



Back-to-School and Grief Triggers for Teachers & Counselors

Many of the routines and rituals of returning to school after summer break create grief triggers for students grieving the death of a family member.

Back-to-school routines that can become grief triggers:

- Checking “deceased” on enrollment cards
- Watching other children being walked to their rooms by a mom or dad when theirs is missing
- Questions about family & family activities during the summer
- Being asked to tell/write about fun summer activities (their summer may have been full of sadness)
- Forms & letters addressed to Mom & Dad
- Requests/requirements for parents to sign a syllabus or checklist
- Back-to-school shopping (without a now deceased parent)
- Morning & evening routines are different at home (without a now deceased parent)

What can teachers & counselors do to help?

- Be aware of these triggers and provide additional support & understanding
- Let students know their response is normal
- Provide extra individual attention and support
- Provide alternatives
- Allow extra time for adjusting to new routines
- Let the student know you understand things are different and difficult for him and invite him to talk to you about struggles whenever needed.
- Check in with these students more frequently to show support and encourage them to share feelings.
- Establish a communication plan with parents/caregivers (see also "Going Back to School Routines).