

Help at School

Before a grieving student returns to the classroom, teachers should prepare other students in the class with the following steps:

- Explain the basic facts of what happened.
- Dispel any rumors.
- Explain the ways grief can express itself.
- Make students aware of what and how they say things.
- Give students examples of how they can help the returning student.
- Ask for volunteers to help tutor or partner with the returning student.
- Plan a “catch-up day” to help the returning student and any other students who are behind catch up with homework due to missed days. (This can be done on a regular basis so the student does not feel singled out.)

Teachers should also:

- Find out what resources are available on campus and within the district.
- Evaluate the work the student has missed and select the most important assignments, tests and quizzes for the student to make up.
- Be available to the student—set up a weekly/biweekly conference time to review grades, talk about progress and how to continue reinforcing acclimation and success.
- Work closely with the other teachers and school counselors involved with the grieving student.
- Keep in contact with the student’s parent(s) or guardian(s). This can be done via e-mail, phone and with a weekly grade check or progress report.
- Be sensitive throughout the year—especially around holidays, birthdays and anniversaries.

Counselors and social workers should:

- Find what out what resources are available on campus and within the district.
- Update teachers regularly on the student.
- Meet with the grieving student on a regular basis.
- Work closely with the other teachers and school counselors involved with the grieving student.
- Keep in contact with the student’s parent(s) or guardian(s). This can be done via e-mail, phone, and with a weekly grade check or progress report.
- Be sensitive throughout the year, especially around holidays, birthdays and anniversaries.

Here are some ways teachers and classmates can help grieving students get back on track with their school lives:

Problem: Forgetfulness

The student may forget textbooks, supplies, tests, assignments, or reports.

Solution

- Establish and reinforce routines and schedules.
- Have extra textbooks and supplies available in case they are forgotten.
- Have students write down important dates and information—even create a simple agenda form for the student to use.



More this way...

Problem: Lack of concentration

The student may have a difficult time staying focused and appear to be “day dreaming.”

Solution

- Refocus student.
- Break information into smaller segments.
- Assign a partner, study buddy.
- Allow ample time to complete the assignment or task.
- Provide breaks as needed.

Problem: Lack of interest or motivation

The student may appear to be uninterested or even display a “why bother” attitude. He/she may be focusing on everything that has happened and may question the importance/relevance of school work.

Solution

- Meet weekly/biweekly to review grade, progress, problem areas.
- Encourage the student to use his/her experience to reach out to others.

Problem: Lack of organization

It may take a grieving student a lot longer to accomplish a given task. What once took 15 minutes to finish may now take an hour.

Solution

- Refocus student.
- Provide an agenda to help keep track of assignments and tests.
- Assign a partner to administer the test, quiz, project, or assignment.
- Allow ample time to complete a task.

Problem: Inability to retain information

The student may have difficulty retaining information. Help the student change study habits by providing notes and using some of the following tips. It may help to have the student do this initially with a partner and then alone.

Solution

- Outline reading material.
- Highlight important facts.
- Read “out loud” instead of silently.
- Complete homework in 20-minute segments with 5-minute breaks.

Problem: Preoccupation with the event

Students may appear to be “day dreaming” because their minds will wander back to what has happened. Even if they are doing something they enjoy, they will find their mind drifting back to the loss experience.

Solution

- Refocus student.
- Work on smaller amounts of information.
- Work in shorter increments of time.

Problem: Impatience and lowered tolerance

Grieving students may be impatient—especially if a peer complains of something trivial.

Solution

Make other students aware of what and how they say things around the grieving student.

- Have the student write about this frustration in a journal entry or work it into class discussion as it applies to the lesson (theme of a short story, current event, etc.)
- Remind the grieving student that other students may not have experienced a loss on that level and do not necessarily mean to be shallow or unfeeling/unthinking.
- Help the grieving student find a healthy outlet of expression for this frustration.

Problem: Drop in grades

Students may experience a drop in grades due to absences and all of the problems listed above. Make-up work may seem too overwhelming.

Solution

- Conference with the student, counselor and parent/guardian, and identify the most important assignments/tests/quizzes requiring make-up.
- Create a reasonable timeline for make-up work.
- Assign a class partner/tutor to help.
- Have the student complete only the designated work.
- Provide a weekly grade check to help student and parent/guardian monitor progress.