

APPROPRIATE ACTIONS FOR DEALING WITH GRIEF

During the time of a crisis involving personal injury to or death of a child, words of comfort and support from school staff are extremely important to both the parents and friends. It is, however, important for us to avoid saying inappropriate phrases that may serve to further complicate the pain, suffering, and grief of the family and friends. Below are items that may be appropriate and items that are generally inappropriate to say to a family.

INAPPROPRIATE PHRASES:

- "I know just how you feel."
- "Everything is going to be all right."
- "How did this happen?"
- "What got into him/her that she would do such a thing?"
- "What had you done to him?"
- "Why was he so defiant?"
- "It would be a blessing if he would go ahead and die."
- "No, you really don't feel that way."

AVOID THEOLOGICAL STATEMENTS

Respect individual beliefs and statements by students or parents.

MORE APPROPRIATE RESPONSES:

- "I feel part of the pain/grief that you are feeling at this time."
- "I know that it must be difficult (terrible) for you now."
- Simply say, "I am sorry because there is no other way I can feel for you."
- "What may we do to assist you?" Suggest what you are willing to do.
- "Don't try to second guess your own wisdom or decisions."
- Do not be afraid to say the child's name when discussing the incident.
- Let the family affirm their feelings. Do not negate their expression of feelings; what they say is usually correct.
- Let the individuals know that there will be people available to help.
- Listen to parents and what they have to say; you may build integrity by not saying anything.
- Affirm that being a parent/friend sometimes involves having to deal with pain and grief that we do not want to deal with.

SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF IN YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Nervousness
- Uncontrollable rages
- Frequent sickness
- Accident proneness
- Antisocial behavior
- Rebellious behavior
- Hyperactivity
- Nightmares
- Depression

SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF IN OLDER CHILDREN

- Difficulty in concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Poor schoolwork
- Insomnia
- Reclusiveness or social withdrawal
- Antisocial behavior
- Destructive behavior
- Resentment of authority
- Overdependence
- Resistance to discipline
- Frequent sickness
- Accident proneness
- Overeating
- Truancy
- Experimentation with drugs and/or alcohol
- Depression
- Secretiveness
- Sexual promiscuity
- Staying away or running away from home
- Talk of or attempted suicide

HOW LONG DOES GRIEVING LAST?

The answer to this question depends on many factors, the principal ones being:

- The degree of attachment or love for the one lost.
- The period of psychological preparation.
- Age and general health at the time of bereavement.
- Security when bereavement occurs.
- The extent of supportive family network
- The presence and affection of a close circle of friends to help in coping.