

Informing a Student at School about a Death

Often students are in school when a family member calls the school or comes to school to deliver the sad news, that someone in their family has died. The school counselor is usually assigned the job of summoning the student. At Lost & Found, many children describe a long, dread-filled walk alone from their classroom to the counselor's office. They describe feeling something bad is about to happen and wondering the entire walk, what the bad thing will be. Others see a family member's car or someone from their family in the office as they make that walk, creating more dread and anxiety.

A few tips to make the situation better:

1. The counselor or principal should meet with the family member who has arrived to tell the child. Spend a few moments getting the facts and helping the adult gain some composure before retrieving the student
2. The adult may be in shock and not capable of reading or comprehending. You can provide a few brief, tips if it seems appropriate. Ask the adult if he/she needs help talking to the child.
3. Let the adult know that sometimes children initially have little or no reaction to such shocking news. Sometimes they may fall apart and later have very difficult questions. Explain the lack of comprehension and emotion that often accompanies shock.
4. Inform the adult you have resources that can help provide guidance about helping children deal with a death, the funeral etc. Offer to stay with the adult while the conversation informing the child occurs, if the adult would like that support.
5. Be sure to get a phone number to call for follow-up information and support.
6. Have the counselor or a familiar, comforting adult go to the child's classroom to walk them to the office. A reassuring touch and casual conversation can help ease the anxiety.
7. Make sure the car of a family member or a police car is out of site of the student as you make that walk.
8. Take the child to the counselor's office, where the child and family member are shielded from the view of others.
9. Stay with the family while the child is informed. Help with any questions the child may ask.
10. Reassure the child that you are available in the coming days and will be available when he/she returns to school.
11. Walk the family to their car, helping shield them from awkward questions or interactions with others.
12. Follow-up with the family in the coming days.

Lost & Found Grief Center 2016

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