



## What to say to bereaved families

**Please remember that making a connection and reaching out is much more important than saying the right thing.** People in the grieving process will not remember your words but only that you reached out. Unfortunately what you say will not remove the pain, your job is simple, listen and connect.

### What to say:

- “I am so sorry for your loss, \_\_\_\_\_ (use their name) was so loved at our school and will be dearly missed.” Be true to your own emotions, it’s okay to cry, it’s also okay not to cry. “I am so sad about the death of your son/daughter”
- Ask permission to communicate to the school community: “We would like to share this news with our school community (students and parents) in order to offer support for them during this difficult time” You could also ask about memorial plans and whether or not they are comfortable with that information being shared with the school.
  - “We are thinking of you and your family, please reach out so that we can support you”
- If you get an opportunity, share any memories or positive experiences with their child or family member, keep it simple but share details ... they didn’t know their family member as a student or teacher, so it can be healing to hear these stories.
- If you have any belongings (lockers, cubbies, desks) from the teacher or student, invite the family to come and go through them when they are comfortable, don’t rush to collect things or put them in boxes. Let the bereaved family lead the way as much as possible.
- Note: If this is a death by suicide the family may be resistant to sharing details of how the individual died, but open conversations are important for prevention, the reason for sharing the cause of death and getting permission to do so in this case are two-fold:
  - rumors will spread and friends will likely hear from each other rather than from adults who can offer support and resources, this can be misunderstood by friends and fellow students as not caring when the real issue (suicide) is not talked about
  - to prevent other deaths by suicide it’s best to have open conversations with students and that’s promoted by being honest about what happened in all communication, grief is best confronted through honest connections

**What to avoid:**

- Isolating or catastrophizing phrases like “I can’t imagine how bad this is,” “I could never survive losing my child”
- Explaining away feelings or trying to make them feel better with phrases like “they are in a better place”
- Don’t use the words “at least” ... you aren’t in a place to minimize pain in any way
- Don’t tell them to be strong or be optimistic, this is incredibly difficult and just listening helps
- Avoid doing most of the talking, connecting with a bereaved person is all about listening, or even sitting in silence sometimes.
- Avoid asking permission for school decisions (i.e. approving Skylert content or offering counseling services for friends/fellow students)
- Avoid promising to accommodate memorials, vigils, or other services at the school that aren’t school-related

For additional ideas, visit [wellness.jordandistrict.org](https://wellness.jordandistrict.org)