**Tips When the Whole School is Affected by a Teacher or Student Death**

* A letter and/or direct communication via email should be sent home to all parents on school letterhead informing them of the death. Information to include in the communication:
  + Facts about the death to dispel rumors
  + Discussion of the range of feelings and reactions that may occur throughout the grief process
  + Guidance about talking to their children about the death
  + Indicators of the need for mental health counseling
  + Direction on how to contact the school if they have questions or believe their child may benefit from counseling
  + Direction on how to obtain community resources
* Share factual information with staff (through meetings and bulletins), students (through class announcements and meetings), and parents (through letters/email). Regularly provide them with relevant updates.
* Provide teachers with guidelines on how to share information about the death with their students and establish referral procedures for students requiring additional support.
* Pay close attention to students who have experienced recent deaths or key life changes, witnessed the death, or have emotional problems.

**Tips for Specific Age Groups**

**Preschool**

* Avoid euphemisms as preschoolers have trouble understanding death and may believe the death is reversible.
* Provide opportunities to express thoughts and feelings about death through play activities and drawing.
* Answer questions using concrete descriptions and be prepared to repeatedly answer questions.
* Possible reactions include:
  + Crying or screaming
  + Clinging to caregivers or other trusted adults
  + Fear of separation
  + Regressive behaviors such as wetting pants and thumb sucking
  + Decreased verbalization

**Elementary School**

* These students may ask questions and seek to try to understand what happened. Be patient and refer them to adults that can answer their questions.
* Students below the age of eight may engage in magical thinking and believe they could have prevented the death. Recognize these feelings and fears but do not validate them.
* Students ages nine through twelve may feel less comfortable showing feelings and seeing expressions of grief in others. Make sure to provide these students with a variety of ways to express grief.
* Possible reactions include:
  + Behavioral difficulties
  + Decreased concentration
  + Poor school performance
  + Depression
  + Irritability
  + Withdrawal
  + Somatic complaints (headaches & stomachaches)

**Middle and High School**

* Do not force students to share their feelings with others, including their peers if they do not feel comfortable. 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.
* High school students may use physical contact to show their support and empathy (e.g., hugging or touching the arm)
* Possible reactions include:
  + Poor school performance
  + Anxiety
  + Depression
  + High risk behaviors or substance use
  + Emotional numbing
  + Suicidal thoughts

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**Recommended Resources**

[Addressing Grief: Brief Facts and Tips](http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/addressing-grief)

[When Grief/Loss Hits Close to Home: Tips for Caregivers](http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/addressing-grief/when-grief/loss-hits-close-to-home-tips-for-caregivers)

[Memorials: Special Considerations When Memorializing an Incident](http://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Handouts/Safety%20and%20Crisis/WS1H21.Memorials.pdf)

[The Dougy Center (National Center for Grieving Children & Families)](http://www.dougy.org/)

[Mayo Clinic Terminal illness: Supporting a terminally ill loved one.](http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/end-of-life/in-depth/grief/art-20047491)

[The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](http://www.nctsnet.org/resources)

[American Cancer Society](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/childrenandcancer/index)

[Sesame Street Grief Resources](http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/tlc/griefresources)

[National Alliance for Grieving Children:](http://childrengrieve.org/)

[Coalition to Support Grieving Students](http://www.grievingstudents.org)

[Recommended Books for Children Coping With Loss or Trauma](http://www.nasponline.org/x33507.xml)