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.

www.OurHouse-Grief.org
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