

Suggestions to Teachers for Helping Students Following Death in a School

1. Be prepared for tears. Crying is a normal and healthy reaction, even though it may make you or some students uncomfortable.
2. Recognize that some students who are traumatized most by this news may be very quiet or seem to be in a daze. Be alert to this possibility and have someone bring these students to the counseling office. Notify the counselors if you become aware of a student who is especially affected by the death.
3. During the day, you may, if you wish, let your students discuss this event or allow them to write about their feelings. Avoid rumors and blaming through speculation about causality.
4. If, in your opinion, the class discussion is not helping some grieving students, send them to the counseling office. A counselor or crisis interventionist will be there to assist them.
5. Just listening to students express their feelings and responding to the “hurt: is helpful.” Supportive responses include:

“I can see that you are really hurting.”

“It is very hard to accept the death of someone you knew well.”

“It must seem unbelievable that someone your age has...”

6. Some teachers ask their students to share the memories they have of their deceased friend or teacher. This discussion helps them realize the influence the deceased person has had in their lives.
7. Avoid responses which could be perceived as cold or avoiding any discussion about death:

“It’s best if we just forget about his and get back to our work.”

“You’ll feel better tomorrow.”

“OK, let’s start our test.”

“Here, you move up to this empty chair.”

8. Consult with crisis intervention team members for further strategies on working with student grief.