

Guidelines for parents dealing with childhood grief

Grief process: Grief does not follow a pre-determined pattern or sequence. Children may experience a few or many of the behavioral/emotional changes that are listed below. They may vary in intensity and frequency. The grieving process can take weeks or months, and even longer depending on the nature of the relationship. Accepting the reality of the loss is important for a child to understand that the person they cared about has died and will not return. During the process of grief, it is important that their feelings are acknowledged and supported. As a district our support staff is available to directly work with our students and parents are welcome to reach out to our support staff if they have questions. A person's reaction to a death is also effected by the circumstances of the death and the behaviors of the adults around them. Typically the closer the relationship the child had with the deceased the more severe the reactions. Adults may try to shelter their children from their own grief, thinking that this may cause their children more pain, however children will be aware and when loved ones are openly sad they will learn that mourning is natural and okay.

Children may experience a few or many of the behavioral/emotional changes that are listed below:

Elementary School: Difficulty concentrating, more somatic complaints , such as headaches and stomach aches, sleep disturbances, repeated telling and acting out of events, social withdrawal, increased irritability, overall regressed behavior, feelings of depression guilt or anger.

Middle School: Experience flashbacks, emotional numbing and depression, nightmares, avoidance or withdrawal from relationships, increased problems with friends, substance abuse and risky behavior.

Individual behaviors may not be a major concern, however if such behaviors persist for weeks or present challenges for healthy adjustment then caregivers and teachers should communicate with the child and help them access support.

Suggested guidance for conversations relating to grief:

- *Talk about the loss, this gives children permission to talk about it too.
- *Ask opened ended questions and listen.
- *Be prepared to discuss death and the feelings that come along with loss repeatedly.
- * Set an example of healthy grieving by being open about feelings of sadness about the death.
- * Create structure and routine for children so they experience predictability and stability.