

Dear Parents,

It has been a particularly sad week for our school community with the passing of Mrs. Jennifer Scruci on Wednesday evening. Mrs Scruci has been a much loved member of staff who worked as a support teacher with many classes in the primary school. She is survived by her husband, Emad (who works in the PE department) and her two children, aged 6 months and 2 years.

The children at school may ask some questions about "Miss Jenny" and I have included some information for you to look at should the need arise.

We will also provide a "memories" book in primary office if you would like to offer any thoughts or comments that we can then pass onto Emad and the children.

The Grieving Process

Grief is a process that reshapes our inner world following loss. It involves a set of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical reactions that can vary depending upon the individual and the nature of the loss. During the grieving process, there are two central challenges for the child: (1) processing the actual event ("What is cancer?" "Can you catch it too?") and (2) coping with the loss of the loved one ("I want Daddy to take me to school"). In the weeks immediately following the loss, the child often experiences disturbing thoughts. The primary emotion during this time is fear — fear of the unknown, fear of the future. Over time, the child's thoughts will be dominated by loss and feelings of sadness.

There is no "best" way to grieve, and there are no cookbook approaches to taking the pain away from children. Children of different ages have different styles of adapting and different abilities to understand abstract concepts such as death, love, and marriage. The 4-year-old may have little appreciation of the finality of death or why divorced couples do not take vacations together. In addition, each child has an individual style of coping. Some children will not talk much, and some will talk about it to strangers. Sally may announce to a substitute teacher, "My mother is dead." Other children in Sally's class may become extremely fearful about losing their own parents.

Tips for Teaching: Talking About Loss With Children

Don't be afraid to talk about death or loss. Children do not benefit from "not thinking about it" or "putting it out of their minds." Share important facts about the event and try to get a sense of what the children think about it and about death in general.

Share some of your own feelings and thoughts. Sometimes children act as if they have not heard anything you have said, but they have. Remember that in the midst of distressing experiences, children are not very capable of processing complex or abstract information. Be prepared to repeat the same information again and again.

Invite children to talk about feelings they have regarding the event or death. Then you can let them take the lead as to when, how long, and how much this is discussed. If you sense that one or more of the children are becoming over-focused on these issues, redirect the discussion in a way that will not disrupt the class or impact the affected child.

During these initial conversations, try to understand what the children think about divorce or death. Do they have a view of afterlife? Do they place blame for divorce on one party or another? The more you understand about how the children think about death or divorce, the easier it will be for you to talk about it in a meaningful way.

If children sense that you are upset by the loss, they may not bring the topic up even when they want to. Be

a good role model, showing children how to express emotions in a healthy and nondisruptive fashion. It can be very helpful for children to know that you have been affected by the event and that you are willing to talk about how you feel.

Help the children understand how devastated their classmate feels. Explain that this child may be more tired than usual, more irritable, and less interested in playing. Advise them that their classmate may want to talk about the loss and encourage them to listen

Tell the children that this is a completely out-of-bounds topic for teasing. You can teach the children to respect the grieving process and avoid the emotional tender spots for a child. Also help children understand that this will be a long process and a major challenge for their classmate.

Regards,

Nick Kendell
Head of Primary