

CONNECT SUICIDE PREVENTION PROJECT

# STUDENT / TEEN / YOUNG ADULT FUNERAL MEMORIAL SERVICE

## FAQ'S APPENDIX

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### INTRODUCTION:

For many young people, the suicide of a friend or fellow student will be the first time they have had to attend a wake/viewing or funeral service. Since this is a completely new experience, there are many questions that arise about what to expect or how to act. This protocol is intended to help provide information to teens and is written in a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) format.

#### *Should I attend the wake/funeral?*

Each individual needs to make this decision on their own. People attend the wake or funeral as a way to publicly mourn or grieve the death. It is an opportunity to give support to the family and friends through this difficult period of time. It is also a way for all of us to get support to help us cope with the loss. For many people, attending the wake or funeral makes the death real and provides closure. If you are not sure if you should attend, ask yourself, “*will it help me or hurt me, and will my presence help the family/friends of the deceased?*” Talk with a parent, teacher, or clergy as well as your friends. Let them know what you are thinking and why you think you should or shouldn't attend and ask for their advice.

#### *What happens at a wake or viewing?*

The wake or viewing is an opportunity to pay your respect in a public way to the deceased and his or her family and loved ones. Oftentimes, the family will stand in a line and receive people. The coffin will be present and you may wish to kneel by it and say a prayer or reflect on your memories of the person. After you have greeted the family, you may leave or stay and talk with other mourners. Expect to see a wide range and intensity of emotions, from laughing to crying. Sometimes, the family asks a clergy member or the funeral director to say a brief prayer. Sometimes, as part of the final prayer ceremony, the coffin will be closed.

### ***Do they show the body?***

Depending on the wishes of the family, the body may or may not be displayed. The funeral director uses embalming fluid (to keep it from decomposing) to preserve the body and makeup to prepare it for presentation. The body is then placed in a coffin and the coffin is usually placed at one end of the room surrounded by flowers and/or pictures. If the body is displayed, the coffin will be left open.

### ***How should I dress?***

Your choice of clothes should be tasteful and respectful. Solid and dark colors are a good choice. For boys, a button shirt with a collar or shirt and tie and nice pants would be good. For girls, a conservative dress or skirt and nice blouse or slacks would be appropriate. Avoid t-shirts and jeans, or torn or dirty clothes, or clothes that draw attention to yourself. If you do not have the right clothes, see if you can borrow some from friends. Your presence is more important than how you look or what you wear.

### ***What should I bring?***

You do not need to bring anything. You may wish to bring a favorite picture of your friend, or a single stem rose, or flowers to place on the coffin. You can also bring a sympathy card that expresses your condolences to the family. You can purchase these at a card store or make one yourself. Or, you could write a poem or bring a drawing or picture of the deceased.

### ***How should I act?***

Some wakes/viewings/funerals are very serious and somber occasions. Others are more light-hearted celebrations of life. You can see when you get there how to respond. Be sensitive to the family and respectful of their wishes. Use appropriate language. Do not be afraid to show your sadness or grief or to cry.

### ***What should I do when I get there?***

Many funeral homes station a funeral director near the door to open the door and greet people. They can direct you to the right place and answer any questions you have. There is often a guestbook to sign in. If the family is in a line greeting guests, you should introduce yourself and express your condolences. If you do not feel comfortable approaching the coffin, you can stand in the back or talk with other mourners.

### ***What should I say?***

When you meet the family, you should introduce yourself (you might give them a hug if you are close to them) and tell them how you knew the deceased, e.g. “we were on the soccer team together.” You might simply say “I’m sorry for your loss” or “I will miss \_\_\_\_\_” or you might share a particular story or memory of the person or tell the family what you liked about him or her. Recognize that the family may be in shock, but they will appreciate your presence and support. Some services have a place where people who wish to can take turns speaking about their memories of the deceased. Just being together with people is more important than what you say.

### ***What if I am not religious?***

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You do not have to be religious or share the same religious beliefs as the family in order to attend the wake or the funeral. You do need to be respectful of their religious practices. If there is a religious service, you can watch what other people are doing, stand when they stand, and sit when they sit, etc. If a prayer is being said, just sit or stand quietly and bow your head. If members of the congregation approach the altar for communion, just remain silently in your seat.

***What happens during the funeral service?***

The funeral service might take place in a church, public hall, the funeral home, or at the cemetery. It may be a religious service that is officiated by a clergy member, or the funeral director may direct it. There may be prayers, songs, a eulogy (a speech about the person and their life given by clergy, a friend, or a family member), poems, or other readings or remembrances. After the service, there may be a gathering with food and refreshments at the family home or in a hall.

***Should I call the family or go to their home?***

Depending on your relationship with the family or deceased, you may wish to contact the family before the funeral to offer your condolences and support. If you are close to the family or deceased, you can offer to participate in the service. You might also consider bringing over food or a meal for the family. Ask the family what you can do to help them. This is very helpful for some families. If you are not sure, check with friends, parents, teachers, etc. to get their advice. In the days, weeks, and months after the service, most families deeply appreciate visits and phone calls from their son or daughter's friends.