

When a Death Impacts Your School

YOURSELF

Check In

Take a moment to evaluate how you, your colleagues and the students are reacting to the death, and identify impacting factors. Be aware that some may have a reaction that you don't understand, but may actually be linked to "old" or other personal grief experiences.

- ◆ Are there feelings from other deaths that occurred in the past that are resurfacing now?
- ◆ Do you know someone who is dealing with a terminal illness or other diagnosis right now?
- ◆ What was your relationship with the person who died?
- ◆ What was the cause of death?

All of these factors will impact the effect this death will have on you.

COLLEAGUES

- ◆ Remember that everyone's reactions vary when a death impacts your school.
- ◆ Some find it helpful to talk about how they are feeling soon after the death, while others need time to process the situation and may need some time on their own.
- ◆ It is important be patient with one another and accepting of the varied reactions.

STUDENTS

- ◆ Many factors will impact how students will grieve: developmental age, personality, relationship to the person who died, previous experience with death.
- ◆ Encourage students to express their feelings in a safe way and help them find healthy outlets for their grief: writing, drawing, talking and/or physical activities.
- ◆ Never force students to express their feelings but encourage them to find someone with whom they feel safe and who they can connect with when they are ready.

Identify Supports

A healthy support system is imperative to creating a healthy school environment. While your job every day is to help and support students, grief support is not everyone's strength.

- ◆ Be honest with yourself about what role you are comfortable playing at this time.
- ◆ Identify those in the school system that can provide needed support and those that may be able to fill in with other roles as well.
- ◆ Identify those outside the school on whom you can lean during this difficult time.

- ◆ Everyone has something to offer in helping to make your school a safe, supportive and functioning environment.
- ◆ Check in with one another to see what everyone feels comfortable doing and keep in mind that support looks different for everyone.

- ◆ Students may look for support from their peers, school staff and/or their support systems outside of school.
- ◆ Not all students require the same type of support, so be open and flexible to the needs of the students.
- ◆ Share with the students what kind of support will be available at the school and also what supports are available outside of school.
- ◆ Note: Support within the school should be open to any student who may be struggling, helping them process what they are experiencing in ways that work for them and that encourages healthy coping skills.

YOURSELF & COLLEAGUES

STUDENTS

Grief

Reactions

*Individual reactions to a death are unique to that person and we need to do our best to not judge the reactions of ourselves and others. A wide range of emotions occur and **all feelings are ok!***

- ◆ Feelings themselves aren't inherently good or bad, it is our reaction to them and what we do with the emotion that can have positive or negative consequences.
- ◆ Grief goes beyond emotions. You also may notice physical reactions to the death such as sleep changes, difficulty concentrating, change in appetite, headaches, body aches, etc.
- ◆ It is important to find healthy ways to cope: talking to others, writing, art, music, physical activities, hobbies etc.
- ◆ Remember there is no timeline on grief. Seek additional support if you feel you are struggling to manage your grief in a healthy way.

- ◆ You may notice some changes in the students that are grieving, such as: frequent trips to the nurse, daydreaming in class, a sudden drop in grades, social isolation, acting out.
- ◆ Even if the student did not have a close relationship with the person who died we do not know what is underneath their reaction to the death. It is not our job to judge the grief but rather to find ways to help and support the student.
- ◆ The school counselor or social worker can assist to get the student the proper help and support they need so that they can succeed in school.

Establish

Routine

Getting back to a normal routine after a death can be both helpful and difficult.

- ◆ Some people will want to return to daily activities right away and some may find it hard to do.
- ◆ Communication is key. Talk about any difficulties in re-establishing routine, decisions on moving forward and supporting one another. This can help make the process easier for everyone.
- ◆ Getting back to your routine in your own time is important to establishing a "new normal" after the death and continue to live life.

- ◆ It is especially important for students to return to routine while allowing for accommodations based on their grief needs.
- ◆ Accommodations should help to acknowledge what has occurred and provide a supportive environment for the students' grief.
- ◆ Although it may be difficult for them at times to focus due to their grief, the routine is the familiar piece during an uncertain time.

Make Space for Grief

Allow yourself a space to grieve as you return to life and your routine.

- ◆ It is important to communicate with one another when we are having a tough time. Getting feedback on things others can help you with can lighten your load.
- ◆ Give yourself permission to take breaks when you need them.
- ◆ If you are having a hard time concentrating, try writing things down so you remember them.

- ◆ Understand that students also need a space to grieve
- ◆ Allowing space within the routine of the school day will be helpful both for the student as well as the greater school community.
- ◆ Consider starting a grief support group in your school for students.

YOURSELF & COLLEAGUES

STUDENTS

Honoring a Life Lived



No matter who the person was, or how they died, an essential part of healing is how we choose to honor a life that has impacted our own.



- ◆ Communicate with one another about tangible ways you can honor the person who has died.
- ◆ Consider what has been done in the past and decide together if you would like to continue a tradition or begin something new.
- ◆ Don't feel like it's ever "too early" or "too late" to do something. Do what feels best for everyone involved...no need to rush.
- ◆ Be cognizant of "special days" - for you, your colleagues, the students and the family: birthdays, anniversary of the death, holidays, graduation, etc. Send a note to those closest to the person who died.
- ◆ Share your personal memories of the person who died with the family. They will treasure knowing how their loved one impacted your life!

- ◆ Invite students to share ideas about how they would like to honor the person who has died through temporary or permanent visible memorials, donation to a cause, gift to the family, etc.
- ◆ Even if all of the shared ideas aren't used, the students will so appreciate being heard.
- ◆ Always involve students in a timeline for taking down temporary visible memorials (those can be gifted to the family!).
- ◆ Encourage the students to acknowledge special days with you, with one another and with the family.

For more information or for additional support services, please contact:

Hamilton's Academy of Grief & Loss

(515) 697-3666

www.HamiltonsFuneralHome.com