



## Common Student Reactions & Recommended Staff Response to Suicide

While the emotional responses of students do not occur in a uniform manner, they are somewhat predictable in nature.

Emotional Response	Student Reaction	Staff Response
<b>Shock and Denial</b>	Initially students may appear remarkably unresponsive to the news of a suicide. They find it difficult to accept the reality of the death. "You have to be kidding!"	Staff needs to assume a stance of anticipatory waiting, acknowledging the shock and demonstrating a willingness to talk when students feel ready.
<b>Anger towards others</b>	Students will look for someone to blame. Anger may be directed at adults in the deceased's life, including school staff. "Why did they let it happen?"	Staff members can listen to student feelings. Explaining that blame is a normal reaction to an event that can't be explained is sometimes helpful.
<b>Guilt</b>	Typically students who knew the deceased may move from blaming others to blaming themselves. "If only I had talked to him more."	Staff can help by reminding students about the limits of personal responsibility.
<b>Anger at the Deceased</b>	This is not uncommon, even among those who were not really close to the deceased. "How could he be so stupid to do such a thing?"	Allowing some expression of anger is ameliorative. Staff can point out that feeling angry that someone has chosen to leave us is normal. A simple acknowledgement of this feeling may lessen its intensity.
<b>Anxiety</b>	Students may begin worrying about themselves. "If he could kill himself because he was upset, maybe I (or my friends) could, too."	Discussion should be guided toward helping students differentiate between themselves and the deceased. Problem-solving options and alternatives to suicide can also be introduced.
<b>Loneliness</b>	For those close to the deceased, returning to valued interactions with friends may seem impossible. "Being with my friends seems so empty without him around."	It is important that people not feel alone with their grief. Staff can foster sharing by encouraging students to work together in finding positive ways to help each other move on with their lives.
<b>Hope and Relief</b>	Making it through the normal feelings depends upon an acceptance of the reality of the death and a belief that the pain and hurt will eventually subside. "I know I'll feel better in time."	Staff should recognize both the importance of mourning and the fact that the process takes time. Remaining open to the expression of feelings by student is helpful.