

Sudden Deaths in Schools: Breaking Bad News and Interventions of Support

Invited lecture · Vita Poštuvan

Assoc. prof. Vita Poštuvan works as a researcher and Deputy Head of the Slovene Centre for Suicide Research (UP IAM) and Department of Psychology (FAMNIT) at the University of Primorska. She leads the work related to clinical-research and public-health interventions in suicidology, bereavement, crisis interventions and psychotherapy. She has participated in major European and Slovenian studies in the fields of (public) mental health, suicidology and psychology, which were published in international journals. She has worked at the National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry (NCNP) in Tokyo, Japan as well as in the Suicide Research Group, Department for Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, Medical University of Vienna, Austria, as a fellow researcher. Her professional work is also focused on psychological counselling, psychotherapy and prevention. As a psychological counsellor and cognitive-behavioural therapist she offers psychological support for students and individuals and implements mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. She is a member of the national unit for psychological research within civil protection.

Abstract. The death of a young person happens more rarely compared to older people. Although any news of the death of a loved one represents a significant and usually painful moment, in the case of a young person it is even more profound. There are some differences regarding the cause of death, such as suicide, accidents or diseases. The way death is communicated in the school setting is important, as it can have long-term effects on the mental and physical health of the bereaved and those affected. There are several models for addressing death in the classroom or school setting. However, peers are not the only group that needs in-depth support: teachers (especially classroom teachers), counsellors, and principals are often deeply affected by such news. In order for them to provide appropriate support to grievous classmates or friends (adolescents), debriefing and support interventions must be implemented.