

Helping Students Who are Returning to School After a Death

“I remember when I went back to school how terrified I was. My heart began to beat faster as I reached for the doorknob.” - 12 year-old

1. Talk to the student about what she/he may want the class to know about the death and who should tell them. Ideal to know this before the student returns to school.
2. Make a plan with the student so she/he may leave the room if she/he is upset.
3. Find a safe place that the student can go during the school day, at recess, at lunch or during class if she/he wants some time alone.
4. Find a safe place that the student can go during the day if she/he wishes to talk with a counselor, principal or nurse.
5. Encourage the student to answer questions only when she/he feels like it. If the student does not want to answer, suggest that they say, “I’d rather not talk about that right now.”
6. Offer the student a journal as a gift. Encourage the student to write about feelings, thoughts and/or memories in the journal during the school day when needed, especially during times the student is not able to concentrate on school work. Offer crayons and a blank drawing book to a younger child.
7. Negotiate, on an ongoing basis, homework and classroom assignment expectations. Grief takes tremendous physical and emotional energy. It will take time for the student to return to previous standards of performance.
8. Offer yourself as a listener or friend to the student if you want to do so. Designate times when you are available; i.e., lunch, recess, after school.

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