

## SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

Date

Dear Parents:

It is with sadness that I write this letter to inform you that \_\_\_\_\_, a parent of \_\_\_\_\_, died over this past weekend. She was an active parent in our school community and many of our students knew her personally. *OR*

It is with sadness that I write this letter to inform you that one of our faculty, \_\_\_\_\_, died this past Friday afternoon from a heart attack. As you can imagine the mood here on campus is somber.

Tomorrow, we will address the students in two different chapel periods in ways appropriate to the age level. We will have pastors available as well as faculty to provide support.

*You may choose to include sections from the handout, "Teacher Grief Resources" in this next section of the letter.*

It is reasonable to respond differently. Grief is a process, not an event. Please be assured that we will do all we can to help our students through this difficult time. Feel free to contact the school at any time with your questions or concerns. Finally, we ask for your prayers for our students and teachers as they grieve and seek to support the family.

Sincerely yours,

*Principal or Other School Administrator*

## TEACHER GRIEF RESOURCES

from Lori Holm and Lynne Hattendorf

*School administration may choose to use this information as an attachment to the parent letter.*

Following are common signs that may suggest the need to talk to your child or ask for additional professional help:

- Difficulty sleeping, afraid to sleep alone or be left alone
- Is easily startled by sounds, sights or smells
- Becomes hypervigilant
- Seeks safety "spots" (special hideout places)
- Becomes irritable, aggressive, acts tough, provokes fights
- Withdraws and wants less to do with friends
- Develops headaches, stomach problems, fatigue and other ailments not previously present
- May become more needy of attention
- Develops a pessimistic view of the future, loses resilience to overcome additional difficulties, loss of hope or loss of desire to engage in social activities.

### **Ways to Nurture**

#### **Understand**

- Spend extra time with your child. He or she will need more nurturing and fewer demands.
- Protect your child from stress.
- This event may be a loss to your student. If he or she has experienced other loss, he or she may need to revisit those events. Help your student feel free to communicate openly about any perceived loss.

#### **Normalize**

- Structure will be important to your students. Keep things as routine as possible.
- Help your student understand that different people experience and react to loss in different ways.
  - Some may want to stop everything and talk.
  - Some may need to avoid the issue for now.
  - Some may need to be physical and/or socialize to relieve the anxiety.

It is reasonable for people to respond to a crisis differently.

## TEXTS WHICH MAY BE HELPFUL IN DISCUSSION from Mark Holm

- Romans 6:23
- I Timothy 6:15-16
- Ecclesiastes 9:5-6
- John 11:11-14
- Colossians 3:4
- I Corinthians 15:51-54
- I Thessalonians 4:13-17
- John 5:28-29
- Revelation 20:1-10

## OTHER IDEAS

- Have students write letters to the family.
- Encourage students to talk about their feelings and fears with trusted adults.
- Model healthy grieving processes for your students. It is okay for you to express your personal grief in front of the students. Remember that many students need permission to cry or not cry, to talk or be silent, etc., to process grief in a personal way.
- Use your instinct and judgment. Trust yourself.

## CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR THIS WEEK

- Provide spaces and times for local pastors, teachers or other professionals to speak with students one-on-one or in small groups as needed throughout the week.

# **10 Things Grieving Children Want You to Know**

Pamela Gabbay, M.A., FT

## **#1 – Grieving children want to be told the truth.**

- Tell grieving children the truth with these considerations in mind:
  - The age of the child
  - The maturity level of the child
  - The circumstances surrounding the death
  - Answer questions as honestly as you can

## **#2 – Grieving children want to be reassured that there will always be someone to take care of them.**

- Grieving children spend a lot of time worrying about another person in their life who might die.
  - To help alleviate this fear, it's important to reassure them that there will always be someone in their life who will take care of them.
  - Enlist the aid of their parent or caregiver to determine a plan for the children. Let the children know what the plan is.

## **#3 – Grieving children want you to know that their grief is long lasting.**

- Children will grieve the person who died for the rest of their life.
  - Grieving kids don't "just get over it".
  - They will often be bewildered when other people in their life have seemed to move on.
  - Their grief changes over time as they grow and change over time.

**#4 – Children often cope with grief and loss through play.**

- Children grieve through play.
- Typically, they cannot sustain prolonged grief.
- Children use play as a way to cope with their grief and to take a break from the grief.

**#5 – Grieving children want you to know that they will always miss the person who died.**

- People die, but love doesn't die.
- Grieving children will miss the person who died for as long as they live.

**#6 – Often, grieving children want to share their story and talk about the person who died.**

- Having an opportunity to tell his or her story is often beneficial to a child's healing process.
- Sharing memories about the person who died is also very important.
- Grieving children don't want to forget the person who died – they are also worried that others will forget their person.

**#7 – Every child grieves differently.**

- Every child has his or her own grief journey and own way of grieving.
  - Some children might be more expressive with their grief.
  - Some children might keep it all in.
- Siblings grieve differently.
  - Just because children come from the same family doesn't mean that their grief will be the same.
  - It is important to honor each child's story, even if it is different than his or her sibling's story.

**#8 – Grieving children often feel guilty.**

- Grieving children will often feel pangs of guilt.
  - Even if the guilt is not justified and has no basis in reality.

**#9 – Even though I might be acting out, what I'm really feeling is intense emotions of grief.**

- Grieving children frequently feel sad, angry, confused, or scared.
- Since they might not know how to express all of these emotions, they often end up acting out instead.

**#10 - If you're not sure what a grieving child wants, just ask him!**

- When in doubt, ask a grieving child how you can help.
  - Check in with the child – do they want to talk about the person who died? Maybe not. Expect a myriad of answers.
  - Do they want to write about their grief or do some other activity to express their grief?
  - What do *they* need?
  
- You can help grieving children by:
  - Listening
  - Really *hearing* them when you're listening
  - Following their lead
  - Validating their feelings
  - Answering their questions
  - Seeking out additional resources, as needed

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