

DO's AND DON'TS FOR MEMORIAL ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING A SUICIDE

Because of the danger of “contagion” (increased suicide ideation, gestures, and attempts following a completed suicide), schools should be careful not to glorify or sensationalize the death in any way. For this reason, it is recommended that the suicide victim not be memorialized at school, as a memorial places the deceased in the position of role model.

- Don't dismiss school or classes for the funeral.
- Don't dedicate a memorial to the deceased.
- Don't have a large school assembly to notify the school community members of a suicide
- Don't fly the flag at half-staff.
- Don't have a moment of silence in all-school assemblies.
- Don't have mass assemblies focusing on the suicide victim.
- Don't make special arrangements to send all students from school to funerals.
- Don't have memorial or funeral services at school.
- Don't put plaques in memory of the suicide victim
- Don't dedicate yearbooks, songs, or sporting events to the person who committed suicide.
- Do something to prevent other suicides from happening.
- Do develop living memorials (e.g. Students Against Violence Everywhere Club (SAVE)) that help other students cope with feelings and problems.
- Do allow any student, with parent permission, to attend the funeral.
- Do encourage affected students, with parental permission, to go to the funeral.
- Do mention to school staff, affected families, and clergy the need to distance the person who committed suicide from survivors and to avoid glorifying the suicidal act.

This “hard-line” position against memorializing suicide victims can be very difficult for schools to follow and explain. Often, students may want a permanent memorial, especially if the suicide victim was popular. In some instances parents also may request a memorial to honor their child. In such situations it may be helpful to mention that this guideline is recommended by the American Association Suicidology and explain why this ban on memorial is necessary (i.e., to prevent suicide “contagion”).