

**April 2019 2017April**

**Supporting Students Through Grief:**

Teacher Resource Package



**Childhood Bereavement**

"Anyone old enough to love is old enough to mourn." Alan Wolfelt

Overview of Childhood Children and Loss

* Grief is a natural response to loss.
* Everyone grieves in his/her own way. There is no real "right' or "wrong" way to

grieve.

* Grief lasts longer than most people imagine.
* Children grieve in ways that are similar, yet distinct, from the way adults grieve.
* There are no distinct stages that one passes through. The process is fluid and

can be transformative.

* Grief begins with loss. There is a period of shock and denial, followed by

confusion and painful feelings before healing and growth finally occurs.

* When in doubt, ask a child or teen what helps. He or she will tell you.

Children and Adults Grieve Differently

* A child's world is primarily a world of play. Play is the natural medium of expression for children. Encourage and give opportunities for play during this

critical time.

* A child mourns in doses or on an intermittent basis - often in shorter and more intense spurts than adults.
* Cognitive development affects a child's capacity to integrate the finality,

inevitability, and irreversibility of death.

* Children are more at the mercy of those around them for help or hindrance.
* Children, especially teens, do not want to be different from their peers.
* Sometimes, children suppress grief in an attempt to create stability in the home

and not upset other family members.

Common Characteristics of Childhood Bereavement

* Impulsivity
* Distractibility
* Hyperactivity
* Inability to concentrate

Ways Children's Behaviour can be Misinterpreted

* Reacting inappropriately
* Taking too long in their grief
* Not wanting or needing help
* Acting strange, different and or/distant

Creating a Supportive Environment: What a Bereaved Child Needs

* A sense of safety - physically and emotionally
* To experience some control over their world by being included in age-

appropriate ways

* Choices. It is a meaningful and important experience for children to have the

opportunity to say goodbye to the person who died in ways that feel right to them. By allowing choices, we help them regain some of the sense of control they have lost after the death.

* To be with friends
* To be with grieving peers
* To find out and tell the story in their own way
* To gradually learn the language of feelings and how to express them
* To have some age-appropriate strategies for experiencing, expressing, and

managing stressful thoughts and feelings

* To know that worries and regrets are inevitable
* To have access to adults who can tolerate their pain and confusion
* To believe that their relationship to the person who died is changed, but is not

over

* To take care of themselves
* To have help with identifying individual needs and how to have them met
* To be their own age and have fun

## Important Concepts about Dealing with Grief and Mourning

Definition of Grief: Grief is the internal thoughts and feelings one experiences when someone loved dies.

Definition of Mourning: Mourning is the outward expression of grief. Mourning is necessary for healing to take place.

The Six Needs of Mourning

1. Acknowledge the reality of the death.
2. Feel the pain of the loss.
3. Remember the person who has died.
4. Develop a new self-identity.
5. Search for meaning.
6. Receive ongoing support from caring adults.

**Adapted from:**

Marlene Jackson, M.Ed., MTA (2010). Children Grieve Too: An Overview of Childhood Bereavement. Greystone Bereavement Centre.

35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child (2004). The Dougy Centre for Grieving Children

**A Guide for Staff for Supporting Children Responding to Loss**

# Ages 3-5

Preschool students may

View death as temporary and/or reversible.

* May show regression or loss of recently acquired developmental milestones (e.g., cling to parents and worry about parents' safety and return, thumb-sucking,

baby talk or simpler speech, lose potty training, or increases in bed-wetting)

* Express grief through behaviour and not words (e.g., increased irritability, temper tantrums, difficulty calming down)
* May become very withdrawn, subdued, or even mute after a critical incident
* Difficulty falling asleep. May experience bad dreams or nightmares about the

incident

* Changes in normal patterns of sleeping or eating
* May ask questions about death repeatedly
* Take words literally (e.g., "sleeping," "gone away," may be confusing if related to

death). They may not understand their new, scary feelings or be able to verbalize them

* Preschool students will process the critical incident through post-traumatic play

re-enacting the death.

Ways to Support Pre-School Students

* Provide them with words for their feelings: sad, mad numb, glad, angry, etc.
* Be honest and don't tell half-truths. Answer concretely and lovingly.
* Death play is fine and helps children integrate the reality of the death.
* You may want to join in and offer your guidance.
* Short-term regressive behaviours are normal.
* Offer your presence and support.

# Ages 6-11

Elementary students may

Develop a clearer understanding of death.

* Show signs of distress through somatic complaints (e.g., stomachaches, headaches & pains)
* Act out because they do not know how else to handle their grief feelings (e.g.,

change in behaviour such as increase irritability, aggression, and anger)

* Show a change in school performance and have impaired attention and concentration and more school absences
* Have fascination with death
* Not know how to ask the questions (embarrassed)
* Talk excessively and ask persistent questions about the incident D Start to worry

about their own welfare and the welfare of others

* Feel self-conscious about their emotional responses to the incident D Act like nothing has happened
* Seek out ways to self-soothe as they experience sadness and confusion
* Feel shame and guilt about the incident and express fantasies about revenge and retribution
* In late childhood, children may experience a loss of innocence which can arise from

feeling the world is unfair or feeling that their thoughts and concerns are different than their peers

Ways to Support Grade School Students

* Children need to concentrate on mourning before they can be expected to forge ahead with the rest of their lives.
* Involve them in art, music, writing, and other activities that allow them to express themselves.
* Give them time.
* Offer constructive 'venting' alternatives.
* Encourage them to get involved in support groups.

## Ages 12 and up

Adolescent students may

Understand death cognitively, but are only beginning to grapple with it spiritually.

* Experience their grief as embarrassing & overwhelming as they do not want to seem different than their peers
* Experience ambivalence and give mixed messages regarding support D Foster a

radical shift in the way they think about the world

* Engage in high risk behaviour (e.g., self-destruction, accident-prone, or reckless)
* Shift their interpersonal relationships with family members, teachers and

classmates withdraw (long-term withdrawal is a sign the teen needs extra help)

* Show a change in school performance, attendance, and behaviour

Ways to Support Adolescents

* Acting out behaviours should be tolerated if the teen or others are not being harmed. Withdrawal is normal in the short-term.
* A teen’s normal egocentrism can cause him/her to focus exclusively on the effect the death has his/her future. After time has seen given to explore the issue, encourage him/her to consider the death's impact on a larger social group: family, friends, etc.
* Teens begin to explore the 'why' questions about life and death. Encourage this search for meaning unless it may harm the teen or others.

**Adapted from:**

Marlene Jackson, M.Ed., MTA (20 I 0). Children Grieve Too: An Overview of Childhood Bereavement. Greystone Bereavement Centre.

Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., C.T. (June 2, 2012) Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Grief Sponsored by Greystone Bereavement Centre, Moose Jaw, SK.

**My Grief Rights: For Kids**

* + I have the right to have my own unique feelings about death.
  + I have the right to talk about my grief whenever I feel like talking.
  + I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way.
  + I have the right to need other people to help me with my grief, especially

grown-ups who care about me.

* + I have the right to get upset about normal, everyday problems.
  + I have the right to have “grief bursts”
  + I have the right to use my beliefs to help me deal with my feelings of grief.
  + I have the right to try to figure out why the person I loved died.
  + I have the right to think and talk about my memories of the person who died.
  + I have the right to move toward and feel my grief and, over time, to heal.

**Adapted from:**

Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD. (2001). Healing a Child's Grieving Hear - JOO Practical Ideas: For Families, Friends and Caregivers. Companion Publishers, Fort Collins, CO.

**Guidelines for Teachers Informing Students and Dealing with Death:**

Do's/Don'ts

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| **Do’s** | **Don’ts** |
| Feel comfortable asking for help. This experience need not be handled alone. | Don't force a child to participate in a discussion about death. |
| Develop an environment in which students feel safe to ask questions, and confident of receiving an  honest answer. | Never link suffering and death with guilt or punishment. |
| Use correct terminology related to death. Use  "died," not "He is sleeping." Avoid euphemisms such as "passed away", etc. | Don't be judgmental; don't lecture It's all too tempting to make a point or moralize. |
| Listen and empathize. Make sure you hear what is said and not what you think the student ought to  have said. | Don't say "I know how you feel" unless you truly do. |
| Allow the students to express raw feelings freely or encourage them to ask questions. Allow them to express as much grief as they are able or willing to share with you. Caution: Over-dramatizing by students should be discouraged and down played. If a student is over-emotional, call an administrator since the student may need to be with his/her  parents. | Don't force a "regular day" upon grieving students. At the same time don't allow the class to be totally unstructured. Offer choices of activities, (e.g., open-ended sentence starters, cloze procedures, letters, journals, and stories with follow-up discussions). |
| Say "I don't know" when you don't know. Answer questions honestly and simply. Do not go into detail, unless asked. Offer only as much detailed information as is requested. | Don't assume that children who are laughing, playing, giggling, etc. are not grieving. Children experience grief in doses over time, unlike adults who may feel intense grief periods for longer  extensions of time. |
| Share your own feelings and tell about your own  memories of the student, but don't idealize the dead student. | Don't feel you must handle this alone. Ask for help. |
| Recognize that classroom routines and  management may be disrupted. This is natural. Be flexible. | Don't expect "adult responses" from children and  teenagers. Their grief responses may seem inappropriate to you (e.g., giggling). |
| Maintain a sympathetic attitude toward the student's age-appropriate responses. Be prepared  for a strong reaction. | Don't assume every child in a certain age group understands death the same way or has the same  feelings. |
| If appropriate, organize activities that will allow students to tangibly express their grief (e.g., cards, letters using cloze procedures or open-  ended sentence starters, drawings, class murals, etc.). | Don't assume that grief is an event and after the funeral, grieving is done. Grief is a process, not an event. Children, like adults, will grieve long after the  person has died. No one gets over grief. Instead, we learn to live with it. |
| Tell children what will be happening in the next few days (until the memorial service or funeral, if  applicable.) | Don't assume that children always grieve in some kind of orderly and predictable stages. |
| Reassure students that he or she will be cared for and explain the plan. | Don't force others to look for something positive in the situation. |
| Believe in the student's capacity to heal. With lots of support, students cannot only integrate the loss, they can grow as a result of it. | Don't view older students as being so independent and separating themselves from adults that they don't seem to want or need help. In fact, they especially need love and support and need reminders that it is okay to feel the many emotions  they feel and to talk or not talk about those emotions. |

**Guidelines for Teachers Informing Students and Dealing with Death:**

Words that Help vs. Words that Hurt

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| --- | --- |
| **Words That Can Help** | **Words That Can Hurt** |
| Offering support to a grieving child can begin but may need to be repeated day after day with a simple statement or open-ended question conversation starters including: | The following are a few of the potentially harmful comments that are often offered to children grieving the loss of a parent. Some are theologized clichés/expressions that tend  to minimize the mourner's loss and need to mourn. |
| I'm sorry.  I'm sorry your mom/dad/sister died. | I know just how you feel.  I know just how you feel, my pet died last year. |
| What was your dad/mom/brother like? | She/he wouldn't have wanted vou to be sad. |
| Tell me about your | You'll get over it. |
| What do you miss the most? | It will be okay. |
| What is the hardest part for you? | Don't think about it. |
| What is the hardest part of the day for you? | You are better off without him. |
| I cannot know how you feel, but I remember how I felt when my died. | Don't cry. |
| I care. I am thinking about you. | It's your fault. |
| I want to help. I am here for you. | Forget about it. |
| You are important to me. | You are the man/woman of the house now. |
| I'm thinking of you and praying for you every day. | You should feel... (proud, relieved, happy, sad, etc.) |
| I want you to know that I miss too. | Give it time. Keen busy. |
| Is there anything I can do in the classroom to  help? Would it help if l… | Be strong. |
| Is there anything in the classroom you would like to change to feel more comfortable? | Now she's in a better place. |
| Would you like to talk about it? | This is a blessing. |
| I'm available at this time, if you would like to come by to talk. | Now you have an angel in heaven. |
| I'm thinking about you especially today because I'm aware that today is your  mother's birthday (anniversary of the death, your birthday, etc.). | At least he/she didn't suffer. |
| I'm here if you want to talk, or just spend  time together if you don't want to talk. | God only gives you what you can handle. |
| You must be having a lot of feelings right now. | It was God's will. |

Adapted from:

Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD. (2001) Healing a Child's Grieving Heart- JOO Practical Ideas: For Families, Friends and Caregivers Companion Publishers, Fort Collins, CO.

Ogden E.H and Germinaro, V. (1988) The At-Risk Student: Answers for Educators. Lancaster, Pa. Technomic Publishing Co., Inc. Mary M. Lyles, MSW, LCSW (2004). Children's Grief Education Association

**Suggested Class Discussion Guidelines**

(Script Follows)

School is a place where learning takes place, where it is safe to ask questions and obtain factual information. Adults frequently attempt to insulate children from the realities of death or other tragic events. A teacher's expression of sorrow in class conveys to students that strong emotions are natural and that mourning does not have to be hidden away. When students are allowed to grieve in a supervised setting, they can have the comfort and reassurance they need which will serve them well when they must deal with subsequent trauma-related situations. Depending on the age of your students, this process should only take a maximum of 30 minutes. This is not therapy. The teacher is the instructional leader of the classroom. He/she sets the tone for recovery. Monitor students to determine if they require further support and refer as needed. Counsellor and/or family support follow-up may be necessary for some or all of the students and teacher, depending on the situation. Classroom teachers may request that a counsellor carry out some or all of the classroom discussion, as needed.

Advice for Teachers

The following general principles can be helpful when working with students of all ages:

* Advise class of incident and acknowledge the reality of the tragic event and
* your willingness to talk.
* Be simple and straightforward. Explain all known facts in a concrete, clear and accurate manner.
* Express your own feelings in an open, calm way which encourages students to
* express their own grief or fear. Some students choose not to talk. The discussion of the event strikes them as a source of more pain or fear and some have a hard time verbalizing their feelings. These students should not be pressured to talk. Create a climate where asking is acceptable.
* Allow for discussion questions and answers. Answer questions as simply as

possible. Only offer as much information as needed to satisfy the questions raised. If required, address rumours/speculations and clarify student perceptions.

* Provide information Re: funeral arrangements, if applicable
* Memory box/framed photo of the deceased placed on desk. Invite students to
* Place cards, drawings, notes, special memories of the deceased, letters to the deceased or their family, etc.
* Cards, flowers, visit to family, etc. (if appropriate)
* How to approach the bereaved siblings or parents (family of deceased).
* Identify the range of individual expressions of grief (e.g., crying, verbalizing,

hugging, expressions of anger and denial).

* Be aware of cultural differences in manners of grieving.
* Project confidence and calmness. Be encouraging and reassuring. Listen. Acknowledge the loss or fear and have a non-judgmental attitude.
* Be patient. Many times, because of their need for reassurance, young children

will repeat the same questions. Repetitions of this sort are part of the normal grieving process.

* Be prepared for any student who may feel the need to discuss unpleasant

features of the relationship. Anger directed toward the deceased person is one of many normal responses to loss. Students who may have had recent conflict with the deceased may be particularly affected.

* Be aware of high-risk students and pay close attention to them. Assess the

meaning of the loss for each child.

* Expect regressive behaviors such as fear of being left alone. Expect physical

complaints such as stomach aches and headaches.

* Be aware that both children and adults find it natural to show their empathy during grieving through physical contact such as hugging or touching on the arm.
* If there is media involvement, discuss this with students and ensure they

understand that they should not allow the media to pressure them into responses.

* Ensure students are supervised at all times. "Pockets" of grieving students should be directed to location of support personnel.
* Discuss positive coping strategies:
  + Physical exercise
  + Talk feelings out with family and friends
  + Normal routine
  + Participate in favourite activities Eat well and get plenty of rest
  + Accept that everyone grieves in their own way and that there is no right way to do this. Encourage students to be respectful to one another and prepared for those that need to express their feelings. Acknowledge some people may cry or feel sadness while others may not.
* Identify and refer students who may require extra counselling to the support rooms. Have someone accompany the student to the support rooms, if needed
* Allow students to call home if they want to speak to their parents. Some may need to go home.
* Re-establish classroom routine and maintain the teaching and learning.

**The Class Discussion**

(Sample Script)

There is no right way to talk about death or other tragic event. The following is only an example to guide your class discussions.

Beginning Script

* Script: "Something very sad has happened. Tracey Stewart, a Grade 6 student, has

died in a car accident. This kind of sad news is hard to accept. You will probably have many feelings in the next while. You could be sad, angry, confused, depressed, afraid or have no feelings at all for some time. When I've felt like this, it has helped me to talk to someone. Sharing my feelings made it easier, although not less painful, to deal with the tragedy. If you'd like to talk about the situation, I'd be glad to take time to do that. I'll try to answer any questions as well as I can."

Responding

* Acknowledge that a wide variety of feelings are normal. There is no one right way to react to a tragic event. Feelings will vary from student to student and will change

over time.

* Some possible responses include: "Some of you feel angry that Laurie died. What can you do with your angry feelings?"
* "It's ok that some of you are very scared or angry as a result of hearing about the fire

at the elementary school, and some of you are only a little sad or scared."

* "Because Laurie died, you may be reminded of another person you cared for who has died."
* "It's ok to forget Laurie sometimes when you work and play."
* "It's ok to cry. It's all right."
* Acknowledge that you don't have all the answers. Often there is more comfort from

an honest, "I don't know why," than from explanations that don't sound credible.

* Acknowledge the various cultural beliefs that may be expressed.

Concluding

* Focus on the strengths and supports the students have to get the help they need:
  + The support that comes from sharing feelings of grief or fear with others
  + The student's support network, such as family, significant adults, teachers
  + The student's individual strengths which provide self-support.
* Talk about the natural healing process. "Over time the pain of missing Laurie

won't hurt so much. That's the way it should be. It doesn't mean that you loved Laurie any less."

* "Class is almost over, and it seems there's more to talk about. We can set aside

some time tomorrow."

* Provide information to the students about the designated support room and how to access this support from counsellors. "The support room is where you can go to talk about your feelings. The support room will be located in the office and is available for the morning or the day (as provided). You can use this center whenever you like. Please let me know if you would like to go and talk with one of our counsellors. The people there want to help you. They will listen to our feelings and concerns."
* Remember the person who has died. It is helpful to channel the feelings of the

class into appropriate expressions of concern. It may provide comfort for students to feel they have participated in some meaningful activities to express their feelings and reach out to grieving families affected by the tragic event.

Teachers will need to use their own judgment to guide the appropriateness of student activities. The activities may need to be cleared with the school administrator or counsellor.

Statements to Avoid

* Avoid euphemisms for death such as 'passed away,' 'gone,' or 'went to sleep,' which may confuse or frighten the child.
* Avoid the general statement, "If you need anything, tell me." It would be better to

say, "Would it help if l ..."

* Avoid saying, "I know just how you feel." It is more empathetic to say, "You must be having a lot of feelings right now ..."
* Avoid blaming or judging

**Suggested Classroom Activities after a Loss**

Grief is the internal thoughts and feelings one experiences when someone loved dies. Mourning is the outward expression of grief. Mourning is necessary for healing to take place.

These activities are meant to help teachers and students to put compassion into action during this difficult time. Here are practical recommendations for spending time with and actively supporting grieving students. Children often mourn through their behaviours, including their play, than they do through words. Play is often a child's normal, natural healing response to death. It is critical for students to mourn by getting involved in actions that help them to deal with their feelings of grief.

* + Placing a memory box or a type of collection box in the class on the deceased

desk (if appropriate) for notes, letters, drawings to be later given to the family

* + Creating a class mural or banner of the deceased name and decorating and

displaying it

* + Designating and creating a collage or a bulletin board in memory
  + Reading stories, poems, and books to the class and having follow-up discussions

about their response to them

* + Purchasing a special book and designing a label with condolences from the classroom or school to be given to the family
  + Purchasing a special book and commemorating it with the deceased name and

donating it to the school library in memory or placing it on the school altar for a period of time

* + Discussing and preparing children for funeral (what to expect, people's reactions,

what to do, what to say)

* + Having the students or class create a keepsake book about special memories of

the deceased using photos, music, drawings, stories, titles, quotes, etc.

* + Creating a slideshow or a power point presentation of a special book and/or photos of the deceased and schoolmates to be later shown at a memorial service
  + Directing energy to creative art pursuits, physical exercise, or verbal expression

when intense emotion arises

* + Encouraging young children to write a note to them and place in a helium balloon to be released at a memorial service
  + Writing a eulogy
  + Designing a yearbook page commemorating the deceased
  + Honoring the deceased by collecting memorabilia for the trophy cabinet
  + Investigating laws governing similar incidents
* Creating a sculpture or other art forms using pounding, rolling, squeezing

techniques

* Discussing ways to cope with traumatic situations
* Discussing the stages of grief and remind students that there is no specific order

that people go through each of the stages

* Starting a new school activity such as SADD unit if a child was killed by a drunk

Driver

Encouraging students to keep a journal of events and of their reactions, especially in an ongoing situation

* Discussing alternatives for coping with depression, if suicide is involved
* Analyzing why people take drugs and suggesting ways to help abusers, if

substance abuse related

**Adapted from**

Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD. (2001) Healing a Child's Grieving Heart. JOO Practical Ideas: For Families, Friends and Caregivers. Companion Publishers, Fort Collins, CO.

Suni Petersen &Ron Straub (1992) School Crisis Survival Guide: Management Techniques and Materialsfor Counsellors and Administrators. Center for Applied Research in Education

**First Day Ideas for Classroom Use**

### Activity 1: Special Letter

Your special person may have died before you had a chance to say everything that was in your heart.

Dear '

I remember when you... It was fun when we ... You were...

It would have been nice if. .. I wish we had.. . Thank you for...

Signed

### Activity 2: Journal Writing: Open-Ended Statements Finish the following sentences:

* If I could talk to the person who died I would say...
* Since the death, my family doesn't ...
* One thing that I liked to do with the person who died was...
* When the person died, I ...
* Since the death, my friends ...
* After the death, school...
* When I am alone...
* If we had one more day together, I would...

### Activity 3: Commemorating a Special Life:

* My favorite memory was when...
* I am happy that we had a chance to...
* I wish we could have...
* I remember laughing together when…
* A legacy that left me is ...

### Activity 4: Supports in my Life

A healthy support system is important, especially while we are grieving. This list may help identify who is there for you and what things give you energy. Fill in the information.

**People Who Care about Me:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Family |  |
| Teachers: |  |
| Friends: |  |
| Neighbours: |  |
| Counsellors: |  |

**Interests Important to Me**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| School related: |  |
| Sports: |  |
| Arts/Crafts: |  |
| Music: |  |
| Groups/Organizations/Clubs: |  |
| Other: |  |

**Things Important to Me**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Pets: |  |
| Memorabilia (Pictures, Special Items): |  |

**People I could Add to this List to Strengthen my Network**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |

### Activity 5: Memory Paper

Materials: Butcher paper & Markers

Procedure:

1. Have a long white butcher paper spread out in a hallway or on long tables in the library or classroom.
2. Have coloured markers spread out along the paper.
3. Explain that our memories are important to hold on to after our classmate or teacher has died and sometimes it makes us feel better to make a physical representation of those memories.
4. Allow each student to decorate the paper. They can draw pictures, write words, make a memory text box and write about a special memory, draw symbols, or decorate their own name.
5. When the students are done, ask the class if they would like to display the "Memory Mural" in the classroom or school for a determined period of time. It may be used at the memorial service or given to the family at a later date, if suitable.

### Activity 6: Classroom Memory Box

Materials:

A large box that could be purchased from a craft store that is already decorated or could be made by the students and decorated.

1. Explain to students that we all have so many memories of the student or teacher that died that sometimes we are afraid we will forget those memories. If we write them down, find things that remind us of the person that died, and find a place where we can store these physical memories, we will never forget the person. Discuss whether the class would like to have the memory box given to the grieving family to support them.
2. Show the students the box and tell them that they have the opportunity to make a classroom memory box for the student or teacher who died. Place the memory box on the desk for a time period (e.g., until the date of the memorial service or funeral, if applicable).
3. Have the students place letters, memories, drawings, or other items that they have created at home or at school that they wish to be placed in the memory box and later given to the family.
4. The memory box may be given to the family at a later date.

**Activities adapted from:**

Mary Kelly Perschy (2004). Helping Teens Work Through Grief (Second Edition). Brunner• Routledge, New York, NY.

**When a Student Returns to School after a Family Death**

When a student returns to school after experiencing the loss of a parent or sibling, it can be uncomfortable for both the student and the rest of the class. If possible allow the student to get settled as usual. Sometime early in the day the teacher should speak to the student privately, expressing concern, sharing any relevant experience, and letting the student know that he/she appreciates how painful life is right now. The teacher's body language is important. Make eye contact, keep a relaxed bearing, and remember that returning to school is a very important step for that student. It is the sign of beginning to return to "normalcy" and, perhaps, returning to a place where the student can find the most stable environment in his/her life at that moment. Be direct in your comments. Avoid platitudes or euphemisms.

Later, let the student talk about the death as well as discussing any concerns about getting behind in school work. Accept the feelings, fears, and concerns of the student. Recognize that people vary in how much they wish to disclose their feelings. Allow the student to talk.

Demonstrate by touch, if appropriate, as well as words, that you care. When a person is faced with painful feelings, especially those that make him/her isolated, physical contact can be very important. Touching, when touching is needed, may contribute so much that it outweighs the very slight possibility that it will not be desired. A reassuring hand on the shoulder can convey great meaning.

Recognize that the pain of a loss may persist over an extended period. The teacher may choose to consult with appropriate resource personnel regarding students who have suffered such a loss.

The teacher should have taken time to discuss with the class the return of the bereaved student. There is a tendency to avoid people who have experienced a death. A sense of isolation results partly from the deliberate withdrawal of the person who has experienced a death of a family member or friend, but it is also caused by others who avoid the bereaved. The teacher should encourage students to be open and supportive of the bereaved student upon his/her return, without an excessive focus on the death.

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| Thank you to Regina Catholic Schools for sharing their ***Critical Incident Response Guide*** to support Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division in the development of this resource. |