



For Immediate Release

Contact: Chris Davis 805/687-3322

Recent Deaths among their Peers Brings Confusion and Fear to Santa Barbara Youth

Hospice of Santa Barbara Provides Guidance and Advice for Community

March 28, 2007, Santa Barbara, CA—Most teens and pre-teens consider death to be something that happens to “old people” and so they keep death at some distance from their consciousness or thoughts for their future. As a result, young people may at times seem quite blasé and almost callous upon hearing the news of a death of someone who is not close to them. On the other hand, the death of a peer interrupts the assumed remoteness of death; understanding and accepting the death of another young person is particularly difficult.

Hospice of Santa Barbara has been dealing with issues related to recent high profile deaths of young Santa Barbarans. Part of what Hospice of Santa Barbara provides is outreach to schools—both staff and students—to help provide information about expectations and potential signs of stress and anxiety in children—and directly addressing these issues with classmates and friends of the deceased.

Over the past months our community has been confronted with suicides, traffic accidents, violence, and military-related deaths of our young people. Each kind of death has its own particular set of reactions and feelings, and young people react in their own unique ways as well.

“While Santa Barbara may not experience a higher percentage of death among our youth than any other city, when we do experience it, it reverberates very strongly throughout the community. The fact that Santa Barbara is a tight-knit and relatively small town makes all deaths feel, especially those of our young people, extremely personal,” said Gail Rink, Executive Director of Hospice of Santa Barbara.

Symptoms of grief are natural but they should be monitored. These include:

- Numb feelings
- Denial
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Anger
- Fear
- Feeling of going crazy
- Sleep/diet issues
- Physical symptoms
- Depression

Impacts of grief may take on many forms that should also be monitored:

- Psychological isolation
- Blaming others
- Hostility
- Conduct problems
- Risk-taking behavior
- Substance abuse
- Eating disorders
- Headaches
- Psychosomatic disorders
- Abdominal discomfort
- Academic problems
- Suicidal thoughts

Tips to help:

- Provide a safe environment for sharing feelings
- Temporarily lower your expectations
- Encourage talk, but do not force it
- Ask them what they need
- Listen
- Normalize feelings
- Provide alternative means of expression such as writing, art, music, etc.
- Encourage physical exercise
- Maintain routines as much as possible
- Identify those at greater risk

Hospice of Santa Barbara provides **free grief counseling services for anyone in our community**. They also have a wide-ranging program for kids and teens. For more information about the programs of Hospice of Santa Barbara please call 563-8820 or visit www.hospiceofsantabarbara.org

The mission of Hospice of Santa Barbara, Inc. is to provide care to anyone experiencing the impact of a life-threatening illness, or grieving the death of a loved one.

-xxx-