

## ATTACHMENT 4.01

# GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH THE FAMILY

Representatives from the school should follow the guidelines below when working with the family of the deceased student.

1. Appoint two representatives (administrator and designated school mental health professional) from the school to engage the family.
2. Representatives should reach out to the family via phone call to offer condolences and request an in-person visit (preferably in the family's home, if possible; certainly not at the school). Best practice is to meet as soon as the family is ready and available.
  - a. If the deceased student splits time between two or more households, coordinate to the best of your ability (the District Office might be a neutral ground for meeting jointly).

**If the student died by suicide**, the school must ask for permission from the family to share that information with students and staff during their initial phone call with the family. See the sample script below:

*On behalf of the entire school district, we are so incredibly sorry for your loss. I can't imagine how painful and difficult this has been for you and your family. If there is anything the school can do to support you at this time, or to connect you to the folks who can support you, please let me know without hesitation. I'd like to speak with you about the school's response to [Student's Name] death. We've received guidance from HeadQuarters Kansas, who are the leading experts in suicide prevention for our state, on the best way to support our school community as we all grieve this loss. Many students are already talking about what happened and we are concerned that word is spreading. We know that when a student dies by suicide, the risk for the rest of the school population increases. Because of that, we have a responsibility to take actions that are most protective for our students AND that honor this loss in the most truthful way. We don't want people to engage in spreading*

*rumors that aren't true about [Student's Name] and we also want to ensure that our students have access to the resources and support they need to process and cope. Suicide prevention experts say that the most protective thing we can do at this time is alert students of the death, be transparent that it was a suicide, and provide ongoing support. I understand that this has been an incredibly painful time for your family, and we absolutely want to respect your privacy. For all these reasons, I am asking for your permission to disclose to the school community that [Student's Name] died by suicide.*

### **During the physical visit with the family, the school representatives should:**

- Offer condolences on behalf of the school.
- Inquire about memorial services. Ask if the services will be private or if the family will allow students to attend.
- Ask if the family knows of any students who may be especially impacted so the school can check-in.
- Ask the family if they would like their child's personal belongings returned (items found in student's locker, in-class projects, homework assignments, etc.).
- Give the option to take any school property with you at this time or let them know that you can follow up in a few weeks to return school property (iPad, books, etc.).
- Provide a point-of-contact to the family for any future questions, needs, or concerns.
- Provide resources to family.

### **IMPORTANT RESOURCES**

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- Local mental health services
- Local support groups for suicide-loss
- Grief and loss brochures/materials.