

Tips for Leading a Discussion with Grieving Students

Guidelines for Teachers

1. **A Teacher Can Have Help**

A teacher must be comfortable enough with the issues being discussed in order to lead the discussion. If a teacher is not comfortable, then ask for help from the counselor/crisis team.

2. **A Circle**

Sit in a comfortable way. A circle is the best to include all members in the discussion. Move the desks and sit on the rug or in a comfortable location in the classroom.

3. **"I Pass" Rule**

A child can pass the opportunity to share their feelings at anytime. In this way, we express to the child that we trust her/him to know when she/he is ready to share grief.

4. **"Talking Stick"**

Use a special object as your "Talking Stick". It can be a stuffed animal, a special rock, or a traditional Native American Talking Stick with feathers tied to it. The one holding the "Talking Stick" is the only one to speak at a time.

5. **Answer Questions**

Answer questions truthfully, and if you do not know what to say, say so. Offer to find out answers and report back if possible.

6. **Avoid Asking Too Many Questions**

While in discussion groups, remember that too many questions can often be overwhelming. Listen carefully when a child shares an experience and be willing to simply reflect their statements. This often gives the children a sense of what they are feeling and inspires them to proceed along their own direction at their own pace.

7. **Avoid Interpretations**

If a child is indirect or is using symbols in order to express him/herself, it is because direct communication is too painful. Communicate with a child through the information and the symbols that are offered.

8. **Avoid Judgement**

Referring to a child's sharing as either "good" or "bad" can encourage a child to seek adult approval while discouraging the child to trust his/her own way of expressing grief. Simply say "thank you" for their sharing.

9. **Allow for Silence and Tears**

**Courtesy of The Dougy Center for Grieving Children*