

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL AFTER A DEATH

As kids and caregivers everywhere are excitedly preparing backpacks, lunches, and schedules for the new school year, others are filled with anxiety and dread as to what the year will look like after someone important has died. As much as we want things to stay the same, a death impacts every aspect of our lives. Here are a few things to remember as you send your child back to school after they have experienced a death:

1. TALK WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Opening up the conversation is a good start, no matter the age of your child. Your child may not know how to start talking about their fears of returning to school. Listening and validating that your child may have many feelings about returning to school is an important first step. Remember that although the transition can be tough, the schedule and routine of school can be helpful and comforting for a child after a death.

2. COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL COUNSELOR AND TEACHER

It is important that your child's teacher and counselor are aware that someone died in your child's life. This is also a good opportunity to learn what supports are available for them. There may be a grief support group in your school or community that they can attend. (If you are reading this and live in Philadelphia, contact your child's school to ask about Uplift's in-school grief support services.) It is important to ask your child what details, if any, they would like to be shared with the school, and even classmates, in order to feel a sense of control in the situation.

3. ANTICIPATE QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT BE ASKED

Your child's friends may be curious about what happened to the person who died or may want to ask your child how they are doing. Although these questions may be well-intentioned, they can also be uncomfortable for your child. Kids just want to be "normal" and do not want to be known as the "kid who had someone die" because that can make them feel different. Having attention drawn to the death can be upsetting, and it is important to discuss how your child will answer those questions. Reassure your child that they have the right to not answer questions and to give only the information they are comfortable giving.

4. CREATE A SAFETY PLAN FOR SCHOOL

There may be times when your child is in school and feels an intense wave of grief, is asked a question that makes them uncomfortable, or just needs a break.

Identify what they can do in that situation to cope. This may include talking with the counselor, getting a drink of water, writing in a journal, or something else that will help your child feel more settled and able to refocus in school. Identifying a few safe people in the school for your child to talk with should be a part of the plan. It is a good idea to share this plan with the school counselor, teacher, and other relevant school staff.

5. GIVE YOUR CHILD PERMISSION TO HAVE A GREAT YEAR

Often after a death, kids can feel guilty for laughing and having fun. It is important to let your child (and yourself) know that there are still fun, happy, and silly moments to be had and that you are there for them in this process.

Questions or concerns? Contact us.

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