

**Responding to Secondary School Critical Incidents**  
**Using Outdoor Education**

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EDUC 6800: Winter Project: Sustainability, Creativity and Innovation

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## THE EVALUATION

### Successes

This project was successful because it met the intended goals and objectives. The initial primary goal was to “provide an alternative option to traditional responses to traumatic events that promotes long-term sustainable healing, rather than short term solutions.” This project was successful in doing so as I have gotten feedback from a variety of colleagues including school guidance counselors that this guide is useful, and could be a successful tool if a critical incident were to occur. There were many challenges in creating this guide. The biggest challenge that I had was determining the scope of the guide. I was trying to ensure that it included enough detail so that it was thorough - but was still concise enough that it was quick, accessible and user friendly. I was successfully able to do that, and the feedback I have received suggests the same. Another challenge that I faced was that a lot of folks in the traditional school system value policy and procedure - so much so that they fear challenging the policies that currently exist. I emphasized that my guide works well along with current policy, and allows for collaborative, long term success of the community, rather than just short term solutions. This conversation generally was positive, and allowed for a better understanding of my intentions.

I shared the resource with a variety of my former colleagues who were previously impacted by a critical incident, and they shared that they believe the resource would have better supported them in navigating the situation. They also shared that some of the activities (such as the community fire and community memorial) were similar to ones they had implemented, and they were successful in helping support students and rebuilding a sense of community.

## **Learning Experiences**

One of the most critical learning experiences I had throughout the process of working on this project is the importance of collaboration. In education, there are so many parties involved including but not limited to students, teachers, parents, support staff, administration, and community members. It is essential to include all of them in the changemaking process. I found that the times where I was working independently and not seeking feedback were the times where I felt the most “stuck” and unsure about next steps forward. Collaboration with colleagues and other stakeholders really supported the development of this project.

This project also offered a lot of learning in the research process, and what postgraduate research really entails. I learned about the types of research, types of data, the process of collecting data, and the process of creating a thorough literature review, which are valuable skills to continue developing. I found the research portion of this project to be particularly interesting because the concept of using outdoor education to respond to trauma is not a well researched field. Because of this, I really had to explore the field of ecopsychology and make connections between that and school communities. This felt particularly impactful, and developed a certain excitement about exploring it further.

I have a much greater understanding of the skills I need to develop in order to continue to advocate for change in my school community. As a relatively new teacher, I find that I sometimes lack the confidence to have more serious conversations with administration and more senior staff at my school, because I worry that they will not take me seriously. After this project, I feel more empowered to continue developing this skill to be able to effectively advocate for change. I also have a better understanding of my own goals and ambitions for the future, so I have more intrinsic motivation to take on leadership roles within my school community.

Finally, this project has transformed my understanding of what it means to teach through a trauma-informed lens. Whether the critical incident impacts the whole school, or it is a personal experience for a student it is essential that teachers are prepared to support the student in navigating their experiences. Schools are foundational pieces of students' lives - it is where they spend a large amount of their time, and where they learn the skills to develop and grow into functioning adults. It is essential that they have positive peer and adult relationships to foster this growth so that they feel supported and able to navigate any challenges they face. Now as an educator, I plan on using immersion in outdoor learning to help support students in feeling safe and accepted in their school community.

### **Project Impact**

The impact of this project on my school has been very positive. I have been able to share the guide I created with colleagues who have provided a lot of positive feedback. Students reported that they felt supported and like there was a stronger sense of community in their class after completing these activities. Myself and colleagues have implemented a variety of the activities included in the guide with a lot of success simply as a form of trauma-informed practice. We are also implementing a school wide peer mentorship program that will allow us to be proactive about our response to critical incidents. Another proactive initiative my school is implementing is a variety of camp days, where groups of students who are experiencing a variety of challenges are invited to a local camp for the day to participate in camp games, high and low ropes courses, and other team building activities to help them feel more like a part of the school community.

Although the product has not yet been implemented after a critical incident, I feel confident that it will have a positive impact upon implementation. The product will be

disseminated to other schools in my school board, so that they can implement it if the occasion arises for them as well. I hope that if the unfortunate situation of a critical incident occurs in my school board, staff will feel more confident and prepared to support their students and colleagues, and navigate the situation together as a community.

Finally, I have learned that change is an ongoing process. The field of education is constantly evolving, and it is important to be open-minded to change. However, change does not happen quickly, and to incite positive change requires dedication, collaboration, initiative and courage. This project served as an important reminder to invest in the process of change and collaborate with colleagues to continue to evolve our practice.

### **Project Sustainability**

This project is sustainable because it can continue to be reused by staff and school communities both before and after a critical incident. It is a living document, meaning that as it used to respond to critical incidents it can be modified and edited to ensure that it meets the ever-changing needs of students. Also, as more research becomes available in the field, it can evolve to continue to be accurately evidence-based, which is important especially when dealing with serious issues such as traumatic events. I now feel motivated and inspired to continue my learning in this field, and share this learning with my school community, making the project sustainable. Now that I understand the impact his project can have, I want to work to ensure that it is sustainable and continues to grow and evolve.

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**Appendix A: The Product**

To view the product please click [here](#). To view the presentation please click [here](#).

## **Appendix B: Project Proposal**

### **Introduction**

Unfortunately, critical and often traumatic incidents can happen within a school community. A critical incident can be defined as a “sudden and unexpected event that has the potential to overwhelm the coping mechanisms of a whole school or members of the school community” (Beeke, 2021, p. 75). This could be anything traumatic, including threats, violence, death, natural disasters, etc. These events can have a negative impact on both individual and community mental health, leaving students and staff feeling isolated, alone and lacking support and guidance. With so many vulnerable parties involved, including youth who do not have the coping strategies to navigate the grief and loss of a traumatic event, it is necessary for schools to have Traumatic Incident Response Plans. These plans often vary at the school, district and provincial level, and often do not address the large-scale impact that trauma can have on a community. The response plans that currently exist do not acknowledge that grief and trauma are long lasting, impacting each individual very differently.

Current critical incident response policy for the Durham District School Board includes “providing staff with resources, such as speaking notes, to help them talk to students; bringing in support staff to help secretaries field challenging phone calls; and setting up rooms for staff and student counseling” (Follert, 2020). Furthermore, in discussion with the guidance department at my school the response plan is very short term, and more focused on a school media response rather than promoting long term, sustainable healing for community members. Therefore, schools do not currently have comprehensive and consistent response plans to school traumatic events that acknowledge proactive and reactive healing strategies through a trauma informed lens.

This project will result in the development of a School Traumatic Response plan that focuses on both proactive and reactive strategies, activities and programming to support students and staff as they navigate a critical incident within the school community. The response guide will be divided into the following sections: Context and Background Information, Intended Outcomes, Classroom Teacher Strategies and Activities, Community Wide Strategies and Activities, and Additional resources to ensure that it is clear and user friendly. This response plan will focus on working together as a community. Research by Saari (2005) summarizes the concept of community healing after trauma by describing:

The aim of crisis work is to control the reactions in a community caused by a traumatic event. If the community is not equipped to address an incident that has shocked the whole community sufficiently comprehensively and quickly, the emotions elicited by it will drift around uncontrollably in people's minds. People reinforce each other's fears and anger, which can easily acquire quite uncontrollable proportions. Appropriate processing and information will calm, provide tools for controlling emotions, and keep people in touch with reality and everyday life. The community will recover more quickly and suffer less damage from the traumatic incident (p. 88).

This research emphasizes that "crisis work is community work" (p. 87) and that the entire community needs to work together to ensure that everyone is able to collectively navigate their emotions and individual experiences of trauma, which this project intends to do. Furthermore, research by Fisher has proven that:

Trauma-informed nature therapy appears to provide both preventative (e.g., developing unique coping skills) and restorative benefits. It provides a whole-brain whole-body approach that has been shown to calm the limbic system, enhance the prefrontal cortex,

expand the support network, provide opportunities for physical mastery, and promote the reconstruction of the trauma narrative (2022).

Therefore, immersion in outdoor education can promote positive healing in both youth and adults who have experienced trauma. This research will serve as important foundational knowledge at the basis of this project.

This project will help educators meet a variety of the UNESCO goals and competencies of education for sustainability. The competency that “the educator is able to create opportunities for sharing ideas and experiences from different disciplines/places/cultures/generations without prejudice and preconceptions” is emphasized as the response guide will provide opportunity and space for conversations about individual and community feelings. Furthermore, the competencies “the educator is able to work with different perspectives on dilemmas, issues, tensions and conflicts” and “the educator is able to understand why there is a need to transform the education systems that support learning” are valued in the response guide as it challenges traditional plans and responses to trauma using different, outdoor focused perspectives to transform the learning space into one that is safe and inclusive after trauma. This project will also address the competency that “the educator is someone who is willing to take considered action even in situations of uncertainty” as it will give educators specific guidelines for handling critical incidents - which are often uncertain. Finally the response plan will provide opportunities and strategies for teachers to foster positive relationships after traumatic events, which connects to the competency that “the educator is someone who is a critically reflective practitioner and engages with learners in ways that build positive relationships” (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, 2011).

## **Goals and Objectives**

The primary goal of this project is to provide an alternative option to traditional responses to traumatic events that promotes long-term sustainable healing, rather than short term solutions. Another goal is that this project will support classroom teachers in navigating traumatic incidents by providing them with the language, activities and additional information. This would take the pressure off of grieving or traumatized staff members, allowing them to engage in the healing process as well.

An objective of this project is for it to be used by a school community after a traumatic event. If it is implemented after a critical incident, members of the school community including both staff and students can provide additional feedback and suggestions to improve its functionality in practice. This project will be successful when this objective is met, and the guide is being used in diverse communities by a variety of school staff including administration, guidance departments and classroom teachers, who are then able to provide feedback.

## **Barriers and Constraints**

This project will include a variety of constraints that will need to be mitigated for the project to be successful. This type of research is difficult to assess because of the nature of trauma and traumatic events in schools. They cannot be planned, and therefore the guide cannot be easily tested and assessed. However, feedback can still be sought from communities that are recovering from traumatic events, and individual proactive feedback can be sought from students, staff and other community stakeholders that have not been impacted by a school traumatic event. One of these communities includes that of Rosseau Lake College - who implemented a variety of outdoor education activities to promote healing after a traumatic death in the community. I will be discussing with a variety of my previous colleagues there to discuss

strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the programming that they implemented.

There is limited research about large scale community responses to traumatic events, and even less about using outdoor education as a tool to do so. Because of this, research around general wellness and the outdoors will be used as the factual basis to support this document. The field of ecopsychology will also be explored to help mitigate this gap in knowledge. There will be time constraints for this project, as this is being completed within the timeline of the Masters Project Course. A clear project timeline has been developed to ensure that despite a time constraint, the project is still successfully completed.

### **Tentative Project Timeline**

The timeline of this project will span from March 27th (upon proposal completion) to July 4th when the project will be disseminated to members of my school community, and shared with academic peers. This project will not require any funding, as it will be the production of a digital product that will not require any additional financial resources. The following table tracks the project research, implementation and feedback process.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Resources Required</b>
April 3 - 7, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review project proposal feedback and develop a strategy for implementation</li> <li>● Develop and use “Research Organizer” to gather research (using Literature Review as a starting point)</li> <li>● Idea brainstorm - consider specifically the structure of the response plan to ensure it is user friendly as possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Research organizer document</li> <li>● Research database</li> <li>● Completed Literature Review and Project Proposal</li> </ul>
April 10 - 14, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prototype and implementation of ideas in to first iteration of response guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Resource guide template</li> <li>● Completed Literature Review</li> </ul>



		and Project Proposal
April 17 - 21, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brainstorming aesthetic and design elements of the response plan</li> </ul>	
April 24 - 28, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have completed outline of project completed</li> <li>Seek feedback from a variety of stakeholders - they will be aware in advance of the week-long timeline to return feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School guidance department</li> <li>School administration</li> </ul>
May 1 - 5, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin production of dissemination plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School guidance department</li> <li>School administration</li> </ul>
May 8 - 12, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult with stakeholders to receive feedback on the dissemination plan - they will be aware in advance of the week-long timeline to return feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School guidance department</li> <li>School administration</li> </ul>
May 15 - 19, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make adjustments, and complete dissemination plan</li> <li>Meet with school administration to discuss dissemination plan, and any concerns they may have</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School administration</li> </ul>
May 22 - 26, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue working on rough draft of project focusing on the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy and activity guide sections</li> <li>List of additional resources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research database</li> <li>Completed Literature Review and Project Proposal</li> </ul>
May 29 - June 2, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue working on rough draft of project focusing on the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting research and context section</li> <li>Visual appeal and</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research database</li> <li>Completed Literature Review and Project Proposal</li> </ul>

	aesthetics	
June 5 - 9, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have rough copy of project completed</li> </ul>	
June 12 - 16, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disseminate rough copy to colleagues in the guidance department and administration to seek feedback - they will be aware in advance of the week-long timeline to return feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School guidance department</li> <li>• School administration</li> </ul>
June 19 - 23, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combine iterations of the project, as well as other products documenting the learning process to produce presentation to share with peers</li> <li>• Final copy produced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All iterations and feedback of project</li> </ul>
June 26 - 30, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with school administration to review final copy of the project</li> <li>• Develop and fine tune presentation to peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Presentation</li> <li>• School administration</li> </ul>
July 3 - 7, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present completed project to peers</li> <li>• Receive feedback from peers, and continue to make ongoing changes and adjustments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with Cape Breton University peers</li> </ul>

**Appendix C: Confirmation of Support From Collaborating Organization****Cape Breton University**

School of Professional Studies

Cape Breton University  
 Department of Education  
 P.O. Box 5300  
 1250 Grand Lake Road  
 Sydney Nova Scotia, Canada  
 B1P6L2

**Confirmation of Support from Collaborating Organization**

Project Title	Responding to Secondary School Critical Incidents Using Outdoor Education
Project Lead (student name)	Aryn Lang
Contact Information	4397 Lakeshore Rd. Newcastle, ON 236 989 3430 <a href="mailto:chu21fdj@cbu.ca">chu21fdj@cbu.ca</a> <a href="mailto:aryn.lang@ddsb.ca">aryn.lang@ddsb.ca</a>

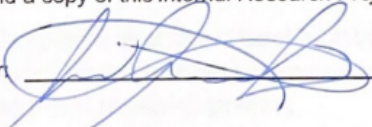
Instructor	Dr. Patrick Howard
Course	EDUC6800: Education for Sustainability Project
Contact Information	1250 Grand Lake Rd., Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS. Tel: 902 563 1300 <a href="mailto:Patrick_howard@cbu.ca">Patrick_howard@cbu.ca</a>

Supervisor/Head of Collaborating Organization	
Name	BASIL BROWNE RICHES
Position	PRINCIPAL
Organization	DDSB
Contact email/phone	905 767 0368

- I confirm that the school administration (or division head/management) is aware and fully supports the proposed applied research project.

Name: Aryn Lang Position: Teacher  
 Signature: *Aryn Lang* Date: Mar 22/23

**Appendix D: Durham District School Board: Internal Research Project Form**

<p align="center"><b>DURHAM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD</b> <b>INTERNAL RESEARCH PROJECT FORM</b></p>	
Researcher(s):	Aryn Lang
Location:	Henry Street High School
Title of Project:	Responding to Secondary School Critical Incidents Using Outdoor Education
Objectives:	<p>This research will be to develop a resource that examines the impact of outdoor education on individual and community wellness, both as a proactive and reactive response to trauma. This resource guide will include different sections including: an outline of trauma-informed practice, examples of restorative and healing practices, and outdoor community building activities. It will provide examples of how both teachers and administration can utilize the various activities and strategies to rebuild community and promote healing after trauma. The end goal is that this guide will be used by a variety of schools, in a variety of communities, and as traumatic events occur, feedback is provided that can be used to enhance or develop the guiding document. The ultimate goal is that when traumatic events happen in schools, the entire community feels prepared to navigate the complex emotions that diverse community members might be experiencing.</p>
Process:	<p>This is an applied research project will involve primarily literature review and application, and will not involve student participants. It will involve an analysis of policy and procedure, as well as collaboration and interviews with a variety of staff, including the guidance department. The gathered research information will be condensed and analyzed to develop a trauma-informed guide that student support departments in secondary schools can use to promote student and staff wellbeing.</p>
<p><b>Please Check:</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I/We have read Durham's <i>Research Procedure</i> and will make every attempt to follow it.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I/We will send a copy of this <i>Internal Research Project Form</i> to the Research Advisory Committee.</p>	
Principal/Supervisor:	<p></p> <p>Date: <u>March 8th 2023</u></p>
RETURN TO:	<p>Accountability and Assessment Department            Durham District School Board            400 Taunton Road East            Whitby, Ontario L1R 2K6            Fax (905) 666-6453</p>
<p align="center">PLEASE INCLUDE 7 COPIES PLUS THE ORIGINAL.</p>	
<p align="center">Accountability and Assessment            Durham District School Board            Internal Research Application</p>	

## **Appendix E: Dissemination Strategy Planning**

What is the campaign purpose, the intended impact (benefit)?

- The purpose of the campaign is to share my project with a variety of guidance departments and administration teams, in hope that they will use it if it is required in their school community. From there, it is hoped that they will provide feedback so that the guide can continue to evolve.

Describe the primary target audiences for your campaign.

- The primary audience is guidance departments and administration teams - specifically in Durham Region - but extending beyond Durham if possible as well.

What specifically do you want your audiences to do? To know? To believe?

- I would like my audiences to question the Critical Response Plans they currently have in place, and examine whether they are sustainable and trauma-informed. I would like them to apply the learning from my project both proactively and reactively in relation to traumatic events. I would like them to learn about the many benefits of outdoor learning - specifically as it relates to trauma informed practice and supporting student and community well-being. From this, I would like them to feel comfortable and confident in applying some of these strategies and activities in their own community.

What key messages do you want your campaign to communicate?

- I would like my campaign to communicate the benefits of outdoor learning in relation to trauma, and how easy it can be to apply to your own school community. I would also like it to communicate the flaws in traditional systems, and how they can be overcome or adapted for the overall well-being of the community.

What communication channels will you use? Consider what is available to you (public media, print, school/organization networks/resources, social media channels etc.) Be as specific as you can about ways you intend to use each channel you identify.

- I will use the following communication channels:
  - School email lists
    - I will use DDSB email lists to communicate specifically with administration and guidance departments to share the project and how they can apply it to their own community
    - DDSB communication channels
      - There are a variety of internal communication channels that I can use to share information and digital copies of my project to them
    - Print copies and interschool mail
      - I will print off copies of my project and send them to different guidance departments throughout the DDSB
    - Guidance Professional Learning Communities
      - There are a variety of digital Guidance PLCs that I will share my project with so that it can extend beyond Durham Region

What permissions will you require? (model release forms, parental permissions, school/board permissions)

- Because of the paperwork I signed at the beginning of the course, the DDSB must be informed of the completion of my project and any distribution. Therefore I will maintain communication with my administration team and the Research Department to ensure that procedure is followed.

What creative strategy will you use? Consider highlights you will emphasize, scenes, sounds, images, taglines, tone, overall impression to be achieved through graphic elements - text, colour, font etc.

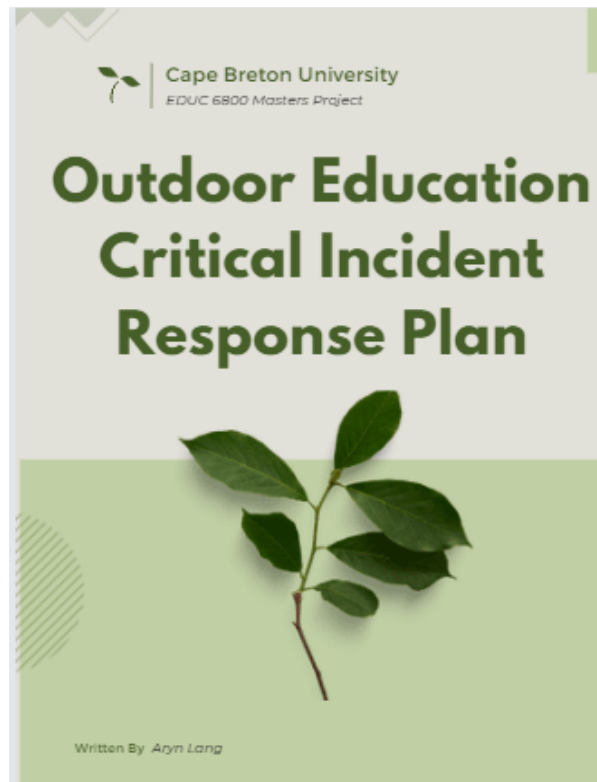
- I will use a consistent colour, text and font scheme throughout my project and use this in my marketing as well so that it looks consistent and flows well. I will try to use written communication that promotes reflection, and is rooted in research so that the guidance teams understand the background information and research that has gone into the project to ensure that it is trauma informed. The marketing and project will be professional, clear and concise so that it is taken seriously, yet still engaging and easy to follow.

What costs, if any, may be associated with dissemination related strategies? What resources will you need to access? What may be available to help you achieve your strategies? (Consider both material and human)

- I do not anticipate any costs with dissemination related strategies.

## Appendix F: Prototyping

I do not have many photos of my “prototype” as it is currently still just a brainstormed list of activities, and structure ideas for the guide I am producing. These are photos of what the design of the guide will look like upon completion. The feedback I have received has been positive - stating that the guide is user friendly and accessible.



Get Feedback:

- I would like feedback on activities that have been successful in incorporating outdoor education after critical incident (if any)
- I would like to gauge if guidance departments believe that it is practical to use in a suburban public secondary school setting



Feedback Goals:

- I would like to refine my guide so that it is as user friendly as possible
- I would like feedback on the specific activities teachers/admin/other staff could see themselves facilitating/organizing

Select Feedback Participants:

- Katie Hines - Henry Street High School Guidance Department
- AnnMarie Igel - Henry Street High School Guidance Department
- Ken McNaughton - Principal and Former Safe Schools Superintendent
- Basil Broumeriotis - Current Principal
- Cheryl Wellwood - Current Vice Principal
- Artur Pawliszko - Outdoor Educator at Rosseau Lake College
- Monica Rand - Outdoor Educator at Rosseau Lake College
- Shannon Abel - Colleague

Build a Question Guide:

- In your experience, have you implemented any initiatives that have helped build community and/or resilience through outdoor education?
- Would you use a guide like this in response to a critical incident
  - If no - what would you change so that it is more practical for use?
- Which of the activities included do you see yourself potentially using? Why?
- Which activities do you see yourself NOT implementing? Why?

Facilitate feedback:

- Should be as simple as possible - so that anyone who is under high pressure/stress/grieving can easily access and implement

- Because of this activities (at least shorter term ones) should require minimal resources
- Should be organized in a way that makes sense
  - Could organize by type of activity - or by when the activity can be done post - critical incident
- Maybe provide a timeline within the guide so that the user can gauge when they should be doing what
- Provide a list of resources required with each activity
- Would like a procedure for how to go about the larger activities (community, garden, tree, memorial etc.)

#### Reflections:

From this feedback, I have learned that colleagues would be willing to use a guide like this after a critical incident. My ideas definitely hold true in the sense that it would be used, and many staff see it as a beneficial document. I have learned that one of the most important factors is that it is simple and easy to follow. The simpler the better - it is important to be clear and concise so that people going through a traumatic incident can easily navigate the activities - without requiring a lot of planning or additional resources. The activities that I have started to brainstorm are generally good according to the folks I got feedback from - but should provide some adaptations for schools in different settings (ie. rural vs. suburban vs. urban). The element that was most well received was the content itself. I am still trying to figure out how to best organize/structure the content. I am going to develop a few versions of structure, and seek additional feedback to see what structure is best.

Identify What's Needed:

- No funding is needed to create my refined concept

Costs: How much do you need?

- N/A

People:

- My schools guidance department can champion my idea, and continue to provide ongoing feedback