

# The Do's & Don't of Supporting a Grieving Pupil/ Staff Member

## Do's

- ✓ Listen, listen, and listen again
- ✓ Sit beside children at their eye level when talking to them about the death
- ✓ Speak at a speed similar to that which they speak/understand
- ✓ Give the child time to talk and be with you – have regular check-ins (that are not too long) to talk about their grief, rather than one long session
- ✓ Always be available to listen and comfort (this can't just be at scheduled times – you have to take the lead from the child's emotions and state of mind)
- ✓ Make sure the child knows they will always be listened to
- ✓ Ensure the child understands that they are allowed to ask questions and then answer the questions immediately
- ✓ Be honest and say 'I don't know' or 'I'll try to find out for you' if you do not have an answer to a child's question
- ✓ Share the facts about the death with them
- ✓ Keep all explanations simple and concise
- ✓ Always accept a child's feelings. Never dismiss or undervalue them
- ✓ Allow the child to cry and allow them to express themselves however they need to (as long as this doesn't put themselves or others in danger)
- ✓ Look for behavioural changes in the child; this will give you clues as to how they are coping
- ✓ Be knowledgeable about your students. You need to know about previous bereavements, losses and any mental health issues they have experienced
- ✓ Be informed of the child's (and their family's) beliefs and cultural background, specifically how this relates to death. These can impact greatly on how the child will cope and come to terms with the death, as well as how you should support them
- ✓ Support the child with their usual schedules, routines and rituals



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- ✓ Remind the child that the death is not their fault
- ✓ Treat each child and their grief as individual and unique
- ✓ Give the child different options and choices about being involved in the rituals of death (sending condolence cards, attending memorials and so on) whenever possible
- ✓ Promote consistency and stick to routines as far as possible
- ✓ Talk about and remember the person who has died
- ✓ Make a safe environment for the child to grieve in
- ✓ Give reassurance and affection
- ✓ Prepare for all of the different emotions that the child might display
- ✓ Have a wide variety of resources and activities to hand through which the children can explore their grief
- ✓ Remember that playing is a part of grieving for a child
- ✓ Make sure the child knows that they are not alone in having to come to terms with the death
- ✓ Take breaks from grieving. The teacher/member of staff may have to structure this into the school day if the child is locked into grief, for example times when there is an activity that will really motivate the child to be engaged and perhaps not be consumed with grief
- ✓ Have good parent-school/teacher communication so that everyone knows how the child is doing in different situations
- ✓ Have signposting to other support agencies/professionals in place and ready to share with families and staff as required
- ✓ Have activities and resources (for explaining the death and dealing with the death) prepared and ready to use
- ✓ Always give clear and direct information
- ✓ Remember and mark special days
- ✓ Look after your own grief
- ✓ Remember to take care of yourself



# The Do's & Don't of Supporting a Grieving Pupil/ Staff Member

## Don't's

- ✗ Think that the child does not feel the loss
- ✗ Assume that a child with additional support needs will not understand the loss and therefore not need support
- ✗ Ignore their emotions, thoughts and opinions on the loss
- ✗ Tell the child not to be sad – they are unable to control their emotions and nor should they have to
- ✗ Force children to talk
- ✗ Be afraid of the moments of silence when talking with children; these periods of quiet give the child time to reflect and digest information
- ✗ Hide your own sadness
- ✗ Lie or tell a half truth
- ✗ Make sudden or unexpected changes to their schedule or routine
- ✗ Feel as if you have to have all of the answers all of the time
- ✗ Be surprised or questions a child's true grief when they are able to put their grief to one side and get on with life for a little while
- ✗ Think that you are unable to support them. The school staff who work with these children every day are the very best placed people to support them because they know them so well.
- ✗ Talk in euphemisms or give them white lies. This only causes problems that need to be unpicked later on and results in the child feeling more confused and worried
- ✗ Say things like “They were so special and good that they were needed in heaven” The child may then fear being good.
- ✗ Say “death is darkness and nothingness” They may then start fearing the dark
- ✗ Say “Emily has gone to sleep” They may then fear sleeping
- ✗ Say “Bradley has gone on a long journey” They may think they have been abandoned and/or that Bradley will return from that trip one day

