

## Do's and Don'ts for Assisting a Grieving Student

### ✓ DO

- Be honest at all times.
- Use the deceased's name when talking about them.
- Expect volatile reactions, view the loss from their unique perspective .
- Use your normal voice and SAY “dead, died, dying, death” as needed.
- Say, “It’s ok to cry”.
- Remember it is appropriate to say “I don’t know”.
- Be straightforward: “I’m sorry your brother died.” “I do not know what to say.” “I am concerned about you...”
- Help students find appropriate ways to express their feelings.
- Reassure students that anger, sadness, guilt, fear, shock, etc. are normal feelings.
- Encourage the student to express fears and concern.
- Reassure students that the death is NOT their fault. Death is NOT contagious and it is not likely other loved ones will die soon.
- Support students who choose not to verbally express their feelings.
- Explain that someone can be sad even if they are not crying.
- Share your own feelings.
- Allow time for students to grieve and mourn —this takes time.
- Let the student ask questions and give honest, short answers.
- Be patient

### ⊗ DO NOT

- Do not tell students how they should feel or what they should do.
- Do not avoid reaching out to others because of your own discomfort.
- Do not give incomplete explanations that can lead to confusion. (“He was sick” ...So am I,...will I die?)
- Do not say, “I know how you feel.” “You’ll get over it.”.
- Do not act as if nothing happened or hide your feelings.
- Do not give a theological lecture or discuss religious issues.

## Do's and Don'ts for Helping a Bereaved Parent

### ✓ DO

- Do ask “How are you really doing?”
- Do remember that you can’t take away their pain, but you can share it and help them feel less alone.
- Do let your genuine concern and care show.
- Do use the child’s name in conversation.
- Do treat the mother and father equally. Father’s need as much support as mother’s.
- Do allow parents to talk about their feelings honestly and openly.
- Do allow them to talk about the child that has died as much and as often as they want.
- Do talk about the special, endearing qualities of the child.
- Do give special attention to the child’s siblings (they are hurt and confused and in need of attention which parents many not be able to give).
- Do get literature about the grief process to help you understand.
- Do say you are sorry about what happened to their child and about their pain.
- Do accept their moods whatever they may be, you are not there to judge. Be sensitive to shifting moods.

### ⊗ DO NOT

- Don’t ask them how they feel if you aren’t willing to listen.
- Don’t try to find something positive in the child’s death.
- Don’t suggest that they should be grateful for their other children.
- Don’t say you know how they feel, unless you really do!
- Don’t tell them what they should feel or do.
- Don’t push parents through the grieving process, it takes a long time to heal and they never forget.
- Don’t be afraid to ask about the deceased child and to share memories.
- Don’t think that the age of the child determines its value and impact.
- Don’t be afraid to touch, it can often be more comforting than words.
- Don’t avoid them because you feel helpless or uncomfortable, or don’t know what to say.