

Staff Handout on Grieving

Reactions after a loss can have significant impact on learning Students may:

1. Show a decline in school performance
2. Have difficulty mastering new material
3. Become more irritable
4. Become withdrawn
5. Become anxious or depressed
6. Become more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, promiscuity, reckless driving, and suicide
7. Become focused on the loss

Student should be offered additional supports, such as tutoring or participation in mentoring programs to assist them in maintaining their academic progress before academic failure occurs, which would represent an additional stressor. Training for staff that takes over the classes on how to deal with the student's emotional needs and reactions to them coming in to "take over" their class.

What teachers can do:

Listen – to what students want to share with you. It may be difficult but just listening can be a powerful healing force. Be patient this will take time.

Protect – students from becoming re-traumatized. Sometimes other students may ridicule highly emotional students or cry

Connect – with students who have suffered a loss by asking how they are doing; checking in with them on a regular basis; letting them know that you are available to listen; or giving them feedback about their attendance or classroom work.

Model – adult behavior that shows them how responsible adults react to loss and respond to crisis. Adults may grieve, but they continue to act with consideration and maintain calm routines at school.

Teach – Crisis councilors can teach students about normal signs and symptoms of grief and/or trauma so that students can assess and understand their own behavior and learn new ways of coping.

Be honest at all times, share your feelings

Use Betsy's name when talking about them

Expect violent reactions

Used your normal voice and SAY, "dead" died, dying, death" as needed.

It's OK to say "I do not know"

Reassure students that anger, guilt, sadness, fear, shock, etc., are normal feelings.

Potentially Unhelpful approaches and Corresponding Statements:

Emphasizing a positive perspective or trying to cheer people up

“At least she had a good life before she died”

“I’m sure you will feel better soon”

Encouraging them to be strong or hide their feelings

“You don’t want to upset the other students or have them see you cry”

Telling them you know how they are feeling or ought to feel

“I know exactly what you are going through”

“You must be angry: instead, demonstrate your own feelings and express sympathy.

Competing for Sympathy

“I lost a teacher when I was in school”

Do not give a theological lecture or discuss religious issues

Do not hide your feelings

Resist the urge to “fix”. Minimize, or give advice

Appropriate Statements:

“I’m so sorry for your loss. Is there something I can do that will be helpful?”

“I can only imagine what you are going through”

“I understand that it may be difficult to concentrate or learn as well when you are grieving; I would like you to let me know if you find yourself having difficulty with your school work so that we can work together to make it easier for you during this difficult time.”

“I am here whenever you want to talk or just need to be with someone.”

When to refer a student:

When upset, crying becomes hysteria

When anger, self-blame becomes threats to others or self

When anxiety becomes panic

When fatigue or slowness becomes physical shock

When dulled response becomes no response, rigidity, fetal position