

## **TALKING TO TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF ABOUT YOUR GRIEVING CHILD**

Most of us are unprepared and overwhelmed when someone we know or love dies. This is especially true for children and adolescents. Because your child spends six or more hours a day in school each weekday, it is critical that teachers and fellow students support and encourage their healing. Teachers may not have direct experience with a grieving student and oftentimes classmates and friends will not know what to say or do. This lack of support and understanding may leave your child to struggle alone with the unknown, painful feelings of grief. It is important that peers and teachers be informed of your child's vulnerable state and be enlisted as support figures. Their genuine empathy, patience, and care will have a tremendous impact on your child's ability to cope with their grief. It is impossible for your child to simply put their grief "on hold" while at school. When it is not expressed, grief has devastating effects.

### **HOW TEACHERS CAN HELP**

Teachers need to be aware that your child may experience:

- Shock, periods of crying, denial, anger, guilt, fear, withdrawal, depression, aggressiveness, anxiety, panic, regression and physical complaints
- Shortened attention span and inability to stay focused
- Behavior problems in class
- Difficulties with school work
- Repressed feelings that show themselves at inappropriate times

Teachers can offer support by:

- Interacting with your child rather than avoiding them
- Using the name of the person who died and avoiding euphemisms like "gone" or "passed away"
- Encouraging your child to talk about their feelings
- Being patient, understanding and accepting of your child's feelings
- Being responsive to your child's questions about death, grief, and loss
- Encouraging your child to express their grief in a healthy way
- Providing a safe place for your child to go if they need to be alone
- Informing classmates of the death and enlisting their support and assistance
- Creating safe opportunities for your child to talk about their experience
- Expressing their own feelings of sadness or pain
- Staying in touch with you about your child

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