A: Crisis Management Team Personnel*). The Crisis Management Team may also include a Transition Coach.

- ✓ Define the responsibilities each Crisis Management Team member will have before, during, and after a crisis (*see Appendix B: Responsibilities in Crisis Preparation and Response*).
- ✓ Conduct a **comprehensive risk analysis** and discuss mitigation approaches.

After gathering this information, an analysis is conducted by the Director of Player Engagement to estimate the probability and severity of each potential event. Questions around the team’s vulnerability to these events include:

- How likely is the event to occur?
- How often might the event occur?
- How many people in the organization would be affected by the event?
- What type of impact would it have on the organization—its people, product, reputation, etc.?

**Comprehensive risk analysis.** To appropriately plan for and be able to respond to crises impacting the organization, it is important to conduct an annual risk analysis. This analysis includes a query of employees and management on potential events, review of the organization’s history of events, review of industry trends (i.e., events impacting other NFL teams), review of “near misses,” in which a crisis was averted, and an examination of geographic location.

The Foreseeable Risk Analysis Grid is used for this analysis. Particular attention and planning are devoted to those traumatic events that are considered to be in the Medium/High Probability and Medium/High Severity categories. In planning for these events, the Director of Player Engagement will also begin to plan for the response to other identified events that are seen as having Low/Medium Probability and Low/Medium Severity.

Low Probability <i>High Severity</i>	Medium Probability <i>High Severity</i>	High Probability <i>High Severity</i>
Low Probability <i>Medium Severity</i>	Medium Probability <i>Medium Severity</i>	High Probability <i>Medium Severity</i>
Low Probability <i>Low Severity</i>	Medium Probability <i>Low Severity</i>	High Probability <i>Low Severity</i>

- ✓ Maintain the Crisis Management Team by holding regular meetings, annually reviewing and revising the Crisis Management Plan, and practicing its operation in annual crisis drills.
- ✓ Create clear protocols for responding to players, former players, and staff members in a psychological or emotional crisis. The protocols must define what constitutes a crisis, who responds, and how they should manage the situation.
- ✓ Instruct all members of the Crisis Management Team to formulate a personal self-care plan to follow in the event of a crisis.

During challenging situations, members of the Crisis Management Team may forget to take care of themselves in the rush to make sure others are taken care of. The best time to plan for self-care is before a crisis begins. Thinking about strategies for self-care ahead of time can help members of the Crisis Management Team internalize what their own responses will be when a crisis does occur (*see Appendix D: Self-Care for Members of the Crisis Management Team*).

## **CREATE A COMMUNICATIONS RESPONSE PLAN**

- ✓ Establish a communications response plan and lists of internal and external contacts to be notified in case of a crisis. Maintain a list of emergency contact information for staff and players, including those on injured reserve and the practice squad. (*see Appendix B: Responsibilities in Crisis Preparation and Response*).

## **ADOPT A MEMORIALIZATION PLAN**

- ✓ Adopt policies for memorializing the lives of deceased members of the team family that honor them and their contributions to their family, friends, community, and team, but be mindful of the risk of inadvertently glorifying the cause of death.

- ✓ Treat all deaths in the same way. Having one approach for memorializing a player, former player, or staff member who died from cancer or in a car accident and a different approach for those who died by suicide reinforces misperceptions and stigma associated with suicide and may be painful to the family members and friends of the deceased. It is equally important to memorialize the deceased in a way that doesn't inadvertently glamorize or romanticize a death by suicide. In the case of a suicide, teams must consider how to appropriately memorialize the deceased without risking suicide contagion among others who may be at risk.
- ✓ Meet with the close colleagues and family of the deceased to identify a meaningful, safe approach to acknowledging the loss. The recommendations made here focus on keeping the regular work environment intact to the maximum extent possible for the benefit of the entire organization, including those who may not have known the deceased.
- ✓ Plan safe memorial activities. The team plays an important role in channeling the energy and passion of players, former players, staff members, and the greater community in a positive direction, balancing the community's need to grieve with the impact that proposed activities may have. Teams can offer specific, constructive suggestions for safe memorialization for those who wish to participate, such as:
  - Holding a day of community service in honor of the deceased
  - In cases of suicide or a mental health-related death, putting together a team to participate in an awareness or fundraising event sponsored by a national mental health or suicide prevention organization, or holding a local fundraising event to support a local crisis hotline or other suicide prevention program



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- Sponsoring a mental health or health/wellness awareness day
- Making a book or cards available for colleagues to write messages to the family, share memories of the deceased, or offer condolences

### **Permanent Memorials and Scholarships**

Some communities wish to establish permanent memorials (either physical, such as planting a tree or installing a bench or plaque; or commemorative, such as funding a scholarship) to those who have died. While there is no research to suggest that permanent memorials create a risk of contagion after a suicide death, they can be upsetting reminders to bereaved colleagues. Moreover, the team should bear in mind that once it plants a tree, puts up a plaque, installs a park bench, or establishes a named scholarship for one deceased individual, it should be prepared to do so for others. This can become a difficult precedent to sustain.

Further guidance on memorialization after a suicide can be found at <http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/aftersuicide.pdf>.

# After a crisis

*Timely and Appropriate Response to a Death*

## Crisis Management Checklist

**Use this checklist to manage your team after a crisis has occurred.**

### CONDUCT INFORMATION-GATHERING AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Activate the Crisis Management Team and hold an immediate meeting.
- Obtain the facts.
- Manage the death scene.
- Notify the next of kin.
- Involve family in memorializing the decedent.

### PROVIDE COMMUNICATIONS AND SUPPORT TO YOUR TEAM

- Review the communications guidance provided.
- Stay aware in the aftermath of a suicide.
- Make a clear distinction between positive accomplishments and qualities of the deceased and his or her final act.
- Use appropriate language.
- Disseminate information according to the Crisis Notification Plan.
- Provide players, former players, and staff with immediate crisis response services and promote healthy coping skills.
- Coordinate and schedule crisis response services.
- Coordinate funerals and memorial services with family.

### FACILITATE ONGOING SUPPORT AND FOLLOW-UP

- Identify potentially high-risk individuals who might need continued crisis support.
- Consider the ongoing needs of players, former players, staff members, and their family members.
- Conduct end-of-season outreach and evaluation.

## **CONDUCT INFORMATION-GATHERING AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

### ✓ Activate the Crisis Management Team and hold an immediate meeting.

As soon as the team becomes aware of a death, the Crisis Management Team should be activated to plan and carry out crisis management and support activities. A unified and well-informed response is essential to management in times of crisis. This response begins with a Crisis Management Team meeting, by telephone or in person (*see Appendix E: Sample Agenda for Activated Crisis Management Team Meeting*). The goals of this meeting are to provide accurate information about the event to members of the Crisis Management Team and to make sure members know their role(s) and how to accomplish them.

#### **When death occurs:**

- Obtain all of the facts, including manner and cause of death, to the degree known.
- Reach out to the next of kin.
- Help connect the bereaved, including family, team members, and staff, with supportive resources.

#### **When death occurs on team property, in addition to the steps above:**

- Alert law enforcement officials.
- Secure the scene and document names of witnesses.
- Work with law enforcement to notify the next of kin, using the emergency contact information list.
- Contract for professional cleanup of the scene, if required.

### ✓ Obtain the facts.

There are five classifications for death: natural, accidental, suicide, homicide, and undetermined. Many deaths initially ruled undetermined are assigned a different classification at a later date, when more information is available. There are special considerations for responding to and communicating about a death when the manner is suicide or undetermined (which could later be ruled a suicide).

If the death of a player, former player, or staff member occurs outside of the workplace, the team may be notified by a relative, friend, co-worker, or law enforcement official. The relative, friend, or co-worker may not have all of the facts about the death and may not be certain of the cause of death. Carefully coordinate employee communication so that individuals are notified in a timely and, if possible, simultaneous manner.

No matter where the death occurred, do not make any official statements until the death has been confirmed by law enforcement, the medical examiner or coroner, or an immediate family member. Be especially wary of death reports from disreputable news organizations and/or social media sites.

Confusion, speculation, and rumors are common in the aftermath of a crisis and they can exacerbate emotional upheaval. False information can be especially hurtful to family members and friends of the deceased. The team and its representatives should be considered sources of accurate information. As such, the Crisis Management Team must take great care to ensure that information is factually accurate and communicate it compassionately.

✓ **Manage the death scene.**

On the discovery of the deceased on team property, law enforcement should be contacted immediately. If the death is suspected to be from non-natural causes, keep all unauthorized people away from the body and site, as the area will be treated by law enforcement as a crime scene. Do not disturb the scene until you have received permission from the appropriate law enforcement authorities. Comply with all requests from law enforcement as they conduct their investigation.

The scene of a death should be cleaned by professionals with expertise in safely removing biohazardous material. Outside professionals should be hired to avoid putting employees in the extremely difficult position of cleaning up after the death of someone they knew.

✓ **Notify the next of kin.**

In many cases, law enforcement personnel work with victim advocates (professionals trained to support victims of crime) to notify the next of kin. Depending on the circumstances, consider having a representative from the team accompany the victim advocate when the family is contacted. When notifying the next of kin, dignity and professionalism are essential, but this does not mean you need to restrain yourself from expressing appropriate emotions. Use the person's name and work with the victim advocate to answer the family's questions while avoiding unnecessary traumatizing details, if possible.

✓ **Involve family in memorializing the decedent.**

It is important to work with the family of a deceased player, former player, or staff member. They will often appreciate the support of the team, and their cooperation can be valuable for effective crisis management. The Director of Player Engagement or a team representative should ask to visit the family in their home on learning of the death, if he or she did not accompany the victim advocate during the

death notification. It may be useful for a pair of representatives to visit the family together so they can support one another during the visit. It is important to respect the family's cultural and religious traditions related to the manner of death, grieving, and funeral ceremonies.

The Director of Player Engagement or team representative(s) should:

- Offer the team's condolences.
- Ask what the team can do to assist and whether there is anybody else the family would like them to notify.
- Inquire about funeral arrangements. Ask whether the funeral will be private or the family will allow others to attend.
- Provide the family with information about counseling (see [Appendix F: List of Grief and Bereavement Resources](#)).
- Ask whether the family knows of any of their loved one's co-workers who may be especially upset.
- Briefly explain to the family what the team is doing to respond to the death.
- Schedule a time for the family to speak with a Human Resources representative about benefits and compensation the deceased was eligible for and how to continue certain benefits, like medical insurance. Discussion might include death-related benefits and compensation, employer-sponsored insurance, and other payroll-deducted benefits.
- At a later time, ask whether the family would like their loved one's personal belongings returned. If they do, set a time to come back and deliver the belongings, transporting them in appropriate containers.



## **PROVIDE COMMUNICATIONS AND SUPPORT TO YOUR TEAM**

### ✓ **Review the following guidance on communicating during a crisis**

Make sure all team officials are familiar with the content, or will consult appropriately, before communicating to others about the crisis.

Communication during a crisis is one of the most important tasks of the Crisis Management Team. Appropriate communication fosters trust and confidence in the crisis response. The following recommendations are appropriate for communicating during all types of crises.

- **Be transparent:** The appearance of withholding information can create distrust and rumors. If you are seen as forthright and reliable, then people will continue to come to you for information.
- **Stick to the facts:** Keep explanations clear and simple. Avoid all conjecture and speculation.
- **Be genuine:** It is OK to show emotion, to the extent it is measured by compassion. Do not insinuate blame, judgment, or conclusions that are not yet known.
- **Describe further communications:** Tell your audience who is communicating to the media, law enforcement/security, and the family. They will also want to know where and how often communications will come from the team to players and their families about unfolding and/or related events.
- **Explain where to get help:** The team and NFL have many resources available. Tell the audience who they can talk to if they wish to have more information or need assistance.

### ✓ **Stay aware in the aftermath of a suicide.**

Some vulnerable individuals may be at risk for responding to a suicide by attempting suicide themselves. This is also known as a contagion effect. The death by suicide of a co-worker or public figure,

and the way it is communicated, may trigger suicidal thoughts and feelings in some vulnerable individuals, and may increase their risk for copycat behavior.

The reasons for contagion are many. The death, particularly of a leader or perceived leader or professional athlete, may instill a loss of hope (e.g., “If he could not deal with his problems, given all he had going for him, what chance do I have?”); team and media attention to the death may offer just what the vulnerable person lacks and desires (e.g., a sense of importance and value, even though that attention could not be appreciated by a deceased person).

When a suicide occurs, many co-workers and people in the larger community might experience suicidal distress and be at risk for an attempt. When a culture or organization acknowledges or memorializes a suicide in a dramatic or sensational manner, or focuses too much on the detailed means of death, there is an increased risk that some vulnerable individuals will imitate the behavior.

It is important in this context not to glamorize the current state of “peace” the deceased may have found through death. Although some religious perspectives consider the afterlife to be much better than life in the physical realm, this contrast should not be overemphasized in team communications. For others who are dealing with psychological pain or suicidal thoughts, the lure of finding peace or escape through death may add to the attractiveness of suicide.

In a similar way, the team should avoid normalizing the suicide by interpreting it as a reasonable response to particularly distressful life circumstances. Most people do not seriously consider suicide an option; therefore, suicidal ideation is not normal. Most individuals who seriously consider suicide do not act on those thoughts, but instead find more constructive ways to resolve them. Presenting suicide as common may unintentionally remove a protective bias against suicide in a community.

✓ **Make a clear distinction, and even separation, between the positive accomplishments and qualities of the deceased and his or her final act.**

Make the observation that although the deceased is no longer suffering or in turmoil, we would rather she or he had lived in a society that understands mental or behavioral health problems and supports those who seek treatment—without a trace of stigma or prejudice. Envision how the community or society in general could function better, or provide more resources to help other troubled individuals find effective life solutions. The goal of this approach is to motivate the community to improve the way it cares for, supports, and understands all of its members.

✓ **Use appropriate language.**

Although common English usage includes the phrases “committed suicide,” “successful suicide,” and “failed attempt,” these should be avoided because of their connotations. For instance, the verb “committed” is usually associated with sins or crimes. Along the same lines, a suicide should never be viewed as a success, nor should a nonfatal suicide attempt be seen as a failure. Instead, use phrases such as “died by suicide,” “took his life,” “ended her life,” or “attempted suicide,” which are more accurate and less offensive.

✓ **Disseminate information according to the Crisis Notification Plan.**

- Internally to staff and players, including those on injured reserve and the practice squad
- Externally to the NFL, media, and families, if appropriate

Players and staff members should be informed of a colleague’s death by someone in a position of authority. An employee’s close colleagues should be told of the death in person, if at all possible (**see Appendix G: Sample In-Person Talking Points**). This will allow members of the Crisis Management Team to gauge reactions and facilitate the identification

of potentially high-risk individuals who might need continued crisis support. It may be appropriate to tell employees from other departments or those who had limited contact with the deceased in writing (**see Appendix H: Sample Internal Memo for Notifying Staff of a Suicide or Homicide**) or by phone, if they cannot be told in person.

The Crisis Management Team can minimize the potential for contagion by setting an appropriately respectful tone when acknowledging and communicating about the death of a player, former player, or staff member. One of the most challenging elements in effective crisis response is for the Crisis Management Team to accurately, respectfully, and carefully communicate information regarding the death. Occasionally, a death in the workplace involves other employees as witnesses. In these cases and others, information about the death may spread quickly, especially with rapid information exchange via texting, social media, and the like. The Crisis Management Team should be aware that, even before any official team announcement, a great deal of information may be circulating, much of it inaccurate. Timely and accurate information can help dispel rumors.

Communication in times of crisis presents an opportunity to reinforce and build trust, confidence, and team cohesiveness. When done well, players, former players, and staff members will feel cared about, supported, and secure in the knowledge that leadership is both compassionate and competent. Feeling cared about and supported in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event is hugely important in the healing and recovery process. The positive outcomes of this response can contribute to an overall stronger, more cohesive, engaged, and productive team culture. One way to establish trust is for leaders, including those on the Crisis Management Team, to acknowledge how they have been personally affected by the loss.

Expert consultation on crisis messaging and communicating about suicide is available from the NFL Life Line team. For more information contact the NFL Life Line at **(800) 506-0078** and ask the crisis counselor to have a member of the NFL Life Line Crisis Communications Team connect with you for a consultation.

### **Communicating With the Media**

A written statement to the media about any high-profile death should:

- Acknowledge the death has occurred without including too many details.
- Concentrate on the life of the deceased, instead of the details surrounding his or her death.
- Express the team's sympathy to the family members and friends of the deceased.
- Focus on supporting the living.
- Include information about crisis resources for the general public, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, or general ways to seek help.

If the death was by suicide:

- Do not include details about the location or cause of death.<sup>1</sup>
- Do not attribute the death to specific circumstances or offer simplistic explanations.

Be aware of any recent crises affecting your team or others where these sample news releases (**see Appendix I: Sample Media News Releases**) may have been used. The reuse of similar news releases can make the team and its representatives appear disingenuous and overly scripted.

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<sup>1</sup> *Suicide is a manner of death, but is often confused with cause (e.g., gunshot, suffocation).*

### **Tips for Working With the Media**

- Review the media talking points before conducting an interview or press conference (**see Appendix J: Sample Media Talking Points**).
- Stay on message. Although you have no direct control over a story's editing, you do have control over your messages and how you deliver them.
- Watch out for hypothetical, speculative, or personal questions.
- Do not speculate or answer questions outside of your knowledge or expertise. Instead say, "I am not the appropriate person to answer that question."
- Never say, "No comment." It will make you look uninformed or as if you are trying to hide something. It is better to explain why you can't comment. For example, say, "It would be inappropriate for me to speak on behalf of the individual's family."
- Never speak off the record. Consider every conversation with the media as being on the record.
- Do not repeat negative questions or comments by the reporter. Instead, block the negative question and bridge to one of your key messages.

Examples of blocking a question and bridging to your key message:

- "That question raises an interesting point, but the more important point is..."
- "The best way to answer that question is to tell you what we are trying to do..."
- "That is not really the issue. The real issue is..."
- "I can't speak to that. But what I do know is..."

- “The most important matter at hand is this...”
- “Let’s focus on the facts...”
- “Allow me to frame my answer like this...”
- “Looking at that question broadly...”

✓ **Provide players, former players, and staff with immediate crisis response services and promote healthy coping skills.**

✓ **Coordinate and schedule crisis response services.**  
 Services should include those provided by team mental health professionals, local professionals with whom the team has an existing relationship, and the NFL Life Line Crisis Specialist.

Crisis response services should be offered on-site to assist players, former players, and team staff in coping with the death. Some players, former players, and team staff may want individual crisis intervention services, while others prefer to meet in small groups. There should be enough mental health professionals and physical meeting rooms that afford privacy on-site to accommodate these preferences. It may be advisable to offer on-site crisis intervention services for a period of time, depending on the circumstances.

It will likely be necessary to find ways to temporarily integrate crisis counseling and messaging into routine work schedules (e.g., brief messages from counselors/coaches/management during team meetings promoting available support services; brief meetings with position coaches and players). It is preferable to reach out to players, former players, and staff members in a deliberate and timely way rather than to allow the emotional environment to escalate. They should be given accurate information about the death, the kinds of reactions that can be expected, and safe coping strategies to help them in the coming days and weeks. Wherever possible, group meetings should follow a structured outline, keep to a time limit, and provide each individual with an opportunity to speak.

There are several resource materials available (**see Appendix O: Resource Materials**) for downloading that can be distributed after a crisis to provide support. They include:

- NFL Life Line two-page information sheet
- NFL Life Line wallet cards
- A tip sheet on coping with traumatic events
- A tip sheet on coping with a suicide and/or witnessing a traumatic event

✓ **Coordinate funerals and memorial services with family.**

Ask the family whether they would like a counselor present at the funeral or memorial service and make arrangements to provide one as needed. It is also appropriate to ask the family whether they would like tip sheets on self-care and/or a list of grief and bereavement resources available at the services, reception site, or some other venue.

Arrangements should be made to allow all who desire to attend the funeral or memorial service to do so.

If the death was by suicide, a guide to help funeral directors support survivors of suicide loss is available at <http://www.sprc.org/library/funeraldirectors.pdf>.

**Spontaneous memorials.** In the immediate aftermath of a high-profile death, it is not unusual for mourners to create spontaneous memorials by leaving flowers, cards, poems, pictures, stuffed animals, or other items in a place closely associated with the deceased. The team’s goal should be to balance the need for grief expression with the need to limit the risk of inadvertently glamorizing the death. In all cases, teams should have consistent policies so that suicide deaths, for example, are handled in the same manner as any other death. A combination of time limits and straightforward communication can help to restore

equilibrium and avoid glamorizing the death in ways that may increase the risk of contagion.

When a memorial is spontaneously created on team property, team representatives are advised to monitor it for messages that may be inappropriate, such as those that are hostile or inflammatory, or that indicate individuals may themselves be at risk. Teams can leave such memorials in place until after the funeral (or up to about five days), after which the tribute objects may be offered to the family. It is generally not necessary to prohibit access to the site or to cordon it off, which would merely draw excessive attention to it.

American flags should not be flown at half-staff, as that decision is made by the U.S. president or a state governor.

## **FACILITATE ONGOING SUPPORT AND FOLLOW-UP**

### ✓ **Identify potentially high-risk individuals who might need continued crisis support.**

Everybody responds to crisis situations differently. Therefore, some players, former players, or staff members may need more continued support than others. It is most beneficial to identify potentially high-risk individuals as soon as possible after the crisis to provide them with appropriate support and resources.

Members of the Crisis Management Team and others who have regular contact with players, former players, and staff members, such as chaplains, trainers, and coaches, should compile a list of potentially high-risk individuals. A High-Risk Identification Form (see [Appendix K: High-Risk Identification Form](#)) for each person should be completed and given to the individual responsible for following up with high-risk individuals. A personalized plan for follow-up and support should be developed for each identified individual.

An individual may potentially be at high risk if he or she:

- Has a history of mental health problems, emotional difficulties, or substance abuse, or is in treatment.
- Had a close relationship with the deceased (friend, relative, close colleague, romantic relationship) and/or a contentious relationship with the deceased.
- Received a phone call, text, or other communication from the deceased just prior to the death.
- Has personal experience with the manner of death (e.g., recently lost a family member to homicide or suicide, was in a serious car crash, has a history of driving under the influence).
- Is dealing with stressful life events such as a death or divorce, retiring, or being cut from the team.
- Was an eyewitness to the death.
- Has a history of suicide attempts.

There may be other high-risk individuals in need of support with whom the team does not have contact. If the deceased was a player or former player who had previously played for another team, a member of the Crisis Management Team should communicate with that team's Director of Player Engagement to provide information and make sure they are seeking to identify high-risk individuals themselves. This should also occur when players on other teams went to college with a deceased player or former player.

### ✓ **Consider the ongoing needs of players, former players, staff members, and their family members.**

Grief feelings can resurface on or near the anniversary date of a tragic loss. Members of the Crisis Management Team can be prepared to monitor and support players, former players, and staff members at that time. The team also should be prepared for grief and emotions associated with the death that may occur on other occasions, such as:

- Anniversary of the event/death
- Birthday of the deceased
- Holidays
- Other celebrations in which the deceased would have participated
- Start of a new season

Members of the Crisis Management Team should brainstorm on other events and activities that may need to be altered or canceled, or will require special planning as a result of the crisis.

Another way to make sure the team is providing appropriate ongoing support is with a survey of well-being and/or social climate, which is best to conduct after some weeks (at least a month) have elapsed and services have been provided since the death. Surveying a few weeks later will help remind players, former players, and staff that some assistance needs may be ongoing, and also determine what services were most beneficial to team players, former players, and staff for continuing, or future, needs. This survey may be provided at the end of the season as well (see [Appendix N: Crisis Response Player Feedback Survey](#)).

✓ **Conduct end-of-season outreach and evaluation.**

The end of the season offers a critical opportunity to bring the Crisis Management Team together once again to plan for any ongoing needs and review how the crisis response went. The Director of Player Engagement or team mental health professionals should follow up again with individuals who were previously identified as potentially at high risk and ask for their consent to participate in brief check-ins during the off-season. If players or former players agree to be contacted, arrange a schedule for follow-up.

All players should receive information and guidance about accessing resources and services during the off-season (see [Appendix L: Sample Team Discussion](#) and [Appendix M: Internal End-of-Season Memo](#)).

The Crisis Management Team should evaluate its activities after a crisis in two ways: through a Crisis Response Review and a Crisis Response Player Feedback Survey (see [Appendix N: Crisis Response Player Feedback Survey](#)). These two evaluation activities will help the Crisis Management Team identify strengths and areas for improvement from its crisis response, and provide information to guide revisions to the Crisis Management Plan.



# Crisis Management Team Personnel

## Appendix A

### Crisis Management Team Matrix

Create a contact list for your Crisis Management Team for use during crisis preparation and mitigation.

Crisis Management Team	Office	Cell	Home
Director of Player Engagement			
General Manager			
Peer Support(s)			
Director of Security			
Director of Human Resources			
Vice President of Public Relations			
Head Trainer			
Team Physician			
Mental Health Professional			
Team Chaplain			

### Crisis Responsibilities Matrix

Assign responsibilities to your Crisis Management Team or other identified individuals to aid in crisis preparation and response.

Steps	Responsible Party	Relevant Resources	Target Date
Before a Crisis			
<b>Build Organizational Resilience</b>			
Develop relationships with local mental health professionals	Lead: Backup:		
Provide trainings on life skills and mental wellness	Lead: Backup:		
Review signs of mental health problems and resources	Lead:		
	Lead:		
	Lead:		
	Lead:		
	Lead:		
Cultivate peer supports	Lead:		
	Backup:		





**Independent Confidential Support**  
for the entire NFL Family

Steps	Responsible Party	Relevant Resources	Target Date
<b>Develop and Maintain Crisis Management Team</b>			
Create Crisis Management Team	Lead: Backup:		
Hold regular meetings and revise crisis plans	Lead: Backup:		
Practice crisis drills	Lead: Backup:		
Create and revise protocols for emotional crises	Lead: Backup:		
Form a self-care plan	All Members	Self-Care for Members of the Crisis Management Team	
Maintain lists of internal and external contacts	Lead: Backup:		
Adopt memorialization policies	Lead: Backup:		

Steps	Responsible Party	Relevant Resources	Target Date
After a Crisis			
<b>Activate the Crisis Management Team</b>			
Verify the death and/or facts of the case	Lead: Backup:		
Notify members of Crisis Management Team	Lead: Backup:		
Hold immediate Crisis Management Team meeting	Lead: Backup:	Sample Agenda for Activated Crisis Management Team Meeting	
Schedule crisis response services (e.g., counselors on scene, staff briefings)	Lead: Backup:		
<b>Internal Communication</b>			
Reach out to next of kin	Lead: Backup:	List of Grief and Bereavement Resources	
Notify players, former players, and staff	Lead: Backup:	Sample Talking Points for Notifying Players and Staff, in Person, of a Death  Sample Internal Memo for Notifying Staff of a Suicide or Homicide	
Distribute printed resources	Lead: Backup:		



**Independent Confidential Support**  
for the entire NFL Family

Steps	Responsible Party	Relevant Resources	Target Date
External Communication			
Notify NFL Player Engagement and NFL Life Line	Lead: Backup:		
Notify other teams, if necessary	Lead: Backup:		
Provide statement to the media	Lead: Backup:	<p>Sample News Release for Notifying the Media of a High-Profile Suicide</p> <p>Sample News Release for Notifying the Media of a High-Profile Death, Manner Undetermined</p> <p>Sample News Release for Notifying the Media of a High-Profile Death by Other Manner, Including Natural, Accident, Homicide</p> <p>Sample Talking Points for Working With the Media</p>	



**Independent Confidential Support**  
for the entire NFL Family

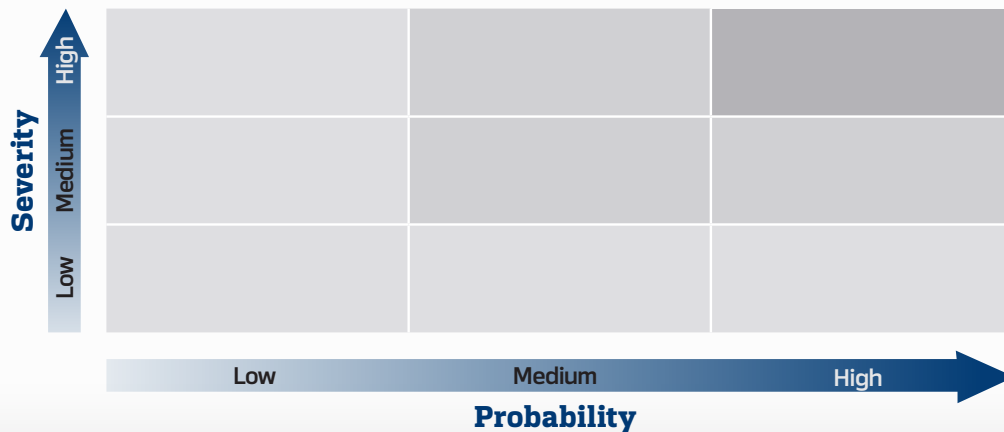
Steps	Responsible Party	Relevant Resources	Target Date
<b>Ongoing Support and Follow-Up</b>			
Identify high-risk individuals	Lead: Backup:	High-Risk Identification Form	
Hold end-of-season team meeting	Lead: Backup:	Sample Talking Points for End-of-Season Meeting  Sample Internal Memo for End-of-Season Support	
Distribute printed resources	Lead: Backup:		
Conduct player survey	Lead: Backup:	Crisis Response Player Feedback Survey	
Conduct Crisis Response Review	Lead: Backup:		
Follow high-risk individuals through off-season	Lead: Backup:		

### Risk Analysis Worksheets

#### Risk Analysis

Some potential risks to an NFL team might be:

- Unexpected death (by natural causes, suicide, or homicide) of a current player, former player, coach, or team staff
- Expected death of a current player, former player, coach, or team staff
- Serious injury of a current player, former player, coach, or team staff
- Accidents causing injury on team property
- Domestic violence involving a current player, former player, coach, or team staff
- Workplace violence involving a current player, former player, coach, or team staff
- Stalking/threats of violence against a current player, former player, coach, or team staff
- Aviation accident or incident involving team aircraft
- Natural disasters impacting the team facility or home of anyone within the organization
- Illegal activity by a current player, former player, coach, or team staff
- Acts of terrorism at a team facility



**Mitigation**

Key to preparation for a crisis is mitigation. Each risk must be examined individually to identify potential ways in which the probability or severity of the event might be reduced. Where applicable, strategies may be identified to reduce or eliminate the risk. Annually, the Crisis Management Team will review all identified risks and:

- Develop strategies to reduce or eliminate risk
- Identify responsible risk reduction staff
- Develop timelines for completion of each risk reduction task
- Identify needed resources to reduce risk
- Conduct training (when applicable) on changes to procedures and other risk reduction methods
- Implement mitigation strategies

Some strategies that assist in risk mitigation are:

- A process for the release of players, coaches, and team staff that is respectful and assistive
- A safety review of the team's physical locations
- A new-hire orientation and presentation for current players, former players, coaches, and team staff on the team's philosophy of seeking assistance and preparation/response to traumatic events
- Dissemination of the Crisis Management Plan throughout the organization (starting with leadership and the Crisis Management Team and then trickling down)
- Securing of identified necessary external resources
- A comprehensive training program within the organization on topics such as suicide prevention, conflict resolution/violence, preventing domestic violence, treating substance abuse, managing stress, maintaining general mental health and physical wellness, dealing with stalkers, etc.

<b>Event</b>	<b>Probability</b> <i>(low, medium, high)</i>	<b>Severity</b> <i>(low, medium, high)</i>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Unexpected death (accidental, natural causes, suicide, or homicide)			
Expected death			
Serious injury			
Accidents causing injuries on team property			
Domestic violence			
Workplace violence			
Stalking/threats of violence against team personnel			
Aviation accident or incident involving team aircraft			
Natural disasters impacting team facility or home of anyone within the organization			
Illegal activity committed by team personnel			
Acts of terrorism at a team facility			

## Stress and Self-Care Strategies

At one time or another, your important role on the Crisis Management Team may leave you feeling overwhelmed and pushed to your limit. As an important resource to your team, you may also feel vulnerable, especially when dealing with highly stressful or traumatic events. These feelings are normal responses to challenging situations, and it is important that you practice good self-care so that you can be your best for your team, your family, and yourself.

### Causes of Increased Stress

- Increased demand for your time (often during significant events)
- Limited resources
- Juggling multiple tasks
- Lack of control over a situation
- High expectations placed on you
- Difficulties maintaining balance of team needs and self-care needs (e.g., not enough time in the day to be with family, eat well, sleep, or exercise)

### Signs of Being Overwhelmed

- Anger
- Depression
- Mental/physical exhaustion
- Irritability
- Sleep and/or appetite disturbance
- Unreasonable personal expectations
- Reluctance to take time off
- Feelings of not being caught up/not having enough time
- Feeling there is more work than you are able to do
- Headaches
- Difficulty concentrating

### Self-Care Strategies

- **Rely on your support systems.** Spend time with supportive people in your life. Talk about your concerns; enjoy sharing common interests and conversation with them for a while.
- **Make time, several times a day, to take a break.** Leave work for lunch or a walk, find a quiet place to meditate, listen to relaxing music, or practice breathing exercises.
- **Get enough rest and nourishment.** Do your best to maintain regular, routine sleeping and eating habits. Put away work materials or highly stimulating reading, turn off the television, or stop other activities at least an hour before bedtime. Include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet.
- **Take time to engage in activities you enjoy, even if only briefly.** Take part in personal creative pursuits, athletic activities, attending a show or event, or eating out with friends. Don't forget that play is an important balancing factor against work, even if it is in small doses during high-demand times.
- **Practice good stress management in your personal life.** Avoid increased use of alcohol or misuse of drugs. Schedule time to practice relaxation methods, engage in physical exercise, and spend time with friends or family.



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- **Set realistic goals and expectations.** Focus on what's important and keep perspective of the big picture. Determine the one or two most critical, achievable tasks for you to accomplish each day and focus on achieving those goals.
- **Delegate when you can.** When your stress or workload is high, it can be difficult to let go and rely on others to complete tasks. Whenever possible, assign tasks to others on your team so you can focus on those tasks that require your expertise.
- **Stay organized.** Arrange to-do lists and categorize tasks by high, medium, and low priorities. Keep a calendar of deadlines so that you can plan your schedule.
- **Set good boundaries.** Remember that saying "no" to some requests allows you to say "yes" to the things that are most important.
- **Ask for resources you need.** Some demands may be beyond your area of expertise or are more than you can handle alone. It is OK to recognize and acknowledge that you need additional assistance and support to responsibly meet your team's needs.

If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed and struggling to cope, **support is here for you** 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Members of the NFL family—current and former players, coaches, team and league staff, and their family members—can call the independent, confidential NFL Life Line at **(800) 506-0078**, or go to [www.NFLLifeLine.org](http://www.NFLLifeLine.org) to chat online or take a self-check quiz. Members of the NFL family can also access counseling and mental health support through the NFL's Employee Assistance Program by calling Cigna at **(866) 421-8628**.





# Sample Agenda for Activated Crisis Management Team Meeting

## Appendix E

### Sample Agenda

Use this sample agenda to structure meetings of the activated Crisis Management Team after a crisis.

Time	Item	Notes
	Introduce new members and/or outside individuals brought in to assist (e.g., NFL Life Line staff, local mental health professionals)	
	Share accurate information about the event	
	Review crisis response roles	See Responsibilities in Crisis Preparation and Response
	Review who is the designated media spokesperson and instruct members to refer all media inquiries to him or her	
	Explain plans for the day, including provision of crisis intervention services	
	Discuss how to identify potentially high-risk individuals and the referral process	Distribute High-Risk Identification Forms
	Schedule a follow-up meeting	

# List of Grief and Bereavement Resources

## Appendix F

## Grief and Bereavement Resources

### NFL Resources

**NFL Life Line**  
**(800) 506-0078**  
**[www.NFLLifeLine.org](http://www.NFLLifeLine.org)**

The NFL Life Line is here for the entire NFL family—current and former NFL players, team and league staff, and their family members. Trained counselors are standing by 24/7 to listen and assist. You can also visit [www.NFLLifeLine.org](http://www.NFLLifeLine.org) to chat online. Support is completely confidential. The NFL Life Line is independently operated by an outside organization, so no confidential information about individuals or their conversations is shared with the NFL, teams, or any other organization. What you say will stay between you and the counselor.

### **NFL Player Assistance and Counseling Service** **(800) 635-4625**

Players and their family members can call to get access to the NFL Player Assistance and Counseling Service administered by Cigna through the NFL's Employee Assistance Program. Eligible current and former players can receive up to eight free counseling sessions and referrals for child care and elder care resources, financial and legal assistance, and other support.

The resources at right are provided as a courtesy, and their inclusion on this list should not be taken to imply endorsement or oversight of any kind by the NFL or its franchises.

### General Grief and Bereavement Resources

Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC)  
[www.adec.org/Coping\\_With\\_Loss\\_New\\_/3469.htm](http://www.adec.org/Coping_With_Loss_New_/3469.htm)

ADEC is an interdisciplinary organization in the fields of dying, death, and bereavement. Its website includes resource listings of organizations, books, and websites by loss relationships (e.g., parent, friend, spouse) and type of death.

**Bereaved Parents of the USA**  
[www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org)

Bereaved Parents of the USA offers support, understanding, encouragement, and hope to other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents after the death of a loved one. The organization offers local chapters and a national newsletter.

**The Compassionate Friends**  
[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

A national nonprofit, The Compassionate Friends assists families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and provides information to help others be supportive.

**The Dougy Center**  
[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)

Through its National Center for Grieving Children and Families, The Dougy Center provides support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children in grief.



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### The Moyer Foundation

[www.moyerfoundation.org](http://www.moyerfoundation.org)

The Moyer Foundation's mission is to empower children in distress by providing education and support—helping them to live healthy and inspired lives. The foundation runs camps nationwide for children who are bereaved (Camp Erin) or affected by an addicted family member (Camp Mariposa).

### National Bereavement Resource Guide

[www.moyerfoundation.org/nbrg](http://www.moyerfoundation.org/nbrg)

This guide, sponsored by New York Life and The Moyer Foundation, compiles state and local resources for children and their families experiencing loss.

### National Funeral Directors Association

[nfd.org/grief-resources](http://nfd.org/grief-resources)

The National Funeral Directors Association supports its members in providing families with meaningful end-of-life services. Its website also offers grief resources for individuals.

### Suicide-Specific Grief and Bereavement Resources

#### Alliance of Hope for Suicide Survivors

[www.allianceofhope.org](http://www.allianceofhope.org)

The Alliance of Hope for Suicide Survivors offers an online community forum and other resources designed by survivors for survivors.

#### American Association of Suicidology (AAS)

[www.suicidology.org/suicide-survivors/suicide-loss-survivors](http://www.suicidology.org/suicide-survivors/suicide-loss-survivors)

AAS is a membership organization for those involved in suicide prevention and research, or who have been touched by suicide. Its survivors division offers a support group directory, newsletter (for a fee), and free downloadable pocket guide titled "SOS: A Handbook for Survivors of Suicide."

### American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

[www.afsp.org/coping-with-suicide](http://www.afsp.org/coping-with-suicide)

AFSP brings together people across communities and backgrounds to understand and prevent suicide, and to help heal the pain it causes. Find personal stories, information about coping with suicide, and a support group directory on the AFSP website.

### Fierce Goodbye: Living in the Shadow of Suicide

[www.fiercegoodbye.com](http://www.fiercegoodbye.com)

The website and documentary "Fierce Goodbye" focus on stories from people who have experienced suicide in their families or among their loved ones, and how they have found hope amid terrible pain.

### SAVE: Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

[www.save.org](http://www.save.org)

SAVE believes that suicide should no longer be considered a hidden or taboo topic. Its website includes a support group directory and information on coping with loss.

### Suicide: Finding Hope

[www.suicidefindinghope.com](http://www.suicidefindinghope.com)

The Suicide: Finding Hope website was created by two suicide loss survivors to help other survivors navigate their journey through grief.

### The Link's National Resource Center (NRC) for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare

[www.thelink.org](http://www.thelink.org)

The Link's NRC is dedicated to reaching out to those whose lives have been impacted by suicide, and connecting them to available resources.

## Talking Points for Notifying Players and Staff, in Person, of a Death

These talking points offer general guidance to assist in the difficult task of notifying players, former players, and staff members of a death.

In relating facts about a death, keep the facts very general. If the death involved suicide, do not provide details about the method or location of death.

### **Take control of your mental well-being:**

- Mental well-being is just as important as physical well-being.
- We all need support with difficult situations at times.
- Think about how you've coped with difficulties in the past and use those same coping skills now.

### **Know where to turn:**

- Crisis response services
- The team, family members, friends, faith leaders, and health care professionals
- NFL Life Line: (800) 506-0078
- Cigna Employee Assistance Program: (866) 421-8628

### **Suicide is complex (when death is a suicide):**

- It is not caused by a single event, but almost always has several contributing factors.
- An underlying mental disorder, like depression or substance abuse, often contributes to suicide.

### **Common reactions:**

- Everyone reacts to news of a death differently, but there are some common reactions.
- Expressing grief is normal.
- Anger at the deceased is common; it doesn't mean you didn't care about [him/her].
- You may feel guilty or responsible in some way, but we cannot control the actions of others.
- Many people ask "why?" after a death, but we will never really know.

### **Funeral/memorial arrangements:**

- Funeral/memorial arrangements will be arranged by/are being made \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Media inquiries:**

- Our media spokesperson is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Do not speak to the media. This is to protect the privacy of the family and team.



# Sample Internal Memo

## Appendix H

### Internal Memo for Notifying Staff of a Suicide or Homicide

Use this sample internal memo to notify staff of a suicide or homicide.

Date: [Date]  
To: Staff  
From: [Name of Owner]  
Re: Death of [Name of Employee]

It is with great sadness that the [TEAM NAME] learned of the reported [accidental death/death/suicide/homicide] of [player/team staff]. [Player/team staff's] death and the circumstances that surround it may cause all of us to experience a range of reactions. We are sharing the facts as we know them and are offering support for those who might need it.

[Player/team staff] [played for/worked for] [TEAM NAME] for the last [number] years and will be remembered for [positive attribute]. On [Saturday night] [s/he] died around [11 p.m.] [DO NOT MENTION PLACE OR METHOD USED FOR SUICIDE]. We may never know all of the factors leading to this tragedy; however, [only use if a suicide and/or homicide] experts agree that there is no single cause or simple explanation for any [suicide/homicide] death.

[Player/team staff's] memorial service will be held on [Jan. 7 at 11 p.m.], and all employees who wish to attend may be excused. The family would like to welcome all of [his/her] friends and colleagues who wish to share in the celebration of [his/her] life.

Some of you may be having difficulty coping with this sudden loss. We have arranged for professionals from [the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and/or the NFL Life Line] to be on-site on [Jan. 8 and 9 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.] During this time, counselors will be on hand to support us and answer any questions we may have.

You can contact our EAP at any time by calling (866) 421-8628. The NFL Life Line [(800) 506-0078] also offers crisis support to every member of the NFL family. The NFL Life Line is a free and confidential service, answered 24/7 by professional counselors.

The family has requested that instead of flowers, those who wish to do so may donate to [charity as shared by the family] in [employee's] memory.

## Sample News Releases After Death

**Use these sample news releases to inform the media of different death scenarios.**

### **Sample News Release for notifying the media of a high-profile suicide**

The [TEAM NAME] are saddened to learn of the death by suicide of [player/team staff, title/position]. Our hearts and condolences go out to the family and friends at this difficult time. We have spoken with the family and will be sharing the facts as appropriate, and are offering support for those who might need it.

Suicide is a complex, multifaceted, and tragic event, and thus we will not speculate on the causal factors of this death. Rather, we will focus on pulling together and helping the [TEAM NAME] family find support and resources as necessary. For people outside of the [TEAM NAME] family who may be affected by this tragic loss or are struggling with thoughts of suicide, we encourage you to contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The Lifeline is answered 24/7 by trained counselors ready to provide support and resources in your area.

#### *Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide*

Research has shown that graphic, sensationalized, or romanticized descriptions of suicides in the news media can contribute to suicide contagion, also known as “copycat” suicides. The media are strongly encouraged to refer to the two-page document “Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide,” which is available at <http://reportingonsuicide.org/Recommendations2012.pdf>.

### **Sample News Release for notifying the media of a high-profile death, manner undetermined**

The [TEAM NAME] are saddened to learn of the death of [player/team staff, title/position]. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family and friends at this difficult time. At this time the manner of death is undetermined, and we will not speculate on the manner and cause of death, or any details that surround it.

We are in contact with the family and will be sharing the facts as appropriate, and are offering support for those who might need it. We will focus on pulling together and helping the [TEAM NAME] family find support and resources as necessary. For people outside of the [TEAM NAME] family who may be affected by this tragic loss, we encourage you to reach out to family, friends, faith leaders, and health care professionals for support.



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**Communicating With the Media Sample News Release for notifying the media of a high-profile death by other manner, including natural, accident, homicide**

The [TEAM NAME] are saddened to learn of the death of [player/team staff, title/position]. Our sympathies and condolences go out to the family and friends at this difficult time. We have spoken with the family and have offered to assist them in any way possible.

We will focus on pulling together and helping the [TEAM NAME] family find support and resources as necessary. For people outside of the [TEAM NAME] family who may be affected by this tragic loss, we encourage you to reach out to family, friends, faith leaders, and health care professionals for support.

Expert consultation on crisis messaging and communicating about suicide is available from the NFL Life Line Team.

For more information, contact NFL Life Line at **(800) 506-0078** and ask the crisis counselor to have a member of the NFL Life Line Crisis Communications Team connect with you for a consultation.

# Sample Media Talking Points

## Appendix J

### Media Talking Points

These talking points are intended to provide general guidance to assist in fielding media inquiries.

#### Team response to the tragedy

- We are heartbroken over this death.
- Our thoughts and prayers go out to [his/her] family and friends, and the entire community.
- We are assisting the family in every way possible.
- We will remember [him/her] for [his/her] contributions to family, friends, and the team, rather than remembering [him/her] for the way in which [he/she] died.

#### Pulling together

- Everyone reacts to tragedy differently.
- Crisis response services are available to NFL players, former players, and staff members.
- We are a team, on and off the field, and will continue to support each other.

#### Suicide complexity

- It is not caused by a single event, but almost always has several contributing factors.
- An underlying mental disorder, like depression or substance abuse, often contributes to suicide.

#### Crisis resources

- There are places to turn if you or someone you know is in crisis.
- Family members, friends, faith leaders, and health care professionals can offer support in times of crisis.
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** is available for the general public. (The NFL Life Line is for members of the NFL family.)

#### Team response to the media

- Research has shown that graphic, sensationalized, or romanticized descriptions of suicides in the news media can contribute to suicide contagion, also known as “copycat” suicides.
- The media are strongly encouraged to refer to the two-page document “Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide,” available at <http://reportingonsuicide.org/Recommendations2012.pdf>.
- Media reports should include links to or information about helpful resources, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.



# High-Risk Identification Form

## Appendix K

### Identification Form for High-Risk Individuals

#### CONFIDENTIAL

Please complete this form and return it to the appropriate Crisis Management Team member for following up with high-risk individuals. He or she may contact you with additional questions.

#### Who initiated the referral?

Name:

Title/Position/Department:

Contact Number:

Date:

Time:

#### About the individual

Name:

Title/Position/Department:

Contact Number (if known):

#### Please check all that apply, if known:

- Had a history of suicide attempts
- Had a history of mental health problems, emotional difficulties, or substance abuse, or is in treatment
- Had personal experience with the manner of death (e.g., recently lost a family member to homicide or suicide, was in a serious car crash himself)
- Is dealing with stressful life events such as a death or divorce
- Was an eyewitness to the death
- Was in a romantic relationship with the deceased
- Was a close friend or colleague of the deceased
- Received a phone call, text, or other communication from the deceased just prior to the death
- Fought or had a contentious relationship with the deceased

Shows:

- Irritability
- Inappropriate emotional response
- Anger
- Agitation
- Confusion
- Shortened attention span
- Preoccupation with the event
- Social withdrawal
- Emotional outbursts, loss of control
- Changes from typical behavior



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**Additional reason(s) for concern (please describe in detail and provide any information relevant to checked boxes):**

**Actions taken, if any:**

What:

When:

By whom:

Outcome:

**Recommendations:**

**Follow-up**

**Actions taken:**

What:

When:

By whom:

Outcome:

## Sample Team Discussion Points for End-of-Season Team Meeting

These discussion points are intended to provide general guidance to assist in holding a team meeting at the end of a season in which a crisis occurred.

**“During this season, our team has experienced an event that impacted us all in some way.”**

- Provide a brief overview statement—from a personal perspective—about the event and how it affected the team, staff, and families.

**“Our team, along with the NFL, helped hold us together and worked to provide support to players, former players, coaches, team personnel, and their families.”**

- Talk about support to the team and affected people following the event (provide specific examples or model behaviors of support or assistance).

**“Routines and togetherness play a big role in keeping us healthy through tough times.”**

- Underscore how supporting one another—individually, as players, and as a team—has made a difference, and how the routines of our work—practices, meetings, drills, games, and travel—also keep us going and help us cope with stress.

**“Stay connected in the off-season.”**

- Say that even though team members are going in separate directions, they need to stay connected, maintain routines, and lean on one another. They need to check in with one another, and remember that they're here for one another.

**“During difficult times like these, relying on your support system [within the team and at home] is vital.”**

- Point out who is available during the off-season to provide support (e.g., Director of Player Engagement and team mental health professional).

**“Seek assistance or extra support if you or someone you know needs it.”**

- Note that people may still be struggling to make sense of what has happened, and this can affect their personal lives and relationships.
- The NFL has resources available 24/7 that can provide assistance off the field:
  - The NFL Life Line offers information about emotional wellness, a self-check quiz, videos from former NFL players, and a confidential, independent help line and online chat service—all there for support with personal, relationship, or emotional issues. Members of the NFL family can call (800) 506-0078 or visit [www.NFLlifeLine.org](http://www.NFLlifeLine.org) to chat online.
  - Cigna's Total Wellness resources are available at (866) 421-8628.
  - Tell everyone to put these phone numbers in their phones now, before they leave.

**“We have provided information on support and resources for you.”**

- Leave information about team or NFL support resources at the lockers, pass them around to players, and/or email them.

**“We do not have to go through our troubles alone.”**

- Tell them, “We will get through this together.”



# Internal End-of-Season Memo

## Appendix M

### Internal Memo for End-of-Season Support

Date: [Date]

To: Players

From: [Coach and/or Support Staff]

Re: Continuing support during the off-season

Earlier this season, our team experienced a great loss that has impacted all of us in some way. The team members, with the help of NFL resources, have held together and supported each other. Now that the season is ending, it is important to know where to get support during the off-season.

If you or someone you know needs extra assistance or support, there are several places to turn:

- Our Director of Player Engagement [insert name and number] and our team mental health professional [insert name and number] are here to help you take control of your mental well-being.
- The NFL Life Line—(800) 506-0078 and [www.NFLLifeLine.org](http://www.NFLLifeLine.org)—offers information about emotional wellness, a self-check quiz, video testimonials from former NFL players, and a confidential, independent help line and online chat service—all here for you or someone you care about to offer support with personal, relationship, or emotional issues.
- Through Cigna's **Employee Assistance Program, (866) 421-8628**, you can access counseling and mental health support.

During the season, our practices, meetings, drills, games, and travel provided a very structured routine. Routines like these are crucial to staying healthy and active, and coping with stress. Make sure you find your own routine during the off-season.

The Director of Player Engagement or team mental health professional may ask to check in with you during the off-season to help us all stay connected.

### Player Survey

Thank you for completing this evaluation. This survey is intended to obtain your feedback on the resources provided to you earlier this season after the passing of your teammate. It is important to us to evaluate those resources provided during that difficult time, and your feedback will help us improve them.

Survey responses will be used only for evaluation purposes and to improve resources for our players. Your survey response is anonymous; we will have no way to identify the person submitting the response unless you identify yourself. Please answer honestly and completely.

1. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (please choose only one response per statement):

a. The club informed players of the resources and services available to them after the passing of a teammate.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

b. The club provided the support players needed to address emotional health issues after the passing of a teammate.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

c. I know how to access the resources and services the club has to assist me and (if applicable) my family with emotional health issues when or if the need arises.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

d. When or if needed, I would be comfortable using the resources and services the club has in place to assist with emotional health issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (please choose only one response per statement):

a. I am aware of how to access the NFL Life Line.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

b. When or if needed, I would use the NFL Life Line.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

c. I believe my teammates are aware of how to access the NFL Lifeline.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

d. When or if needed, I believe my teammates would use the NFL Life Line.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

e. I am aware of how to access the resources provided by the League Office/NFL Player Engagement (NFLPE) to assist players with emotional health issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



## Independent Confidential Support for the entire NFL Family

f. When or if needed, I would use League Office/NFLPE resources to assist me in addressing emotional health issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

g. I believe my teammates are aware of how to access the resources provided by the League Office/NFLPE to assist players with emotional health issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

h. When or if needed, I believe my teammates would use League Office/NFLPE resources to assist them in addressing emotional health issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. Who would you most likely reach out to if or when you were in need of emotional support? (Please check all that apply.)

- NFL Life Line
- Current teammate
- Current coach
- Former teammate
- Former coach
- Team physician
- Director of Player Engagement
- Team chaplain
- Personal chaplain
- Spouse or significant other
- Parent or other family member
- Non-NFL friend
- No one
- Other – please specify

4. What additional resources or services would you like to see the club provide when a teammate passes away?

5. What additional resources or services would you like to see the League Office/NFLPE provide when a teammate passes away?

6. Please provide any additional feedback you have about how the club and League Office/NFLPE responded earlier this season, and how you think they should have responded differently.



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for the entire NFL Family

# Resource Materials

## Appendix O

### NFL Life Line Resource Materials

#### NFL Life Line two-page information sheet

8.5" x 11"

**“Please... make the call.”**

Visit [NFLLifeLine.org](http://NFLLifeLine.org) to see Michael Irvin's video testimonial.

**NFL LIFE LINE**  
**(800) 506-0078**

**Independent Confidential Support**  
for the entire NFL Family

The NFL Life Line is a confidential resource for current and former NFL players, coaches, team and league staff, and their family members who may be in crisis or need assistance dealing with serious life issues. Trained counselors are standing by to listen and provide support, resources, and referrals. It's free, independently operated, and available 24/7.

**If you or someone you know is in distress, reach out and CALL (800) 506-0078**

Chat online at [NFLLifeLine.org](http://NFLLifeLine.org)

**NFL LIFE LINE**  
**(800) 506-0078**  
Independent Confidential Support  
for the entire NFL Family

Current Players    Former Players    Family    NFL and Team Staff

Distress can come in many forms and happen for different reasons. No matter what you're going through, you can call and get immediate support. Call us or chat online if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Relationship or family problems
- Confusion, memory problems, or difficulty concentrating
- Economic or job-related problems
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Violent or angry outbursts
- Reckless or unusual behavior
- Social withdrawal
- Troubling thoughts
- Difficulty transitioning to life after football
- Substance abuse or addiction
- Thinking about killing yourself

You can also take a self-check quiz at [www.NFLLifeLine.org](http://www.NFLLifeLine.org) to learn more about how some of these experiences might be affecting you or someone you care about.

**The NFL Life Line is here for the entire NFL family** — current and former NFL players, team and league staff, and their family members. Trained counselors are standing by 24/7 to listen and assist.

**Support is completely confidential.** The NFL Life Line is independently operated by an outside organization, so no confidential information about individuals or their conversations is shared with the NFL, teams, or any other organization. What you say will stay between you and the counselor.

**“Families can feel the stress of the game too. If your family member has played or worked in the NFL, support is here for you.”**  
- Tony and October Gonzalez

**“It's free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day.”**  
- Brett Favre

**Call (800) 506-0078 or chat online at [NFLLifeLine.org](http://NFLLifeLine.org)**

The NFL Life Line is an independent, confidential resource operated by the following organizations:

LINK HEALTH    CENTERSTONE    JED    EDC    AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR Suicide Prevention    Action Alliance    SAMHSA

The NFL Life Line is sponsored by:

PLAYER CARE PRODUCTION    NFL

Cigna Members of the NFL family can also access counseling and mental health support through the NFL's Employee Assistance Program by calling Cigna at (866) 421-8628.



**Independent Confidential Support**  
*for the entire NFL Family*

### NFL Life Line wallet card

3.375" x 2.125"



**Independent Confidential Support CALL (800) 506-0078**

**Distress can come in many forms and happen for different reasons.  
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# Coping With a Traumatic Event

## Information about Coping With a Traumatic Event

Exposure to a traumatic event can have a strong impact on an individual's well-being, and the road to recovery can involve many intense, complicated feelings and emotions. It's a process that takes time, and you may not be totally back on track after a day, a week, or a month. Understanding how people typically react to trauma can be helpful in the recovery process.

### What might I experience after a traumatic event?

A traumatic event can affect people emotionally, physically, and mentally. These experiences are considered "normal reactions to abnormal events," and will usually decrease with time. Below are some common feelings you may experience:

- Continued thoughts and images of the event
- Wanting to stay away from the scene of the event and/or fear of returning to work
- Difficulty concentrating, or feeling "dazed" or confused
- Difficulty handling tasks or making decisions
- Increased agitation, restlessness, or frequent sitting and staring into space
- Feelings of guilt or wishing you could have done something differently
- Wanting to separate yourself from family members, co-workers, and friends
- Nightmares or trouble sleeping
- Headaches or other physical reactions such as stomachaches or feeling tired all the time
- A desire to use alcohol or drugs to numb your feelings

### What can I do to feel better after a traumatic event?

If you have seen or been touched by a traumatic event, the following actions may help you deal with what you're feeling:

- **Talk to someone; stay connected.** Use your support system. Talk to friends, your spouse, family members, or a counselor—people who are likely to be supportive and understanding. Talking about the event seems to help many people, even though you may feel uncomfortable discussing it. Staying connected with others during this stressful period is one of the best things you can do to help you feel better sooner.
- **Exercise and relax.** Physical exercise can be physically grounding, mentally distracting, and helpful in reducing the tension related to the traumatic event. Relaxation methods (meditating, praying, practicing breathing exercises, spending time in nature, listening to quiet music, etc.) can also be helpful.
- **Keep active and retain your everyday routines when possible.** Try to keep to your normal schedule of working, eating, sleeping, bathing, exercising, etc.
- **Eat well and try to get a good night's sleep.** These may not be easy to do, but it's important to stay focused on your health during times of intense stress.



## Independent Confidential Support for the entire NFL Family

- **Avoid using alcohol or drugs to change your mood.**  
Using alcohol or drugs can delay your healing process by affecting your judgment and behavior in ways that can interfere with your ability to cope with the traumatic event in a safe and healthy way.

If concentration problems, nightmares or flashbacks, sleeping problems, feelings of depression, shock and numbness, confusion, guilt, or anger do not begin to subside over two weeks, or if these feelings seem unbearable, **it is important to seek professional support, including medical care**, to assist with coping and recovery.

If you or someone you know is going through a difficult time or struggling to cope with a traumatic event, **support is here for you** 24 hours a day. Members of the NFL family—current and former players, coaches, team and league staff, and their family members—can call the independent, confidential NFL Life Line at **(800) 506-0078**, or go to [www.NFLLifeLine.org](http://www.NFLLifeLine.org) to chat online or take a self-check quiz. Members of the NFL family can also access counseling and mental health support through the NFL Player Engagement Transition Assistance Program by calling Cigna at **(866) 421-8628**.

# Coping With Having Witnessed a Traumatic Event or Suicide

## FAQs About Witnessing a Traumatic Event or Suicide

### Frequently Asked Questions

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### Dealing With Suicide

The suicide of a friend, family member, co-worker, or fellow player can be an especially traumatic event. After a suicide, it is common to experience very complex thoughts and feelings related to the deceased and the many factors related to his or her suicide.

### What will I feel while coping with suicide?

In the wake of a suicide, it is normal to feel a range of complicated emotions. Professional support can help you deal with these difficult reactions, especially if they persist over time or feel unbearable. Common reactions to suicide include:

- **Shock** – This is usually the first reaction to a suicide and can be accompanied by a feeling of physical and emotional “numbness,” which is the mind’s way of protecting you from feelings that are too overwhelming to process all at once. This numbness allows you to deal with your pain more gradually.

- **Confusion** – Many who die by suicide do not leave behind an explanation for their actions, and it is natural for you to have questions. Even when a suicide note is present, it may be difficult to accept that you may never know all of the reasons why someone took his or her own life.
- **Guilt** – You may have repetitive thoughts of “what if/if only” scenarios following a suicide. “What if I had done [this]?” “If only I hadn’t said [that]?” “Why didn’t I notice the warning signs?” In time, many people bereaved by suicide learn that they did not have control over the person’s choices and behaviors, no matter how much they wished they could have prevented this tragedy from occurring.
- **Anger** – Reaction to suicide is further complicated by the fact that it’s common to feel intense anger at the person for taking his or her own life. You may also feel anger toward doctors, therapists, family members, or yourself. Understand that these feelings can be a normal part of the grieving process. Over time, these feelings usually diminish, as those losing someone to suicide often learn that blaming behaviors prolong the experience of the painful loss in all who are affected, and can interfere with more comforting connections with others that can promote healing.
- **Despair and Depression** – Feelings of sadness and despair following a catastrophic loss can affect your sleep, appetite, concentration, and hope for the future. These feelings may hamper your day-to-day functioning for a while, but use of your social supports and keeping a regular routine may help lessen the intensity of these feelings over time.
- **Nightmares and Flashbacks** – If you have witnessed or been exposed in some way to a suicide or its aftermath, you may relive the memories of the distressing event. These memories can come in the form of nightmares or sudden flashbacks sparked by reminders of the people,

places, or things associated with the suicide. In these cases, you might feel as if you are re-experiencing the event. The frequency, intensity, and length of these experiences diminish over a few weeks for most people.

- **Relief** – In many cases, a suicide occurs after years of coping with emotional pain and suffering. A feeling of relief on behalf of the bereaved is very normal in these situations. You may feel relieved that the individual's suffering is over or that you no longer have to worry about the person's well-being.
- **Stigma and Shame** – Societal, religious, and personal beliefs can all contribute to your reactions, including feeling uncomfortable about acknowledging or talking about the cause of death. While these reactions are common, they can delay or complicate your long-term recovery as you cope with this traumatic loss.

### **How can I cope with the suicide of a member of the NFL family?**

Following the death of an NFL family member by suicide, other family members can be a natural support system for each other, a critical piece of the long-term healing process. While in mourning, consider these points to help deal with your loss:

- Know that while many of you may have similar reactions, the range and intensity of reactions can vary. It is important to make room for each person's different ways of reacting and coping with the event.
- Try to be both patient with and supportive of one another, and recognize that suicide may add more layers to the grieving process and can intensify all of the normal grief reactions.
- Remember the life of the NFL family member who

died rather than dwelling on the circumstances of his or her death.

- Remind each other that you can best honor the person's life by the way you carry on with your own.
- Although people will heal in their own ways, recognize when a friend, loved one, staff member, or teammate might need professional help. Pay attention to whether their grief is severely affecting their relationships, work performance, or other aspects of their life after two weeks, or if they say their pain is unbearable. If you notice these issues, offer to assist them in getting professional help or let someone else know of your concerns about them.

### **How can I help someone who is grieving a loss by suicide?**

It can be difficult to know how to help someone who is mourning a loss by suicide. One of the best ways to help someone coping with a suicide is to simply pay attention to the grieving person and acknowledge the pain that he or she is feeling. Other ways to help include:

- Letting the person know you are available to listen and provide support. This is especially important after the first few weeks, when things "get back to normal" for everyone except the bereaved. If you don't know what you can do, just ask.
- Avoiding unconditional support without making judgmental statements about what could or should have been done differently. Listening without judgment is the best resource you can offer; a nonjudgmental listener can help the individual process and move past his or her feelings of guilt.



## Independent Confidential Support for the entire NFL Family

- Being patient, compassionate, and understanding. Accept that people who are grieving a loss by suicide will be struggling with intense emotions that can be different from reactions to other types of death. The stigma, guilt, and blame that survivors can feel often isolate them from others and cause them to be uncomfortable discussing their loss.
- Avoiding cliches that provide a simple explanation for their loss. It is not your responsibility to answer questions such as why a person died by suicide or whether there is anything more that the grieving individuals could have done. Although these intensely painful and complicated questions may never find a satisfactory answer for those grieving a suicide loss, over time these questions often become less intense and preoccupying.

If you or someone you know is going through a difficult time or struggling to cope with a traumatic event, **support is here for you** 24 hours a day. Members of the NFL family—current and former players, coaches, team and league staff, and their family members—can call the independent, confidential NFL Life Line at **(800) 506-0078**, or go to [www.NFLLifeLine.org](http://www.NFLLifeLine.org) to chat online or take a self-check quiz. Members of the NFL family can also access counseling and mental health support through the NFL Player Engagement Transition Assistance Program by calling Cigna at **(866) 421-8628**.