



CHILDREN'S GRIEF EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

IDEAS FOR COPING WITH DEATH IN YOUR SCHOOL OR ORGANIZATION

IMPORTANT NOTE: *If there is an emotionally or psychologically unstable student in class, consult with the school psychologist, counselor, social worker, nurse, or special education teacher and the child's parents.*

Here are some suggestions for supporting each other prior to and after the death. Adapt these suggestions to the needs of the students and the family involved.

Before the death you can:

- Allow students to talk about their own feelings
- If the child has hospice care, with the family's permission, invite the social worker or nurse to come talk with the class
- Answer questions about the illness, disorder, or disease
- Reassure the students that the illness is not contagious, even when that seems obvious
- Reassure the students that the sick child is not in pain (if that's true)
- Reassure students that they did not cause the sickness
- Create a banner with each class member contributing artwork or notes to the sick child
- Make an audio or video recording of students' messages to the child and family.

Both before and after the death:

- Create opportunities for service to the family
- Make greeting cards
- Visit as appropriate
- Share in a class project to make something for the sick child or family
- Ask a florist to donate flowers to the class so the class can make a bouquet to deliver
- Parents may coordinate, prepare and deliver meals for the family
- When a terminally ill elementary age child dies, with the bereaved family's permission, notify the students' parents of the death and relevant information
- Encourage the parents to discuss this with the children prior to coming to class
- When parents ask, "Should my child attend the funeral or memorial service?" the appropriate answer is to allow the child to decide, if the funeral is open to the community.

Some additional suggestions for supporting each other after the death of a student:

- Answer questions about the death truthfully.
- When Dinosaurs Die by Laurie and Marc Brown offers a helpful explanation of death for preschool and elementary age children
- Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley is meaningful for all ages
- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia is popular with older children and adults
- Remind students that the illness was not contagious, even when that seems obvious
- Reassure the students that the child did not die in pain (if true) and is not in pain now
- Reassure students that nothing they thought or did caused the death
- Continue to create opportunities for service to the family
- Attend the funeral
- Send a special note from the class on the deceased's birthday and special holidays.