



Addressing Grief: Tips for Teachers and Administrators

Supporting Students of All Ages

- Be understanding and tolerant of common grief reactions.
 - Communicate in a **simple, clear, and straightforward** manner.
 - Reassure students that death is **not contagious**.
 - Be **brief and patient**—students may ask the same questions repeatedly and need consistent answers.
 - Listen actively, acknowledge feelings, and remain **nonjudgmental**.
 - Model healthy emotional expression by sharing your own feelings in an appropriate way.
 - Avoid making assumptions or imposing personal beliefs.
 - Normalize grief by reminding students that a wide range of emotions is common after a loss.
 - Be sensitive to **cultural differences** among students and families.
 - Consider each student's **developmental level, cognitive ability, and understanding of death**.
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When the Whole School is Affected

- Send a letter or email to parents/guardians (on school letterhead) that includes:
 - Clear, factual information to dispel rumors
 - Common emotional reactions students may experience
 - Guidance on how to talk with children about death
 - Warning signs that may indicate a need for counseling
 - Instructions for contacting the school for support
 - Information about accessing community resources
 - Share **accurate updates regularly** with staff, students, and families.
 - Provide teachers with guidelines on how to communicate the news to students.
 - Establish a **clear referral process** for students needing additional support.
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Tips for Middle & High School Students

- Do not force students to share feelings publicly; offer **private opportunities** for expression.
- Encourage students to seek help for themselves or support friends in need.
- Recognize that older adolescents may express grief in ways similar to adults.
- Understand that physical gestures (e.g., hugs) may be a common way students show support.

Action Plan

1. Notification

- Notify the **school crisis team, teachers, and staff first**.
- Develop a coordinated action plan before informing students.
- Inform students **face-to-face** with familiar and trusted staff.
- Prepare a consistent statement for both students and parents.

2. Crisis & Grief Counseling

- Provide immediate access to **counseling and support services**.
- Establish **designated support rooms** for students and staff.
- Create clear procedures for students who need to leave class.
- Ensure substitute teachers are available to support staff needs.
- Plan for both **short-term and long-term services**.

3. Supporting Students in School

- Help students maintain **attendance and engagement** in learning.
- Support students in managing **difficult emotions**.
- Provide additional support tailored to **younger students' needs**.
- Encourage help-seeking and normalize use of counseling services.

4. Supporting Teachers and Staff

- Offer staff access to **support spaces and counseling**.
- Train teachers to identify: Risk factors, signs of emotional distress, and when to refer students for additional help.

Identifying Students at Higher Risk

Students may be at increased risk for emotional distress if they:

- Were a **close friend** of the deceased
- Shared classes or activities with the deceased
- Identify closely with the deceased (personality, background, etc.)
- Had a **complicated or strained relationship** with the deceased
- Have a history of **prior loss or emotional difficulties**