



PINEWOOD AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Grief Response Protocol

Updated August, 2025

This protocol supports teachers and parents at Pinewood, the American International School of Thessaloniki, in responding effectively when there is a possibility or a fact of the loss of a family member, a close friend, a member of Pinewood staff, or of a student within the Pinewood community. It clarifies which steps can be taken, both from parents and educators following a loss, as well as the support that the child, the family and the staff can receive.

Our goals are to:

- Provide compassionate, timely, and appropriate support.
- Ensure clear and respectful communication between school and home.
- Reduce disruption to learning while recognizing emotional needs.

Grief response is initiated by:

- A sudden, unexpected, or unanticipated death or incident that triggers grief and disrupts the school day and may interfere with teaching, learning, attendance and behavior;
- A situation in which the individual's usual coping mechanisms may not be enough to handle a particular situation;
- Members of the school community witnessing or learning about an event involving death or physical injury, or threatened death or injury (including the death of a staff member, or the loss of a family member).

Understanding Grief

Grief is a **normal and individual process** that can last months or years following a death. Frequently, aftereffects are felt as a pervasive sense of malaise.

Emotional aftereffects may appear as sadness, irritability, or disengagement. While experiences vary, common stages of grief may include:

1. Denial
2. Anger or sadness
3. Bargaining
4. Acceptance



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Stages of school support

1. **Acknowledge the Event** – Ensure that tragic events are neither ignored nor minimized.
2. **Emotional Support** – Assist students, staff, parents, and community members in processing their emotions.
3. **Accurate Information** – Share verified facts to reduce misinformation and rumors.
4. **Resource Coordination** – Secure and coordinate the support required (internal and external).

How teachers can support a Grieving Student

- Create a **safe, accepting classroom** environment where children feel comfortable discussing loss.
- Listen with empathy and acknowledge feelings. Avoid offering quick solutions; instead, provide available support options.
- Encourage consultation with the **School Psychologist**.
- Watch for behavior changes such as falling grades, inattentiveness, misbehavior, withdrawal, or persistent sadness.
- Notify the School Psychologist if you observe significant changes in behavior or emotional well-being.
- If unsure how to answer a student's question, be honest—say you will find out and follow up.
- Maintain **normal classroom and academic routines** to provide stability.
- Encourage classmates to ask the grieving student what they would like upon returning (e.g., space, company, help catching up).
- Adjust academic expectations to reflect the student's emotional state.



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Notification guidelines

1. Death of a Student's Family Member

Initial Steps:

- Parents notify the Principal, who informs the relevant teachers and staff.
- A staff meeting may be held to share known details, answer questions, and prepare staff before the student returns.
- If a teacher is uncomfortable discussing the death directly with students, the School Psychologist may lead or assist.

If Notification Happens During School Hours:

- The Principal and School Psychologist inform affected students **face-to-face** after removing them from the classroom.
- The message should be **clear, honest, age-appropriate**, and tailored to the situation.
- Students are encouraged to share feelings and seek adult support.

2. Death of a Faculty or Staff Member

- If the deceased staff member had regular interactions with students, the Principal will make an **age-appropriate announcement** in a whole-school or divisional setting.
- If there was limited student contact, the information may be shared individually with inquiring students, with parental consent or in alignment with family wishes.
- The School Psychologist will be available to support both students and staff and may recommend additional outside services if needed.

3. Death of a Student

- With **family consent**, the Principal and School Psychologist will inform the student's teachers, classmates, and their families—either in person or through an online meeting.
- The wider Pinewood community may be informed in writing, based on the family's wishes and the Principal's discretion.
- All community members will be reminded of available **support services**.



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- The School Psychologist will hold follow-up discussions with classmates and other affected students, providing individual or group support as needed.

Support Steps May Include:

- Expressing sympathy and offering clear support to the family.
- Sharing **factual, respectful information** about the death to reduce rumors and misinformation.
- Giving opportunities for open discussion about the loss.
- Encouraging remembrance of the student through shared memories or commemorative activities.
- Applying the same classroom support strategies used for students experiencing family loss.

Additional Notes

- Communication with families should always prioritize **respect, accuracy, and sensitivity**.
- Confidential details should never be shared without family permission.
- When in doubt about what to say or do, staff should consult the **School Psychologist** or the Principal before acting.
- The protocol is intended to be **flexible**—adaptable to the needs of the individuals and circumstances involved.



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