



TOOL 12 – DEALING WITH GRIEVING STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS

Tool for teachers

You have been given this sheet because a child in your class is grieving the loss of their brother or sister.

Steps for supporting grieving students

The following steps help support the grieving student as well as prepare your class for making the grieving student feel comfortable and supported.

1. Talk with the bereaved student before they return.

Ask them what they want the class to know about their sibling, the death, funeral arrangements, or other matters. If possible, call the family prior to the student's return to school so you can let the student know you are thinking of them and want to help make their return to school as supportive as possible.

2. Talk to your class about how grief affects people and encourage them to share how they feel.

One way to do this is to discuss what other types of losses or deaths the students in your class have experienced, and what helped them cope.

3. Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to return to school, and how they may be of help.

You can ask your class for ideas about how they would like others to treat them if they were returning to school after a death, pointing out differences in preferences. Some students might like to be left alone; others want the circumstances discussed freely. Most grieving students say that they want everyone to treat them the same way they treated them before. In general, they don't like people being 'extra nice'. While students usually say they don't want to be in the spotlight, they also don't want people acting like nothing happened.

4. Provide a way for your class to reach out to the grieving classmate and his or her family.

One of the ways students can reach out is by sending cards or pictures to the child and family, letting them know the class is thinking of them. If students in your class knew the child who died, they could share memories of that child.

5. Provide flexibility and support to your grieving student upon his or her return to class.

Recognize that your student will have difficulty concentrating and focusing on school work. Allow the bereaved student to leave the class when she needs some quiet or alone time. Make sure that the student has a person available to talk with, such as a school counsellor.

Do:

- listen—grieving students need a safe, trusted adult who will listen to them.
- follow routines—routines provide a sense of safety which is very comforting to the grieving student.
- set limits—just because students are grieving, doesn't mean the rules don't apply. When grieving, students may experience lapses in concentration or exhibit risk taking behaviour. Setting clear limits provides a more secure and safer environment for everyone under these circumstances.

Don't:

- suggest the student has grieved long enough.
- indicate the student should get over it and move on.
- act as if nothing has happened.
- say things like:
 - It could be worse. You still have one brother.
 - I know how you feel.
 - You'll be stronger because of this.
- expect the student to complete all assignments on a timely basis.

As a teacher, you have the opportunity to touch children's lives in a very special way. Your actions have a lifelong impact. When a death influences the lives of your students, you and your school can make a life-long difference by creating an environment for healing and support.