GUIDELINES FOR TALKING WITH STUDENTS IN THE AFTERMATH OF A SUICIDE

1) Explain that it is normal to feel emotions such as shock, fear, sadness, guilt, or anger. Encourage students to talk about these feelings with parents/guardian, friends, and counselors.

2) Let students know that there is no "right way" to feel after a suicide. Remind them that people deal with grief differently, and they need to be patient with each other.

3) Do not expect students to "resolve their grief" after talking with someone about it. Grief is a process, and students need to work through that process in order to reconcile themselves with their loss.

4) Do not try to "cheer students up." They need to experience the grief process, even though it is often painful.

5) Help to clarify facts about suicide. Ask student to tell you what they have heard. Correct errors and rumors, if necessary.

6) Stress that no one is to blame for the suicide. The victim alone made the decision to commit suicide. No one "caused" the victim to come to that decision.

7) Do not glamorize the suicide in any way. In discussing it, focus on recovery of the survivors and alternative methods of dealing with problems.

8) Encourage students to describe their memories of their friend. These memories may be happy, sad, or angry.

9) Talk candidly with students about what they can expect at the funeral home and funeral service.

10) Rehearse possible condolence messages to the family. This is a new experience for most students, and they don't know what to say.

11) Emphasize that help is available to students who are feeling suicidal. Make sure students know where to go to get help for themselves or for a friend who is depressed or suicidal.

Copyright 1993. University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic Services for Teens At-Risk (STAR Center) Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213. All Rights Reserved.