

How Counselors and Teachers Tell Students about a Death

Which Students Need to Be Told?

The ones directly affected by the crisis. —Do not under-estimate who these students may be; friends, rivals, and/or acquaintances.

Information is a powerful tool for the integration of a crisis. We are not protecting children by withholding from them. Information does not “stir things up needlessly.” Children will discuss these critical events among themselves within their own underground lines of communication, on the playground, or by their lockers, often with incorrect information and embellishments.

—How much better to respect ourselves as adult role models on whom students can rely for the processing of the difficult events in their lives. What could be more representative of our roles as educators?

What Will They Be Told?

The Truth

The truth is the foundation of a child’s exploration of the unknown. Let us be true counselors/ teachers by offering to children true information on which to build their own understanding of meaning.

How Will They Be Told?

- As soon as possible (in the first period class)
- An informal setting is preferable; i.e., Sit in a circle on the rug or move the chairs or desks together in a circle in the classroom.
- Take time, allow for silence, questions and personal sharing.
- A child’s speculation about what has happened and his/her need for details is not morbid. It is a natural function of his/ her grieving process. Answer the questions when appropriate or reply, “I don’t know” when that is the truth. Questions may include: What are the details of the death? Where is the body now? What is cremation? What will happen to the family or the one who died?
- See guidelines for teachers on *How to Lead a Discussion with Grieving Students* handout.