



## Isn't it Really Better to Ignore a Death and Go on With Life?

“Life as usual” is changed any time a death occurs. Ignoring it doesn't alter the fact that a death has happened and it may send students the message that it's better not to acknowledge or talk about unfortunate life events. And it's certainly naïve to think that students will not be talking about what's occurred among themselves if they aren't given an opportunity to do so within the structure of the classroom.

Planning proactively about how to address a death if it occurs to a member of the school community provides you with a degree of control if and when a death happens. You can facilitate the expressions of grief in a structured, organized way that maintains the predictability of school routine at a time when something unpredictable and upsetting has happened. The acknowledgement of a death, however, is limited and should be circumscribed by the school's policies and procedures. Acknowledging a death and assisting grieving students should be accomplished within the framework of the school's continuing responsibility to its living student body.

Students can be encouraged to record their memories of the deceased privately in letters or memory books that can be given to the family as more lasting tributes. These latter examples are more active forms of grieving than passive displays like flowers or mementos which are placed at a symbolic site. And as the name implies, 'active' grief engages our emotions in the process of remembering more effectively.