

# THE RISK OBSERVER

FOUNDED 2006 – VOL. CLXI

GLATFELTER PUBLIC PRACTICE

DAILY 5 CENTS, SUNDAY 15 CENTS

## SUICIDE/DEATH GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

Many schools have developed guidelines for staff to follow in the event that your school has a student death or suicide. Additionally, it is common for grief counselors and mental health professionals to assist in the days after a tragic event to support the students and staff in the grieving process. The following guidelines for teachers can also help to support the students and staff following a death or suicide.

1. Don't expect to get your usual amount or quality of work done. Try to teach a lesson, if you can, based on your feelings as well as those of your students. If this is not possible, a quiet class period is certainly appropriate.
2. You may feel uncomfortable about dealing with the situation. Call for help if you want it.
3. It is okay for teachers to show their feelings.
4. Both teachers and students need to support each other as much as possible.
5. Staff may be overwhelmingly upset; especially those who have had contact with the deceased. Crisis rooms can be designated for a comfortable place for the faculty to go. Mutual support is helpful and encouraged.
6. Get back to routines as soon as possible after children have had a chance to express their feelings.
7. Be aware of the facts regarding what happened to counteract rumors.
8. There is no inappropriate, immediate response. What may seem like inappropriate feelings expressed by some children reflect real feelings which we, as professionals, may not immediately understand. Children can be helped to empathize with others and express honest feelings appropriately. Expect the entire range of emotional reactions from hysterical behaviors to joking. All reactions are normal.
9. Teachers may get the feeling that there are some students who are using this tragedy to avoid school responsibility. However, these students are in the minority. We all need to be careful not to judge the feelings or motivations of others.
10. If a child expresses feelings that he/she should have "done something to prevent the death," listen to what the child has to say. Don't shut a child down until he/she has expressed themselves, and let them know that they were not responsible.
11. If there is a possibility of suicide, do not glamorize, romanticize, or speculate about what might have happened. When children speculate, ask them if they know for sure what happened; listen and point out gently and without criticism that what we think we know and don't know may not represent all the facts related to what happened.
12. Think about adults with whom children can talk, at home or at school. Should they express a need or desire, help the student find an appropriate contact person.
13. For those students who are extremely upset, locations should be set up in various parts of the building where support staff are available to assist them. Unsupervised students should not be in the corridors, but rather sent to designated areas of the building; they will be returned to class at the appropriate time.
14. Students who seem overwhelmed by the tragedy will be identified by the support team for follow up conferences and/or parental involvement.
15. What can the students do to express sympathy to the family? Students may write notes of sympathy and some children may attend the funeral with an adult.
16. All services available to students should be available for staff as well.
17. Continue to monitor reactions and review with support services teams and faculty. Be prepared to deal with intensity for some time after the crisis.