The Four Tasks of Grief

Grief Task	Why It's Important	Implementation Strategy
1. Accept the Reality of the Death	Not talking about a death doesn't change the fact that it happened or that it will be a topic of conversation among students and faculty. Ignoring a death is often perceived as an insensitive administrative response and misses the opportunity to reach out to students whose ability to learn may be compromised because of the death. Acknowledgment of a death can also give you the opportunity to address rumors and misinformation.	1. Verify with official sources accurate information about what happened. 2. Use formal communication channels to disseminate "need to know" information to all members of the school community. 3. Schedule faculty/staff meetings to update as necessary. 4. Prepare for the onslaught of parents/guardians who may descend on the school to take their children home. 5. Post resource information on your school's website for parents/guardians.
2. Acknowledge the Feelings of Loss	Being able to discuss feelings about a death, especially a suicide, is the first step in managing them and, for many students, may decrease the intensity of their reactions. Faculty and staff will have reactions, too, and will benefit from an opportunity to talk about the death.	1. Provide care stations where reactions to the death can be discussed. Establish a protocol for dismissing students to attend. 2. Reach out individually to vulnerable students, as well as vulnerable faculty and staff, to assess reactions and offer support. 3. Provide information to all members of the school community that helps them understand reactions to death and identifies both in-school and community resources. 4. Reach out to community resources, especially faith leaders, if there appears to be a need to provide continuing support to students and their families after school hours.

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3. Adjust to the Changed Environment without the Deceased	Every death leaves a space, whether it's the emotional role the deceased filled in our lives or the empty desk in the classroom where he or she sat. In addition, a suicide in a school changes the learning environment. Classroom content that deals with death or suicide may need to be temporarily modified to avoid retraumatizing both students and faculty.	1. Provide support to the classes, teams, etc., in which the deceased was directly involved to assist in this adjustment process. 2. Offer suggestions for curriculum modifications as appropriate. 3. Continue to monitor those students who may be vulnerable and would benefit from a higher level of support than the general student population. 4. Anticipate spontaneous memorials and follow an established protocol to deal with them.
4. "Emotionally Relocate" the Deceased and Go On with Life	The resolution of grief takes place when the deceased becomes more a part of our memory than a missing piece of our everyday lives. Again, depending on our connection to that person, this may be a quick or lengthy process. The loss can be, however, re-triggered by events like the birthday of the deceased or the anniversary of his or her death, or by transitional school events like graduation. This "emotional relocation" is also reflected in the choice of memorials to the deceased. Visible reminders of the death, like plaques in the halls or even the planting of reflective gardens or trees, can stand as reminders of the death rather than of the deceased student's life, so they must be carefully considered.	1. Return to a normal school routine as soon as possible but monitor students who appeared more affected by the death. 2. Anticipate the resurgence of reactions around significant dates and provide extra support. 3. Address issues like remembering the deceased at graduation or in the yearbook well in advance. 4. If there is another death in the school community, regardless of the circumstances, expect reactions to the earlier loss to be reactivated. 5. Refer all requests for memorials to a special committee that understands their implications for contagion.

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