



"What To Know About Grief"

by Kelly Baltzell, M.A. & Karin Baltzell, Ph.D.

1. **Grief Take Times:** Society generally gives us three days to grieve. However, grieving can take from a year to a few years. Each one of us grieves differently. Just do not expect grief to be a short-term affair.
2. **The pain is intense:** Pain? Oh yes, pain. Grieving is emotional pain and can manifest as physical pain. Do not be surprised by the level of the emotional pain - especially if you have never grieved intensely before in your life.
3. **Go through the pain:** No one can cheat the grieving process. You cannot go around the pain, you cannot bargain with the pain, you can only feel it and go through it. Look at the grief head on and realize the sooner you face it the sooner you will have gone through the process.
4. **Expect different emotions:** Grief is a mixture of emotions. These emotions will materialize at different times and in different combinations. Some of the emotions you may feel are sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, emptiness, numbness, and despair. You may even feel that you are losing your mind.
5. **Watch for Depression:** Grieving is normal when a loss has occurred. Depression is a chemical change in the brain. If you are crying all the time, can't get out of bed or complete the basic functions of living, please see a doctor or a therapist right away to determine if you are depressed. If you are suicidal go to the Emergency Room or call 911 as soon as possible.
6. **Greet the tears:** They will bring healing. Let your tears flow either when you are alone or in public. Crying is a natural outlet of grief. Do not apologize.
7. **Grieving takes strength:** Grieving takes most, if not all, of your strength. Do not worry if you do not have as much energy as you did before your loss. Scale back and only do the things that are necessary. Do not feel guilty about doing less.
8. **Triggering events:** Anniversaries, holidays, birthdays, places, objects and people may all trigger memories surrounding your loss. Be prepared for the grief to gush forth again during these times.
9. **Grief changes you:** Grief is transforming. The process of grieving makes a person change who they are emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. It is okay to change. Just be aware it might happen. Embrace the change rather than fight it.
10. **Others will be at a loss:** Grief is something that is not discussed easily. People have no clue how to discuss death or your personal loss. Tell friends and family specifically what you need and want during this period of grief. They will be thankful and so will you.
11. **Be aware of scheduling changes:** Life will not be normal and routines may need to be different. Try to keep as much structure as possible in your life and minimize the amount of change.
12. **Grief brings the opportunity for growth:** Look for it. Direct your thoughts forward. Grief is a healing process.

Ways to Take Care of Yourself in Time of Loss

Crisis Management Institute

Talk to family or friends about how you are feeling and doing.

Write your thoughts and feelings in a journal.

Write poetry.

Write letters of regrets and appreciations about anything in life.

Draw pictures. Get into art.

Play a game or sport. Get lots of exercise.

Listen to soothing music.

Listen to upbeat music and dance!

Snack on healthy foods. Take vitamins.

Enjoy a bubble bath.

Care for your pets and house plants.

Take a favorite stuffed animal to bed with you.

Read a favorite story.

Ask someone who loves you to read you a story.

Let yourself cry.

Ask for a hug. Ask for another hug.

Get lots of sleep.

Spend time in prayer or meditation.

Collect a favor from someone who owes you one!

Treat yourself to a massage.

Light a candle.

Sing loud.

Laugh. Rent a great, hilarious video. See a fun flick.

Ask for a hug. Ask for another hug!

Signs of Need for Professional Help

Crisis Management Institute

After a school crisis, it is important to look at students to identify those who might need professional help. Following a death or tragedy, if a student or staff person's demeanor changes noticeably and remains so for a time, pay attention.

Physical Signs:

- Changes in eating (more or less)
- Changes in sleeping
- Headaches, tummy aches
- Loss of caring about personal hygiene, appearance



Emotional Signs:

- Persistent anxiety
- Hope for reuniting with deceased
- Clingy
- Absence of grief
- Fear of attachments
- Appearing depressed or speaking of being depressed
- Voicing only the negative or positive of the deceased in a way that seems noteworthy

Behavioral:

- Aggression or displays of power
- Withdrawal from others
- Overachieving
- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Daydreaming
- Compulsive care-giver of others
- Accident prone
- Stealing, illegal activities, drug and alcohol abuse
- Inability to speak of deceased

Cognitive:

- Inability to concentrate
- Confused or distorted thinking
- Memory loss
- Poor decision-making skills

Don't ignore your gut sense of how a child is doing. The above are indicators, but you know these kids. See what several others who know the child think.

Remember that what we observe is being filtered by our own history, cultural norms and beliefs. The best way to know what is going on with someone is to ask! Students are remarkably desirous of having someone who cares listen to them. Start by making a statement of observation. "You've looked depressed lately..." and just see how the student responds. "I just want to check in with you. It has been a really difficult time, and lots of us are struggling. I'm just wondering how you're doing?"

Confidentiality is an important thing to remember. We can talk about these students out of a place of caring and concern, but we must remember to guard their integrity and respect confidentiality.

We can often help families recognize changes in student behaviors and other signals that there is a need for help. Be sure to find out how to refer students both to school services and what the process is for referring families to outside agencies as well. Remember to keep a paper trail!

General Tips to Support Students of All Ages



Mission Hospice Society
... when time matters most

- Be understanding and tolerant of common grief reactions which include: decreased appetite, difficulty sleeping, a decreased ability to concentrate, increased sadness, and social withdrawal. Students sometimes also feel anger toward the deceased for leaving them.
- Be simple and straightforward. Discuss death in developmentally appropriate terms for students.
- Use words such as "death," "die," or "dying" in your conversations and avoid euphemisms such as "they went away," "they are sleeping," "departed," and "passed away." Such euphemisms are abstract and may be confusing, especially for younger children.
- Let students know that death is not contagious. Although all human beings will die at some point, death is not something that can be "caught" and it is unusual for children to die.
- Be brief and patient. Remember that you may have to answer the same question multiple times and repeat key information to ensure understanding.
- Listen, acknowledge feelings, and be nonjudgmental.
- Express your own feelings in an open, calm, and appropriate way that encourages students to share their feelings and grief.
- Avoid making assumptions and imposing your own beliefs on students.
- A variety of feelings are normal. Be sensitive to each student's experience, as there is no one right way to respond to a loss. Feelings and behaviors will vary across students and will change throughout the bereavement process.
- Normalize expressed feelings by telling students such are common after a death. However, if their expressions include risk to self (e.g. suicidal thoughts) or others, refer immediately to the appropriate professionals.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences of students and their families in expressing grief and honoring the dead.

- Consider a student's intellectual abilities, behavior, and conceptual understanding of death. For children with developmental disabilities. Their limited communication skills do not mean they are unaffected by the death. Behaviors such as increased frustration and compulsivity, somatic complaints, relationship difficulties, and increased self-stimulatory behaviors may be expressions of grief.
- Maintain a normal routine in your classroom and engage students in activities they previously enjoyed.
- Provide the opportunity to talk and ask questions and use these questions to guide further discussion. Encourage students to share feelings, but in ways that are not disruptive to the class or hurtful to other students.
- Keep in mind that some children may have a difficult time expressing their feelings or may not feel comfortable talking at school. Do not pressure these students to talk. Some may prefer writing, drawing, listening to music, or playing a game instead of talking about their feelings. Provide students with a variety of options for expressing grief.
- Talk to the bereaved student's classmates about grief and emphasize the importance of being understanding and sensitive.
- Help bereaved students find a peer support group. There will likely be other who have also experienced the death of a loved one.

Tips for Specific Age Groups:

Elementary School

- These students may ask questions and seek to try to understand what happened. Be patient and refer them to adults that can answer their questions.
- Students below the age of eight may engage in magical thinking and believe they could have prevented the death. Recognize these feelings and fears but do not validate them.
- Students ages nine through twelve may feel less comfortable showing feelings and seeing expressions of grief in others. Make sure to provide these students with a variety of ways to express grief.
- Possible reactions include:
 - Behavioral difficulties
 - Decreased concentration
 - Poor school performance
 - Depression
 - Irritability
 - Withdrawal
 - Somatic complaints (headaches & stomachaches)

