

Addressing Grief: Tips for Teachers

- **Be understanding and straightforward.**

Be understanding of common grief reactions, which include: decreased appetite, difficulty sleeping, a decreased ability to concentrate, increased sadness, and social withdrawal. Discuss death in developmentally appropriate terms for students. Use words such as "death", "die", or "dying" and avoid euphemisms such as "they went away"

- **Listen and be patient.**

Remember that you may have to answer the same question multiple times and repeat key information to ensure understanding. It's okay to not have all the answers. Listen, acknowledge feelings and be nonjudgemental.

- **Do not force students to share their feelings with others**

Provide them with opportunities to share their feelings privately. Students often seek support via social media. Be aware of what is being posted and shared. Encourage students to seek support for a friend in need. Students in their mid-to-late teens tend to feel more comfortable expressing their feelings and grief similar to adults.

- **Maintain a normal routine in your classroom**

Engage students in activities they previously enjoyed. Provide the opportunity to talk and ask questions and use these questions to guide further discussion. Encourage students to share feelings, but in ways that are not disruptive to the class or hurtful to other students.

- **Help bereaved students find support**

Talk to bereaved student's classmates about grief and emphasize the importance of being understanding and sensitive. Help students in need find support. There will likely be others who have also experienced the death of a loved one.

Possible Reactions to Watch Out For:

- Poor school performance
- Anxiety
- Depression
- High risk behaviors such as substance use
- Emotional numbing

