

Sudden Death/Suicide Protocol for CVMBS

Step One: Notify the Argus Institute staff at the VTH and Lori Kogan in the Dean's Office upon learning of a college-related death.

It is very helpful for the Argus Institute staff and Dr. Lori Kogan to be notified prior to the general announcement of a death. Anyone who is likely to be in a counseling role is then available and prepared to deal with peoples' shock and grief.

Step Two: A member of the Argus Institute staff composes a college-wide announcement, sends it to Dean's office for review and edits, and distributes it college-wide.

Research and clinical experience tell us that there are certain words and phrasing that are more effective than others when delivering sad news. For example, when the death is caused by suicide, the research shows there may be a "contagion effect" and that the words should be chosen very carefully. The Argus Institute staff will consult with appropriate experts and take the time necessary to compose such an announcement. This task will be the first priority for that day. The Dean will have final say regarding the wording of the announcement.

Step Three: As appropriate, the Argus Institute staff and/or Lori Kogan organizes and facilitates memorial gatherings, debriefing meetings, and referrals. When appropriate, the Argus Institute and/or Lori Kogan provides follow-up for grievors.

Memorial gatherings, question and answer sessions, debriefing meetings, and referrals are important components of the grief process. Debriefing sessions sometimes include several different meetings with those who have been most affected by the death. Occasionally, a member of the Argus Institute staff or Lori Kogan may want or need to speak directly with alumni and others who contact the college in search of information or support.

Step Four: If it is appropriate and budgets allow, the Dean's office will make arrangements to send flowers or a suitable condolence to the funeral and/or to the family of the deceased on behalf of the College.

The Dean's office should notify the Argus Institute staff about whether or not flowers or some type of condolence will be sent to the funeral on behalf of the College. This information will be included in the initial notification memo to faculty, staff, and students. Grievors are often comforted when they know they are included in a symbolic overture of concern and care. Information about flowers or condolences will also prevent numerous calls of inquiry to the Dean's office and duplicate condolences.

Step Five: If it is determined that CSU should play a role in notifying classmates or colleagues of the deceased, a letter should be drafted and signed by a classmate or colleague and delivered to the Development Director's office for mailing.

The Development Director's staff can request a current mailing list, copy the letter, and either facilitate any memorial fund-raising efforts that classmates or colleagues may want to instigate as a result of the notification or redirect them to the proper resource.

Lagoni/Perryman et. al. Adopted as of November 20, 2002. To be reviewed and revised annually.