

# School Based Activities After a Death

Here are a few ways schools can support to students and teachers after the death of someone in the school community. Activities can be adapted to meet the unique needs of your school, including culture, ethnicity, and spirituality.

**School based memorial service:** It's important to have a policy to guide how you will respond to a death so you're not making decisions based on the specific student or how the person died. While you may incorporate the wishes of the family as well as student generated ideas, your policy should guide your response rather than decisions made under pressure. Whatever your school policy is, it should be the same across the board, and not based on how well-known a person was or how they died.

**Memory Box:** Invite students to write down memories of the person who died and collect them in a box (they may want to decorate the box with pictures or items that are significant to the person who died. This box can be left out for students to add to as they think of memories. There are a variety of ways to use these memories – students can create a list to be given to the family, each day for a period of time someone can choose one memory to read from the box, students can use these memories to create a scrapbook about the person who died. This activity can also be used with staff members.

**Memory Wall:** Identify a wall in the hallway/cafeteria/or other common area to hang a long piece of paper for students to share thoughts and memories on. Provide a small table nearby with paper, writing utensils, crayons, scissors, tape, and glue. Invite students, staff, and other school community members to post pictures, memories, or create something to hang on the wall. Let the community know ahead of time how long the wall will be available.

**Candle Lighting:** Teens often light candles at The Dougy Center in honor of the person who died. These can be lit on the anniversary date of the death, the person's birthday, or any other significant date. Sometimes teens choose to verbally share a memory of that person as they light candles.

**Question Jar:** Invite students to write down (anonymously) any questions they have about death, the dying process, or grief. Read through the questions and encourage responses & reactions from the entire group.

**Difficult Day Safety Plan:** Many students, especially teenagers, worry about 'losing it' or becoming emotional during the school day. Some fear crying in front of their peers or acting in a way that makes people treat them differently. It's helpful to plan ahead with a grieving child about his return to school. You can create a plan that includes ways that the child can let you know that he or she needs to take a break. Some children prefer a non-verbal way to communicate this so you can create a card or use a stone or something else the child can put on a teacher's desk to say that they are taking a break. Help the child identify who in the school he's comfortable going and talking or sitting with when he takes a break. You may also need to figure out a way for the child to touch base with the surviving adult in his or her life as grieving kids commonly worry about the safety of the other adults in their lives.



The Dougy Center

The National Center for Grieving Children & Families