

## GUIDELINES FOR MEMORIALS AT SCHOOL

After a death within the school community, many students and staff feel the need to express their grief, say good-bye, and do something as a memorial. Often this can help survivors focus their grief, fears, and anger constructively. Below are guidelines regarding memorials and related activities at school:

- When planning a memorial, first consider the cause of death and think about what your school has done historically to memorialize students and staff who have died. **In general, a “consumable” gesture (cards/remembrances to the family, donations, etc.) is preferred to any sort of permanent memorial in a prominent location.** Over the years, a permanent memorial for every school community member who died may give your school an unwanted appearance.
- **Instead of permanent memorials, consider activities that students can do as a class or a group** to fulfill their need to remember the deceased. Examples of such activities include:
  - List attributes on a “wall of paper” to be delivered to family after one to two days.
  - Create Memory Books to deliver to family after one to two days.
  - Wear Memory Ribbons for one to two days.
  - Provide information about any donations that can be made in the deceased’s memory to a relevant cause, charity, general scholarship fund, etc.
  - Dedicate a single school event to deceased (e.g., sporting event, a club meeting, or school performance).
  - Collect sympathy cards from students and deliver them to the family.
- **Permanent memorials (planting trees, plaques, yearbook dedications, etc.), if chosen, should be done only after careful consideration and should require the approval of your school’s administration.** Do not rush into the completion of a permanent memorial. Time and emotional distance from the incident often brings insight into the design. Students, along with staff and administration, should be involved in the planning of a permanent memorial, but it is important to establish who will make the final decision.
- **It is suggested that schools do not fly the United States flag at half-staff after a death.** According to the United States Flag code, this honor is generally reserved for Memorial Day observance and for deaths of principal figures of the U.S. and state governments or judiciary and is proclaimed by the president or governor. The president also may order the flag to be flown at half-staff to mark the death of other officials, former officials, or foreign dignitaries. Additionally, the president may order half-staff display of the flag after other tragic events.

- **Do not memorialize deaths by suicide.** Following a suicide, it is important to reduce the chances of anyone else committing suicide by avoiding glamorization of the deceased. Because memorials may reinforce the idea that death is a way to obtain attention, avoiding them completely is recommended (see next section for more details).
- **With exception of deaths by suicide, memorials and related activities need to be implemented consistently to avoid offending or alienating certain members of the school community.** It is very important that the school crisis team discuss the issue of memorials with school administration to implement school-wide guidelines that will carry over from year to year.