

Which Students Need to Be Told?

The ones directly affected by the crisis. —Do not under-estimate who these students may be; friends, rivals, and/or acquaintances. Information is a powerful tool for the integration of a crisis. We are not protecting children by withholding from them. Information does not "stir things up needlessly." Children will discuss these critical events among themselves within their own underground lines of communication, on the playground, or by their lockers, often with incorrect information and embellishments. How much better to respect ourselves as adult role models on whom they can rely for the processing of the difficult events in their lives. What could be more representative of our roles as educators?

What Will They Be Told?

The truth.

The truth is the foundation of a child's exploration of the unknown. Let us be true counselors/ teachers by offering to a child true information on which to build their own understanding of meaning.

How Will They Be Told?

- As soon as possible (in the first period class)
- An informal setting is preferable; i.e., Sit in a circle on the rug or move the chairs or desks together in a circle in the classroom.
- Take time, allow for silence, questions and personal sharing.
- A child's speculation about what has happened and his/her need for details is not morbid. It is
 a natural function of his/ her grieving process. Answer the questions when appropriate or reply,
 "I don't know" when that is the truth. Questions may include: What are the details of the death?
 Where is the body now? What is cremation? What will happen to the family or the one who
 died?

See guidelines for teachers on How to Lead a Discussion with Grieving Students handout.

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Counselor and Teacher Guidelines on How To Lead A Discussion With Grieving Students

1. A TEACHER CAN HAVE HELP

A teacher must be comfortable enough with the issues being discussed in order to lead a discussion. If a teacher is not comfortable, then ask for help from the counselor/crisis team.

2. A CIRCLE

Sit in a comfortable way. A circle is best to include all members in the discussion. Move the desks, sit on the rug, or in a comfortable location in the classroom.

3. "I PASS RULE"

A child can pass the opportunity to share their feelings or thoughts at any time. In this way, we can express to the child that we trust him/her to know when he/she is ready to share grief.

4. "TALKING STICK"

Use a special object as your "Talking Stick." It can be a stuffed animal, a special rock, or a traditional Native American Talking Stick with feathers tied to it. The one holding the "Talking Stick" is the only one to speak at a time.

5. ANSWER QUESTIONS TRUTHFULLY AND IF YOU DO NOT KNOW, SAY SO. OFFER TO FIND OUT ANSWERS AND REPORT BACK IF POSSIBLE.

6. AVOID ASKING TOO MANY QUESTIONS.

When in discussion groups, remember that too many questions can often be overwhelming. Listen carefully when a child shares an experience and be willing to simply reflect their statements. This often gives the children a sense of what they are feeling and inspires them to proceed at their own pace.

7. AVOID INTERPRETATIONS

If a child is indirect or is using symbols in order to express him/herself, it is because direct communication is too painful. Communicate with a child through the information and the symbols that are offered.

8. AVOID JUDGEMENT

Referring to a child's sharing as either "good" or "bad" can encourage a child to seek adult approval while discouraging the child to trust his/her own way of expressing grief. You can say "thank you" for their sharing.

9. ALLOW FOR SILENCE AND TEARS

10. ALLOW FOR LAUGHTER AND JOKING

Good memories of the person who dies may also arise.

11. SHARE YOUR OWN FEELINGS

You can model grief for students by sharing your own feelings, but seek your support from other adults.

12. ENCOURAGE OTHER SUPPORT

After a sharing time, it is important to close with appreciation for what has been shared and a discussion about who the child can talk to when they need support. Offer going to a support room, if available, during the school day.

13. BEARS OR PLAY-DOH

It helps younger students to talk about difficult issues if they can hold a stuffed animal or manipulate some play-doh.

14. WARN OF POSSIBLE FEELINGS

Inform students that they may experience wide ranges of feelings (anger, sadness, laughter) from one moment to the next. That is okay, and is normal.

15. ALLOW FOR CURIOSITY

The discussion may include curiosity about what occurred, especially for older students. They may wish to share memories of the person who died, regrets (assure them they did their best), and wishes to memorialize the person. Assist them in developing ways they can personally and collectively memorialize the person who died.

^{**}information adapted with permission from Hospice of Metro Denver

Pathways Hospice How students may react following the news of a death

How Students May React

- Children may appear:
 - quiet withdrawn
 - talkative laughing
 - crying curious
 - rowdy belligerent
 - thoughtful cooperative
 - cruel -numb/in shock
 - -any combination of reactions is possible
- Accept a child's response with neutrality as long as the child is not hurting himself or others.
 Each is a valid and often sensible response for that particular child.

How Can You Detect An At-Risk Student?

- Students may be directly related to the crisis, i.e., the friends of someone who has died.
- Students may be unrelated to the present crisis but recovering from a recent tragedy in their own family or community.
- Students may be undergoing the stress of accumulated losses.

Regardless of the situation, all students may be potentially "at-risk." Observe them, listen to them, and ask others for help in finding the students that may need extra care and attention.

- At-Risk behavior may appear in any of 3 categories:
 - 1. Persistent withdrawal;
 - 2. Persistent acting out;
 - 3. Excessive obedience or achievement.

Whenever a child's behavior places that child or another in a dangerous situation, then the staff must find professional help for the child.

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Pathways Hospice \(\) A Script To Help Counselors And Teachers Announce A Death To Their Students

This is a hard task- to tell your students about a death that has occurred.

First and Foremost: If you do not feel that you want to be the one to tell your students, then don't. The crisis team will make available to you someone who can lead the discussion for you, or take over your class while you seek the support you need. Please take advantage of this resource! We care about your needs in this sad time and want you to feel our support.

If you do want to lead the discussion, then here are the facts and some suggestions for procedures: "I have something very sad I want to share with you. Write here the factual information (agreed upon by the crisis team) e.g.;

Joe Smith, a student who attends our school, who was missing, is dead. Yesterday, the police found the little boy's body and he had been murdered. The police are investigating the crime and will give us information they can as they make progress in finding the killer.

I am feeling very sad about what's happened and a little scared, too. I would like to spend some time together now to share with each other. Maybe we could help each other in expressing how we feel about (name the one who died) and how she/he died."

- Take some time for discussion.
- Attached are handouts:

(Handouts could include: How Counselors And Teachers Tell Students About A Death, Counselor/ Teacher's Guidelines on How to Lead A Discussion with Grieving Students Handout; and Handouts about grieving children).

- After your discussion, tell the children that there are counselors in the building if they need to talk further and arrange with them a procedure for going to see the counselor or to a support room.
- · After your discussion you may want to:
 - 1. Take a time of recess or playground play;
 - 2. Do some drawing, art project or other projects- leave the subject matter up to the student;
 - 3. Do some Journal Writing- write down thoughts about whatever is on the child's mind.
 - 4. Go back to curriculum.
- These activities may be useful to continue to do at intervals during the day and to intersperse throughout your curriculum in the coming days.

If you need some support, please call the office. Do not hesitate to ask.

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