

Tips for Teachers

Talk to the grieving student before he/she returns to school.

Find out what he/she wants classmates to know about the death, funeral arrangements etc. Reassure the student that you want to make the transition back into school as supportive as possible.

Have an open discussion about death/loss and grief.

Grief can come as a result of many things such as the death of a loved one or pet, divorce, or the end of a friendship or relationship. Consider asking the class what are some ways they coped with loss in their lives.

Provide an opportunity for the class to reach out to the grieving classmate or family.

There are many ways to show support such as making "Thinking of You" cards to give to their classmate. If it's a classmate (or even teacher) who died, maybe have the class make a scrapbook where they can write messages, special memories, or place pictures of the person who died. During this activity encourage the students to talk about their feelings or memories.

Be flexible while also keeping a routine.

A student's life becomes disrupted after a death and life may be very hectic at home. The student may become easily distracted and/or have trouble completing assignments. Sometimes your student may need a "grief break" where he/she may need some time alone or with the school counselor. Identify a place within the classroom and/or allowing the student to leave the classroom (of course with some boundaries) when they need a breather- that way it doesn't necessarily highlight the kid but a preplanned arrangement so they can have that burst without the classroom disruption or the child's embarrassment.

That's OK, however, maintaining routine in the classroom will help your student feel more secure.

Provide a safe outlet.

Children often have "grief bursts" which means that the child is overcome by a sudden surge of grief. It's typical for grief bursts to arise during special dates such as birthdays, anniversaries, etc. When this occurs, it's important that you provide a safe place where the student can go and express his/her grief.

Be there to listen.

Set aside a time in case your student (s) wants to talk to you about the death. Don't worry, you don't have to provide an explanation or an answer to every question they may have. Just being present and listening is most important.

Refer students to Erin's House at (260) 423-2466.

All of Erin's House programming is available at no fee for the services we provide. Erin's House staff is also available to speak to you directly or to your classroom or school about grief.

Tips for Parents

Notify your child's teacher, counselor and school administration.

You want your child's teacher, principal and other administrators to be aware of the death. Let your child's teacher know about your child's normal habits, behaviors and personality; so they can better spot any changes as your child returns to the classroom. Make sure to let your child know that you will be talking to the school about the death. Discuss with them what they are comfortable having shared so they feel included in the process.

Make a communication plan.

This helps to keep everyone on the same page so you can uniformly and consistently support your child.
Prepare your child for other kids.
If other students are aware, they may ask questions about the death. Prepare your child that this may occur and let them know that it is their choice what they share with other children. If they don't want to share, you may want to practice with them something they can say to other kids if questions come up.

Brainstorm some coping tools for when things are tough.

We all have bad days. Try to prepare your child as best you can. Coping skills might be anything from having a safe friend who they are comfortable talking with, talking to a teacher or other trusted adult at the school, or carrying something with them that helps them feel comforted or safe. Also, offer the child choices in even the simplest things so they can in order to take a little control back because they didn't choose for their person to die.

As a teacher, counsellor or adult, don't always assume that their negative behavior or outburst is automatically linked to the fact that their person died.

Identify adults your child trusts.

If there is someone your child trusts, let your child's teacher, guidance counselor and that individual know. Ideally the school will allow some flexibility for your child to speak with that person if they are having a difficult day.

Give your child permission to enjoy school.

After a death a child may still be feeling confused, guilty or self-conscious about having fun and being happy when something terrible has happened. Make sure to remind your child that you want them to enjoy school and that it is normal for them to be happy and have fun.

Reach out for help from Erin's House at (260) 423-2466.

All of Erin's House programming is available at no fee for the services we provide. Erin's House staff is also available to speak to you directly or to your child's classroom about grief.

Tips for Kids

Just Listen.

Knowing what to say to a friend that is sad and grieving is hard. And that is okay. Sometimes your friend just needs to talk about their loved one that died and have someone that cares listen. No words, just a listening ear.

Offer a Side-Hug.

Physical contact can be very comforting. Offering your friend a hug or just putting your arm around him/her let's her know you're there for him/her.

Be Present.

Your friend may not feel ready to talk and might not want to be hugged. They might want to be alone with her grief for a time and that's okay. If that's the case, just being present is enough. Let them know that it's okay if they don't want to talk right now but that you'll be there when and if they do.

Be Yourself.

If your friend has lost a loved one, their whole world has changed. They need to be able to count on the few things that haven't changed, like your friendship. You might be tempted to act differently around your friend, dampening your humor or avoiding certain topics. Don't change because you think it's what they need or want. Continue to be yourself and, if your friend feels up to it, continue doing the things you enjoy doing together.

Keep in mind that grief lessens over time but never goes away. A piece of your friend is forever changed but your friendship can continue to thrive. Offering your time and energy is a gift that they will be forever grateful for.