

## **Nine Ways to Support Grieving Students**

- 1. Children have difficulty accepting the reality of a death due to:**
  - Lack of experience with death and death related concepts
  - Immature thought processes lead to disbelief and confusion
  - Always talk about death in plain, age-appropriate language (i.e.: “I know your sister died and I am here to support you when you need a break or want to talk.”)
- 2. Euphemistic language such as “We lost Daddy today” adds to their confusion.**
  - Instead of saying “your Mommy was very sick and she died” use the names for the cause of death (i.e.: breast cancer, brain hemorrhage, etc.)
- 3. Encourage Parents to be truthful about the circumstances of the death.**
  - Children always find out the truth
  - Impacts their ability to trust when they have been deceived by those they love
  - Better to find out from parent than to hear the news some other way
- 4. Get permission from the child to break the news to student body**
  - Some children appreciate not having to be the one to tell their peers
  - Other children prefer for it to remain private for fear of being “different”
- 5. Children appreciate a show of support from school staff & students**
  - Encourage attendance at funeral or memorial services
  - Collect handmade cards from their peers to deliver to the family
- 6. Identify staff person who the child can go to for support during school**
  - Meet with child to discuss ways they can cope during the school day
  - Offer to listen when they need to talk, to draw or read grief related books.
- 7. Advocate for students when their grief impacts their academic or social performance**
  - May not be prepared to resume class work during initial weeks
  - Identify students who can bring the child assignments prior to their return to school
  - Explore whether tutoring is necessary to help them catch up on missed work
  - Some children require professional help from a licensed therapist to adjust to life without the deceased.
- 8. Know that Grief is a lifelong process so student records should indicate the need for ongoing support in the second and third year etc.**
  - Birthdays, anniversaries and holidays are difficult times for grieving students
  - Other transitions and secondary losses may trigger anniversary reactions.
- 9. Offer parent referrals to OUR HOUSE or organize an OUR HOUSE Grief Support Group for your school**