

Contact with the Family of the Deceased

Parental distress is great and parents may be understandably reluctant to discuss the death of their child with a person unknown to them. Therefore, it is important that, if possible, the designated contact person be someone with whom they are familiar (e.g. principal, classroom teacher).

When you contact the family by phone, you would first express the sympathy of yourself and your staff. In this initial conversation, you may or may not be able to confirm the details concerning the death. You may wish to offer to call again at a later time to see if the school community could be of assistance. It is more important to establish clearly the wishes of the family concerning the school's involvement. If you have procedures you intend to follow, indicate these to the parents. Invite their involvement if appropriate. Leave a number where you can be reached. In some situations, it may be necessary to confirm that a death has occurred.

Sample Language for Call to Family

Death of Student or Staff

- This call needs to centre on caring for the family and their needs.
- "I wondered what we could do to help you during this difficult time..."
- "It is not easy for me to call you but I wanted you to know that we at the school are thinking of you..."
- "We've been thinking about you and wondered what we here at school can do to help..."
- "Perhaps if we give the students some information that may stop some of them from calling you directly unless you want to hear from them..."

Rumours, Verification of Death or Accident

- "Some of the students arrived at school with some rumours about Sally and we wanted to check them with you..."

- “We wondered how you would like us to handle this with staff and students and what information you would be comfortable having us share...”
- “We’d like to be supportive of you and we don’t want to do anything to upset the family...”