

Buffalo Hide Academy: February 2021



Complicated Grief Response Team

To the esteemed board members of BPS District #9;

Please consider this our humble request and great honor to formally create, form, and co-manage a newly minted BPS *Complicated Grief Response Team*. The primary objective of this team will be to facilitate the strategic, comprehensive, and empathic response to any Potentially Traumatizing Event (PTE) the BPS community may experience in the future.

The types of PTE's that would illustrate a need for this newly created Complicated Grief Response Team would include but are not limited to; the death of a student or staff member, a suicide, a community tragedy, and other wide scale events in terms of level of impact. Basically, we would respond and help coordinate the strategic intervention to any major event that in turn elicits a potentially complicated grieving response amongst the school community.

Currently, Sienna is a counselor at Browning High School, and Charlie is one of the counselors at Buffalo Hide Academy. In addition to the passion with which we bring to the world of grief and loss counseling and critical incident management, we have been trained extensively and are certified to offer and coordinate support services in both traditional school based Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) models, as well as more recently developed Critical Incident Debriefing models (Creating Healing Spaces) specifically meant to address complicated, traumatic deaths.

Fortunately, most BPS buildings and counselors are trained and equipped to handle a critical incident response to most situations and events. However, our passion and interest is to offer support in coordinating the response to tragedies that can easily overwhelm those that may be in proximity to that event. Suicide in particular is an extremely challenging death to deal with, and consequently requires a highly targeted, specialized response and after-care plan for any impacted individual. As a professional helper, responding to a suicide (especially in a close knit community such as Browning) can have massive, unintended and vicarious "side effects" for us as practitioners.

Thus, a natural consequence of being a school counselor is that we tend to be closely connected to all students in our schools. So when a particular school loses a loved one, it can take a heavy toll on that building's staff members, especially the counseling and support staff. We will be ready to assist in those situations, when the support staff itself is in great need of support, so to speak.

In the future event of a death or a critical event in BPS that warrants the involvement of the Complicated Grief Response Team, we will immediately liaison with that building's counselors and administrators to assist in coordinating their grief/support response. An immediate priority will be to offer critical services to survivors and grieving families and to assist in connecting the district and its resources with anyone profoundly impacted by the PTE. Further, the ongoing support (counseling, grief and loss groups, brief check-ins, etc.) of grieving students and their families in the weeks and months after a traumatic event will be a key feature of this new endeavor.

Our goal will be to coordinate responses not only during the school year, but the summer months as well. In the event of our inability to respond directly to an event (for example if we happen to be out of town) we will create a user friendly folder with a response template which includes relevant documents, sample letters, plans, checklists, etc. to be utilized by other members of the BPS Complicated Grief Response Team in our stead.

During the last decade we've spent countless hours working with and strengthening grieving students and families in Browning as school counselors. Additionally, Sienna has worked in the clinical field of grief and loss as an LCPC as both a full time therapist and consultant (2010-present) with the Tamarack Grief Resource Center. Coordinating grief responses and individual and community treatment plans, especially in the wake of a complicated death is one of Sienna's areas of expertise.

Charlie has worked for the last 11 years to develop grief and loss groups while supporting grieving students and their families as counselor at Buffalo Hide Academy. The Honor Group, the six session grief and loss support group we developed in 2011, is now being used (pre pandemic!) in all BPS schools as a primary tool to support bereaved students.

It has been the honor of our lifetimes to be able to help and assist grieving individuals in the BPS community by creating healing spaces in our schools; those where students and staff members can safely process and explore painful thoughts, emotions, and feelings related to grief.

As loving and invested members of this community, we feel passionate and obligated to bring our skills and expertise to the forefront of future BPS critical incident responses specifically and intentionally in the event of a complicated, potentially traumatic event. In doing so, we feel confident and empowered to be able to support, strengthen, and honor grieving students and their families in the midst of extremely challenging times.

Please reach out to either or both of us with any questions regarding this formal request, and we look forward to serving Browning Public Schools in this capacity for the long haul.

Respectfully,

Sienna and Charlie Speicher

Continued Coursework Development

After receiving positive feedback – both from students and parents/guardians - BHA staff has continued to develop coursework for 2nd Semester that is focused on three things: asking students to reflect on the past year of their lives; taking stock of where they are in this current moment; and taking time to think about their futures. With those ideas in mind, here is a sample of three courses that Chris Lewis (our counselor), Nick Rink (English teacher), and Jason Krane (instructional coach/teacher) have recently created.

Art #1:

Self-Expression (Chris Lewis)

The expressive arts incorporate various artistic mediums (painting, drawing, music, collaging, writing, etc.) that allow us to tell our stories and make meaning out of our thoughts, experiences, and emotions. One of the coolest aspects of the expressive arts is that we focus on creating more than the finished product.



Key Points

- *Expressive Arts is for all of us. We were all born with an innate ability to create.*
- *Expressive Arts does not require us to be an "artist" in the traditional sense.*
- *Expressive Arts is about working with our creative process to tell a story.*
- *Much like meditation, the expressive arts are about being mindful and making meaning in the process of creating.*

Some of these sections may bring up powerful emotions and feelings, which is normal. If at any time you need someone to talk to, don't hesitate to reach out to Charlie, Chris, or anyone at BHA. Miss you and love you all!

BHA Front Desk: 338-4380

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Section 1: Free-Writing

Free-writing is an activity in which a person writes continuously (non-stop) for a short period of time about a topic, without worrying about grammar, structure, etc. Basically, you won't have any teachers telling you that you spelled something wrong! In this section, you will be telling us who you are - in your family, your friend-circle, the community, the world.

Section 2: PONGO Poetry

In this section of the course, you will be completing a poem called "Self-Portrait." Basically, you will be painting a picture of who you are through the written word instead of using a traditional canvas and paints.

Section 3: Self-Understanding

What do you think of yourself? What does the world think of you? How do these two ideas compete/cooperate? In this section you will take some time to think and answer these questions.

Section 4: Self-Portraits

An expressive self-portrait allows the artist to either communicate something about themselves or shed some light into their personality. You will be asked to create three versions of yourself - how you see yourself, how you think others see you, and who do you aspire to be.

Section 5: Reflecting on the Self-Portraits

Taking time to reflect and think about the expressive arts can be a really rewarding experience. In this final section of the course, you will be asked to write a short paper reflecting on the three self-portraits you completed in Section 4.

English #3: *Rez Dogs (Nick Rink)*

Rez Dogs are a part of everybody's experience growing up on the reservation, and all too often they are overlooked or only acknowledged as being in the background of life here. In this course, Rez Dogs will take the forefront of our thoughts, writing, and art as we celebrate them for the amazing animals and family they are!



Section 1: Essay Writing

In the first section of this course you will be asked to write a 4-5 paragraph expository essay explaining what a Rez dog is.

Section 2: Interview

In this section you will interview a family member and have them tell their favorite story (or maybe a few stories) about Rez dogs!

Section 3: Creative Storytelling

Let the creative juices flow! In this part of the course you will get to choose between either writing a short story or creating a work of art based on Rez dogs.

Section 4: Health and Wellness

Part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle is having healthy relationships with the beings around us, including our dogs and other animals. You will be asked to create a photo essay, piece of writing, or another art form reflecting on the relationships you've had with your dogs (or cats, or horses, or...) in your life.

Section 5: Looking Towards the Future

Every community has issues that affect the daily lives of the people that live there. Take a few minutes and think about life for Rez dogs on Blackfeet Nation... If you were able to improve one thing about their lives here, what would it be? Or, what can dog owners off the reservation learn from Rez dogs to make the lives of their own dogs happier and healthier? In the final section of this course you are going to write a 4-5 paragraph persuasive paper convincing us **what** needs to change for Rez dogs, **how** they would benefit, **why** it needs to change, and **how** you will go about making that change.

Elective #1:

Financial Literacy (Jason Krane)

In this course, you will learn some of the basics about becoming financially independent. We will investigate the following: identify needs vs wants and consider what it is we value; the steps necessary to get a job; the costs of living on your own and how to set up a budget to track those expenses; what kind of vehicle best fits your current financial situation; and what to watch out for when it comes to credit cards. This will be an introductory course to these topics, so we hope you enjoy it, as well as learn a few things along the way!



Section 1: Investigating Your Values (MUST COMPLETE THIS SECTION!)

Oftentimes when we think of success we conjure up images of big houses, fancy cars, and lots of money. True, being financially successful does allow people the opportunity to experience the “finer things” in life, but for many there is so much more we hope for than the newest, nicest objects. In this opening section of the course, you will spend some time investigating your values as well as focusing on the differences between wants and needs.

Section 2: The Job Search - Resume/References/Interview (MUST COMPLETE THIS SECTION!)

In order to make money, you first need to get a job. And in order to get a job, there are some things you need to do first. In this section, you will be writing a resume, asking people for references, and practicing your interview skills.

Section 3: Living On Your Own - Rent/Food/Bills (MUST COMPLETE THIS SECTION!)

Now that you have a job and have money coming in, you may find yourself wanting to live on your own. We will be looking at some of the costs that come with this newfound independence, as well as how to set up a budget to track those costs.

Section 4: Owning a Vehicle (MUST COMPLETE THIS SECTION!)

What is your dream vehicle? What is a realistic vehicle for you to buy right now? How do you determine what kind to purchase and when to make that purchase, and what are some hidden costs to owning a vehicle? This is what we will be looking at in this section.

Section 5: Credit Cards - Beware! (MUST COMPLETE THIS SECTION!)

Finally, in this last section, we will learn a little about credit cards - how they work, when to use them, and how to avoid falling prey to the big corporations that want you to use their cards.