



Grief - Guidelines for Teachers

1. Take care of yourself. Get the support you need to deal with your own responses to this loss or others this one brings to the surface. There are people available to assist with your class. Contact your department chair or the main office or ask any other staff member to make the call for you.
2. Recognize that some students will not understand the loss and may react insensitively. Try to look upon this as a teachable moment when you can instruct them in socially appropriate ways to support others, or, if they cannot do that, at least withdraw from conversation.
3. Remember that students are usually ready to talk about a loss before adults are. Your students may need to talk about what happened. If you don't feel up to it, contact your school's counseling center and request a counselor or social worker to lead the discussion. If you feel comfortable leading the discussion, here are some things people of all ages often need to talk about:
 - a. What happened – getting the facts straight. When a disease is responsible for the death, there may be questions about the disease. School nurses can answer such questions.
 - b. How the event relates to other events in their lives. Most people have experienced losses. These losses typically come back to us when a new loss occurs. We need to integrate this one into our history.
 - c. The meaning of the loss for themselves and for those around them. This will vary significantly from person to person. Respect of others' responses is extremely important.
 - d. Coping skills for dealing with the pain for themselves and for others around them. Healthy coping skills should be encouraged and unhealthy ones challenged and replaced.
 - e. Resources for further assistance for themselves or others around them – counselors have referral sources.
 - f. Maintaining their usual routines during recovery. This is the best course of action; unless we were very close to the person who died, we need our routines to take our minds off the pain for part of the day.
4. It's OK to shed a few tears with your students. If you are completely overcome, ask a nearby teacher to call your department chair or the main office and ask that someone come and take care of your class so you can take care of yourself.
5. If you have known about a fatal illness for a while, you may have prepared yourself for the death. Sometimes people have done much of their grieving before the death occurs; then they wonder why they are not responding to the loss. They need reassurance that deaths we have prepared for may bring forth a less intense response than those that occur without warning.
6. Be gentle with yourself and with all those around you in the coming days.