



## **FOR FIRST RESPONDERS: Immediate Response to Loss Survivors after the Death Notification or Once the Investigation has been Conducted**

**Be there and Listen.** It's okay if you don't know what to say. Just say you are sorry. Your calm and supportive presence can be comforting and reassuring. Letting your humanity show will help to ease this difficult situation.

Sometimes first responders are afraid to talk about the loved one because they are worried it will make the survivor emotional. The survivor is already emotional. Many survivors desperately want to talk about their loved one and need to tell their story over and over to someone who can listen patiently.

**Say the person's name.** Don't refer to their loved as "the body". Some people crave hearing their loved one's name. It hurts so much more when no one talks about the person they lost.

**Provide information that is available.** Explain what is going on and what is going to happen next in clear, brief, factual terms. Repeat information if necessary. Do not promise or suggest anything that you cannot guarantee.

**Be prepared for a wide range of physical and emotional reactions.** Have first responders on hand in the event a family member needs medical assistance.

**Identify a point person to be on the scene** who is coherent and can provide assistance and comfort to the loss survivors and take information on their behalf. Utilize the point person for assistance if the survivors are unable to respond.

### **What to Do:**

Ask if they have questions and answer all questions honestly.

Keep the family/friends together if it is safe and provides comfort for them without interfering with procedures. If you must separate them, explain in clear, factual terms what you are doing and why, and ensure that children have the supervision of a responsible adult.

Minimize their exposure to traumatic scenes but keep them in a place that is familiar and comfortable to them.

If there was a suicide note that is blaming or harsh, summarize it for them rather than giving specific quotes. However, if they ask for the note, provide them with a copy or have the point person provide it and sit with them to review it.

*\*In the creation of this protocol, NAMI NH is indebted to the collaboration with Laconia Police Department, Lakes Region Mental Health Center, and Partnership for Public Health.*

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**Things You Might Say:**

“I am so sorry for your loss.”

“Who can I call for you?”

“I will try to answer questions that I can, or get you information you request.”

**Things Not to Say:**

“I know how you are feeling.”

“Be strong.”

“Everything happens for a reason.”

**Protocol for Clean up:** Most suicides occur in the home and loss survivors can be left to deal with the clean up after the body is removed. Cleaning services may be covered by homeowners insurance.

**Before Leaving:** Do not leave loss survivors alone in the home. If they cannot stay in the home, it’s important to help them to find an alternative place to go.

**Provide resources:** Identify a person for them to talk to in helping with their shock and grief, such as a faith leader (note: during business hours, contact NAMI NH for additional loss survivor supports) and/or a grief counselor or emergency services through the community mental health center. Additional resources for loss survivors are available at the Connect Program website. Please offer these to the point person or loss survivor directly as appropriate.

The Connect Program website has resources for loss survivors: [www.theconnectprogram.org/resources](http://www.theconnectprogram.org/resources)

**Longer Term:**

**Consider visiting again in the next few weeks.** If it is possible to make another outreach visit, a follow up contact to show that you care can be very meaningful to the loss survivors. You may also have more information to answer questions and help them process what has happened.

Watch for signs of contagion, such as increased contact with the law or other emergency services by immediate survivors and/or other vulnerable community members, such as youth who were familiar with the deceased. This may indicate that these individuals are at risk. Outreaching to them and/or informing school/parents/the mental health center would be advised, depending on the situation.

**These difficult situations can also have an impact on persons responding. Remember to take care of yourself and seek help as needed.** For more information and resources for suicide loss, go to [www.theconnectprogram.org/resources](http://www.theconnectprogram.org/resources)

