

Communication with School

“Children carry more between home & school than lunch and a backpack. Working together we can lighten their load.” – National Association of School Psychologists

The reality is that children do not “leave their grief at the door” when they enter the classroom. We know that after a death or loss, the emotional reactions of children can have a significant impact on their learning and classroom behavior, as well as on their relationships and interactions with classmates, teachers and often the larger school community.

If you have any concerns about your child’s academic, social or emotional functioning it is important to open communication with your child’s school.

Where to begin.

In elementary school, the first point of contact is usually your child’s teacher. As middle and high school students tend to have multiple teachers the school counselor or school social worker is usually the initial point of contact.

Who’s who?

The roles of student support personnel can be confusing. Here is a general overview of responsibilities:

School counselor: is responsible for providing counseling assistance related to school and career planning.

School social worker: is responsible for providing counseling for student with disabilities and other identified needs.

School psychologist: is responsible for conducting assessments of students referred to Committee on Special Education and provide consultation to teachers on student’s learning styles.

Working together.

- As a first step it can be helpful to gather and share information. What behaviors are you seeing before and after school? What is your child reporting about the school day? What are your child’s concerns or fears? What is being observed at school? Depending on the age of your child, it may be helpful to include him or her at the meeting or at least to provide

input.

- You can decide who should be at the meeting. A meeting with the just the teacher(s) may be sufficient or it may be appropriate to include student support staff. It may also be helpful to have a support person for yourself who can assist in outlining your thoughts before the meeting and take notes during the meeting.
- The next step is to identify your child's specific needs. Does your child need academic support? Social-emotional support? Other supports?
- Once needs are identified, you can work with the school to develop a written plan to support your child. Any plan should include regular communication between home and school in order to assess effectiveness. If the plan is not adequately meeting your child's needs, adjustment may be needed. Also, needs may change over time and require a different response.
- Remember, grief is a process and new issues may emerge at different developmental stages, anniversary dates or with new losses.