

Sudden death: information for families

When a student dies suddenly, it can be challenging for their friends and other students.

This information can help you understand what's happening. It can help you talk with your child.

Everyone reacts differently

Each child's or young person's response will be unique. A wide range of reactions are possible. Their reaction will be influenced by:

- their personality
- what's happening in their life
- their ability to adjust to change.

Your child, whatever age, needs to find safe ways to express their feelings. They can experience many emotions. This includes:

- confusion
- anger or aggression
- withdrawal
- fear
- guilt, denial or blame
- feeling betrayed or abandoned
- feeling hurt and sad.

It's important you are understanding and reassuring. Be guided by your child's need to talk. Make it clear you are there for them.

Other stressful situations can make it harder to cope

Other concerns or past losses can mean your child finds it harder to cope now. For example:

- separation or divorce of parents
- death of a relative or pet
- moving house or school.

They might feel upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns. This might happen even if they appeared to cope before this event.

If your child is seeing a mental health professional, let them know about the student's death.

Your child might want to know more

Consistent information about what happened has been shared with your child. Specific details about a sudden death are not given to students.

Your child might have questions. If they talk about the details, try not to get drawn in.

You can help your child understand how to be respectful. Encourage them to find other ways to express what they're going through.

Look at the websites below for advice, ideas, and ways to connect to health professionals.

“Tell an adult if you are worried about a friend”

This is an important message to share with your child.

Children and young people sometimes share their feelings with friends.

If your child is worried a friend might hurt themselves, encourage them to tell an adult immediately. This might be at school or with you when they're at home.

Keep a check on what's being shared

After a sudden death, students might share news about what happened. Sometimes it might not be accurate. It might also be harmful.

Contact the school if you have concerns. Especially if you hear about:

- impromptu gatherings
- online memorials
- harmful social media posts.

If you are aware of any insensitive, inappropriate or inaccurate posts, talk to us. We can ask the network provider to remove the information.

You could also talk to your child about removing any inappropriate content.

Think about reducing exposure to media and online content

Think about ways to protect against harm from these sources. You could look at it with your child so you can discuss any reactions or concerns.

Some reactions can happen weeks, month or years later

If you are concerned about changes to your child's behaviour, talk to the school. It might help to refer them to a mental health professional.

Respond to community concern with respect

When speaking with other people in your community, respect the student and their family. Avoid sensationalising the tragedy.

Where to get more information and help

When you contact any of these services you can ask for specific Aboriginal support.

- Your local doctor
- Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia Ltd
www.ahcsa.org.au
- Parent helpline 1300 364 100
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800
www.kidshelpline.com.au
- Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636
www.youthbeyondblue.com
- eheadspace 1800 650 890
www.eheadspace.org.au

Find support for your child on the sa.gov.au website

<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/education-and-learning/health-and-wellbeing/mental-health-and-education-children-up-to-18>