

KinderMourn

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What Bereaved Students Need from their Teachers

What to do:

- Be a good listener: avoid the temptation to give advice or make judgments. Allow the bereaved student to talk about the death and about his/her reactions. Reflect back what you have heard the student say and be willing to sit in silence.
- Follow your usual classroom routines. This structure provides comfort in its predictability. Most likely, the child will go along with the class activities, but be sensitive to the need to modify classroom expectations. Demonstrate thoughtfulness by reducing the volume of work expected from the grieving student.
- Acknowledge the death, invite communication about it and express that you care.
- Talk about the person who died and tolerate the student's sharing of memories. Don't be hesitant to say the deceased's name.
- Acknowledge how difficult it must be to return to school.
- Recognize that the student may have difficulty concentrating on work.
- Allow the student to leave the classroom when he/she needs some quiet time alone or needs to talk to someone.
- Make sure the student has an adult to talk to during the day if needed such as the school counselor.
- Avoid statements such as "you'll get over it," or "he is in a better place" as these can be confusing and intimidating for a child to hear even if not meant that way.
- Incorporate activities into the classroom that foster awareness of feelings, self-care, death education and related topics.
- Model that feelings are natural and universal. Support the student by letting them know that feelings are neither good or bad, but are real and are to be expected.

What NOT to do:

- Do not treat the student as if nothing has happened.
- Do not expect the student to be “done” grieving within a certain time period. Dealing with grief takes time and effort and has no time frame. Avoid statements such as “It’s time to move on.”
- Do not say “I know how you feel” because even if you have experienced a loss before, you cannot surmise to share this same experience.
- Do not say “things could be worse,” or “At least he is not suffering anymore.”
- Don’t try to take away or deny the student’s pain and unpleasant feelings.

What to expect from bereaved students:

- Decreased concentration in the classroom and in quality of work.
- Increased sleepiness and moodiness.
- Unexpected (and sometime strong) outbursts of grief in response to a trigger that reminds the student of the deceased or the loss.
- Expressions of sorrow, anger, hopelessness, confusion, guilt and other feelings.
- Reactions/sensitivity around significant dates such as the anniversary of the death, a birthday (theirs or that of the one who died) or holidays.

**For more information or guidance on supporting your school community,
please call KinderMourn during office hours: 704.376.2580.**