

WONDERS & WORRIES

School Re-entry After a Death



Wonders & Worries

Professional support for children
through a parent's illness or injury.

We will, together.



Returning to school after experiencing the loss of a parent can fill children with many emotions. Grief impacts children in different ways at different times and returning to school can feel comforting one day, with many opportunities to focus on friends and schoolwork, while at other times, school may feel extremely stressful and challenging. The following information covers tips to keep in mind while supporting your child's transition period back to school:

Connect with School Support Team:

Grief can affect a child on many different levels: emotional, physical, cognitive, spiritual, and behavioral. School can activate grief reactions, so it's helpful to plan the re-entry with your child.

Topics to consider when talking with your child's teacher(s):

EXPECTATIONS

Learn what the expectations are for each class and coordinate a plan for success by modifying the workload, as needed, while your child is adjusting back to a normal routine. Discuss what your child's specific needs may be.

STRESS AND EMOTIONS

To help manage stress and feelings that arise, having a fidget or comfort item available can be helpful.

ADDITIONAL BREAKS

Children may need to take additional breaks during the day. During challenging times, so much energy is being spent trying to maintain a sense of equilibrium and breaks or play helps them continue to cope.

ABILITY TO FOCUS

Grief can impact the ability to focus and complete tasks, so a child may need to spend extra time and energy on organizing and planning. Teachers may have ideas for time management and tracking assignments. For some children it may be beneficial to have a homework friend.

HEIGHTENED FEARS

Share with the school team if your child has heightened fears about the health and safety of other family members and strategies for the child to check-in at appropriate times during the school day.

NONVERBAL SIGNAL

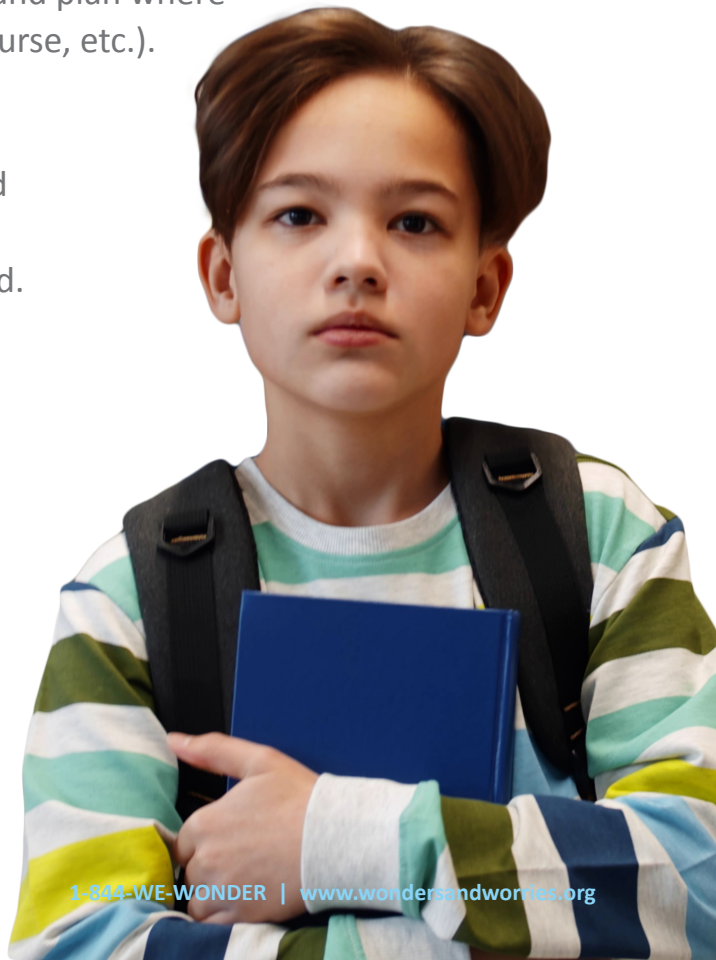
Encourage your child and teacher to create a nonverbal signal to indicate that the student may need: help, reassurance, or a break from class (and plan where this break could be – school office, with the school nurse, etc.).

ANNIVERSARIES

Alert the teachers about important anniversaries and milestones so they can maintain an awareness and provide added support during these times, as needed.

School-Day Plan:

With your child, map out what the school day will look like. This could include creating a schedule for before/during/and after school. The more prepared your child feels, the greater sense of safety and security they will have. Additionally, prior to the first day back, having a scheduled playdate with a best friend may be a helpful warm up before the first day where they see many friends/peers.



SAMPLE PLAN FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD:

7:00 – 8:00 Eat breakfast, get dressed, and ensure all supplies are in backpack (books, binders, lunch, etc.).

8:00 – 8:30 Bike to school with friend (will meet at bench near the park)

8:35 – 11:45 Morning class (reading, recess, and math)

11:45 – 12:30 Lunch with friends

12:30 – 2:30 Afternoon class (science, and art)

2:35 – 3:00 Bike home with friend (meet in front of the school office to walk to the bike rack)

3:00 – 3:15 Check in with afternoon caregiver to talk about the day's highs and lows.

3:15 – 4:00 A favorite activity

4:00 – 5:30 Homework

5:30 – 8:00 Dinner, reading, and getting ready for bed.

CREATING A SCRIPT...

Part of the plan is also practicing what to say if someone should ask them about the loss they are grieving. Depending on the child's preference, practicing responses may be helpful: "I'm not ready to talk about that today." Another part of this conversation may include talking with your child about the power of being able to tell their story, rather than people finding out in other ways.

COPING CHEAT SHEET

There will be days that are harder than others for various reasons. Talk about these days in advance with your child and think about supportive strategies that can lessen feelings of being overwhelmed. Create a coping cheat sheet:

"People that love me..."

"Favorite place to think about..."

"_____ always cheers me up when I'm feeling sad."

It will be helpful to regularly check in with your child and the school support team to assess for any adjustments that need to be made for an ongoing optimal transition back to school. The check-in's may be more frequent in the beginning and become fewer as time moves on. For example, at first you may be connecting with the school support team weekly, and then monthly, depending on how your child is coping.

In addition, it may be helpful to prepare school personnel for important holidays that are especially important to your family (e.g., the parent's birthday, beginning of soccer when a parent isn't in the stands, 1st Christmas after the loss, etc.).

To connect with a Wonders & Worries child life specialist regarding additional support for your child, please contact the helpline at 1-844-WE-WONDER or helpline@wondersandworries.org.



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