

BEREAVEMENT

Support for Schools



SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Death impacts all communities, and schools are not immune. Bereaved children and young people need thoughtful and informed support to help them.

Here are some tips:



Routine

Maintaining routine is important when unpredictable events or significant changes occur.

Classroom routine and rituals can provide reassurance and help students to feel safe.

Choices

When difficult things happen children often feel trapped or overwhelmed. Choices can help them feel they have some control.

Create safe spaces within the classroom if children need a break.

Listen

Listen to concerns and acknowledge their feelings. Answer questions simply and honestly.

Allow for expression of feelings.

Reassure

Be available to support and assist with tasks e.g., homework planning so students don't become overwhelmed.

Open Minded

Children and young people move in and out of their grief. Some children, for example, may be very distressed at school whilst others may prefer to deal with loss related issues elsewhere.

Behaviour may be communicating a need - be gently inquisitive.

Family

It is important in this situation to be guided by the family's expectations and wishes, as shared with the school.

Every child and every family is unique and will experience their loss and grief in their own way.

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Supporting Students

May include:

- teaching the student about grief and emotions so that they understand what is happening to them (and that grief is normal and natural)
- accepting and helping the student to learn to manage changing moods
- planning for and understanding the impact of physical changes can have on participation in school activities and tasks
- being flexible to accommodate emotions while maintaining class routines (safe space for alone time, and classroom signals for support as mentioned earlier may both be useful)
- giving the child opportunities to participate in decision making to build a sense of control, both individually and within the classroom environment
- encouraging them to access additional support when needed, e.g., the school counsellor.

Self-care

Teachers, too, may need additional support to talk about how they are coping. School leaders are encouraged to provide opportunities for structured support for teachers (school counsellors, school leaders or the school's EAP program may be good starting points).

Change and loss are a part of life, and by planning for and engaging with students, their families, and staff when bereavement occurs, school leaders provide their communities a chance to feel safe and supported during what can be a very challenging and often overwhelming time.

School leaders may consider offering the *Seasons for Growth* program an evidence-based program that provides children and young people with a safe space to learn about loss and grief and learn ways to respond to these changes.

The program is endorsed by:

- ◆ BeYou Program Directory
- ◆ Evidence-Based Programme Guide - Australian Institute of Family Studies
- ◆ Professional learning hours with accredited bodies.