



Grief Response Protocol

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Empowering Every Potential.



SUPPORT



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Grief Response Protocol

The Grief Response 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 staff, or 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.

The goal of this protocol is 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 ongoing emotional and physical distress.

Emotional aftereffects may appear as sadness, irritability, or disengagement. Some losses may also be experienced as traumatic, particularly when sudden, violent, or unexpected.



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Responses to grief and mourning may vary across cultures, religions, family systems, and individuals. The school aims to respond respectfully and sensitively to these differences.

Physical aftereffects may appear as headaches, difficulty to sleep, stomachache, lack of energy, fatigue and other physical unusual signs of anxiety.

The usual stages of grief are the following:

1. Denial
2. Strong emotions such as sadness, anger, confusion, guilt, or numbness
3. Bargaining
4. Acceptance

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 and Communication** – Share verified facts to reduce misinformation and rumors and appropriate and timely communication to the school community.
4. **Resource Coordination** – Secure and coordinate the support required (internal and external). School-based support is supportive and educational in nature and does not replace ongoing clinical or therapeutic care when needed.

How teachers can support a grieving student

Student's teachers will receive information regarding the loss that the student is experiencing, warning signs and how to support the student in and out of class if needed.

- Create a **safe classroom** environment where children feel **supported, accepted,** and **comfortable** discussing loss.
- Listen with empathy and **acknowledge feelings.** Avoid offering advice or solutions; instead, provide available support options.



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- Staff should remain attentive to students displaying significant emotional distress, hopelessness, withdrawal, or safety concerns and consult the School Psychologist immediately when concerned.
- Be alert to behavior changes such as lower 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, academic routines, and flexibility with workload** to provide a sense of stability.
- Maintain academic expectations while adjusting them to accommodate the student's emotional state.
- If a teacher is the first person to receive this sensitive information, they should inform the School Psychologist immediately, while maintaining confidentiality and sharing the information only with the appropriate safeguarding or support personnel.

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.



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- 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 in consultation with the family and school leadership.
- All community members will be reminded of available **support services in and out of school**.
- 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.



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Additional Notes

- Communication with families should always prioritize **respect, accuracy, and sensitivity**.
- Confidential details should never be shared without family permission.
- Students and staff should avoid use of social media respectfully and sharing unverified or private information.
- 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.