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## DOH Offers Mental Health Support After Teen's Death From Gun Violence

The Department of Health said counseling referrals, emotional support and mental health resources are available following the teen's death, urging parents, caregivers and educators to check in with children and young people.

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The V.I. Department of Health is offering behavioral health support to residents affected by the death of Tre'Vante Etienne, extending condolences to his family, friends, classmates, teachers and loved ones, as well as others impacted by the tragedy.

Tre'Vante, 15, [died after being shot multiple times Friday](#) afternoon in the area of Vester Gade on St. Thomas. According to the VIPD, ShotSpotter alerted 911 to multiple gunshots around 2:17

p.m., and a concerned citizen later reported that a male victim had been injured. Tre'Vante was transported to the Schneider Regional Medical Center, where he later died despite lifesaving efforts.

“This is a profoundly difficult time for our community,” said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. “Our hearts are with Tre'Vante's family, friends, classmates, and all those who loved and cared for him. We encourage parents, caregivers, educators, and community members to check in with one another, especially our children and young people, and seek support if needed.”

Encarnacion said the loss of a young person to gun violence affects not only a family, but an entire community.

As residents process grief, sadness, fear and uncertainty following Friday's fatal shooting, the department said its Behavioral Health Division is available to provide support and resources to individuals and families struggling in the aftermath.

The Behavioral Health Division is available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, to provide counseling referrals, emotional support and information about available mental health services for individuals, families and community members affected by the loss.

For assistance, residents may contact:

St. Thomas Behavioral Health Clinic | 340-774-6380

St. John Behavioral Health Services | 340-776-6400

St. Croix Behavioral Health Clinic | 340-773-1311

Deputy Commissioner for Behavioral Health Renan Steele said exposure to violence can have a significant emotional impact on young people, families and entire communities. According to the department, individuals may experience grief, anxiety, fear, anger, confusion or feelings of helplessness, and those reactions are normal after a traumatic event.

DOH said children and adolescents may respond differently to trauma and loss. Some may have trouble sleeping, changes in behavior, withdrawal from friends and activities, difficulty concentrating, increased anxiety or concerns about their own safety. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to create a safe and supportive environment where children can express their feelings, ask questions and receive honest, age-appropriate reassurance.

“Following a traumatic event, it is normal to experience a wide range of emotions,” said Steele. “However, if feelings of sadness, anxiety, fear, or distress persist or begin to interfere with daily functioning, seeking professional support can be an important step toward healing.”

Individuals experiencing emotional distress or a mental health crisis may call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, for free and confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

DOH asked the community to keep Tre'Vante's family, friends, classmates and all those affected by the loss in their thoughts during this difficult time.

“In times of tragedy, the greatest strength of our community is our ability to come together,” said Dr. Gesil Ramos, Director of Behavioral Health. “I encourage all of us to intentionally reach out to our young people, listen without judgement, and remind them that they are valued, supported

and never alone.”

“The conversation and connections we nurture today can play an important role in healing and preventing further harm tomorrow,” Director Ramos said.

The Health Department said it remains committed to supporting the emotional well-being of the community and again asked Virgin Islanders to keep the child’s family, friends and loved ones in their thoughts.

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