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## COMPASSIONATE

## OPEN-ENDED

## DIRECT

## EVOLVING

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### COMPASSIONATE

Approach students with empathy. Reflect on your own losses and the types of support that buoyed you in times of grief. It may seem obvious, but taking a compassionate, strengths-based approach to communications with grieving students by sharing genuine concern and respect for their realities is the most pivotal force undergirding healthy grief support at school. When you have one-on-one time with the impacted students, express concern in a private, gentle manner. Take their lead; honor their, as well as your own, boundaries; and follow your intuition.

### OPEN-ENDED

Rather than make assumptions or assertions about grieving students' realities, it is important for educators to open conversations with students using authentic, open-ended questions. Instead of statements like, "Let me know if you need anything," "You must be feeling sad," and "Your mom would be so proud of you," position students as the narrators of their experiences by asking open-ended questions, such as, "How can I help you right now?" or "How are you feeling?" or "How do you think your mom would feel about your accomplishments?" Asking students to tell you about the person whom they lost invites them to tell the story of their experience—a critical act in the grieving process—and affords you insight into the nature of their grief and how best to support them going forward (Coalition to Support Grieving Students n.d.).

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## From *Learning from Loss* by Brittany R. Collins

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### DIRECT

It's hard to talk about death. The sooner we can come to terms with that, the sooner we can conquer discomfort for the sake of our students and ourselves. Don't beat around the bush in conversations with bereaved students—or, worse, pretend that their loss never occurred. Feel comfortable mentioning their circumstances and opening doors to communication, even if they don't take you up on the opportunity at first. Never force students to talk about their grief, but know that consistent, clear messaging about your willingness to do so is an important part of relationship building in a grief context.

### EVOLVING

As noted previously, grieving students may not feel comfortable opening up about their feelings or experiences. This is not a reflection of you but the reality that avoidance is a response to both grief and trauma. Because it is important not to push students' boundaries or meddle in deeply personal experiences, focus on the ways in which you can support students' overall well-being throughout the school year. Grief support is not limited to one attempt at discussion but extends to relationship building, social-emotional learning, and mentoring across time. Connect with students beyond curricula. Attend a sporting event. Share a favorite book. Emphasize a grieving student's growth in class, or compliment their resilience. Little by little, consistent, evolving acts of reaching out—whether about loss or not—build a relational foundation that is, in itself, an antidote to isolation and grief.

