

## Supporting Grieving Children in a School Setting

### **1. Children have difficulty accepting the reality of a death due to:**

- Lack of experience with death and death related concepts
- Immature thought processes leading to disbelief and confusion
- Euphemistic language that can be confusing and misleading. Talk about death in plain, age-appropriate language.
  - Instead of saying, “We lost Daddy today” say, “Daddy died”.
  - Instead of saying “your Mommy was very **sick** and she died” use the name for the cause of death (i.e.: breast cancer, brain hemorrhage, etc.)

### **2. Encourage parents/guardians to be truthful about the circumstances of the death.**

- Children will inevitably find out the truth
- Better to find out from the parent/guardian than to hear the news some other way
- Not telling the child the truth will impact their ability to trust

### **3. Get permission from the child to break the news to student body**

- Some children appreciate not having to be the one to tell their peers
- Other children prefer for it to remain private for fear of being “different”

### **4. Children appreciate a show of support from school staff & students**

- Encourage attendance at funeral or memorial services
- Collect handmade cards from their peers to deliver to the family

### **5. Identify staff person who the child can go to for support during school**

- Meet with child to discuss ways they can cope during the school day
- Offer to listen when they need to talk, to draw or read grief related books.

### **6. Advocate for students when their grief impacts their academic or social performance**

- May not be prepared to resume class work during initial weeks
- Identify students who can bring the child assignments prior to their return to school
- Explore whether tutoring is necessary to help them catch up on missed work
- Some children require professional help from a licensed therapist to adjust to life without the deceased.

### **7. Know that grief is a lifelong process so student records should indicate the need for ongoing support in the second and third year etc.**

- Birthdays, anniversaries and holidays are difficult times for grieving students
- Other transitions and secondary losses may trigger anniversary reactions.

### **8. Offer to give the parent/guardian referrals to OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center or organize an OUR HOUSE Grief Support Group for your school.**