

Hardenhuish School - Guidance for Parents supporting Young People with Bereavement

There is no precedent or blueprint for how to manage a situation like this but here are some general guidelines to help support young people at this time. We have discussed these guidelines in an extended tutor time on Tues 7th May 2019.

1. **Give facts and dispel rumours:** It is best to stick to facts by referring to press release statements. Try to answer questions and dispel rumours. In a crisis, rumours are often more frightening than the facts. Understanding the facts is the first step in coming to terms with what has happened. Answer questions openly within the bounds of what is to be shared; it is alright to say, 'we don't know that yet'.
2. **Normalise feelings:** Acknowledge that people react differently to such news and that all responses are OK. They are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. Allow young people to express their feelings and ask if other people feel like that; there can be comfort in knowing you are not alone in your feelings. As an adult, acknowledge your own feelings. Also say that it is OK to be happy and have fun. Encourage young people to share their worries even if they are irrational worries as they may have a limited understanding of death.
3. **Emotion:** Don't be afraid to show emotion, it shows that you are human but can throw you if you are not expecting it. It will help the young people to see that emotions are normal. You are role models for them in terms of showing how to deal with feelings in difficult circumstances.
4. **Support:** You do not need to be an expert to provide effective help. Many people feel inadequate and out of their depth when faced with adults or children experiencing deep sadness or trauma. As parents, you are caring individuals who naturally support your children. It is more about being there for them at home rather than being a bereavement professional.
5. **Allow the pupils to talk about the person who died:** Where young people have memories of the person who has died encourage them to share their stories. In some cases, especially if the person was well known to them, it may be appropriate to spend time thinking and talking about what has happened and sharing thoughts and memories of the person. Explain that a memory book of messages will be put together in school and all pupils have had and will continue to have the opportunity to contribute to this.
6. **Reassurance:** When supporting young people bereaved by murder, it is important to give lots of reassurance. For a young person who feels that they are somehow responsible for what happened, emphasise that there was nothing they could have done to prevent it. Try to give them a sense of control. The young people bereaved in this way tell us the sudden nature of the death and the disruption and uncertainty caused by the legal processes increase their sense of powerlessness and lack of control.
7. **Empowerment:** It is helpful to include discussions that help young people to regain a sense of control as this makes events less frightening. This may come from discussions that help them understand why something has happened.
8. **Resume normal routine:** It is important to take time to reflect/discuss the current situation but also to resume normality as soon as possible. This is a difficult balance but continuing as normal will help young people to find a way to carry on.
9. **Respect:** It is important to discuss respect for all people involved with young people in terms of all members of the community. For example, some people may need a quieter environment than usual to process the news. Please also discourage anyone making inappropriate comments (e.g. jokes) about the situation, including on social media, which may cause offence to others. When bereavement is due to murder, it is common for some young people to feel angry about the cause of death. This may result in some young people wanting to challenge friends/family of the person/people they think are responsible. Please reassure them that the appropriate authorities are dealing with the situation and there is no need for others to be involved.
10. **Support:** Please encourage young people who are particularly withdrawn, acting very matter of fact and detached, or angry and protesting, to seek further support. However, it is important to refrain from added pressure. Remind them what is on offer at school, seek support from your GP or refer to the list of agencies on our support leaflet (available on our website). Remember that they are going through important emotional development as teenagers and are not ready to manage adult responsibilities even if at times they think they are adult. They need to be reassured that support is available and that boundaries/limits will still be enforced.

Thank you for your support of our young people, staff and school community.