

Hello Parents,

As we all have likely heard by now, Lake Louise Ski Clubs has confirmed that one of their athletes passed away following an avalanche incident at Nakiska Ski Resort yesterday.

This is a devastating loss for the family, his team and club and for the wider ski community. I want to acknowledge that this may have different impacts on people.

I, Frank van den Berg (Lead Mental Performance at Canadian Sport Institute Alberta), have experience with/am trained in critical incident stress management, psychological/mental health first aid and crisis response in sport. I want to take this opportunity to provide you with some information and recommendation in support of good care of your children in the aftermath of this tragic incident.

This Saturday I was present in Lake Louise, have engaged with the Clubs' leaders, met with numerous individuals in the U14 and U16 teams (as well as Free Ride team), and facilitated a grief support/crisis intervention group session for athletes, coaches and parents in attendance, covering the following areas:

- Acknowledgement of the athlete's passing.
- Initial memories and qualities of the athlete, honoring the athlete as a person, teammate and ski racer.
- Typical human reactions to terrible news and realizations.
- The importance of community and social support, to work through grief better together.
- Self-compassion and self-care, being kind to yourself and others and engaging in healthy coping methods.
- Going Back Skiing, and appreciating different levels of willingness/readiness to 'send it'.

Following a serious incident in the sport your children love, they may present different stories, signs and effects at home, on the hill or in days to come:

- Witnessing and/or hearing about a teammate getting hurt seriously or dying can be very upsetting and traumatic for most people.
- It is important to realize that these types of traumatic experience may **have different effects and reactions for different people**, and can occur **at different times**.
- These are **normal human reactions to an abnormal event**. These reactions can vary in nature, cognitively, emotionally, socially and/or physiologically/physically. If you have interest to learn more about possible reactions, please see the **handout** "What You May Experience".
- Everyone may wonder if and how we may and can offer support. This really depends on the person and their needs, but in general, **show care for each other, ask for permission to offer support, and respect everyone's wishes**. If you want to learn about how to give social support, please see the **handout** "Giving Social Support". In addition, consider these strategies how you can help your child:
 - *Remain calm and controlled. Children respond to how the adults in their life conduct themselves.*
 - *Let children know that it's okay to be sad and upset – encourage children to talk about their feelings.*
 - *Reassure children that they are safe. Point out things that ensure their immediate safety.*

- *Observe children's emotional and behavioural states. Look for changes in mood, appetite and sleep patterns.*
 - *Tell children the truth – don't pretend things didn't happen. Children are smart and will figure it out. Keep explanations age-appropriate.*
 - *Limit TV and movies that may remind a child of the event.*
 - *Maintain a normal routine as much as possible.*
 - *Make time to keep talking to children – check up on them.*
 - *Stay close – don't leave for extended periods of time.*
 - *Make sure children get sleep, proper nutrition and lots of activity.*
 - *Reaffirm relationships – love and care from family is a primary need.*
 - *Express that the future is hopeful – help rebuild trust and faith in our own future and the world's.*
- Everyone is encouraged to seek support with trusted resources and people (family & friends, coaches, support staff, mental health supports). And, everyone is encouraged to take good care of themselves, practice good self-care/psychological hygiene, and talk to coaches or mental health/performance supports when necessary.

Note: If your child doesn't want to talk to you or anyone else in your surroundings, you may want to direct them to [kidshelpphone.ca](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca), where they can text/call anonymously with professional support personnel,

- Regarding **Return to Training/Competition**, athletes may have different needs, motivations and levels of readiness to resume ski racing.
 - Assess scenarios, demands and competitive schedule
 - Adjust and/or re-affirm of performance goals/objectives
 - Adjust focus, performance, and distraction control plan
 - Assess increased risks resulting from event (risky behavior, lack of focus etc.)

Finally, I encourage everyone to find joy and gratitude in ski racing, and for being together in the ski racing community. Share your joy and gratitude with others.

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions: fvdberg@csialberta.ca or 403.473.5603

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