

ATTACHMENT 4.14

## SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH GRIEF | NON-SUICIDE / NOT PERMITTED TO DISCLOSE

TALKING POINTS	WHAT YOU CAN SAY
<p><b>Give accurate and specific information about the death (while remaining age-appropriate).</b></p> <p>When discussing death, avoid euphemisms. Youth can be very literal. Euphemisms like “went to sleep” or “went home” or “went to heaven” or “left us” or “passed away” can feel scary and confusing. Additionally, using euphemisms can impede the child’s development of emotional regulation and coping skills.</p> <p>It’s always okay to explain how the person died but avoid gory details of the death. The fewer words we say, the more likely youth are to understand.</p>	<p>“This person died.”</p> <p>“This person is dead.”</p> <p>“This person died from [cancer, car accident, etc.]”</p>
<p><b>Allow youth to ask questions.</b></p> <p>They are likely to have questions about what happened and/or what it means. Answer questions honestly and in age-appropriate ways, avoiding euphemisms.</p>	<p>“Do you have any questions about what I’m saying?”</p> <p>“Is there anything on your mind?”</p> <p>“I may not know the answers to all of your questions, but I’m here to listen and will answer anything I can.”</p>
<p><b>Encourage youth to express their feelings about the death and the person who died.</b></p> <p>Youth will benefit from hearing that it is okay to feel their feelings and by seeing examples of that modeled for them. If you are sad, tell them. If you cry, that’s okay – even healthy. Just reassure the youth that you are safe and label the emotion you are feeling.</p> <p>Let them know that they are safe and that you are there to support them.</p> <p>Provide age-appropriate opportunities for the youth to express their feelings. Talking isn’t always the easiest way to express emotions.</p>	<p>“I’m here to listen if you want to talk about it.”</p> <p>“It’s important that you don’t keep your thoughts and feelings inside. I’m here for you.”</p> <p>“It’s okay to talk about and remember the person who died even if it makes you feel sad.”</p> <p>“A person we really care about died and that makes me feel sad too.”</p> <p>“I am crying because I’m going to miss [person’s name]. This is very sad, but we will be okay.”</p> <p>“You can draw a picture about how this news makes you feel if you’d like.”</p>

SECTION 4: RESPONDING TO A STAFF OR STUDENT LOSS IN SCHOOLS (POSTVENTION)

TALKING POINTS	WHAT YOU CAN SAY
<p><b>Normalize all feelings and responses.</b></p> <p>Everyone grieves differently, so you will see a variety of feelings and responses. Some youth may feel sad, guilty, angry, confused, shocked, etc.</p> <p>Explain to youth that every person grieves differently. Encourage them to accept their own emotions about the event and to accept the emotions of their peers without judgment.</p> <p>You may notice youth expressing their feelings in unexpected ways. Some behaviors you might see could include changes in eating or sleeping habits, new or increased clinginess, increased anxiety, or increased agitation. Younger children often primarily behave normally and only show signs of impact in spurts.</p> <p>Validate feelings and redirect aggressive or otherwise problematic behaviors.</p>	<p>“Whatever feelings you are having right now are okay.”</p> <p>“There is no ‘right way’ to feel about this. There is no ‘correct’ reaction. Grief is messy.”</p> <p>“It’s okay to cry.”</p> <p>“It’s okay not to cry.”</p> <p>“We often think our feelings and reactions should ‘make sense’ but the truth is that sometimes the feelings and reactions we have about a loss can feel surprising or unexpected, and that’s normal.</p> <p>“When something sad happens, it’s appropriate to feel sad. We all show our sadness in different ways.”</p> <p>“It’s okay for you to feel angry right now but it’s not okay for you to hit your classmate or throw your pencil.”</p>
<p><b>Encourage help-seeking.</b></p> <p>Encourage youth to seek help from a trusted adult if they or a friend are struggling or having thoughts of suicide.</p> <p>Promote the 988 Suicide &amp; Crisis Lifeline.</p>	<p>“I am always here to help you through any problem, no matter what.”</p> <p>“Who are the people you would go to if you or a friend were feeling worried, depressed, anxious, or had thoughts of suicide?”</p> <p>“You can <b>call or text</b> the number <b>9-8-8</b> at any time for any reason. Counselors through 988 are available 24/7 to help with any mental health crisis. It’s free and confidential.”</p>

SECTION 4: RESPONDING TO A STAFF OR STUDENT LOSS IN SCHOOLS (POSTVENTION)

TALKING POINTS	WHAT YOU CAN SAY
<p><b>Avoid discussion of religious or faith-based beliefs in the school setting.</b></p> <p>Every family has different beliefs about the afterlife, and it's important to allow them to discuss that with their children. Don't make assumptions about what families believe because that will ultimately confuse the youth.</p> <p>Encourage families to meld their faith with facts by incorporating their beliefs into how they talk about death while also clearly and concretely explaining what has happened/is happening/will happen.</p>	<p>Respond to questions from youth by asking them what they think. Don't confirm or deny any faith-based beliefs.</p> <p>"Where do you think they went when they died?"</p> <p>"Does it bring you comfort to think of them that way?"</p> <p>"I'm glad you feel comforted by that thought."</p> <p><b>Example for families:</b> "They died and that means their body isn't alive anymore, but their spirit will always watch over us from heaven."</p>