

Grief Issues at School

Common Signs of Grief in Children and Adolescents	Ways to Help
<p><u>Cognitive</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgetfulness: Children may forget school assignments, book reports, or backpacks at home. • Disorganization: It may take a grieving child an hour to do what previously took 15 minutes. • Inability to concentrate: Grieving children may “day dream” and find it hard to stay focused. • Inability to retain information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students establish routines or develop schedules. • Remind them to write down important things. • Outline reading material • Highlight important facts • Read “out loud” instead of to oneself • Complete homework in segments. Encourage students to work in 20 minutes segments, with 5 minute breaks. • Have a get-together with friends to help the grieving student catch up.
<p><u>Emotional</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of interest or motivation: Even if the child is doing something s/he loves. • Crying at unexpected times: Children may experience sudden, overwhelming waves of grief. • Lowered tolerance level and increased impatience: Grieving children may be impatient, especially if someone else complains of something perceived as trivial, i.e., “bad hair day.” • Hyperactivity and/joking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentle encouragement to continue with regular activities. • Identify a place inside (quiet reading area) and outside the classroom (guidance counselor’s office) if the student feels stressed or upset. • Sensitively maintain usual expectations, academic standards and discipline. • Normalize feelings by letting student know that it is okay to feel irritable, sad, and even angry. Remind student that is not a good idea to take out feelings on others. • If needed, develop a personal support plan.

<p><u>Physical</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling tired, lacking energy: Grieving children may feel fatigue, even with enough sleep. • Aches and pains: Children may experience stomachaches and headaches • Non-serious, recurrent illnesses such as colds, sore throats • Difficulty sleeping: May have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or experience disturbing dreams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage regular sleep, healthy eating and exercise. • Develop plan with school nurse as needed for brief check-ins or rest. • Allow for a brief call home to talk with parent or caregiver. • Develop a bedtime routine that allows for extra time together to talk, read together, listen to soothing music or just be together.
<p><u>Social</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased interest in interacting with friends or activities • Change in peer group: Children may seek out peers who have experienced a similar loss. • Noncompliance with adults • Regressive behavior: Children may be more “clingy” or engage in other “babyish” behaviors. • Angry Outbursts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare child’s peers and friends for the student’s sadness and encourage them to continue to provide opportunities for normal activities and interactions. • Help students plan for handling questions for other peers and adults in their lives. • Uphold school standards in a compassionate way. • Help children learn ways to safely express powerful emotions (physical activity, drawing, and writing).

Remember:

- It is not unusual for children to experience a temporary drop in academic performance.
- Children may be reluctant or refuse to go to school. The first step to address this issue is to understand it from the child’s perspective. Is the child anxious about being separated from his or her parent? Perhaps they are having difficulty concentrating and grades are dropping. Understanding will help to direct appropriate intervention.