



Death and Dying: Guidelines for Classroom Discussion

Before the Discussion

1. **At-Risk Students:** Refer these students to appropriate counselors and other helping resources.
 - Identify close friends of the person who died who appear to be particularly upset.
 - Play close attention to students who:
 - a. have experienced recent or numerous deaths
 - b. who have emotional problems
 - c. who for any reason think that they had some responsibility for the death

Contents of the Discussion

2. **Review the facts as presented in initial announcement.**
 - Who died
 - What happened
 - When it happened
 - Where it happenedShare the facts without being graphic
3. **Things to remember when students are discussing their feelings and concerns:**
 - Students look for causes of death. Young students, in particular, may be afraid they wished it to happen or in some way caused it to happen.
 - Carefully and directly explain what happened to allay these fears.
 - If suicide: discourage discussion about why the person committed suicide.
 - Students may feel uncomfortable grieving or sharing their feelings. Share your own sadness as a way of showing that it is all right to grieve.
 - Students may show their feelings differently than adults. Avoid judging their expressions of feelings.
 - Students may feel deserted. Reassure them that they don't need to be alone and that their feelings of loss are shared and can help people support each other.



- Young students, in particular, may have unrealistic images of death. Don't use fantasies or abstractions, e.g., death as sleep, death as a long trip, or death as the result of God's wanting good people. Do assure students that the person who died is not in pain.
- Students may ask the same questions over and over. Be patient, reassure students and give them the information they want to know as well as you can.

Funerals and Memorial Activities

4. Give students basic information if they are unfamiliar with funerals or memorial activities

- People attend funeral and memorial activities to say good-bye to the person who died.
- People may be crying because they are sad.
- People may say prayers in addition to special things about the person who died.
- The body may be in a box called a casket, which is later taken to a cemetery and lowered into the ground; or, if cremated, the ashes may be in an urn.
- People often gather together afterward to talk and to comfort each other.