

## WHEN A GRIEVING CLASSMATE RETURNS

Your classmate will probably feel like he/she is from a different planet when returning to school. At the very least say "welcome back".



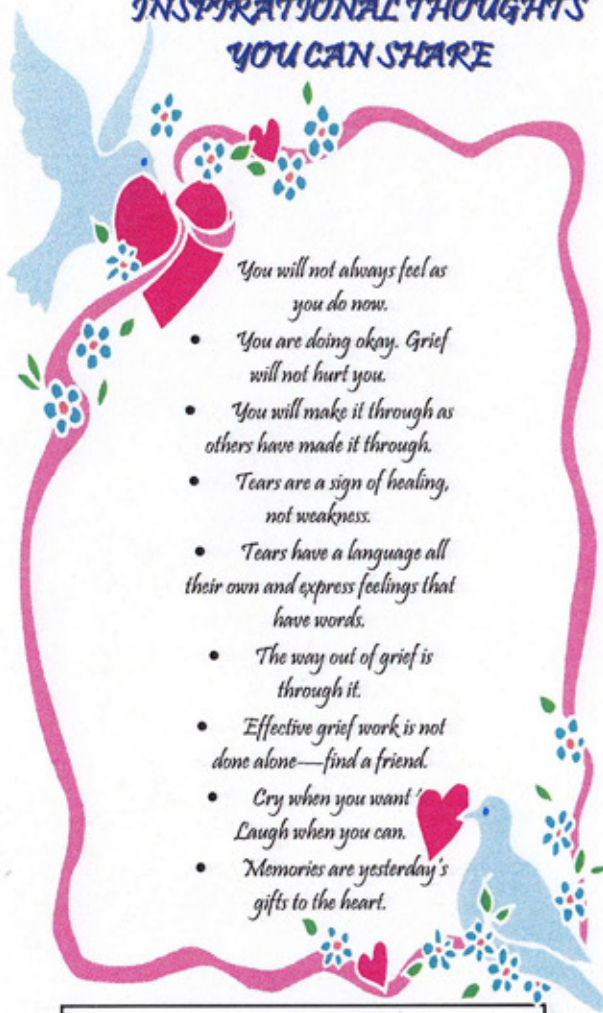
There is a lot you can do to help your classmate adjust to school:

- Offer to provide past notes
- Offer to provide notes for comparison for the next week or so. (Their attention span will probably vary for several weeks).
- Give them your phone number to call if they have problems with homework.
- Offer to study together in person or over the phone; this might help with both motivation & concentration.

## SOME REMINDERS WHEN AROUND GRIEVING PEOPLE

- Don't shun or ignore the person.
- Don't use cliché statements like "I know how you feel" when nobody knows the other person's situation.
- Don't expect the person to snap back into his "old self"
- Don't be surprised if the person seems unaffected by the loss; **everyone has their own way of grieving**; they may also still be in shock.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions or talk about their loss.
- Just because the person seems to be adjusting, don't assume the grieving has stopped, nor the need for comfort and help.

## INSPIRATIONAL THOUGHTS YOU CAN SHARE



*You will not always feel as you do now.*

- *You are doing okay. Grief will not hurt you.*
- *You will make it through as others have made it through.*
- *Tears are a sign of healing, not weakness.*
- *Tears have a language all their own and express feelings that have words.*
- *The way out of grief is through it.*
- *Effective grief work is not done alone—find a friend.*
- *Cry when you want. Laugh when you can.*
- *Memories are yesterday's gifts to the heart.*

## RESOURCES

- Family, friends, teachers, school counsellors
- Ministers or ministerial counsellors
- Bereavement counsellors or support groups
- Peace River Mental Health Clinic—(780) 624-6151
- 24 Hour Mental Health Help Line—1-877-303-2642

Sources for this brochure:

Resource Guide for Crisis Management in Schools (Virginia Department of Education)

A Student Dies, A School Mourns (Klicker, 2000)

# Helping a



# Grieving Friend

## Information for Youth

Crisis Response & Suicide Prevention Program  
Mental Health Services  
(780) 624-6151  
Bag 900-8  
Peace River, Alberta, T8S 1T4

## FIRST STEPS

Sometimes we don't know what to do when a friend is grieving. We are often afraid we will say or do the wrong thing. Knowing that we will be a support if one of the greatest gifts we can give our friends. The following tips may help you help your friend while they are grieving.

If you learn that a friend is grieving outside of school hours, call and go to his/her home as quickly as you can, if possible, or at least call. If you learn about it at school, try to see the friend or send a note until you are able to talk.



### Your presence is all that is needed.

- Offer physical comfort.—a hug, handshake
- Don't be afraid to cry with your friend.
- Do not try to take the pain away from your friend
- Just sitting with your friend may be all that's needed at times.
- Don't be afraid of silence—your friend will

## COMMUNICATION

Don't be afraid you will upset your friend more by asking or talking about their loss. Talk about the deceased person or loss. Grieving people really like telling stories.

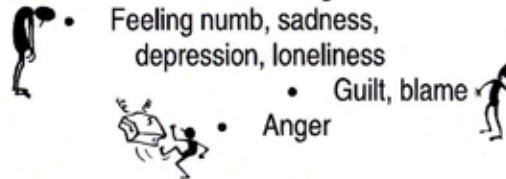
Listen, no matter what the topic. Offer suggestions only when advice is asked.

## GRIEF REACTIONS

Try not use cliché statements such as "He's better off now since he now has no pain."

Let your friend know that **any** feeling they have is **okay**—feelings aren't facts. Grief stirs up lots of different feelings that often seem **contradictory and confusing**.

Grief reactions can range from:



Grief can affect your friend

- **Physically**—eating, sleeping, energy
- **Emotionally**—roller coaster of emotions
- **Behaviorally**— withdrawal, silence, acting out
- **Spiritually**— questioning faith

Encourage your friend to **avoid** alcohol and drugs to numb their pain. Encourage your friend to express their emotions in healthy ways.

## FUNERALS



If you have never been to a funeral expect to feel nervous. Go with a friend or ask a parent to go with you if this would make you feel more comfortable. If the visitation or funeral has an open casket, you can view the person if you want to—**you do not have to**.

If this is the first time you have seen your grieving friend, simply offer your condolences. Just saying "I'm sorry about ..." will be supportive.

## HELPING GRIEVING PARENTS

When a friend or classmate dies it's important that we respect the wishes of grieving parents. The following information may help but they must fit the parent's needs and requests.

Most of the time, parents want to see the friends of their deceased child because **they find it comforting**. If you were a close friend and you know the parents, visit them at their home. If you still a friend, but not close, you might wait until the funeral. Regardless of how close your relationship, let them hear from you either by a phone call or note.

- Don't worry about what to say—your presence is all that is needed.
- Don't be afraid you will upset the parents more by asking or talking about the deceased.
- Don't be afraid to cry with the parents.
- Ask what you can do for them, and ask other relatives what you can do to help.
- Talk about their child. "Do you remember when...?"

If you and other friends want to be involved in the funeral or other memorial, talk to the parents about what they would like or not like. If you want to involve the school, talk to the school counsellor and/or principal about your plans.

After the funeral, continue to visit the parents. They will probably continue to want to see their child's friends. It helps them feel connected to their child. Call to check on and talk to the parents. **Continue to talk about their child from time to time.**