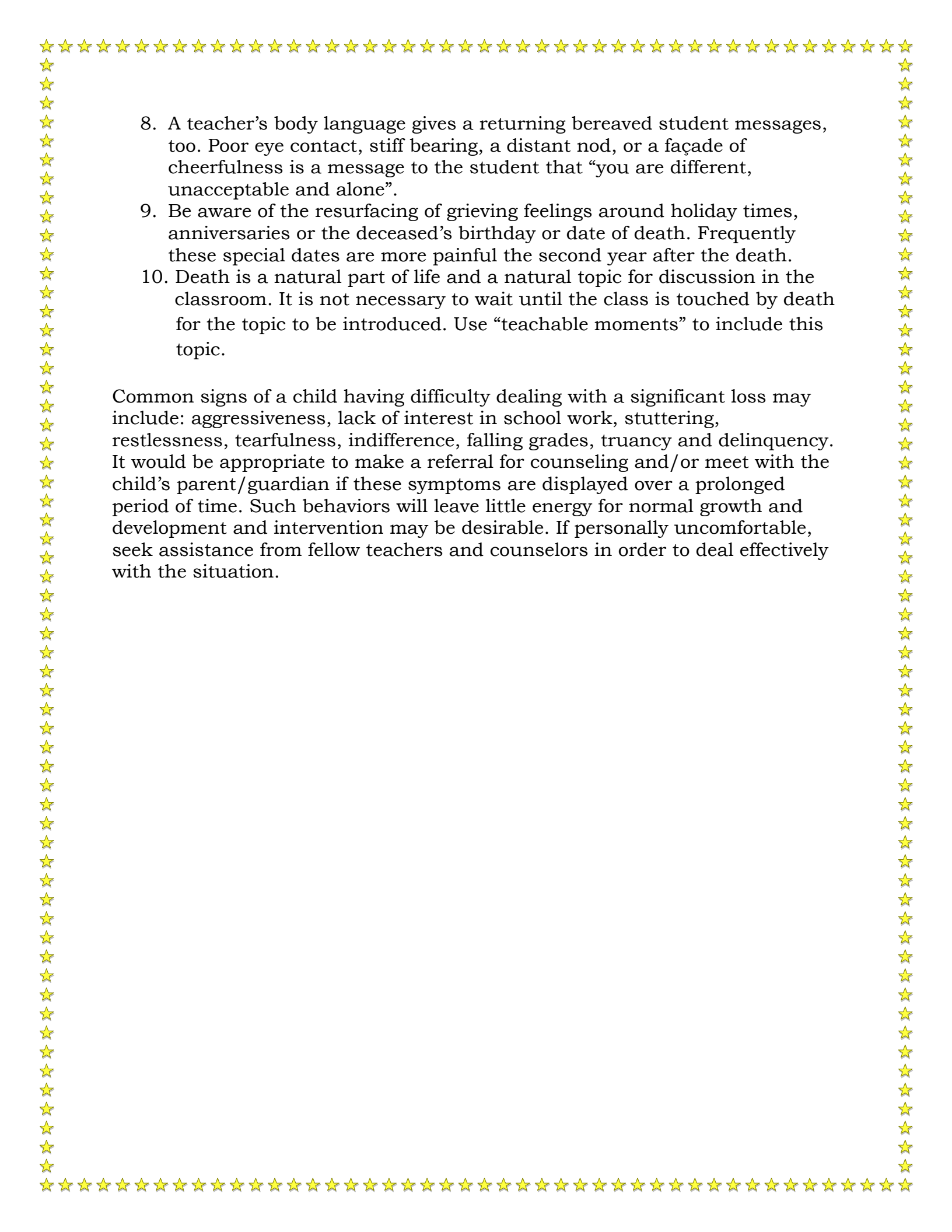


Schools & Teachers Helping Grieving Students



1. A child's first return back to school after being absent due to the death of a person close to them is a very important step. They are returning to more normal living. It is appropriate to help alleviate his/her worries about being behind in school work.
2. Some suggestions for teachers regarding the first day a grieving child returns to school are as follows:
 - The student should enter the classroom and get settled as usual.
 - Do not act as if nothing has happened and wait for the student to initiate conversation, unless requested to do so by the student.
 - At some point early in the school day, you may want to take the student aside and say "I missed you. How are you doing?" or "I lost my ... and I felt ...".
 - Follow natural instincts when talking, keeping in mind being direct, honest, sincere, and accepting of the child and his/her feelings.
 - If unsure, it is appropriate for teachers to contact the child's family prior to their return to school and inquire about how the student would like to be received back into the classroom.
3. Talk normally and honestly with the student(s) and use words like "dead", "dying" and "death". Avoid using phrases that soften the blow such as "went away", "fell asleep" or "God took her" as they may be confusing and scary.
4. Listen to the child's emotions. This means allowing the child to lead in discussing what he or she feels is important. By listening carefully, it is possible to relate to some of the child's feelings. This will help him/her to look at and identify his/her feelings and understand them better.
5. No matter how well intentioned, teachers must not impose their own religious beliefs on students when answering questions (an exception to this might be in a parochial school). There are too many variations in religious viewpoints; sharing these in a public school setting could cause deep confusion and fear. If a child expresses his or her religious ideas about death, it's important for the teacher to respect them.
6. Be patient. They are still children and may bring up the subject again and again as they try to accept and learn to live with what has happened. If posed with questions, be sure to answer the child's questions honestly and simply.
7. Allow personal unresolved feelings about death to surface. Don't hide feelings. The struggle which is experienced may be the greatest demonstration of caring.

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8. A teacher's body language gives a returning bereaved student messages, too. Poor eye contact, stiff bearing, a distant nod, or a façade of cheerfulness is a message to the student that "you are different, unacceptable and alone".
 9. Be aware of the resurfacing of grieving feelings around holiday times, anniversaries or the deceased's birthday or date of death. Frequently these special dates are more painful the second year after the death.
 10. Death is a natural part of life and a natural topic for discussion in the classroom. It is not necessary to wait until the class is touched by death for the topic to be introduced. Use "teachable moments" to include this topic.

Common signs of a child having difficulty dealing with a significant loss may include: aggressiveness, lack of interest in school work, stuttering, restlessness, tearfulness, indifference, falling grades, truancy and delinquency. It would be appropriate to make a referral for counseling and/or meet with the child's parent/guardian if these symptoms are displayed over a prolonged period of time. Such behaviors will leave little energy for normal growth and development and intervention may be desirable. If personally uncomfortable, seek assistance from fellow teachers and counselors in order to deal effectively with the situation.