

When a Grieving Student Returns to the Classroom

A teacher's support of grieving students is very important. Be sensitive to the student's level of understanding. Offer warmth, affection and the assurance of your physical presence.

- The day a death is announced within a class is not a normal day. Teachers need to allow time for students to express their feelings. Perhaps an activity pertaining to the death could be substituted for regular class work:

Letter writing, journal keeping, discussions, reading literature, having students write about a favorite memory of the deceased and putting those together in a book.

- A teacher's body language gives the returning bereaved student messages. Poor eye contact, stiffness, a distant nod, or a façade of cheerfulness is a message to the student that "you are different, unacceptable and alone."
- Teachers will be watched for role modeling to help students become comfortable with their own sadness and the way they respond to a grieving classmate.
- The first day a grieving student returns to school, allow the student to enter the classroom and get settled as usual. Sometime early in the class period, take the student aside and say: "I missed you. I wonder how you were doing." Follow natural instincts when talking, keeping in mind being direct, honest, sincere, and accepting of the student and his feelings.
- Returning to school after being absent due to the death of a person close to a student is a very important step for a young person. It signals the return to routine living. Validating worries about being behind in schoolwork is appropriate. Is your schoolwork more important than adjusting to life without a love one?
- Try to represent order, security, and stability in the child's life. There are sure to be changes at home; keeping a routine at school can be helpful.

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