

Needs of Students

The following will be helpful for students:

- An honest accounting of facts and relevant details.
- Some understanding of the biological aspects may be helpful.
- Understanding whether the disease was contagious; whether they are at risk.
- Sense of safety and security -- stability of adults. Is the world safe?
- Opportunity to verbally or actively process the event (talking, drawing pictures).
- Opportunity to ask questions, and respectful and honest answers.
- Time for this to sink in.
- To address issues again (and again, and again).
- To know how the family is doing, whether there will be a funeral, etc.
- Opportunities to be actively involved in doing something helpful.
- To be able to grieve where and with whom the deceased was known.
- To express feelings, share memories, cry together.
- Perhaps to repeat certain things or ask same the questions over and over.
- For adults to model having feelings.
- For reassurance, feelings and experience to be validated.
- DOING something; such as drawing, cards for family, planning the Life Tribute.
- May need an opportunity to say "good-bye".
- Assurance that love goes on. (Gone, but not forgotten.)
- Understanding that the pain eases over time as we talk and cry, that time plays an important role -- that they will not feel this way forever.
- Support from adults that going in and out of grief is to be expected.
- Support for their thoughts and feelings, expectation of appropriate behavior.
- Continued structure; maintain disciplinary code with some flexibility.
- Stable environment, predictable schedule (exceptions announced ASAP)
- The younger the child, the more concrete in reasoning.
- Children sense if something is wrong - NOT addressing it is leaving FAR more to deal with forever than doing what you really can do now.
- Better to be honestly reflective ("I can see you are scared") than artificially cheerful.
- Youth who have lost a parent to death have lost the remaining parent to grief; GIVE SUPPORT for a long, long time.
- Younger children tend to generalize concepts.
 - "Grandma died in a hospital - all who go to hospitals will die there."
 - Grandma died in her sleep - child fears own sleep.
 - Younger children tend to simply act out their grief - what does their behavior say?
 - Make statements of observation and reflection. "You look angry...."
- Create appropriate space and activity for them to act out anger, etc.
- Encourage them to play out a variety of outcomes, solutions, endings.
- They need both choices and limits.
- Younger children understand death as they experience it over time, as they realize the person is not coming back (the accumulated sense of "gone-ness").
- Do not give false reassurances, such as that no one else will die.
 - Be realistic. "We never know when someone will die, but having your mother die doesn't make your dad any more apt to die than he would have been otherwise. It just makes us FEEL so insecure. Let's talk more. How can we work together on this fear stuff?"

If you are concerned that a child needs professional help, see Section D.