



Helping Teens Deal with Grief & Loss Tips for Classroom Teachers

- **A caring check-in is always appropriate.** Individuals who are grieving want to be noticed and need healing, supportive connections.
- Proactively offer support, and let the teen lead the way. **Avoid discussing your own beliefs as an attempt to comfort them, listening without judgment is the key to supporting healing.**
- **What you might see:**
 - New or abnormal behaviors
 - Anger and reactivity
 - Withdrawal and social isolation
 - Resistance to talk about feelings
- **What teens need:**
 - To know that a variety of emotions and reactions are normal, there is no “right way” to grieve
 - Supportive peers and adults, people who are willing to listen who won’t tell them how to feel
 - To know that additional help is available and how to get it
 - Ability to maintain regular routines (assignments, classwork, etc.), as well as options for flexibility that allow them to meet their emotional needs
 - Ideas for coping with difficult feelings, without being directed or forced to try them (e.g. what have you tried that has helped when you’re struggling? vs. try exercising, that helps me)
- **Remember the grieving process never ends and has no time limit,** every teen grieves differently and at their own pace. Avoid minimizing student grief responses.

Instead of	Try this
They’re in a better place	I am here for you
At least they ...	I am so sorry
I know how you feel	When you’re ready to talk I’m ready to listen
You’ll be fine in no time	Tell me about this person (use their name)

Ideas for class immediately after a loss

Ideas to show love and support	When to refer student to counselor	Grief Support Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explicitly teach the process to make an appointment to see a school counselor <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to what students want to share with you and allow opportunities for them to write their feelings down or discuss them <input type="checkbox"/> Write notes of support to peers or family members affected by the loss <input type="checkbox"/> Offer ideas for breaks for students to journal, draw, read, listen to music, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage students to share stories and be open to ideas for honoring loved ones <input type="checkbox"/> Talk about how grief comes in waves (some days are good, other days are not); It’s okay to feel sad, mad, neutral, and even happy <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss strategies for coping with difficult feelings and let students lead the way 	<p>Talk with students about meeting with their counselor for further support if they exhibit any of the the following behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Progressive isolation and lack of interest in any activity <input type="checkbox"/> Resistant anger and hostility <input type="checkbox"/> Intense preoccupation with memories of the deceased <input type="checkbox"/> Prolonged changes in typical behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol/drug use <input type="checkbox"/> Risk-taking behaviors that may include identifying with the deceased in unsafe ways 	<p>Safe UT</p> <p>988 Crisis lifeline</p> <p>The Bradley Center</p> <p>The Sharing Place</p> <p>Caring Connections</p> <p>NEA Coalition to support grieving students</p>



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Meeting Students' ongoing needs

Over the next few weeks and months you will **walk with the teen through the grieving process**— do not DIRECT them. Remind students that help is available and that it's okay to feel what they're feeling. Follow their lead and check in with those affected.

Things to do over the coming weeks:

Ideas to show love and support	When to refer student to counselor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Verify that all students know the process to make an appointment to see their school counselor <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a supportive environment where the student can share, when needed. Encourage expression of feelings such as sorrow, anger, guilt, regret <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to what students want to share with you and allow opportunities for them to write their feelings down <input type="checkbox"/> Answer questions honestly and provide factual information <input type="checkbox"/> Model appropriate responses, relating to the students with your own grief, but avoid conveying the belief that you fully understand theirs <input type="checkbox"/> Have class write notes of support to students or offer a timed break (as needed) for students to journal, draw, read, listen to music, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Assist students with plans for completion of assignments; allow for some flexibility in assignments and be willing to adapt <input type="checkbox"/> Talk about how grief comes in waves (some days are good, other days are not); It's okay to feel sad, mad, neutral, and even happy <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage movement, whether through organized sports or class activity 	<p>As you walk with students through the grieving process, continue to keep an eye out for the following behaviors and help students connect with their counselor for further support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Progressive isolation and lack of interest in any activity <input type="checkbox"/> Resistant anger and hostility <input type="checkbox"/> Intense preoccupation with memories of the deceased <input type="checkbox"/> Prolonged changes in typical behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol/drug use <input type="checkbox"/> Risk-taking behaviors that may include identifying with the deceased in unsafe ways <input type="checkbox"/> Suicidal thoughts or behaviors, or talking about suicide or dying <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic physical symptoms without organic findings <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent denial of the death with delayed or absent grieving <input type="checkbox"/> Prolonged feelings of guilt or responsibility for the death <input type="checkbox"/> Major and continued changes in sleeping or eating patterns

IMPORTANT NOTE TO TEACHERS:

*Helping students deal with grief is difficult. It's important to be sure teachers are taking care of themselves through this process as well. Nothing is wrong with feeling terrible about a significant loss, but it's important to seek help to overcome your grief and determine if it's prolonged grief or more complicated grief.

Below are some signs that you might benefit from talking with a counselor about your grief:

- Intensified yearning for the deceased or the person who has left you
- Suspended state of disbelief that the death or separation has occurred
- Creating the idea your loved one is still alive or with you
- Going to familiar places in search of the person **or** avoiding places that remind you of them
- Feelings that your life is meaningless