

Pre-hospital protocol takes RTS practice beyond hospital walls

RTS pre-hospital bereavement protocol materials were developed in partnership with Gundersen Tri-State Ambulance of La Crosse, WI. Emergency personnel are provided with little to no bereavement training. This can cause them to feel helpless and unprepared when supporting survivors at the scenes of fatal incidents. During these times, the actions taken by emergency personnel can have lasting impacts—positive or negative—on survivors.

To address this issue, Tri-State and RTS established a protocol that provides responding personnel with bereavement education, tools to use in the field, and support materials to present to the bereaved.

RTS Pre-Hospital Bereavement Protocol includes the following:

Online Modules

Communicating With the Bereaved: Responders fear not knowing what to say when providing support to the bereaved. In the RTS module *Communicating With the Bereaved*, learn what to say and what to do when interacting with those grieving at the scenes of fatal incidents.

Memory-Making and Ritual: Ritual can be co-created in a matter of seconds with things that can be found in the immediate environment. In the RTS module *Memory-Making and Ritual*, learn the importance of keepsakes, memorials, and rituals for the bereaved when a loved one dies. Ritual can also facilitate healing and resiliency for personnel.

Guided Participation: A Method of Teaching and Learning: How do you help somebody in shock understand the importance of what you have to provide? How do you learn what matters to them most in these moments? Guided Participation supports relationship-based care and practice. In the RTS module *Guided Participation: A Method of Teaching and Learning*, learn what makes guided participation an essential framework for every interaction.

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Pre-Hospital Bereavement Support Folder

Tools for Responders

- **Bereavement Support Checklist:** The checklist ensures the protocol is met and care is standardized. As per the protocol, responders are asked to sign a sympathy card and fill out a page with contact information. Once the checklist is complete, it is retained for data collection.
- **Guided Participation Sample Scripts:** These scripts are intended to guide responders in their conversations with the bereaved. Using guided participation, the scripts are written to empathically introduce the support materials.

Support Materials for the Bereaved

- **"With Deepest Sympathy" brochure:** This brochure covers topics such as next steps, sharing the news with others, and honoring the one who has died. It also provides the bereaved with contact information of responding agencies.
- **"With Deepest Sympathy" card:** Signed by the responding staff, this card may be an important memento for those grieving.
- **Letter template from responding agency:** The letter explains the significance of the resources found in the folder and expresses sympathy on behalf of the agency.
- **"When Someone You Love Dies Unexpectedly" booklet:** This booklet provides readers with caring insights, practical suggestions, and words from others who have unexpectedly lost a loved one. Topics include performing final acts of caregiving, facing unique issues, coming to terms, caring for self, caring for others, and making meaning.
- **"Understanding Grief" brochure:** This brochure discusses the different ways grief can affect individuals—physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Topics include searching and yearning, understanding the journey, and hope.
- **"Resource Booklet:"** Focused on general grief, this resource is easy to read and appropriate for many. Topics include common grief responses, complicated grief, coping with the holidays, and helping children through loss.

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Additional Information

Not included in the folder but also available if needed is the booklet "[Understanding Suicide: You Are Not Alone](#)." It provides those grieving a death by suicide with information on understanding suicide, including language, stigma, possible factors and conditions, and challenges survivors face.

To learn more about the RTS pre-hospital protocol, read "[Gundersen Tri-State Ambulance in Wisconsin Offers Bereavement Support Tools for EMS](#)" in the Journal of Emergency Medical Services.