

FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING FUNERALS

Students benefit from preparation when attending a funeral or memorial service. After giving them the basic information about the service arrangements, lead a compassionate discussion on the following:

Reasons we have funerals or memorial gatherings include:

- Having an opportunity to say good-bye.
- Funerals/memorial services are our way of marking the passing of a human life.
- This is a social or public grief process that provides an opportunity to pay tribute, to share memories, to hear new things about their loved one's life.
- A part of the grief process is a spiritual dimension, which is included in these gatherings.
- A time for group support of all who are sharing in this loss, to support each other.
- The service helps bring a sense of closure and is the ending of the "formal" period of grieving. Stress that individual's grief isn't over, but that this is a turning point back toward usual activities.

Also help them prepare for:

- What the facility might be like -- whether a church or funeral home, how the space might be decorated, what the seating will be like
- Who is likely to be there -- whether they will see family members of the deceased, what that's like
- Who will officiate, the "order of things" one might expect during the service
- Whether the casket will be present at the service, whether it will be open, or whether viewing will or won't be happening elsewhere in the building.
- That they should decide whether to attend viewings based on their own desires and not to satisfy others; is OK to touch the body, and that it will be cold.
- That it is OK to leave the service quietly if they become too uncomfortable during the service. Also, let them know that many people feel somewhat uncomfortable during funerals. Some people may feel a bit of panic, anxiety, fear or acute sadness, which is not unusual... That although it *feels* dangerous, grief – especially the first time - is just very uncomfortable and, for many, unfamiliar.
- There are a variety of means to express condolences to family, including sending cards and flowers, stopping by the house, writing or sharing their favorite memories or appreciations of their deceased friend, taking food, offering errands.
- It often feels awkward the first few times you talk with someone who is in profound grief, but usually families appreciate genuine attempts to express sympathy. Give students some guidelines and ideas for talking with profoundly bereaved:
 - Platitudes and explanations are usually not helpful (such as, "It was God's will," "At least he didn't feel any pain," or "he's in a better place.")
 - Helpful openers include:
 - "This is just so sad for all of us."
 - "This must be so difficult."
 - "I wish I knew something to say or do that could make you feel better."
 - "I don't know what to say, but I came because I care."
 - "I'll miss him so much."
 - "We're thinking about you and are concerned about how you're doing."
 - And best of all, encourage them to share their favorite memories.

Be sure students know what they must do in order to be released from school to attend the service. The school may make a standard slip which students bring back, signed by parents. Consider opening the Safe Room following the funeral for those who need some time for decompression before returning to classes. Some students may have maintained denial until attending the service and may struggle more after the service than prior.

