**Fall**

2019

**El Paso County School District 49**

08

**Fall**

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Grief & Loss Response

Support Manual

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**District 49 Grief & Loss Response**

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# Introduction to Manual

This manual was developed to help support school staff when responding to a death that impacts their campus. The hope is that this manual will walk administrators and mental health providers through the necessary steps needed to successfully maneuver through this difficult time. It has been developed over many years and through many situations which have taught us and helped us to learn from our experiences grow as a team. It continues to be a work in progress and ever evolving. As we debrief after each incident, we learn from what worked and what did not, which helps us continually improve our practice. Therefore, this manual will be updated regularly as we learn from our experience.

The process and content of this manual comes from both research and practice. Many of the concepts are supported through: The National Suicide Prevention Network, the Colorado School Safety Resource Center, Hospice, the National Association of School Psychologists, and general practice experiences.

We hope that you find this manual helpful as you prepare to respond to these difficult situations.

# Procedure for Sequence of Response

Director of Safety and Security

Counselors and nurse on effected campus

Principal(s) of the affected schools

District Leadership Team alerted

Mental Health Team

Executive Director of Individualized Education

Director of

Community Care

Chief Education Officer

Communications Director

Zone Leaders:

Falcon

Power

Sand Creek

iConnect

# Notification Procedures

1. If a staff member is made aware of the death of a student, staff member or parent of a student, he/she will contact the Director of Safety and Security and Security.
2. The Director of Safety and Security then confirms the death with police and obtains information about the event to provide to staff. The Director of Safety and Security then contacts: Director of Community Care, the Zone leaders of the zones affected, and the Chief Educational Officer.
3. The Director of Safety and Security will then contact the Communications Director to alert him/her of possible media coverage of the situation and to create press release information. The Communications Director will text the D49 Response Group to alert District Leadership of the situation.
4. The Director of Community Care will contact the mental health team to respond to the crisis.
5. The Zone leaders will contact the principals of the affected schools.
6. The principal of each school affected will contact that school’s counseling staff and nurse to alert them of the situation and consult.
7. The principal, Director of Community Care and Director of Safety and Security will review the information provided about the situation and determine the level of response required. If the situation is a level 2 or 3, 2 substitutes will be ordered by the principal to cover that campus for the grief/loss response.
8. The principal will alert the campus staff through their notification system of the situation and require all staff to be at school 45 minutes prior to the typical start time if a level 2 or 3 is determined.
9. The Director of Community Care will email the GLTR packet to the principals of the affected schools, Zone leaders and the CEO.
10. The team looks up the student in SIS to determine if there are siblings at other schools or if the student previously attended other district schools. Those schools will be notified and provided supports as needed.

DO NOT CANCEL SCHOOL- It is important for students and staff to have the safety and security of as much normalcy as possible. Cancelling school creates disruption of that sense of safety for many. Staying home, often alone, when grieving creates more distress than being surrounded by people who care and can support those grieving. Supports are provided at the school for those in need that they cannot access if home; both for students and for staff. Also, not all students and staff will be grieving and their need to go to school also needs to be honored.

Classes can be combined, subs requested, and supports brought in from other schools or central office if teachers are unable to teach due to their grief. If students are overly affected, they can be excused, sent home with their parents or allowed to stay in the counseling area until they are able to return to class.

# Level of Response Determination Rubric

## Level 1- Response

* The individual who passed away has an indirect affiliation with the school such as:
  + A family member of a student or staff member or a student who attended the school more than one year ago
  + A volunteer or someone that a small number of people on campus are familiar with
  + OR any person who’s death occurred over a long break and there has been at least 2 weeks for impacted people to process the death
* The campus team is alerted but no early morning meeting is required and no letter or script is created.
* The school counselor(s), nurse, social worker and/or school psychologist assigned to that campus will respond to the campus to provide supports if needed.

Level 1- Death of a Parent of a Student-

A Level 1 response is about the number of people impacted by the death of a person affiliated with the school or a classroom. This may be a situation like the death of a parent of a student. There may be a classroom affected but it may not affect the entire school or student body.

When a student’s parent or close loved on has died, it is helpful to provide supports and interventions both to the student and the teacher of the student. Here are some things to consider when responding to this situation.

* Principal calls the family to offer condolences, check on the student, gain consent to release the name of the student, and ask if the family would allow the school to speak with the class about how to best support a friend in grief.
  + Find out when the student plans on returning to school and set up a time prior to this to process with the student.
* An email is drafted and reviewed by the Director of Communications letting the classroom parents know that the named student has experienced the loss of their parent and that the class will be discussing how to support a friend in grief. Provide links to the handouts about talking to your child about death.
* Prior to the student’s return to school, meet with the student to discuss the following:
  + What they will say when their friends ask what happened. It is important that the student have a prepared response so that they are not caught off guard.
  + Prep the student with possible questions and prepared responses.
  + Discuss with the student what they want to do if they start to feel sad in class and can’t continue; cozy corner, take something to the office, see counselor,….
* If possible, the day prior to the student’s return, hold a circle with the class and alert them that their classmate’s parent has died. Adjust the following to developmental level of class:
  + Ask the students how they might feel if they had experienced this kind of loss.
  + Ask students how they might want to be treated in this situation.
  + Ask students how they could be a good friend to \_\_\_\_\_\_.
* When the student returns, hold a circle including the student and have the student discuss how they want to be treated by their friends. Allow the class to offer supportive statements to the student.

## Level 2- Response

* The individual who passed away has a direct affiliation with the school such as:
  + A student or staff member who attended the school within the past year
  + A student who currently attends the school but is not involved in any activities and does not attend full time
  + A student who recently moved into the school district within the past month
  + The student who passed away attends a different school or has graduated, and siblings attend one of D-49’s schools
  + OR the person passed away over a break and at least one week has passed for impacted people to process the death
* The campus team is alerted and additional counselors, social worker and/or school psychologists from campuses within the same grade level are requested to support the campus. (middle school/middle school, high school/high school, etc.)
* A Level 2 we plan for about 5% of the student population to be affected and needing services. Invite 1 mental health provider per 8 -10 students. (Example Enrollment = 1,000 students. Anticipate about 50 students needing support so ensure you have at least 5 mental health providers on site for response.
* The Timeline of Response procedure is begun. (See page 3 of GLTR packet)

## Level 3- Response

* A staff member or student currently attending the school has passed away.
* The campus team is alerted and other mental health team professionals are requested to support the campus from surrounding schools and zones.
* For Level 3 response, plan for about 20% of the students needing support. Ensure at least 1 mental health provider for every 10 students affected. (Example: Enrollment = 1,000 students. Plan for about 200 students needing support which would require approximately 20 mental health providers.
* The Timeline of Response procedure is begun. (See page 3 of the GLTR packet)

# Timeline of Response/Checklist- Level 2 & 3

The notification process has been completed and all appropriate personnel have been notified.

(See pages 1 and 2 of packet)

## One and a half hours prior to start of day bell

* Principal, zone leader, campus counselors, school psychologist, school social worker, Director of Community Care, Director of Safety and Security, Communications Director and site school nurse meet to plan for the day.
* Principal or staff member calls family to give their condolences and gain consent to release student’s name in the script.
* An Incident Command System organizational chart will be established based on template provided. (page 10 of GLTR packet)
* A student script is developed by the team with **only the facts of the situation as provided from the Director of Safety and Security** based on the templates provided**.**
* A script for the staff meeting is to be developed by the team with the Communications Director.
* The student’s schedule is pulled and reviewed, as well as any information about the student’s extracurricular activities.
* A list of the student’s close associations is developed and these students are unobtrusively monitored for extreme grief responses.
* The student is marked as deceased in the SIS so that information is not sent to the home via auto-dialer.
* An auto-dialer script is sent out at the same time students are notified (in an effort to get information to parents from the school before students do via technology) and/or letter to be sent home to parents at the end of the school day is developed.
  + The student who died and his/her siblings are removed from the auto-dialer prior to sending.
* The team will determine if a notification should be sent to all principals and counselors district wide, including charters, due to possible effect on their students.
* Notification to all staff, including itinerant staff, is emailed so that those coming to the building that day are notified of the situation.
* Copies of packets concerning age appropriate grief response are made for teachers and uploaded to the school’s web page. (Located on district intranet)
* A notice is posted in the front office indicating that if students are going home due to grief they should not be left alone and should have adult supervision.
* An official school response is developed by the team and provided to the Central Office receptionist and any building secretaries that may receive calls from the public.
* The school’s counselors will meet with the responding mental health team to determine assignments and needs of the campus.
* Areas within the school are identified to be used:
  + Incident Command Center: ­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Staff gathering place: ­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Counseling areas for small groups of students: ­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Place for flowers, stuffed animals, balloons that may arrive for the deceased student: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Materials for counseling groups are gathered in a central location
  + Copies of Students Accessing Counseling template (page 9 of GTLR packet)
  + Copies of Grief Counseling Guidelines are provided to mental health team
  + Pen/pencils/markers/crayons
  + Construction paper/Writing paper (do not make large posters)
  + Tissues
* Assignments of specific personnel are made:
  + Follow the student’s daily schedule: ­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Hall monitors are assigned: ­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Group leaders are assigned to stations- 2 group leaders per group

## 45 minutes before school start time- Staff meeting

* The Mental Health Team providers are introduced in the staff meeting.
* The principal provides information about the situation and guidance to the staff (see Sample Staff Meeting Agenda/Talking Points).
* The script to be read in class is read to the staff and questions/comments are addressed.
  + Teachers who would like support in their classroom to read the script are identified and a Mental Health Team provider is assigned to support them.
* The auto-dialer/letter to be sent home to parents at the end of the day is read to the staff.
* The procedure for addressing students who are significantly affected are explained to staff.
  + Teachers should not send entire classes down to counseling. A Mental Health Team provider can be called to a classroom if necessary.
* Handouts on age-appropriate grief responses are emailed/provided to staff. Staff are instructed about response of students as well as their own possible grief responses.
* Staff is made aware that substitutes will be available to them if they need a break to process for themselves.
* Question/Answer time is provided.

## 15 minutes before school start time

* Staff is released to go to their classrooms and prepare for students.
* Hall monitors begin to patrol the hallways.
* Mental Health Team find their assigned areas. (teacher support, command center, other)

## Throughout the Day

* Staff should keep the typical schedule as much as possible but with some lightened work load.
* Major exams or tests should NOT be given on this day; however, work should continue to be given.
* Allow some time for student’s to process in class; about 15-20 minutes. When the tempo of the room seems to lift, redirect to a non-intense class activity. Do not allow students to just sit and talk throughout the day in class.
* Entire classes should not access counseling services as a group- continue with class and only send those that are highly affected. If teacher needs time- call for the sub.
* The principal should contact the affected family to offer support.
* Mental Health Team providers will keep a list of all the students that they see on the Students Accessing Counseling log. The students will be assigned a number next to their name based on their level of response: 1= mild response, 2= moderate response, 3= significant response.
* Mental Health providers will call the parents of the students that have been seen throughout the day to let the parents know that their child has accessed counseling services and his/her level of need.
  + If students are unable to return to class by 2 hours prior to end of day, parents should be called to pick up the student.
  + Students should not be in counseling for more than an hour or so. Providers should encourage students to return to class for a time and come back if needed.
* If a student is unable to return to class and needs to go home for the day, the parent may be contacted and the student sent home. Parents should commit to supervising the child while at home.
* D-49 will provide lunch for all staff and responders for the school day in a centralized location to allow time to process and support each other.
* The school’s counselors will be consulted concerning ongoing needs of students seen by guest providers.
* An auto-dialer/email to parents explaining the situation and the school’s response will be sent out.

## 15 Minutes after the end of school-Debriefing Staff meeting

* All staff will participate in a debriefing meeting after school unless they are supervising a regularly scheduled event.
* The counseling logs will be given to the school’s counselors for follow up.
* Staff is given an opportunity to process the day and express concerns.
* Suggestions are taken for improvement on the process.

## Next day/Following Days

* Students who were identified as needing follow up are checked on by the school’s counselors and teachers will report to the counselor if further support is needed.

# Responsibilities of Team Members

## Mental Health Team

* Two Mental Health providers will be assigned to each grief counseling group whenever possible. Mental Health Team providers must be employed by District 49 and a designated member of the Mental Health Team (i.e. Counselor, Psychologist, Social Worker, Nurse)
* Mental Health providers will take their materials from the central location such as paper, markers, tissue and pens to their assigned area.
* Mental Health providers will write down the names of the students they see and code their response as:
  + **1- mild** (able to be redirected relatively quickly, may be trying to escape class)
  + **2- moderate** (some crying response, has had some loss in their past, takes some processing to get them back to class and calmed down, peripheral friend of deceased)
  + **3- significant** (crying, distraught, has had significant loss in past, close friend of the deceased, difficult to redirect and calm, may need to go home if they cannot return to class)
* The goal of the crisis counseling is to treat the student’s current response and educate them on the grief cycle and responses.
* Providers will process feelings and responses with students and allow them to journal, draw or create cards to families.
* Providers will discuss typical grief responses, what students may expect throughout the day and in days to come, discuss characteristics of the deceased (both good and bad), and the relationship of the grieving student to the deceased.
* Providers will help students develop a coping strategy for the rest of the day, the week and the month and review what the student may expect as they move through the grieving process.
* Providers will call the parents of students they have seen by end of the day and let the parents know that their child was seen and how they are coping. Parents will be provided with community resources and typical responses to grief via the district website.
* Providers will gather letters or cards to parents and review them for appropriateness. All appropriate cards are given to the principal to give to the parents. Inappropriate cards are followed up on with counseling staff.
* Providers and the school’s counselors will create a list of students to follow up with the next day and subsequent days.

## Hall Monitors

* Hall monitors may be substitutes, secretaries, specials teachers or other staff available.
* Hall monitors will patrol the halls and escort students to the counseling areas.
* Hall monitors will observe teachers from the hallway and alert mental health staff if a teacher appears in need of support.
* Hall monitors will ensure that students are not gathering in the hallway and ensure that they are getting back to class or going to the counseling area.
* Hall monitors will periodically check the hallways for memorials the students may leave at the deceased student’s locker and take them to the assigned area.

## Classroom Teachers

* Teachers will prepare lessons and activities that are moderate to easy in difficulty level to keep the students engaged and actively learning during the day.
* Teachers will postpone exams or quizzes for 2 days after the incident.
* Teachers will only discuss the information provided in the script and will stop any “gossip” about the incident.
* Teachers may allow a short time to discuss memories of the student but should not allow large chunks of time focusing on the student’s death during class. Typically about 15-20 minutes is sufficient for students to process. If some students need more time allow them to go to the counseling area.
* Teachers will allow students who are visibly upset to go to the designated intervention area. The teacher will release the student to the Hall Monitor to take to the intervention group.
  + Do not send entire classes down to the counseling area. Instead, request a mental health provider to come to the class if needed.
* Teachers may allow students who are quietly grieving and are not disruptive to stay in class if the student chooses to do so.
* Teachers should keep the student’s desk/space in place for about one week. A new classroom arrangement should then be created outside of student bell times and at a natural break such as a weekend, end of unit, or quarter.
* Teachers should keep displayed work product and pictures of the student up if they were already there for approximately one week. These items will then be replaced with a new class project. Do not put up new pictures or work product of the student as memorabilia.
* The family may want to come collect deceased student’s materials. The teacher should keep the student’s materials as they were left until the family has an opportunity to collect them.
* No memorials should be made in the classroom. The teacher should not allow students to put memorabilia on the student’s desk or at the locker. A designated space will be provided within the school for memorabilia.
* Over the next few days, teachers will monitor for buttons, t-shirts or other memorabilia of the student. Students who wear t-shirts to school with the student’s picture prominently displayed on them will be asked to remove them and they will be returned at the end of the school day as this can become disruptive to the learning environment by triggering those grieving. Small tokens of respect such as bracelets or small ribbons are allowable. This is to reduce glorification of death which can lead to suicide contagion even if this incident was not a suicide.

## Administration

* Administrators will provide an area for community members, students and staff to leave items for the family in memory of the student for one week. This is typically done in the office to allow for monitoring and safety of the items.
* A staff member will be assigned to monitor the student’s locker and remove items from the locker area and take them to the designated area. This will include items decorating the deceased student’s locker.
* The school may collect cards, posters, letters and artwork from students who wish to participate to be given to the family. All materials must be reviewed by staff for appropriateness prior to being given to the family. All items from the designated area will be collected and given to the family at the end of one week or after the memorial.
* Administration should find out information concerning memorials and the funeral and ask the family if they would like this information disseminated at the school. If so, administration should provide this information to staff and students. Students wishing to attend the funeral must have an excusal note from their parents to excuse them from class on the day of the funeral. Administration will count this as an excused absence.
* DO NOT CANCEL SCHOOL so that people can attend the funeral. This may glamorize the death and increase risk of suicide contention- even with an accidental death.
* An administrator or designee should attend the funeral to represent the school.
* **No memorial services should be held on school property**. Administration and staff may help to coordinate with the family a memorial service at a local park or favorite place of the student. However, this should be done as an extension of the family’s plans, not as a school sponsored event.
* No balloon lifts, tree planting, dove release, or markers, etc. are to be done by the school or placed on school property. This is to reduce glamorization of death. Please consult with the Director of Community Care for ideas concerning living memorials.
* The student’s picture(s) should be included in the yearbook in the typical places. No full page memorials are to be put in the yearbook. If the parent contacts the school in regard to purchasing a Senior Ad (the extra pages at the end where parents can purchase space and typically have pictures celebrating their child's successes) they may do so as long as the information is approved by administration and does not glamorize the student’s death.
* Pictures of the deceased may be shown at graduation as they would have, had they not died. A slide show of the deceased is not to be shown at graduation as this may glamorize death and create contagion; even with accidental deaths. A solemn moment may be addressed to honor those lost.
* An empty chair may be kept for the graduating seniors who have passed.
* A parent may accept the diploma for a deceased student if they desire.

## Debrief

After the crisis response, it is important for the response team to debrief with each other and the campus staff about the response within a week of the incident. Those involved in the debrief would be: Campus Administration, Counseling Staff, Director of Community Care, Director of Safety & Security, Director of Communications, District Administration (CEO) and any other pertinent players of the event. The debrief allows the response teams to discuss what worked well and areas of improvement to the process for future events.

### Debrief with Students:

Approximately 1-2 months after the incident a debrief should be conducted with a focus group representative of the student body at the school. Examples of appropriate groups are: Student Counsel, ROTC, or other groups that have a strong cross representation of grade levels and groups. The Director of Community Care will ask the students what went well and what could be improved upon. This information will guide any improvements to this process.

# Incident Command System Organizational Chart

Safety Officer

Name:

Cell Number:

Public Information Officer

Name:

Cell Number:

Incident Commander

Name:

Cell Number:

Building Principal

Name:

Cell Number:

Mental Health Lead

Name:

Cell Number:

Assistant Principal

Name:

Cell Number:

Logistics Coordinator

Name:

Cell Number:

School’s Counseling Staff

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# Instructions for Teachers

School:

Date:

Instructions for teachers:

* Please read the script below at the beginning of your class.
* Allow 10-15 minutes for conversation in small groups or quiet time to process. Allow students to chat, draw, read or work.
* After 10-15 minutes, proceed with your planned lesson
  + If students need to go to counseling release at this time.
  + Release students to a staff member in the hallway or call on walkie-talkie.
  + You may send a student with a pass to the counseling area if no one is available.
* Do NOT bring entire classes to counseling area. Only send those who need support.
* No tests today or tomorrow
* Homework should be at a minimum today and tomorrow
* Keep an ear out for gossip- please squelch gossip by expressing respect for Student and her family
* Please let counseling/admin. know if there are any students you are concerned about.
* If you need some extra time today to process, there is a sub in the building to monitor your class. Please call down to the office and a sub will be provided for a period of time.
* Do not set up memorials in the classroom or on the student’s desk.
* Keep the student’s desk and displayed work for about a week or until a natural break. Rearrange the entire classroom/desks rather than pull out the student’s desk.

# Sample Scripts

## Classroom Script:

It is with great sadness that we inform you that our SCHOOL family has had a significant loss. One of our 8h grade students, ­­­­­­STUDENT, passed away over the weekend due to a health condition. STUDENT has been a student with us since elementary and she will be greatly missed. We currently do not have any information on the memorial services but will get that information to you as soon as we know.

When dealing with loss, keeping to a schedule often provides comfort and security. Teachers will try to keep to the typical schedule for you today. When experiencing a loss, people often respond in different ways: some are visibly upset and crying, some may be quiet and some may not appear impacted at all. We want to support everyone’s way of grieving. There are counselors available in the Library today if you feel that you need to talk. If you feel like you need some support, please let your teacher know.

## Auto-dialer- mailed on letter head

It is with great sadness that we inform you that our SCHOOL Family has had a significant loss. One of our 8th grade students, STUDENT Name, passed away this past weekend. STUDENT has been a student with our school since elementary school and she will be greatly missed.

District 49’s crisis response team will be available today and this week for students and staff. School psychologists and counselors are available throughout the day at SCHOOL and will remain on site as long as necessary to support students and staff. Parents will be notified by the end of the school day if their child has been seen by a crisis team member. If your child is unable to stay at school due to severe grief reactions, please ensure that they are under adult supervision at all times.

We have posted grief resources for families on our website under Resources in the following link. School’s web page address. These resources may help families with ideas on how to discuss this loss with your child.

Future announcements about memorial services for the student will be made as more information becomes available, if the family chooses to share these details.

In respect to the family’s privacy, we are unable to release any additional information at this time. Thank you for your support of our students and staff. Please let us know if we can provide further assistance.

## Secretary information:

An 8th grade student, STUDENT, passed away over the weekend due to a health condition. The District 49 Crisis Team, consisting of School psychologists and School Social Workers, are on site at BLRA to work with students who are struggling with this loss. If your student speaks with a counselor their parents will be notified by the end of the school day by a counselor to discuss the student’s needs. If your child is unable to manage at school today, you may be contacted to come pick up your child. If your child goes home today due to grief, please ensure that they are under adult supervision at all times. There is information on the SCHOOL website concerning how to talk to your child about loss.

## Classroom Script

It is with great sadness that we let you know that our SCHOOL NAME Family has had a significant loss. One of our 7th grade students, ­­­­­­STUDENT, passed away last night. STUDENT has been a student with our school district since elementary school and he will be greatly missed.

Keeping to a schedule often provides comfort and security. Teachers will try to keep to the typical schedule for you today. When experiencing a loss, people often respond in different ways: some are visibly upset and crying, some may be quiet and some may not appear impacted at all. We want to support everyone’s way of grieving. There are counselors available in the counseling office today if you feel that you need to talk. If you feel like you need some support, please let your teacher know and they will give you a pass to the \_\_\_\_\_\_.

## Auto- Dialer Script:

It is with great sadness that we inform you that our SCHOOL Family has had a significant loss. One of our 8th grade students, NAME, passed away this past weekend. NAME has been a student with our school since elementary school and she will be greatly missed.

District 49’s crisis response team will be available today and this week for students and staff. School psychologists and counselors are available throughout the day at BLRA and will remain on site as long as necessary to support students and staff. Parents will be notified by the end of the school day if their child has been seen by a crisis team member. If your child is unable to stay at school due to severe grief reactions, please ensure that they are under adult supervision at all times.

We have posted grief resources for families on our website under [www.blracademy.org/family-access/](http://www.blracademy.org/family-access/) . These resources may help families with ideas on how to discuss this loss with your child.

Future announcements about memorial services for the student will be made as more information becomes available, if the family chooses to share these details.

In respect to the family’s privacy, we are unable to release any additional information at this time. Thank you for your support of our students and staff. Please let us know if we can provide further assistance.

## Secretary Response if people call:

An 8th grade student, NAME, passed away over the weekend due to a health condition. The District 49 Crisis Team, consisting of School psychologists and School Social Workers, are on site at SCHOOL to work with students who are struggling with this loss. If your student is having difficulty and needs to speak to a counselor, parents will be notified by the end of the school day. If your child is unable to manage at school today, parents will be contacted to come and pick up their child. If your child goes home today due to grief, please ensure that they are under adult supervision at all times. There is information on the SCHOOL website concerning how to talk to your child about loss.

# Students Accessing Counseling

School:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Mental Health Provider :\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Student’s Name** | **Grade** | **Response Level:**  **1-Mild**  **2-Moderate**  **3-Significant** | **Comments** | **Time parent called** | |
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* **1- mild** (able to be redirected relatively quickly, may be trying to escape class)
* **2- moderate** (some crying response, has had some loss in their past, takes some processing to get them back to class and calmed down, peripheral friend of deceased)
* **3- significant** (crying, distraught, has had significant loss in past, close friend of the deceased, difficult to redirect and calm, may need to go home if they cannot return to class)

# Crisis Response Counseling Form:

***Complete for those students who are Moderate to High Risk and may need follow up by the counselor.***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Student’s Name:** | **Date:** |
| **School:** | **Grade:** |
| **Parent’s Name:** | **Parent Phone Number:** |
| **Mental Health Provider:** | **Time parent called:** |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Moderate Risk** | **High Risk** |
| **Emotional Proximity to Victim** | ☐ Acquaintance of the victim | ☐ Good Friends with the victim |
| **Emotional Coping** | ☐ No clear coping style  ☐ Some self-regulation  difficulty  ☐ Trauma History  ☐ Emotional Immaturity | ☐ Poor self-regulation of  emotion  ☐ Preexisting mental illness  ☐ Significant trauma history |
| **Support Systems** | ☐ Stressed family relationships  ☐ Social relationships stressed  ☐ Family separation | ☐ Not living with family  members  ☐ Poor family relations  ☐ Poor social support system |
| **Current Reaction and Coping** | ☐ Some coping difficulties  ☐ Crying and emotional  reaction is difficult to control | ☐ Appears distraught  ☐ Coping strategies are  maladaptive |
| **Perceived level of Distress** | **☐ Moderate** | **☐ High** |

Comments:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: ☐ Went back to class. ☐ Sent home under adult supervision

☐ Other- Explain\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**1- mild** (able to be redirected relatively quickly, may be trying to escape class)

**2- moderate** (some crying response, has had some loss in their past, takes some processing to get them back to class and calmed down, peripheral friend of deceased)

**3- significant** (crying, distraught, has had significant loss in past, close friend of the deceased, difficult to redirect and calm, may need to go home if they cannot return to class)

# Grief Counseling Guidance for Mental Health Providers

The goal of school based crisis intervention counseling is to reduce distress, assist with current needs, educate on adaptive functioning and the grief process, and provide referral information if necessary to help the student stabilize and manage their reactions.

**Grief Counseling Goals:**

* Calm and orient the student(s) that are emotionally overwhelmed
* Provide immediate and ongoing safety and support of students
* Identify their immediate needs and concerns by offering practical solutions and support
* Acknowledge their feelings and validate their grief
* Triage emotional-support needs and make referrals if necessary

**Professionalism:**

* Only act within the framework of your expertise and licensure
* Be visible and available
* Maintain appropriate confidentiality of the victim and the grieving student
* Alert those on a Need to Know basis of specific student’s needs
* Document interactions with each student

**Gaining Rapport:**

* Observe first- Do not intrude into groups or with individuals
* Make contact by providing practical assistance- tissues, water, place to sit
* Use proximity without intruding- sit **near** but not **in** the group at first
* Initiate contact after observing and assessing the situation
* Introduce yourself and why you are there
* Provided the grieving students with concrete, age appropriate information about the situation as provided by the scripts.
* Establish a positive connection in a non-intrusive and compassionate manner

**Brief Grief Counseling:**

***Initial Conversation***- Allow students an opportunity to talk if they want. If in a group, do not go around the circle as this may pressure students to respond; simply let them respond as they wish. If someone is monopolizing the conversation and it appears to distress others, use facilitation methods to redirect.

* Try to group students based on their relationship proximity to the victim is possible
  + Typically, acquaintances of the victim should not be in the same group as close friends
  + Sport teams may do well together to support each other

Use the following questions/comments to get a conversation going-

* “How do you know *Student*”
* “Tell me about  *Student*”
* “Tell me some good things about *Student”*
* “What kinds of things did you do together?”
* “What classes do/did you have together”

Get a feel for the level of loss these students have experienced.

* “Is this your first loss?”
* Students may discuss the loss of grandparents, pets, other loved ones or have had no other loss.
* Students having experienced multiple losses may be at greater risk especially if these losses are recent.
* Some students may not know the victim but have experienced a loss and this has triggered emotional responding.

As the conversation ebbs and flows, move into more emotionally based conversation-

* Have the students start to explore what they might feel or how it will be like when they encounter a situation where the student will be missing such as class, the bus, lunch or after school activities.
  + “What do you think it will be like when you go to class (ride the bus, lunch)?”
* Get a feel for their ability to cope and self-regulate with these situations. Provide some guidance on things they can do to manage their stress when presented with these situations.
  + Find a good friend to sit with during lunch. Sit in a new spot at lunch.
  + When you see their locker/desk think of 2 fun things you did together. Allow yourself 2 minutes to think of these things and then turn your mind to other things.
* Provide basic Psycho-education concerning grief-
  + Allow your body and mind an opportunity to rest from grief. It’s OK to be happy. Grief will catch up to you like a wave. The waves will be close together and taller at first but will get further apart and less intense over the next few days, weeks and months. This is normal and OK.
  + Don’t stay grieving for more than 30 minutes at time. Get up and move, change your thoughts to something different, do an activity etc.
    - Help the students find things they like to do and ways to engage their minds to help manage their grief
  + You may have trouble sleeping for the first few days. If this continues for more than 4-5 days talk to an adult.
  + You may have a varying appetite over the next few days- eating more and eating less. If this continues for more than a week talk to an adult.
  + You may have trouble concentrating for a few days. If this continues for more than a week talk to an adult.

Review the Grief Cycle with Students-

(Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle)

* [Shock stage](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/shock_stage.htm)\*: Hearing the news of the death and not believing it is real
* [Denial stage](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/denial_stage.htm): Trying to avoid the inevitable.
* [Anger stage](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/anger_stage.htm): Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.
* [Bargaining stage](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/bargaining_stage.htm): Seeking in vain for a way out.
* [Depression stage](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/depression_stage.htm): Realization that the person is not coming back
* [Testing stage](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/testing_stage.htm)\*: Trying to find solutions and testing out getting back to normal
* [Acceptance stage](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/acceptance_stage.htm): Finally finding the way forward.

Help them make plans for the rest of the day and week.

* + “What will you do today when you go home?”
  + “Who will be with you?”
  + Encourage them to do something constructive and with others
  + “What plans do you have for this weekend?”
    - Get them to look forward to something that will be pleasant for them
* Allow students to draw or write letters to the family. These are much easier for families and staff to manage than posters. Families appreciate and cherish the letters and notes but do not have space for big posters. Posters are NOT to be hung at school.
  + All letters must be reviewed by staff prior to being sent home to parents as some students may say inappropriate things during grief.
* Encourage students to get back to class after they have calmed and appear under emotional control (not sobbing, speaking easily, interacting with others).
  + Let them know they can come back if they need
  + Remind them of the waves of grief and encourage them to allow themselves time off from grief
  + Help them understand that going to the normal routine can provide stability and comfort and is not disrespecting the person who died
* If students are at a moderate to high level of distress their parents may need to come get them. Ensure that adult supervision is provided if they are being sent home.
* All students should either be at home with adult supervision or back to class by 2 hours before last bell. If they cannot return to class by this time, parents should be called to come get them.
  + DO NOT send distraught students home on the bus or walking home.

**After Counseling-**

* All interactions with students should be documented on the Students Accessing Counseling Form.
* Complete the Crisis Response Counseling Form for those students who are Moderate to High emotional responding and will need follow up from the school’s counselor.
* Call the parents of each student and let them know they accessed counseling today. The Counseling form may help you with this conversation.
* Provide counseling forms to the Incident Commander to give to the Counseling staff for follow up.
* The school’s counselors will follow up with students marked moderate or high over the next few school days.

# Sample Staff Meeting Agenda/Talking Points

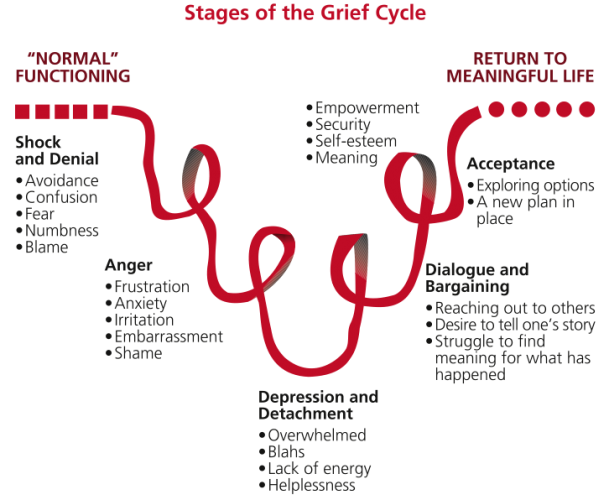
We are all saddened to learn of the death of STUDENT who died over break as a result of an alleged suicide. This is a loss for the \_\_\_\_\_ family, our school and the community. The Grief/Loss Response Team met this morning to plan for the school’s response. As we look to the hours and days ahead, we need to keep the following in mind:

* In your classes first thing this morning we are requesting that you read the script that has been provided so that the information is shared with all students in the same manner. (**read script)**
* Any information released to the public will be through the District’s Safety and Security Coordinator and/or Communications Director.
* We have contacted district support for assistance as we deal with this loss. Counselors will be here today, as well as our building counselors, to help students, parents and staff members. Administration will be in the hallways and otherwise available today to help direct students to the designated areas for support services.
* If you know of students or staff members that may need support, please encourage them to seek support from the school or district counselors at the building today. We have handed out a list of behavioral traits that may help you recognize individuals having difficulty. If you notice that someone appears to be in crisis or having difficulty, please notify a member of the Response Team or one our School Counseling staff immediately.
* A member of the crisis team will be following the student’s schedule to provide any extra support necessary to those classrooms

**Briefly go over the information below** **in regard to teacher responsibilities**

* No student is to be released from school without parental permission and should be accompanied by an adult.
* All parents will be notified by administration via email/auto-dialer by the end of the day
* There will be a brief staff meeting immediately after school today to debrief
* Teachers will prepare lessons and activities that are moderate to easy in difficulty level to keep the students engaged and actively learning during the day. Teachers will keep to the typical schedule as much as possible. This promotes a sense of safety for those grieving as well as those who are not.
* Teachers may want to postpone exams or quizzes for 2 days after the incident depending on their students’ needs.
* Teachers will only discuss the information provided in the script and will stop any “gossip” about the incident.
* Teachers may allow a short time to discuss memories of the student and process with the class but should not allow large chunks of time focusing on the student’s death during class. (approximately 15 -20 minutes). Be mindful of those students who are not affected by the loss as well.
* Teachers will allow students who are visibly upset to go to the designated intervention area. The teacher will release the students to the Hall Monitor to take to the intervention group.
* Teachers may allow students who are quietly grieving and are not disruptive to stay in class if the student chooses to do so.
* DO NOT dismiss entire classes to the counseling area. Students’ needs vary. Some students may be greatly affected by the loss while others are not. We must respect ALL student’s needs and not assume all students are grieving.
* Teachers should keep the student’s desk/space in place for about one week. A new classroom arrangement should then be created outside of student bell times; natural breaks such as weekends and fall/spring break are good times to do this.
* Teachers should keep already displayed work product and pictures of the student up for about one week following the incident. These items will then be replaced with a new class project. Do not put up new pictures or work product of the student as memorabilia.
* No memorials should be made in the classroom. The teacher should not allow students to put memorabilia on the student’s desk or at the locker. A designated space will be provided within the school for memorabilia.
* Teachers will monitor for large buttons, t-shirts or other large gestures of memorabilia of the student. Students who wear t-shirts to school with the student’s picture prominently displayed on them may be asked to remove them and they will be returned at the end of the school day. These types of memorabilia can be disruptive to the learning environment and trigger grief responses of students and teachers. The removal of these items is designed to help protect those that may be triggered.

# Stages of Grief Handout



Adapted from Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle

# A Child’s Understanding of Death Handout- Pikes Peak Hospice

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age | Concept of Death | Grief Response | Suggestions/Interventions |
| 4-7 | Death is still reversible. Feels responsible because of wishes or thoughts. Self is immortal. Suspects parents might die. | Concern with the process. How? Why? Repetitive questioning. May act as though nothing has happened, worry about parents dying, generalized distress or confusion. | Talk about it, factual information about illness or accident not symbolic language. Read books about death together, symbolic play or acting out events, identifying feelings. |
| 7 -10 | Beginning to suspect they might die. Interest in causes of death, age illness, violence. Still may have some magical thinking – my thoughts, wishes caused this. Beginning to see death as real, final. Death may be punishment. | Desire for complete details. Concern with other’s response, What is the right way to do this? Beginning to mourn. | Answer questions regarding facts of death, identify feelings, give permission to express a range of feelings. Be available but allow alone time. Allow for physical outlets and symbolic play. Talk about it. |
| 10-12 | Beginning to develop interest in spiritual aspects of life. | Understands mourning. After initial adjustment to loss of a parent, may not grieve till much later. | Reaffirm the family’s ethnic, religious, cultural, values and customs. Create rituals, customs or remembrances. |
| Teens | Essentially an adult view of death, though they may feel invincible. | May be especially sensitive to loss of a parent due to process of separation and cutting ties already begun | Listen, be available, do not attempt to take grief away. Acknowledge, support expression of feelings. Discuss suicide, causes for despair and reasons for hope. |

* Adolescence itself is a grief process. Teen loses childhood, parent loses a child.
* Children may not demonstrate grief responses right away. If adults are consumed with their own grief, children may postpone their process until stability returns to the family.

A Student Dies, a School Mourns. Are You Prepared?

By Ralph Klicker, Ph.D.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Age** | **Understanding of Death** | **How They Express Feelings of Grief** | **Grieving Behavior** | **Additional Comments** |
| 2 – 5 | Do not understand finality of death. It is temporary and reversible. | Do not have the vocabulary to express grief. Feelings will be acted out in play and behavior. | Crying Egocentric concerns. Have an interest in dead things. At times will act like the death never happened. | May ask the same questions over and over. They react to death in light of their own experiences with it. |
| 6 – 9 | Beginning to understand finality of death. Believe it is real but only happens to others, not them. | Have strong feelings of loss but it is difficult to show them. Need permission to grieve, especially boys. | Magical thinking – what they wish for happens. Can be withdrawn. Can experience nightmares. Aggressive behavior, especially in boys. | May feel responsible for death because of their behavior or magical thinking. Personify death as ghosts, monsters, etc. If it is real they can’t avoid it. |
| 9 – 12 | Have a good understanding of finality of death. Have a curiosity about the physical aspects of death. | Have the vocabulary to express feelings but will often not express the verbally but in behavior. Concerns are egocentric. Need encouragement to express feelings. | Lack of concentration. Decline in school grades. Misbehavior Aggressiveness, especially in boys. | May identify with deceased by imitating their mannerisms. Have short attention spans. Can be grieving one minute, act like nothing happened the next. Adults sometimes misinterpret as not caring. |
| 13 – 18 | Have adult understanding of death. Philosophize about life and death, search for meaning to death. | Can express feelings, but often choose not to because they feel they must be strong. Paradox of feeling immune to death but also fear it. | Aggressive behavior. Need for comforting and reassurance, especially girls. Participate in dangerous behavior like drugs or alcohol. | Have the additional problems of puberty and adolescence to compound grief. Death affects entire life of adolescent, school and relationships with others. May appear to be handling it, but really isn’t. |

# COMMON SIGNS OF GRIEF RESPONSE

The Family Loss Project/Network John R. Jordan, Ph.D. – Director

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***PHYSICAL*** | ***EMOTIONAL*** | ***COGNITIVE/SPIRITUAL*** | ***BEHAVIORAL*** |
| Back/Neck/Muscle Pain | Shock/Emotional Numbness | Disbelief/Unreality/”A Fog” | Sleep Disturbance |
| Stomach upset/ Diarrhea/Constipation | Sadness/Sorrow/ Despair | Confusion/ Disorientation | Change in appetite |
| Weight Loss | Anger/Protest/ Irritability/Resentment | Memory/Concentration problems | Searching for the deceased |
| Feelings of weakness/Fatigue | Self reproach/Guilt/ Regret | Need to make sense of the death – “why?” | Sighing/Crying/ ”Weepiness” |
| Feelings of emptiness/heaviness | Anxiety – general or specific | Rumination about deceased or death | Carrying objects/ Visiting places linking with the deceased |
| Restlessness/Nervous/ Hyperactivity/”Wired” | Fear of “going crazy” | Idealization of deceased and lowered self-esteem | Social withdrawal |
| Headaches | Helplessness/”Out of Control”/Overwhelmed | Visions/Contact with the deceased | Avoidance of reminders of deceased or the loss |
| Chills/Sweats/”Cold Hands” | Mood swings/ Emotional “rollercoaster” | Difficulty with decisions | Change in sexual desire (increase or decrease) |
| Chest pain/tightness/ Difficulty breathing | Peace/Calm/ Heightened awareness | Dreams or nightmares of deceased or death | Increased use of alcohol and other drugs |
| Dry Mouth | Relief | Absent-mindedness | Telling the story over and over |
| Startle Response | Feelings of presence | Feelings of meaninglessness | Clinging/Difficulty with separations |
|  | Loneliness | Depersonalization – sense of unreality |  |
|  | Yearning/Pining | Denial/”Not really dead, just gone” |  |
|  | Apathy/Lack of pleasure in anything | Assumptive world changes |  |
|  | Agitation |  |  |

# How Adults Can Help Children Cope with Death and Grief

If is often helpful for adults to seek additional support and education to understand their own grief process and model a healthy reaction to loss by expressing their feelings and receiving support. Children will generally learn their response to loss from adults in the family.

Children may feel frightened and insecure because they sense the grief and stress of others, and feel powerless to help. They will need additional love, support and structure in their daily routine.

When someone dies, children often worry about themselves and others dying. They need to know who would take care of them in the unlikely death of both parents.

They need an adequate explanation of the cause of death, using correct terms like die and dead. Vague terms and trying to shield them from the truth merely adds confusion. Avoid terms that associate going away, sleep, or sickness with death. Listen carefully to a child’s response.

Children have magical thinking and may believe that their behavior or thoughts can cause or reverse death.

Do not exclude children when family or friends come to comfort grieving adults. Avoidance or silence teaches children that death is a taboo subject. Children need to learn how to cope with loss, not be protected from grief.

Help children learn to recognize, name, accept and express feelings to avoid developing unhealthy defenses to cope with difficult emotions. Make physical and creative activities available for energy outlets.

A child may try to protect grieving adults and try to assume the caretaker role, but children need to grow up normally without being burdened by adult responsibilities.

Help children learn to cope with other losses. The death of a pet is a very significant loss for a child. The patterns for coping with loss and grief begin in early childhood and often continue through adulthood.

Share personal religious beliefs carefully. Children may fear or resent a God that takes to heaven someone they love and need.

A child’s grief may not be recognized because children express feelings of grief more in behavior than in words. Feelings of abandonment, helplessness, despair, anxiety, apathy, anger, guilt and fear are common and often acted out aggressively because children may be unable to express feelings verbally.

Pikes Peak Hospice

# My Grief Rights: Ten Healing Rights for Grieving Children

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. Fort Collins Colorado

Someone you love has died. You are probably having many hurtful and scary thoughts and feelings right now. Together those thoughts and feelings are called *grief*, which is a normal (though really difficult) thing everyone goes through after someone they love has died.

The following ten rights will help you understand your grief and eventually feel better about life again. Use the ideas that make sense to you. Post this list on your refrigerator or on your bedroom door or wall. Re-reading it often will help you stand on track as you move toward healing from your loss. You might also ask the grown-ups in your life to read this list so they will remember to help you in the best way they can.

1. I have the right to have my own unique feelings about the death. I may feel mad, sad or lonely.

I may feel scared or relieved. I may feel numb or sometimes not anything at all. No one will feel exactly like I do.

1. I have the right to talk about my grief whenever I feel like talking. When I need to talk I will

find someone who will listen to me and love me. When I don’t want to talk about it, that’s okay too.

1. I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way. When they are hurting, some kids

like to play so they’ll feel better for awhile. I can play or laugh, too. I might also get mad and scream. This does not mean I am bad, it just means I have scary feelings that I need help with.

1. I have the right to need other people to help me with my grief, especially grown-ups who care

about me. Mostly I need them to pay attention to what I am feeling and saying and to love me no matter what.

1. I have the right to get upset about normal, everyday problems. I might feel grumpy and have

trouble getting along with others sometimes.

1. I have the right to have “grief-bursts.” Grief-bursts are sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness

that just hit me sometimes – even long after the death. These feelings can be very strong and even scary. When this happens, I might feel afraid to be alone.

1. I have the right to use my beliefs about my god to help me deal with my feelings of grief.

Praying might make me feel better and somehow closer to the person who died.

1. I have the right to try to figure out *why* the person I love died. But it’s okay if I don’t find an

answer. *Why* questions about life and death are the hardest questions in the world.

1. I have the right to think and talk about my memories of the persona who dies. Sometimes

those memories will be happy and sometimes they might be sad. Either way, these memories help me keep alive my love for the person who died.

10.I have the right to move toward and feel my grief and, over time, to heal. I’ll go on to live a happy life, but the life and death of the person who died will always be a part of me. I’ll always miss the special person.

*(Author’s Note: This “bill of rights” for grieving children is intended to empower them to help themselves heal – and to help direct adults in their lives to be supportive as well)*

Pikes Peak Hospice

# Boys and Healing from Loss

Here are some signs that you may notice in boys who are experiencing a loss:

* Increased withdrawal from relationships and problems in friendships
* Depleted or impulsive mood
* Increase in angry outbursts
* Denial of pain
* Increasing demands for autonomy
* Inability to concentrate
* Changes in sleep patterns – increase, decrease or disturbance
* Over involvement with sports or academics 
* Increased aggressiveness
* Increased silliness
* Increased risk taking behavior
* Low self-esteem or harsh self-criticism
* Weight change – either up or down

Boys have traditionally been stifled from expressing emotions. Here are a few things they do:

* Using actions instead of words \* Problem Solving
* Door Slamming \* Withdrawing
* Throwing hands in the air \* Timed release

Keep In Mind!

* Boys take longer to heal! \* Avoid shame words like “Why”, “How
* Offer boys shame free zones could you?”, Use “Tell me about it”
* Do something with the boy \* Look beyond the anger, aggression and
* Non-judgment rambunctiousness
* Talk of your own experiences \* Express love openly and freely
* Once a day give your boy your \* Let boys know they don’t have to be

undivided attention sturdy oaks

* When a boy does express tender \* Create a broad inclusive model for

emotions avoid teasing masculinity

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Do!** | **Don’t!** |
| Wrestling | Ask him how he feels |
| Car therapy- talk in the car | Tell him what to do |
| Work backwards from action to emotion | Tell him you know how he feels |
| Ask him “What’s the toughest thing about this?” | Follow him into his cave |
| Tell him what you are feeling |  |
| Honor his loss with your action |  |

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# Girls and Healing from Loss

Here are some signs that you may notice in girls who are experiencing a loss.

* Increased withdrawal and private time
* Clinging and intensified friendships
* Depleted or sad mood
* Increased times of crying
* Pointing out of pain
* Weight gain or loss and other physical symptoms
* Over involvement with studies
* Increased care giving to others
* Increased giggle-fests
* Added sense of responsibility
* Low self-esteem and harsh self-criticism

Girls have traditionally been encouraged to express emotions. Here are a few things they do.

* Long telephone conversations
* Dramatic responses
* Crying with friends
* Girls grow faster and grieve faster
* Offer shame free zones
* **Talk with the girl**
* Share your own experiences
* Talk about your own experiences
* Once a day give undivided attention
* When she cries and shares, hold her hand
* Sharing magazines and books
* Emotionally more needy and clingy
* Drawing, writing

Keep in mind!

* Girls grow faster and grieve faster
* Offer shame free zones
* **Talk with the girl**
* Share your own experiences
* Talk about your own experiences
* Once a day give undivided attention
* When she cries and shares, hold her hand
* Avoid guilt statements
* Look beyond the tears and drama
* Express love openly and freely
* Let girls know they don’t have to be the Big Woman in the house
* Woman in the house
* Create a broad and inclusive model for femininity

D0! Don’t!

* Ask about her day \* Assume how she feels
* Honor her loss with words and actions \* Leaver her on her own
* Shopping Therapy (disciplined) \* Tell her you know how she feels
* Ask her what she can do to help herself \* Forget about her

# ADOLESCENT GRIEF

Adolescents may display their grief in a different way that we see in adults. These are common reactions:

1. Distraught, many tears, sobbing, very dramatic

2. Withdrawn, inactive, appears depressed

3. Few tears, appears quiet and moves on or gets real busy, doesn’t appear sad

**Normal Developmental Tasks**

Adolescence can begin at age 11 and go through age 22. There are specific developmental tasks that need to be accomplished in order to move successfully into young adulthood. These do not go in any particular order, and may be worked on over and over until the adolescent feels comfortable.

1. Join formal and informal groups to discover where they feel comfortable and fit in.

2. Experimenting with many behaviors and activities to find out what is right for the individual. 3. Gender related issues, sexual attractions, feelings, experiences.

4. Challenging parental authority in their life.

5. More complex ideas and abstract thought.

6. Intensify education and set goals.

**Possible Red Flags**

You may see some of these behaviors throughout adolescence. They are a matter for concern when they interrupt individual/family functioning in a serious way for more than two weeks. If you are concerned about any of these behaviors, talk to your child, a counselor and/or your doctor.

* Withdrawn, immobilized, stops doing any usual activities
* Grades drop dramatically/skipping school
* Not sleeping, sleep disturbances, bad dreams, nightmares
* Weight change
* Changes in friends – you don’t meet the new friends or may not like them
* Becomes highly involved/dependent on a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship to the exclusion of other friends/activities
* Appears angry and hostile, and may pick on younger sibling excessively
* Bad attitude, separates self from family, negative about everything
* Thoughts and talk of death – attracted to the topic
* Music – only listens to music that has negative themes and appears obsessed with it
* Indications of substance abuse
* Illegal activity

# Helping Your Grieving Adolescent

Parenting teenagers...it’s a tough job under the best of circumstances. But when a teenager is grieving as well, four dynamics place additional stress on the situation.

First, grieving families often feel a need to pull together for support. Since adolescence is increasingly a time for breaking away and relying on peer support, these conflicting needs can place parents and teens at odds with one another.

Second, adolescents are keenly aware of parental reactions and, when parents are grieving, often try to protect them from further pain. Most commonly, this takes the form of not talking about it.

Third, simply because they’ve experienced the death of a loved one, grieving teens tend to feel different from their peers. In an attempt to fit in, they may try to ignore their own grief reactions. Nevertheless, their normal grief reactions are seen beneath the surface, waiting for expression...healthy or unhealthy, at appropriate or inappropriate times.

Fourth, the stress of bereavement adds to the physical and emotional swings already common in adolescence. So what’s a caring parent or caregiver to do? Here are four strategies for helping your adolescent through bereavement.

Provide and environment the adolescent perceives as safe. Like adults, if they don’t feel safe, young people can’t do the necessary grief work. They need to know that they can trust themselves as having grief reactions that are normal, their peers and adults to be supportive, and parents to be a dependable safety net.

You can help through structure, discipline, and education. Structure and maintaining routines provide adolescents with a subtle, daily sense of continuity and permanence at a time when everything else seems up for grabs

Discipline...reasonable and caring but consistent and firm...reassures adolescents that someone is in control and will save them from serious harm.

Education can transform a neutral environment into a healing one for your teen. Make sure the adults in his or her world (school personnel, coaches, bosses, clergy, etc.) know that a death has occurred. Share with them printed materials about normal grief responses and what grieving people need. And educate your child about normal reactions to grief so that he knows he is not going crazy and can trust the way his body, mind and emotions are responding. If he pulls back from discussion, provide books or movies that illustrate normal grieving.

Encourage your teen to express what the grief experience is like for him or her. Recognize and affirm that her experience is likely to be different from everyone else’s in the family. Provide “emotional coaching” for your child by modeling appropriate emotional reactions to loss.  If your teenager is a quiet or private person, encourage other methods of expression. Helpful ways of expressing emotion include playing music or music instruments, writing (song, poetry, diaries, letters to the person who died), sports (including martial arts and punching bags) and art and photography.

Facilitate an ongoing connection with the person who died. Tell stories about the person who died. Give your adolescent a photo of him or her with the person. Support him in visiting the gravesite if that is meaningful to him. Make sure he has a memento of the person who died...a favorite tool or sports or hobby item, a piece of jewelry, a book, a sweater or robe...by which to stay connected.  And make sure you remember (in discussion, in prayer, by way of a small gift) to include the memory of the person who died in your celebration of important events in your child’s life, events such as graduations, getting a driver’s license, participating in his or her first school play or first varsity sporting event.

Encourage your teenager to participate in normal adolescent life as she feels able. Grieving takes enormous energy, so your child may need to slow down a bit while she works on her grief. However, it’s important for her to know that you don’t expect her to take on an adult role now that someone important has died. Let her know you love and accept and support her...just as she is now with all the normal living and loving and learning she has yet to do.

# What to Say to Grieving Students

“I’m sorry that your mother died.”

“I’m available at lunch (be specific) if you want to talk or shoot some baskets.”

“Let’s talk about what would make you feel more comfortable in class.” Some ideas might be:

* Homework issues
* Being able to leave class when needed  Having a journal or drawing paper for times the student can’t concentrate

“I care about you.”

“I am aware that today is your birthday/your mother’s birthday/Mother’s Day/the anniversary of the day your mother died. I’m thinking about you.”

“When is your basketball game? Maybe I can stop by and watch you play”

**Other Students or Teachers**

* “I can’t know how you feel, but I want to.”
* “I can’t know how you feel, but my Grandfather died (share).”
* “If you want to talk, I want to listen. If you don’t want to talk, I’ll hang out with you.”
* “If you don’t want to talk to other students, I’ll tell them about your mother.”  “I’d like to do something with you on Saturday. We can sit and talk about your Mom if you’d like, or we can go roller skating at the mall – both is O.K.”  “Do you want a hug?”  “Show me her pictures.” *(Don’t forget to continue to joke and crackup. Laughter is food to help us endure.)*

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# Helpful Websites

* <https://grievingstudents.org/>
* <https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief>
* <https://childrengrieve.org/resources/10-ways-to-help-a-grieving-child>
* <http://grievingchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Should-Your-Child-Attend-the-Funeral-or-Memorial-Service.pdf>
* <http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/child_loss.htm>

# Facilitating a Class Discussion

After you have read the script to the class, often it is important to allow some class discussion and an opportunity for students to share their thoughts and feelings about the loss. Some students may choose to participate while others may not. It is important to respect the students’ desires while still helping them feel included. It is also important to explain that the school day will continue relatively typically to help provide comfort and stability in this difficult time. Keeping to the schedule allows those that need the stability that option while allowing those that need a break the option to go to the counseling area for a time. It is not meant as a disrespect to the person who died but as a comfort to the class.

“I want to give the class an opportunity to share any thoughts or feelings about STUDENT. Please be respectful and keep your comments as positive as possible. We can share as a class or you can talk amongst yourself in small groups. How would you like to proceed?”

* Allow the class to decide if they want to share as a group or break up into small groups.

**Class Discussion**

* Try to keep the discussion about positive memories of the student without glamorizing the student’s life. This can be tricky. The student who died was not perfect but we also do not want to focus on negative traits. Try to keep the discussion neutral if possible.
* Try to have the students express their own emotions about the situation. Help them name their emotions and validate their feelings. Do not tell them how they feel.
* Help the students problem solve how they will manage situations where they will be reminded of the loss of their classmate.
* Discuss ways they can support each other during this time; Random Acts of Kindness, share, hugs, etc.
* Review the Grief Cycle with the students and help them recognize that what they are feeling is normal as well as how this will resolve. You can project this from your packet or from the school website under counseling.
* Keep rumors about the incident/situation to a minimum and keep information to what was provided in the script.
* As the discussion begins to shift to other topics or thoughts, you will then recognize that it is time to move into the lesson planned for the day.

**Small Groups**

* Walk around the room and listen to the discussions. Attempt to steer the discussions to positive memories, feelings about the situation, and how they will manage their emotional responses over the next few days to weeks.
* Project the Grief Cycle information onto the board or provide it in some way.
* Keep rumors and discussion of the facts of the incident to what was provided in the script.
* If students are distraught, offer to let them go to the designated counseling area
* If students do not want to process, allow them to read or draw, etc. Checking on these students as well.
* When the noise level of the room indicates that the conversations have shifted, proceed with the lesson.