

## **Supporting Your Child When Someone in the School Community Dies**

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When someone in the school community dies, each student responds differently & so each needs different types & levels of support. But one resource that almost all students need is the support of their parents. It can be hard to know how to provide that support. While there is no definitive ‘one size fits all’ formula, there are some key things that parents can do to help.

### **6 Ways of ‘Being’**

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1. *Be Present*

Try to be nearby or easily contactable. While your child may not engage directly with you, they may need the comfort & security of simply knowing you are there.

2. *Be Aware*

Try to pay extra attention, without being intrusive. Even if you don’t need to intervene, keep an eye on your child’s mood, behaviour & social interactions (both face-to-face & online). Look out for natural opportunities to have a chat, rather than trying to set aside a particular time (e.g. in the car).

3. *Be Open*

- If your child chooses to, allow them to tell *their* story of this experience. Try to be open to whatever they have to say & resist the urge to interrupt with questions or reassurance.
- If your child chooses not to talk to you about this experience, make it clear they can do so whenever they are ready & you will be there to listen with care & without judgement.

4. *Be Responsive*

- Ask your child if they have questions about the situation & be guided by their response. If they don’t, let them know they can come to you if some arise. If they do, answer them as best as you can. Try to be honest & straightforward. If you don’t know the answer, be honest about that too.
- Keep in mind that they may revisit their questions a number of times. For many, this is an important part of the process of coming to terms with death. So revisit or repeat your responses as many times as your child needs.
- Reassure your child that everyone reacts differently to death & that their reaction, whatever it is, is normal for them. Try not to assume how your child feels based on your own feelings - respond to what they actually express.

5. *Be Patient*

Your child may have many ‘ups & downs’ over the coming weeks & months. Stay patient, even if they are difficult to live with. If they are sad or angry they might direct these feelings towards you, but try not to take it personally. They are most likely trying to process difficult emotions by expressing them with those they trust most.

6. *Be Kind*

- This may be a really hard experience for you, as well as for your child. Be mindful of your own feelings & treat yourself with kindness. Accept ‘good enough’ & focus on current needs, rather than seeking perfection or worrying about the future.
- Remember too that your child, their friends & siblings could be struggling at the moment, even if they did not know the person who died or don’t express any feelings of sadness or upset. While you can’t read their minds, you can help by showing & encouraging kindness - both towards the self & towards others.

### **If You or Your Child Need More Help**

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Like adults, most teenagers process death & bereavement with the support of friends & family, while some might need more help. There is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process, but if your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, or if you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek help through your GP/HSE Services.