




When Children Grieve: Your Role as a Teacher

Because you are a role model and you influence your students, you have the privilege and the burden of helping them through a difficult time. When a child is grieving, the needs of students can be overwhelming. The suggestions offered here will help, but seek additional help if you need it.

- Acknowledge your feelings about loss so that you can be emotionally available to help your students
 - By displaying your emotions you validate theirs. Don't hide tears.
 - Provide a safe place, literally and figuratively, for the hard work of grief. Under the stress of a loss, home may not seem stable enough for children to express their fears and pain. Parents frequently put their own mourning aside to "hold on for the kids," so children may feel they have to hold on too.
 - Children have no language and no model for grieving until adults provide them. The words you use and the feelings you express will shape your students' concept of loss and recovery for the rest of their lives. Honest words will serve them better than confusing euphemism. Like "passes away."
 - Because you are uniquely positioned to be an objective observer. You can be alert for extreme responses that may require professional intervention.
 - Use this opportunity to teach the concept of community. Your students will observe and remember how adults care for each other during difficult times. Children want to be taught what they can do.
 - Use other resources in your area; raising children is everybody's business. Hospice of Santa Barbara is a good place to start. It can provide the information and help you need.
 - Make sure that you take care of yourself. Talk with other professionals about how they deal with children in crisis, and develop your self-care plan.
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Adapted from *Grief at School A Guide for Teachers and Counselors*, published by the American Hospice Foundation.