



Students and death (SAD) : the role of the educator
by Majel Gliko Braden

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University

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Abstract:

The problem of this study was to investigate the educator's role and the educational needs of the grieving student. Academic, social, and emotional areas encompass the educational needs of the grieving student. The study was accomplished by utilizing a thorough review of related literature, school personnel surveys, and an authenticated case study approach. In addition, a handbook for educators was developed to assist them in working with grieving students within their classrooms.

The study was conducted during the academic school year 1987-88. The procedure used in this study consisted of three phases. First, school personnel surveys were conducted. One hundred elementary and secondary educators were randomly selected from a population of two thousand educators from the Montgomery, Alabama public schools. Fifty respondents completed the questionnaire, which was developed to ascertain their perceptions and feelings about the educator's role and the needs of grieving students. Second, case studies of grieving students were written. The students involved in the case studies had experienced the death of a parent or sibling while enrolled in school during the academic school years from 1981-1986. The data collected for the descriptions of these case studies came from two sets of interviews conducted with each of the students, their parent(s), and the educator of the student at the time the student experienced the death of a parent or sibling. Fifty-eight interviews were completed. Third, an educator's handbook was developed. Its contents were extracted from the analysis of the educators' questionnaire, the case study interviews, the review of literature related to student bereavement, and the expertise of authorities in the field of grieving children.

Educators felt unprepared in helping bereaved students. The accessibility of printed and nonprinted resources about student bereavement for the educators, students, and parents was limited or not available. The parents and teachers of grieving students expressed a need to help them with the bereavement process and its possible effects on their academic, social, and emotional lives. Mutual sharing between the parents and teachers about the grieving student proved to be beneficial to the student, parents, and teachers.

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THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

by

Majel Gliko Braden

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APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
APPROVAL.....	ii
STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
ABSTRACT.....	xi
CHAPTER:	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Need for the Study and Contributions to Educational Practice.....	5
General Questions to Be Answered.....	7
General Procedures.....	8
Limitations and Delimitations.....	10
Definition of Terms.....	11
2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	14
Factors Affecting Bereavement in Children.....	15
Historical Factors.....	15
Developmental Factors.....	16
Environmental Factors.....	18
The Effects of Grieving in School-Aged Children and Their Educational Needs.....	21
Effects on Academic Performance.....	22
Emotional Effects.....	22
Effects on Social Interactions.....	23
Relationship of School Personnel to the Grieving Student.....	25
Relationship with the Teacher.....	25
Relationship with Classmates.....	26

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Continued

	Page
Relationship with the Counselor.....	27
Relationship with the Principal.....	28
Bereavement Strategies for the Grieving Student.....	30
Bibliotherapy.....	30
Language Arts Activities.....	31
Death Education.....	32
 3. PROCEDURES.....	 35
Population Description.....	35
Setting for the Study.....	37
Method of Collecting Data.....	38
The Survey Questionnaire.....	39
Initial Contact Meeting.....	41
Interviews.....	43
Unstructured interview.....	43
Structured interview.....	44
Description of individual case studies....	45
Method of Organizing Data.....	46
Analysis of Data.....	48
Development of an Educator's Handbook.....	49
 4. ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	 52
Introduction.....	52
Questionnaire.....	52
Interviews.....	55
Unstructured Interviews.....	56
Students.....	56
Parents.....	57
Teachers.....	59
Structured Interviews.....	64
Students.....	64
Parents.....	66
Teachers.....	68
Interpretation of the Data.....	70
Student Case Studies.....	71
Case Study of S ₁	71
Case Study of S ₂	73
Case Study of S ₃	74
Case Study of S ₄	75
Case Study of S ₅	77
Case Study of S ₆	78
Case Study of S ₇	79
Case Study of S ₈	81

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Continued

	Page
Case Study of S ₉	82
Case Study of S ₁₀	83
Case Study of S ₁₁	85
Case Study of S ₁₂	86
Summary of Case Studies.....	87
Development of the Educator's Handbook.....	88
Results of Authoritative Critiques.....	88
Illustrator and Illustrations.....	92
Handbook Introduction.....	94
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	96
Summary.....	96
Conclusions.....	97
Recommendations.....	100
REFERENCES CITED.....	102
APPENDICES	
A. INFORMATION NEWS RELEASE: EXPLANATION LETTER.....	109
B. TEACHER'S EXPLANATION LETTER.....	112
C. QUESTIONNAIRE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT BEREAVED STUDENTS.....	115
D. AGENDA: INITIAL CONTACT MEETING.....	118
E. CONFIRMATION LETTER.....	120
F. PERMISSION FOR TAPING AND TRANSCRIBING INTERVIEWS.....	122
G. LETTER FOR DIRECTIONS OF TRANSCRIPTS.....	124
H. AGREEMENT OF TRANSCRIPT ACCURACY OF THE UNSTRUCTURED AND STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS.....	126
I. APPRECIATION LETTER.....	128
J. UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW.....	130

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Continued

	Page
K. STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW.....	133
L. UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENT INTERVIEW.....	136
M. STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENT INTERVIEW.....	139
N. UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHER INTERVIEW.....	142
O. STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHER INTERVIEW.....	145
P. EDUCATOR'S HANDBOOK.....	148
Q. ILLUSTRATIONS FOR THE EDUCATOR'S HANDBOOK.....	213

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Teachers' perceptions and feelings about grieving students.....	53
2.	Students' unstructured interview questions.....	56
3.	Parents' unstructured interview questions.....	58
4.	Teachers' unstructured interview questions.....	59
5.	Students' structured interview questions.....	65
6.	Parents' structured interview questions.....	66
7.	Teachers' structured interview questions.....	68

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.	Handbook illustration 1: A bereaved student feeling rejection and isolation from classmates.....	93
2.	Handbook illustration 2: Bereaved parents were concerned that their grieving children hid their feelings in order to protect their parents from further hurt.....	215
3.	Handbook illustration 3: Grieving students said some of the comments made and actions done by their classmates were hurtful and unkind.....	216
4.	Handbook illustration 4: Absenteeism is one effect grief can have on bereaved students. (This illustration depicts a bereaved student who continued to be absent; whenever he did come to school, he would end up leaving because he became ill.).....	217
5.	Handbook illustration 5: A helpful way teachers can assist grieving students is to be an empathetic listener when the student may want to talk.....	218
6.	Handbook illustration 6: It is recommended that classmates express their care by visiting a bereaved student.....	219

ABSTRACT

The problem of this study was to investigate the educator's role and the educational needs of the grieving student. Academic, social, and emotional areas encompass the educational needs of the grieving student. The study was accomplished by utilizing a thorough review of related literature, school personnel surveys, and an authenticated case study approach. In addition, a handbook for educators was developed to assist them in working with grieving students within their classrooms.

The study was conducted during the academic school year 1987-88. The procedure used in this study consisted of three phases. First, school personnel surveys were conducted. One hundred elementary and secondary educators were randomly selected from a population of two thousand educators from the Montgomery, Alabama public schools. Fifty respondents completed the questionnaire, which was developed to ascertain their perceptions and feelings about the educator's role and the needs of grieving students. Second, case studies of grieving students were written. The students involved in the case studies had experienced the death of a parent or sibling while enrolled in school during the academic school years from 1981-1986. The data collected for the descriptions of these case studies came from two sets of interviews conducted with each of the students, their parent(s), and the educator of the student at the time the student experienced the death of a parent or sibling. Fifty-eight interviews were completed. Third, an educator's handbook was developed. Its contents were extracted from the analysis of the educators' questionnaire, the case study interviews, the review of literature related to student bereavement, and the expertise of authorities in the field of grieving children.

Educators felt unprepared in helping bereaved students. The accessibility of printed and nonprinted resources about student bereavement for the educators, students, and parents was limited or not available. The parents and teachers of grieving students expressed a need to help them with the bereavement process and its possible effects on their academic, social, and emotional lives. Mutual sharing between the parents and teachers about the grieving student proved to be beneficial to the student, parents, and teachers.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Student: "When I see his locker at school with all his stuff in it, it tears me apart." Parent: "I dreaded them going back to school, having to face those kids and wondering what the teachers would say." Educator: "It's very painful; death in a student's family has been the most difficult problem I have ever handled in my thirty years in education" (comments from personal interviews of participants in this study, April 1987).

Many professionals have proposed that schools need to do more to comfort surviving children; too often when survivors return to school, there is no acknowledgement of the death (Richter, 1986). Most teachers are not prepared to deal with the bereaved student who has returned to the classroom after the death of a parent or sibling. The grieving process experienced by the student more often than not was exhibited within the school environment and had an effect on the child's educational performance (DiSibio, 1983).

All children react differently to their grieving. Frequently they act out their feelings rather than talk about them (Cohn, 1987). Some feelings have been manifested by

certain behaviors such as withdrawal, aggressiveness, panic, silence, fear, and anxiety (Salladay and Royal, 1981). Symptoms of bodily distress like sleeping disorders, disrupted eating patterns, and headaches are also signs of grief (Balk, 1983). Because the school is a natural habitat outside the home, the school situation usually becomes the main focus of displaced emotions directly affecting the school-aged child (Moller, 1967).

School personnel need to be alert to these grief responses and displaced emotions. A patient and understanding teacher can be a source of care and support for the grieving student (The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 1983). We, as teachers, must be as willing and ready to offer the necessary emotional support as we are willing to teach our students academic subjects (Evans, 1982).

Historically, the grieving family was nurtured by the community, where the neighbors provided a support system and the survivors were comforted (Maxson, 1981). The local school teacher also became involved with the family's loss; however, in our contemporary society, death has often been a denied reality by both school and community (Gordan and Klass, 1979). For today's children, death is more distant than ever before.

One factor which has contributed to this has been the distance of the child from the adult world (Maxson, 1981). Most often, the sick and dying no longer remain at home

during the dying process. They are kept in isolated, sterile hospital environments where the family and child are separated. The child is prohibited from exposure to the death and dying experience.

The topic of death has been frequently and purposely ignored in school curricula (Gordan and Klass, 1979). Kübler-Ross (1969) explained that death is hidden from children; dying is isolated from the living. The schools are teaching how to solve quadratic equations, and to memorize who the vice president was in 1898; and yet students are unexposed to the learning about death and its possible effects on school performance. Thus the grieving student returns to the classroom seeking to understand the events related to the shocking changes taking place in his/her life. The school can provide a safe and caring atmosphere where the grieving student finds people who care and are supportive. Yet, this researcher found that most school personnel have no formal preparation dealing with the needs of a grieving student.

Like most institutions of our contemporary society, education has become highly specialized. There are specially educated teachers for the developmentally disabled, learning impaired, emotionally disturbed, and physically handicapped. One specialized area, that of the grieving student, remains somewhat untouched. In 1976, 3.5 million children in the United States under the age of nineteen lost one or both

parents to death (Koch, 1977). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (1985) stated that by the time they reach eighteen, five children out of one hundred will have lost a parent through death. Far more students will have experienced the death of a sibling, relative, or close friend. There have been no specialists trained to work with these grieving children. Teachers, administrators, and school counselors have received little or no formal education related to the grieving student. Yet, school personnel have the responsibility to care for the educational needs of all their students (Maxson, 1981).

Bereaved students require a well-informed educational staff to assist them in adjusting to death and its effects on them. With grief education, teachers can once again restore the historical perspective where the family is nurtured and comforted by an extended family, namely the school.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to investigate the educator's role and the educational needs of the grieving student. Academic, social, and emotional areas encompass the educational needs of the grieving student. The study was accomplished by utilizing a thorough review of related literature, school personnel surveys, and an authenticated case study approach. In addition, a handbook for educators

was developed to assist them in working with grieving students within their classrooms.

Need for the Study and Contributions
to Educational Practice

The researcher found that anytime a child dealt with a lifestyle change, such as death, it was common to experience a disruption in one's formal education. When touched by this permanent experience, children needed ways of expressing their fears and grief in an attempt to stabilize their lives. Kübler-Ross (1983) noted that the biggest fear of children is to be alone. This fear of aloneness was fundamental to children who were grieving the loss of a parent or a sibling. The attachment centers of home and school needed to provide children with these important caring relationships (The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 1983). During a meeting with members of the The Compassionate Friends, the researcher experienced feelings of hostility and resentment by parents towards teachers. These parents stated that teachers did not provide care for their grieving child, but rather avoided them (personal interviews with parents at a July 1986 meeting with the Montgomery, Alabama, Chapter of The Compassionate Friends).

To address this problem of the bereaved child and the role of the educator, it was important to investigate children's educational needs which are academic, social, and

emotional. Furthermore, teachers expressed the need for training in order to effectively work with the grieving student. At a seminar on grieving students, presented by the researcher (seminar for a class of graduate students at Troy State University, July 1, 1986), teachers spoke of the need for knowing how to work with the grieving student. Several teachers stated they felt inadequate and uncomfortable.

As the bereavement progresses, it often produces changes in the physical and psychological system of the child (Holder, 1967). Decrease in energy levels and the inability to participate in school activities are two areas that become affected. Other possible temporary changes occur, such as mood swings, insomnia, difficulties with attention span, concentration, and absenteeism (Balk, 1983). When these changes occur, the student fears teasing and rejection by classmates. This causes the students to reject friendships and creates a reluctance to return to school. The classroom teacher becomes a vital element in the process of providing for special educational and social needs for the student.

It can be bewildering and difficult for some educators to teach this special population of students. The experience of having a grieving student in one's classroom can prove to be an emotional and time-consuming problem (personal interview with a teacher/study participant, 1988). However, this researcher found that such an experience can lead to personal growth for the teacher and students. Such an opportunity may

provide skills which the educator can readily adapt to his/her own life.

To assist with these possible concerns, resources need to be made available for the teachers. Within teacher education programs, courses dealing with grief and death are nonexistent. At the time of this study, limited resources were available for the educator. There were minimal sources for the grieving students and their teachers. Therefore, the need exists for educational materials to be developed for the teacher of the grieving student. One of the contributions to this study was to develop a handbook for teachers who work with this special group of students.

General Questions to Be Answered

- (1) Do teachers feel adequately prepared to assist grieving students with their bereavement process?
- (2) How can teachers best assist grieving students and the effects of bereavement on school performance?
- (3) What factors in grieving students' lives are related to their bereavement responses?
- (4) What are the concerns grieving students have when returning to school following the death of a parent and/or sibling?
- (5) What concerns do parents have about their grieving child's educational needs and the involvement of the teacher?

- (6) What resources are available to teachers, parents, and students to help them cope with the loss of a parent and/or sibling?

General Procedures

The general procedures followed in this study were to:

- (1) Conduct a thorough review of literature related to the needs of grieving students.
- (2) Gain assistance from local bereavement support groups (The Compassionate Friends, Hospice of Montgomery, Alabama, and Catholic Social Services) in identifying twelve students who experienced the death of a parent or sibling within the past five years, from 1981 to 1986. These students were enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve within the Montgomery, Alabama school system.
- (3) Contact the families of these twelve students and their teachers by a telephone call initiated by the researcher.
- (4) Invite the parents, students, and teachers who volunteered to participate to an initial meeting. An explanation of the case study approach was given. It included a discussion of the interview process, the study's contribution to education, procedures, data to be collected, and the means of analysis. Written consent from the interviewees was solicited and the assurance of confidentiality was given.

- (5) Complete a survey in the Montgomery, Alabama public schools to investigate the perceptions and feelings of teachers and their needs in the education of the grieving student. Teachers of kindergarten through twelfth grade were selected randomly for this study. With the approval of the school administration, this survey was conducted by a mailed questionnaire to the teachers.
- (6) Conduct unstructured interviews with the grieving student, parents, and the classroom teacher. Each unstructured interview was intended to elicit from the interviewee a personal and detailed account of particular events or sentiments related to the educational program for the student. These unstructured interviews were scheduled within a one-hour time span. The interviews were taped to assist in the transcription and analysis of data. Permission for the taping was addressed at the initial meeting.
- (7) Conduct structured interviews with the student, parents, and teachers. The structured interview contained a set of predetermined questions relating to the educational relationship of the student. These interviews were scheduled for a one-hour time span.
- (8) Develop conclusions and recommendations from analysis of the interviews and case studies. All contacts made with the interviewees were documented with the use of

a telephone log and/or personal letters for scheduling confirmations and appreciation.

- (9) Create an educator's handbook intended to assist and advise teachers and administrators in educating the grieving student. The handbook design includes an introduction, the results of the study, and recommendations, followed by a summary and a listing of resources. The handbook was submitted to authorities in the area of "grieving children and the educator." Their expertise and critiques were requested in order to provide additional authoritative information for this handbook. Professional illustrations were drawn to enhance the written word and to create an atmosphere to bring meaning for the reader. The final handbook was submitted for publication.

Limitations and Delimitations

The study was limited in the following ways:

- (1) The grieving students involved in this study were limited to the Montgomery, Alabama school system.
- (2) The period of study was limited to the academic school year 1987-88.
- (3) The students used in this study were limited to kindergarten, third, fourth, fifth, eighth, ninth, tenth, and twelfth grade levels.

- (4) The review of literature was limited to an ERIC search for 1970-1987, using the descriptors "children and death," "death and family," "death and education," "teacher and death," "grief--teacher-student," and "bereavement--teacher-student."
- (5) The resources were limited to the libraries of Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana; Auburn University at Montgomery, Montgomery, Alabama; Troy State University at Montgomery, Montgomery, Alabama; Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama; Hospice of Montgomery, Montgomery, Alabama; and The Compassionate Friends, Montgomery Chapter, Montgomery, Alabama.

Definition of Terms

- (1) Grieving Students: Students who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling within the past five academic school years (1982-1987).
- (2) Elementary and Secondary Students: For this study, these students were assigned to grades kindergarten through twelve.
- (3) Educator: The classroom teacher and/or administrator during the time the student experienced the death of a parent or sibling.
- (4) Bereavement: "Loss of a loved one by death" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary).

- (5) Grief: "A pattern of physical and emotional responses to separation or loss, which can be a lifetime process" (The Mosby Medical Encyclopedia, 1st ed.).
- (6) Educational Needs: For this study, the educational needs addressed the academic, social, and emotional aspects of the grieving student, which included (a) academics--"related to all instructional activities"; (b) social--"the development of an individual's ability to get along with others"; and (c) emotional--"general descriptive term applied to observed behaviors, physiological changes, and subjective feelings" (Dictionary of Education, 3rd ed.).
- (7) Hospice: "A system of family-centered care designed to assist the patient with a long-term illness to be comfortable and to maintain a satisfactory lifestyle through the last phases of dying" (The Mosby Medical Encyclopedia, 1st ed.).
- (8) The Compassionate Friends: A self-help organization for bereaved parents. The purposes are "to promote and aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of their child, and to foster the physical and emotional health of bereaved parents and siblings" (The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 1981).
- (9) Structured Interview: A set of predetermined questions, like a questionnaire, that are verbally asked of a person (Spirer, 1980).

- (10) Unstructured Interview: A purposeful discussion between two persons without specific prestructured questions (Spirer, 1980).
- (11) Case Study: An evaluation methodology. The case consists of the data relating to some phase of the life history of the unit or relating to the entire life process, whether the unit is an individual, a family, a social group, an institution, or a community (Good and Scates, 1954).

The next step in this study was to conduct a thorough review of literature related to grieving students. This is found in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The forgotten grievers within a family are most often the children. Many variables influence why children can be forgotten. Few people feel comfortable talking to a child about death (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Until recently, many psychologists believed there was no way to help a mourning child, that children were unable to comprehend a loss and thus unable to mourn it (DeSantis, 1985). Parents may be so absorbed in their own grief that they are unable to care for the bereavement of their children. Rosen (1984/1985) noted that family and other social support groups around the bereaved family tend to focus exclusively on the needs of the parents, giving covert or overt messages to the surviving siblings that they should not grieve.

This chapter reviews the literature relating to grieving children. The findings of this literature are categorized into four major headings: (1) Factors Affecting Bereavement in Children, with subcategories: (a) historical factors, (b) developmental factors, and (c) environmental factors; (2) the Effects of Grieving in School-Aged Children and Their Educational Needs, with subcategories: (a) academic, (b) emotional, and (c) social; (3) the Relationship of School

Personnel and the Grieving Student, with subcategories: (a) teachers, (b) classmates, (c) counselors, and (d) principals; and (4) Schools' Bereavement Strategies for the Grieving Student, with subcategories: (a) bibliotherapy, (b) language arts activities, and (c) death education.

Factors Affecting Bereavement in Children

Historical Factors

During the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, the experience of death in the family was common to children (Wass and Corr, 1982). Children observed friends, neighbors, and the community as a whole visit and care for bereaved people. Death was such a common part of everyday life that children shared in the care and rituals that families went through with dying relatives. From infancy, children lived with the fact of death and nothing was strange about it. Everyone treated death as a part of the natural ebb and flow of life (Maxson, 1981).

For today's children, death has become distant and often denied. Death has come to be looked upon as an accident, or an unnatural event in our culture (Bernstein, 1977). Scientific discoveries and the mobility of families are two major factors affecting the bereavement process in children. Many diseases have been conquered, operations are safer, childbirth is safer, serious diseases among very young

children are far less common (Leshan, 1976). People live longer and our lives are healthier. The sick and aged are cared for in nursing homes and hospitals out of view of the family, rather than at home (Martin, 1983). Because people tend to die in institutions today, and children are often not permitted to visit or are not taken to these institutions, the child may not be exposed to the dying experience (Eddy et al., 1984/1985).

The geographical distance between the immediate family and the extended family has become another factor removing children from the bereavement experience. Adult family members often live and raise their families far away from one another, so that a child's sick uncle or dying grandmother may be a stranger (Maxson, 1981). The closeness of family members and neighbors has begun to falter due to the mobile nature of our society. Family members have separated for school, career, and marriage, thus minimizing feelings about the death of a family member (Martin, 1983). As a result, there is a distinct need to help children deal realistically with dying and death situations (Eddy et al., 1984/1985).

Developmental Factors

If children are to understand the bereavement process, one must know about their thinking and feelings toward death and dying. Wass and Corr (1982) noted that children's

understandings of death depend to a large extent on their level of cognitive development, their experiences, and their perceptions of events in the world. Effects of death on a child can also be influenced by preexisting factors established in the child's development. Rosenblatt (1980) listed four basic factors: (1) the family organization, (2) circumstances of the family member's death, (3) the practice of one's religious beliefs and rituals, and (4) the psychopathology of the child. In addition, Rosen (1984/1985) pointed out that the age of the child and consequent features, such as developmental stage and cognitive understanding of death, are certainly factors that influence mourning in children.

The first published study on children's bereavement was conducted in 1948 by Marie Nagy in Budapest, Hungary. Further studies expanded and modified the framework of Nagy's study. Children's developmental factors have been grouped basically according to chronological age. Klass (1981) held that there are no absolute ideas or molds into which children fall, just because they are one age or another. It is merely a framework to assist others in understanding children's bereavement.

The first developmental stage is infancy to early childhood. Katz (1986) stated that many children in this age group still equate death with the cycle of sleeping and waking and the separation that goes with a long journey and ultimate reunion.

During the second stage, children view death as specific, concrete, and permanent. Eddy et al. (1984/1985) found that children tended to visualize it as an external event; death is something that someone else does to you and, if you're careful, it can be avoided. In the third stage, Klass (1981) noted that children share our adult conceptions about death. Nagy found children in this stage had a logical, biologically sound concept of death.

Environmental Factors

Several environmental factors affecting children's bereavement were addressed in the literature. These factors are family structure, beliefs and rituals, and the experiences of past and present deaths.

Primarily, a child's family structure involves the parents and siblings. Sallady and Royal (1981) noted that parental grief has a definite impact upon a child's reaction to death. The bereavement process modeled by parents can provide healthy ways for children to handle their grief or it can create unhealthy responses. Furman (1984) explained that it should not be surprising that children's ability to cope with bereavement depends so closely on the parents' help. McEvoy (1981) thought that parents try to remove the pain of death rather than help the child deal with the reality of it and, in so doing, soothe their adult anxieties rather than aid the child in working through the grief process in healthy ways.

It is a difficult time for parents to confront their own grief, as well as attend to the needs of the surviving child. However, in the midst of a bereaved family, the parent-child bonding can reassure the grieving child that the love from the parents does not lessen. Moller (1967) observed that when grief reactions after the death of a family member are resolved well at home, the child readjusts to the loss without protracted complications.

Allowing children to participate in family beliefs and rituals can be a healthy way for them to grieve. The Compassionate Friends, Inc. (1982) encouraged the parents to let the child assist with the burial arrangements, visit the cemetery, use his/her ideas of showing his/her love and grief on special days, and share the belongings of the deceased person. Sharing in these expressions of grief may be therapeutic for the child. Eddy et al. (1984/1985) suggested that by permitting the child to take part in mourning customs, parents allow the child to realize that the family unit will continue to function even though one member has died.

A family's religious beliefs and practices can be another positive channel for ameliorating grief. While religious faith does not spare us from life's tragedies, it does make them more bearable (Wedge, 1981). Many religious ideas and customs are valuable sources of comfort to the surviving child. The religious Jewish shivas, Irish wakes,


and Native American rites are traditional death celebrations used in the grieving process of families.

The child's exposure to past deaths and the circumstances of a death are factors affecting the bereavement process. Past experiences can be preparation for children in handling future deaths. The past death experience of a distant relative, classmate, or pet can be opportunities for the child to build healthy grief responses. Wass and Corr (1982) noted that these experiences touch off many questions that deserve honest answers. How these questions are handled can communicate to a child one of two messages: either that death is a horrible, terrifying thing and should not be talked about, or that death is a part of life and living will go on. Howard (1986) advised that if a child isn't talked to, there is the likelihood of more deeply entrenched fears.

Present circumstances of a death may have varying effects on bereaved children. Rosenblatt (1980) observed that the circumstances of the death of the loved one are important; such factors as quickness or slowness, painfulness or painlessness will have their impact. In the case of a prolonged illness, children could be processing their grief long before the actual death. In the event of a sudden death, murder and accidents, the grief response can again be affected in varied ways. For example, some children may respond with extended denial, while others suffer with nightmares and frightening dreams.

The historical, developmental, and environmental factors affecting children's bereavement need to be understood by parents and other caregivers to help children grieve.

In conclusion, DeSantis, in his 1985 seminar, emphasized that given the following conditions, a child can resolve his/her loss:

- (1) the child has enjoyed a reasonably secure relationship with his parents before the loss;
 - (2) the child receives prompt and accurate information about what has happened and is allowed to ask all sorts of questions and have them answered as honestly as possible;
 - (3) the child participates in the family grieving, including funeral rites; and
 - (4) the child has the comforting presence of a parent or adult whom he trusts and can rely on in a continuing relationship.
- 

The Effects of Grieving in School-Aged
Children and Their Educational Needs

The effects of death on a student are carried into other attachment centers such as the school environment. Moller (1967) suggested that because the school is a natural habitat outside the home, the school situation usually becomes the main focus of displaced emotions affecting the bereaved school-aged child. In their grief, students attempt to reestablish their chaotic, traumatized world. A bulletin of The Compassionate Friends, Inc. (1983) asserted that children tend to express grief in their ways of behaving, and that cues should be taken from their behavior.

Within the school, the students' behavior may be exhibited through their academic performance, emotional responses, and/or social interactions.

The literature reviewed by this researcher showed that case studies were the common source used in the discussion of the effects of student bereavement on their behavior.

Effects on Academic Performance

The case studies of Gordan and Klass (1979) and Johnson (1982) concluded that absenteeism was a major factor affecting students' academic performance. The safety and comfort of one's home is more desirable for the bereaved student than attending school. Balk (1983) concluded that bereavement adversely affected children's schoolwork. Of the thirty-three teenagers interviewed, twenty-three reported their study habits changed after the death. Shortened attention span and difficulty in concentrating affected their performance with school work. Sixteen students reported poorer grades and nine stated their academic work was less productive. Greenberg (1975) observed declining grades as a common problem with grieving students. Variables such as guilt and negativity can temporarily cripple a bereaved student's true academic performance.

Emotional Effects

The emotional responses from bereaved students can be displayed in numerous ways, as indicated by the reviewed

literature. Elizur (1982) conducted a study of twenty-five children, aged two to ten, whose fathers were killed in a war. She found half of the children reacted severely with behavioral problems that disturbed their functioning in the family, home, and school. Aggressiveness, temper tantrums, deep anger, and restlessness were examples of problem behaviors resulting from the death. Doering (1980) stated that juvenile delinquency and dropping out of school have been other effects recognized as behaviors experienced by the loss of a parent. Bereaved students can become so depressed that the desire to reenter the school environment may be nonexistent.

Confusion, depression, anger, numbness, fear, guilt, and shock were common emotional responses related in Balk's (1983) case studies. Holder (1967) listed shock, depression, loneliness, panic, guilt, hostility, and resentment as grief responses. Inclusive with the emotional behaviors, symptoms of bodily distress were described by Balk (1983), Elizur (1982), Hare and others (1984), and Cohn (1987). These symptoms included frequent crying, sleep disorders, disrupted eating patterns, and, in younger children, loss of bowel and bladder control.

Effects on Social Interactions

Withdrawal and aggressiveness were two dominant behaviors found in the literature. These behaviors seemed

to be more active in bereaved children at different developmental stages, according to Hare and others (1984). They concluded middle childhood is a stage when withdrawal is demonstrated more frequently due to the nature of peer acceptance. To be bereaved students in that age group could single them out as being different and stigmatized. In processing these feelings, a bereaved student can find security in withdrawing from peers. Eventually, the stored up, suppressed grief may become overtly demonstrated by aggressiveness. The ways in which bereaved students attempt to reenter their social interaction with their classmates may not always be understood. A Compassionate Friends bulletin (The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 1983, p. 1) explained:

Remember, the class functions as a group, and sharing a grief may benefit the entire class. Thus, students can be exposed to death in a safe and caring atmosphere, where the grieving child finds people who care and are supportive. By sharing grief, we help eliminate the compounding problem of school and social isolation the bereaved often experience.

Understanding, caring, and supportive school personnel can be vital instruments in assisting the students in their grief process and in their attempt to interact again with the mainstream of school life.

Relationship of School Personnel
to the Grieving Student

When a student returns to school following a death experience, he/she may have contact with four groups of school personnel: (1) the teacher, (2) classmates, (3) the counselor, and (4) the principal. More likely than not, the classroom teacher and classmates are those most directly involved with the bereaved student.

Relationship with the Teacher

Eddy et al. (1984/1985) and Duhon and Daniel (1987) stated that first and foremost it is essential for the teacher to get involved with the grieving student. However, Martin (1983) and Hare and others (1984) noted that teachers feel uncomfortable and tend to avoid the student.

During the grieving process, a student is seeking someone to trust. Rosen (1984/1985) explained that a teacher may be the most appropriate person to whom a grieving child can turn. This can be a tremendous responsibility for the teacher, especially for those who feel unprepared and frightened. Martin (1983) asserted that teachers of elementary and secondary school students should be extremely well prepared because children's mental faculties at this age are vulnerable. As a result, considerable damage can be caused through incompetence and neglect. Teacher behaviors, such as isolating the student, suppressing the child's need to

talk about the dead, and unrealistic expectations of the student, can be harmful and detrimental to the bereaved child.

Teacher preparation in working with grieving students is key to the relationship of healthy grief work for the student and his/her success in school. The studies by Evans (1982), Martin (1983), and Oaks and Bibeau (1987) cited that teachers must come to terms with their personal feelings about death, understand the grief process, and have a knowledge of children's specific developmental reactions to death and grieving.

In addressing these three vital preparation steps, a teacher can become that trusted, competent friend and can provide an environment where students can safely grieve. The teacher can also become a vital source for the parents in observing behaviors of the students. LaTour (1983) commented that parents and teachers should keep the lines of communication open; how the child behaves in school is going to give parents valuable clues to his/her coping ability.

Relationship with Classmates

Because the class functions as a whole unit, the bereaved child's relationship with his/her classmates must be considered by the teacher, counselor, and principal.

Bryant (1978) found that avoidance, due to fear, and making upsetting comments were behaviors demonstrated by

classmates toward the bereaved student. Classmates' fears can be related to the concern that what happened to the bereaved student could, in fact, happen to them. Avoidance can occur because of the fear of not knowing what to say or how to act. When some peers make upsetting comments to the grieving student, it can be an attempt to communicate in some way; however, not knowing appropriate responses to the death, the students may make comments that are innocent but inappropriate.

LaTour (1983) noted that perceptive teachers might want to spend a few days preparing the class for the child's return, perhaps discussing death and what it means for children of that age. With this teacher guidance, the class can then become a warm, caring support group for the grieving student.

Relationship with the Counselor

Although the teacher and classmates may provide a positive, loving environment for a grieving student, there are some children who need additional care outside the classroom. The support services of a school counselor often become the channel for this care.

Wilder (1980) discussed the need for school counselors to explore their attitudes toward death, understand the grief process in general, and learn about specific reactions of school-age children toward death. Once a counselor is

prepared, he/she can adapt and apply previously learned techniques and skills necessary for the counseling process of bereavement.

Kaplan (1979) asserted that by learning to understand their student's outward actions as signs of emotional adjustment, counselors and staff may present a wide, empathic and constructive network in which the student can continue living, surviving sadness. Individual and/or group counseling, consultation, and referrals to other health care agencies are some of the networking roles of the school counselor. The counselor's responsibilities may carry over into other school personnel such as the teachers, parents, classmates, and others who are significantly involved with the child (Wilder, 1980).

The goal in counseling the bereaved person is to increase the probability of eventual reengagement with life and living, noted Leviton (1985). When a prepared counselor creates a dynamic, therapeutic bond of empathy, respect, and care, the bereaved student most likely will reengage into school life.

Relationship with the Principal

In this researcher's review of the literature, limited resources were cited, specifically about the school principal's relationship with the grieving student. Oaks and Bibeau (1987) stated that there are roles for teachers, counselors, principals, and health care providers.

Principals, like teachers and counselors, need to be prepared in handling bereavement in the schools. Martin (1983) recommended that understanding the developmental phases of bereavement in grieving children, being knowledgeable about the general grieving process, and facing one's own feelings about death are important factors in preparation for school personnel when aiding bereaved students.

A Compassionate Friends bulletin (The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 1983, p. 1) recommended behaviors to be exhibited by school personnel:

If a student seeks you out to talk, be available and really listen. Hear with your ears, your eyes, and your heart. Respect a student's need to grieve. Help students realize that grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss. Have resources available in the library about death and grief. Become a part of the caring team by establishing lines of communication with the parents.

A prepared principal can add support and encouragement to other school personnel who may be more directly involved with the grieving student. Stevenson and Powers (1987) stated that while dealing with death and grief is never pleasant, the astute administrator must be prepared. This preparation can reduce the intensity of the situation, eliminate the possibility of faux pas, and demonstrate administrative leadership.

Bereavement Strategies for
the Grieving Student

Bibliotherapy

Educators and students can investigate how writers themselves confront grief and death through these authors' publications. One strategy educators may use in promoting this investigation is bibliotherapy, which is defined by Sullivan and Horswill (1982, p. 12) as:

. . . an internalizing interaction between the reader and printed material followed by externalizing experiences derived from the interaction for the purpose of development of the individual or adjustment to human problems.

Through the use of books, bereaved children can experience a kind of therapeutic intervention in their lives. Wass and Corr (1982) noted that all printed material can stimulate a child's creative tendencies, enlarge horizons, confirm human solidarity in the face of difficulties, and foster critical assessment. Many books can be used in a variety of ways to interact a child's grief with the characters and events in a story. One way to create this interaction is by reading stories together. The essential value of togetherness and sharing can foster an environment where the bereaved child can talk through feelings and thoughts related to his/her grief.

The written word can have a tremendous influence on the lives of individuals and groups. Shepard and Lies (1976)

stated that the use of books has the potential to change our more personal emotions and modes of behavior. The change affecting children through bibliotherapy is based upon the proper sensitive guidance of the school personnel (teacher, counselor, librarian). Jalongo (1983) recommended skills for an educator to possess in order to enhance a student's success with a particular book. These skills are: a knowledge of child development, children's literature, and assessment tools.

Language Arts Activities

Shephard and Ragen (1982) noted that language arts is the most personal and intimate curriculum area and its purpose is to promote the wholesome growth of the child by helping to meet as effectively as possible those life situations involving the use of language.

Expressions of grief through writing poetry, pictures or drawings, puppetry, music, and dramatization are some examples of a school's language arts curriculum. A creative teacher may utilize these strategies appropriately for the individual interest level and needs of bereaved students. Hare and others (1984) mentioned that there can be no right or wrong way for teachers to help a child who is experiencing the pain of loss. However, language arts is a curriculum field which can provide a vast variety of educational strategies for teachers attempting to aid students' in the

bereavement process. The discernment, sensitivity, and knowledge of the teacher using these strategies is imperative to success and benefit for the child.

Death Education

Children's daily life experiences can be opportunities for death education. Questions about life and death may arise from teaching about health issues or the death experiences through loss of a pet. However, in recent years, schools have introduced a formal study of death education. Oaks and Bibeau (1987) noted that through education, schools can constructively help people experiencing a loss and can become an important source of support for the child, giving aid that the parent(s) may be emotionally unable to provide.

Death education is often presented as a part of other subject areas or as a specific course. Bordewich (1988) explained that formal death education classes vary widely in form and content, from segments of a few days in duration to full semester courses that systematically explore the physical process of death, students' feelings about death and bereavement, the social rituals that surround death, the causes of suicide and prevention, euthanasia, the right to die, the economics of funerals, and methods of interment and cremation. He warned, however, that death education may, in fact, inspire more anxiety, depression, and fear than it reduces. Oaks and Bibeau (1987) and Bordewich (1988)

discussed the value death education can have, but also exposed the possible problems and dangers associated with teaching about death and dying.

Death education can be beneficial when taught with good judgment; however, since it is in its infancy, little has been done to formally train educators, credentials are nonexistent, standards of evaluation have not been established, and the effects it may have on the fragile lives of students is unknown. Serious thanatologists, those who study death and dying, believe that if death education is to become a truly meaningful part of school curricula, it must be standardized and professionalized, noted Bordewich (1988).

Efforts by educational authorities are being made to competently prepare school personnel to teach about death education. Oaks and Bibeau (1987) suggested recommendations for school personnel to consider when devising a curriculum for death education. These recommendations are: (1) know what research reveals about children and death so that schools can better understand and make recommendations for the role of the school; (2) multiple school personnel should be involved so that all are prepared to respond effectively and completely to a bereaved child; and (3) have teachers involved in the preparation of death education curriculum through pre-service or in-service training. Bordewich (1988) advised that sociologists, psychologists, or

counselors, along with parent teacher associations, should be involved in the planning and approval of death education.

The next step in this study was to discuss the procedures used. This information is found in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

This chapter addresses the following procedures used in conducting the study: (1) population description, (2) setting for the study; (3) method of collecting data, which included the following components: (a) questionnaire, (b) initial contact meeting, (c) interviews--unstructured and structured, and (d) description of student case studies; (4) method of organizing data; (5) analysis of data; and (6) the development of an educator's handbook.

Population Description

Four sets of respondents comprised the population for this study: (1) grieving students, (2) parents of these students, (3) teachers of grieving students, and (4) a randomly selected group of teachers who were respondents to a questionnaire.

The grieving students in this study were twelve students who experienced the death of a parent or sibling while enrolled in school during the academic years from 1981 through 1986. The students were enrolled in a Montgomery area school for the academic year 1987-1988.

Parents of the grieving students were the second set of respondents in this study. These parents were and presently are the residing guardians of the students.

The students and their parents were identified through several resources. Some resources were bereavement support groups where the parents and students were participants. The support groups were: The Compassionate Friends, Hospice of Montgomery, and Catholic Social Services, all located in Montgomery, Alabama. The identification process involved having the researcher give a presentation about the study to each of these groups. The presentations addressed the purpose of the study, procedures of the interview processes, the information collected and analyzed, confidentiality, and a question and answer time. A written explanation of the study was published in one group's news publication (see Appendix A). Those students and parents matching the needs of the study were invited to contact the researcher. Some cases included in this study were parents and students who had been personally counseled by this researcher.

The third set of respondents in this study was comprised of the classroom teachers and/or administrators for the grieving students at the time the students experienced the death of a parent or sibling. The educators were located by the assistance of the participating parents and students. When students had more than one teacher for instruction, the researcher requested that the student select the teacher who

was most helpful to them. Once the researcher contacted the teacher, the explanation of the study was given and an invitation was extended. Upon the agreement of the teacher to participate, an appointed time was arranged for the researcher to meet with the teacher.

The fourth set of respondents in this study was a group of randomly selected elementary and secondary grade school teachers. These teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire in order to ascertain their perceptions and feelings concerning teachers and grieving students. These educators were teaching within the Montgomery City Public School System. The teachers were randomly selected by using the Table of Random Numbers Method (Fisher and Yates, 1963). One hundred teachers were selected from the population of two thousand teachers of kindergarten through grade twelve levels. Fifty responses were returned, yielding a fifty percent response rate.

Setting for the Study

The setting for this study included students and educators from three school systems within the Montgomery, Alabama area. The school systems were: (1) the Montgomery City Public School System, (2) the Catholic school system, and (3) a secondary school in the rural area of Montgomery.

The fifty-two schools in the city of Montgomery have a student population of 36,000 in kindergarten through grade

twelve. Approximately two thousand teachers service these schools. The Catholic school system used in this study consisted of one high school with a student enrollment of 260, grade levels nine through twelve, and fifteen teachers. St. Bede's Catholic Elementary School was also involved, with a student enrollment of 295, kindergarten through grade eight, and fourteen teachers. The third school system consisted of a secondary public high school with a student enrollment of 750, grade levels nine through twelve, and thirty-nine educators.

Montgomery, Alabama, located in the central part of the state, is the capital city of Alabama. Its metropolitan population is nearly 300,000. The three chief industry resources are: (1) local, county, and state government agencies, (2) two Air Force military installations (Maxwell Air Force Base, which encompasses the Air University, and Gunter Air Force Base), and (3) agriculture.

Method of Collecting Data

Yin (1984) emphasized that in a case study, the investigator must learn to integrate real-world events with the needs of the data collection plan. In this sense, the investigator does not control the data collection environment as one might in using other research strategies. For this study, the real-world event, the grieving student, and the educator were integrated into the study through different

techniques. As prescribed by Good and Scates (1954), certain types of information can be secured only by direct contacts with people. The techniques of using personal contact were found to be effective for the needs of this data collection plan.

The techniques incorporated into the data collection plan consisted of four parts: (1) a survey of a random sample of classroom teachers as to their feelings and needs in educating grieving students; (2) an initial contact meeting with the participants to explain the study procedures and obtain written consent for taping the interviews (participants of the initial meeting were the students, parents, and teachers of the students at the time of the death experience); (3) an unstructured interview of students, parents, and teachers, and a structured interview of these students, parents, and teachers; and (4) from information gained from these sources, a case study was initiated and completed.

The Survey Questionnaire

Previous to the development of the questionnaire, the administration for the Montgomery public schools was contacted and permission granted for the utilization of the questionnaire. The researcher made contact with an administrator by presenting the objectives and goals for the study.

Important information can be buried within the feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and actions of humankind. An instrument can be used to probe and investigate the areas that are beyond the physical reach of the researchers (Leedy, 1980). The questionnaire was the instrument chosen to assist in the investigation of this study. The purposes for which questionnaires are used, and the types of information sought, vary from study to study (Berdie and Anderson, 1974). This researcher utilized the questionnaire to probe data from the randomly selected teachers. The instrument aided in discovering the hidden feelings and attitudes teachers have about grieving students and their educational needs (Leedy, 1980).

For the purpose of this study, guidelines were used to establish validity, question selection, and phrasing. Carmines and Zeller (1979) proposed three steps to ensure content validity: (1) the researcher must specify the full domain of content relevant to the particular measurement situation; (2) one must organize and sample the specific contents from the collection; and (3) once questions have been selected, they are to be put into a form that is testable. These steps were performed by doing a thorough examination of literature and organizing the information into related areas. Questions for the instrument were developed so that the meaning from each related area was represented.

The next factor, question selection, was developed by following the guidelines and components proposed by Good and Scates (1954). The questions must be designed to fulfill the specific research objectives. Leedy (1980) stated that, item-by-item, a questionnaire should be built and quality-tested again and again for precision of expression, objectivity, relevance, suitability to the problem situation, and probability of favorable reception and return.

Sentence phrasing was the last factor considered in the design of the questionnaire. Leedy (1980) suggested that the instrument be brief. The language used must be clear and specific. Question items are to be simple to read, require a simple response, and written with appeal.

Once the questionnaire construction and validity were completed, the finalization of the questionnaire took place. The instrument, an explanation letter, a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and a token of appreciation were mailed to the randomly selected teachers. Leedy (1980) described this step, the token of appreciation, as an act of courtesy and the oiling of the wheels of cooperation.

The explanation letter and the questionnaire are found in Appendices B and C, respectively.

Initial Contact Meeting

The participants for this study were contacted by telephone approximately ten days before the initial meeting.

was scheduled. The researcher explained the agenda and established a time and location. One week previous to the set date, the researcher sent a letter confirming the discussion of the telephone contact. Inclusive with this letter was an agenda for the meeting.

The initial contact meeting was planned so that students, parents, and teachers could meet informally, and it allowed them contact with the other participants in attendance. A relaxed, comfortable, and welcoming atmosphere was created for these interviewees. Meeting the other participants of the study gave the members a sense of comradeship.

At this meeting, the interviewer guided the meeting by following an agenda. When the agenda had been discussed, the researcher facilitated the written documentations requiring the participants to grant permission for the interviews to be taped and permission to use information from the interview for this study. This granting of permission was based on the understanding that the transcripts' written information used in the study was to receive the participants' complete and final approval. Next, the participants were asked to schedule a time and place for the unstructured interview.

The agenda for the initial meeting, the confirmation letter, and forms for permission and confidentiality are included in Appendices D, E, and F, respectively.

Interviews

When the interview is used for research purposes, the investigator is gathering data directly from others in face-to-face contact, in contrast to certain other data-gathering procedures, such as the questionnaire (Good and Scates, 1954).

This study utilized two specific interview processes, the unstructured and the structured interview. The intent of the unstructured interview is to elicit from the person being interviewed a highly personal and detailed account of particular events. The structured interview consists of a set of predetermined questions, like a questionnaire, that are verbally asked of a person (Spirer, 1980). For the purpose of this study, the interview guidelines and components suggested by Leedy (1980) were implemented.

Unstructured interview. The unstructured interview gave the students, parents, and teachers the opportunity to reveal the individual events unique to their situation. It provided personal and confidential information they would not ordinarily place in writing on paper (Good and Scates, 1954).

At least ten days before the interview was to be held, the participants received a telephone call from the researcher confirming the scheduled appointment made at the initial meeting. A letter of confirmation was issued. This letter stated the date, time, location, and a brief

explanation about the purpose and agenda for the unstructured interview. During the interview, the researcher guided the discussion along the prescribed agenda. After the interview, the researcher submitted a transcript of the interview and obtained a written acknowledgement of its accuracy and/or corrections from the interviewee. Before the closing, the interviewee was asked to schedule an appointment time and date for the structured interview. The questions used in the unstructured interview for students, parents, and teachers can be found in Appendices J, L, and N, respectively.

Structured interview. The structured interview gathered collective feelings and attitudes related to the educational needs of the grieving student through the use of specific, predetermined questions. It provided an opportunity for the interviewer to give information and to develop certain attitudes on the part of the respondent, a procedure that is not possible when using a questionnaire or a test (Good and Scates, 1954).

The questions utilized were designed and developed by the researcher. Information from the teacher questionnaire, personal experiences of the researcher, and related literature were the building blocks for these questions. The questions used in the structured interview for students, parents, and teachers can be found in Appendices K, M, and O, respectively.

Approximately ten days prior to the scheduled interview, the researcher confirmed the scheduled date, time, and location and provided a short description of the agenda to be followed.

Immediately following the completed interview, the researcher submitted a transcript of the structured interview and obtained written acknowledgement of its accuracy and/or corrections from the interviewee. After that interview material was readied for inclusion in the study, the individual section pertaining to the interviewees was sent to them for final approval. An expression of appreciation was the final stage in closing the interview process of this study. A copy of the letter to students, parents, and teachers is included in Appendix I.

Description of Individual Case Studies

Research strategy depends upon the questions being asked. A researcher identifies the situation to be investigated and determines the strategy of greatest advantage to answer the questions related to the situation. Case study design is preferred when a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control (Yin, 1984).

How the educator provides for the educational needs of the grieving student is the fundamental question of this study. Death experiences of grieving students identify the

set of events over which the investigator has little or no control. To meet the needs of the educator and grieving students, the researcher used the individual case study description as the most advantageous strategy for this situation.

"Each individual case study consists of a 'whole' study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the study" (Yin, 1984, p. 52). For the purpose of this study, the case study components proposed by Yin (1984) addressed the evidence sought by this researcher. The following five components are stated and developed for the description of the case studies: (1) the study's questions, (2) its purpose, (3) its unit of analysis, (4) the logic linking data to the purpose, and (5) criteria for interpreting the findings.

The specific interview questionnaires used with the educators, students, and parents can be found in Appendices J, K, L, M, N, and O.

Written narrative descriptions resulted from the analyzed responses of the students, parents, and teachers. These responses comprised the description for each individual case study.

Method of Organizing Data

Spirer (1980) stated that just as quantitative data are collected with predesigned codes and put into the computer

for analysis, the data from a case study must be collected and stored in a format that makes them easily retrievable. The method of organizing the data for the questionnaire was proposed by Berdie and Anderson (1974). The researcher assembled the responses from the questionnaire and tallied the results. The tallied results were presented in a tabular format to provide a visual presentation and enhance readability.

Information gathered from the unstructured interview was organized into a coding system described by Spierer (1980). The coding system was designed by identifying similar categories of information represented by each piece of datum. These individual categories were extracted from the unstructured interviews; the information was then summarized into a written narrative. The unique noncategorical information was described and a narrative was written.

Leedy (1980) recommended a method for organizing the data from structured interviews. He suggested that the responses obtained from the predetermined questions be tallied and then presented in a table format so as to display the question and the frequency that it was marked.

The data collected from the two interview processes were used to develop the case studies of the students. As demonstrated by Rosen (1984/1985), information was organized and categorized into three groups: (1) respondent's profile, (2) circumstances of the loss, and (3) the reactions of the

students, parents, and teachers to the loss. Written descriptions and narratives were compiled. These are presented in Chapter 4.

Analysis of Data

This study was essentially concerned with descriptive research and did not address formal statistical hypotheses.

Spirer (1980) stated that the exact procedures used in data analysis vary according to the amount of data collected, the information needs of the audience, and resources available. This study used two techniques to analyze the data collected. First, narratives were written to describe and explain the interview data. Second, content analysis procedures were used to quantify the findings and frequencies of the questionnaire results (Spirer, 1980).

The questionnaire results were tallied and presented in a tabular format. As suggested by Yin (1984), the researcher developed a content analysis report to discuss the results of the questionnaire.

For the purpose of this study, Spirer's (1980) recommended three steps for the analysis of the interviews were utilized. First, the data of the transcripts were read in order for the researcher to become familiar with the information collected. Second, additional readings were done where the researcher specifically identified patterns and themes which emerged. The narrative technique was used to discuss

the analysis of the interview processes, which completed the third and final step.

Development of an Educator's Handbook

The researcher's experiences as a teacher and counselor have exposed her to grieving students, their teachers, and classmates. It is the researcher's observation that many teachers are bewildered and unable to aid these children because of lack of knowledge. Educational materials and resources for the educator and the grieving student were limited. An educational need existed for the grieving student's second family, the school.

To meet this need, an educator's handbook was developed to assist teachers, students, and parents. Its contents followed the concerns addressed by teachers, students, and parents. These concerns were extracted from the analysis of the questionnaire, interviews, and case studies inherent in this study. In addition, expertise provided by authorities in the field of "grieving children and educators" was given. The researcher's experiences with grief counseling and relevant information from the review of related literature were also utilized.

The handbook's design modeled the format of a PDK Fastback (Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation). The guidelines for the physical layout included a written narrative approximately sixty pages in length. An introduction

addressed its purposes, needs, and the components of the handbook. It was divided into three parts to deal with each concerned group: students, parents, and teachers. The subdivisions included an introduction written for that particular group, the results of the study, and helpful suggestions, followed by professional experts' recommendations and a summary. A listing of resources concluded the handbook's layout.

Creative illustrations enhanced the physical attractiveness. A professional illustrator was contracted. His artistic expertise was intended to add a dimension to encourage and motivate the reader. Other features -- the quality and size of the paper, the type of print, and color -- were important to highlight particular concepts. The art style of realistic drawings was used to portray the characters' emotional dynamics.

The researcher used a personal rather than formal writing style to create a more acceptable product for the reader. Self-imposed guidelines were exercised by the researcher. The writing of the handbook established the goal of bridging together a feeling base with a knowledge base. The balance of feelings with knowledge was intended to provide a blend of empathy and credibility.

Draft copies of the handbook were sent to three authorities in the field of "grieving children and the educator." These authorities were asked to critique the handbook. The

handbook was then revised in consideration of the solicited input from the authorities. The finalized version was submitted for publication.

Chapter 4 provides the findings and interpretations of the data gleaned from the questionnaire, interviews, and case studies.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The data reported in this chapter are arranged in the following categories: questionnaire, interviews (unstructured and structured), case studies, and handbook.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire used in this study was to obtain information from teachers about their perceptions and feelings of working with grieving students. One hundred elementary and secondary teachers from a population of two thousand were randomly selected to receive the questionnaire. Fifty responses were completed and returned. The questionnaire results are tallied and presented in a tabular format followed by a content analysis report.

Table 1 provides data concerning teachers' perceptions and feelings about grieving students. The responses given to question 1 were varied; however, most of them were grouped under the description of "inadequate" and "uncomfortable." For example, some respondents wrote, "helpless," "not prepared," "awkward," and "uncertain." Question 2 received

Table 1. Teachers' perceptions and feelings about grieving students.

Question	Yes	No	No Response	Most Common Response
1) To your knowledge, have you had the experience of working with a bereaved student in your classroom?	26	24	0	Uncomfortable, inadequate, concerned
2) Have you received any instruction on how to work with bereaved students?	5	45	0	Attended lectures/workshops
3) Do you feel prepared to work with bereaved students?	21	27	2	Yes: Personal experience, education
4) Are there specific teacher behaviors needed to assist the bereaved student?	38	6	6	Understanding, patience, and compassion
5) Do you feel there are behaviors you can anticipate from a bereaved student?	44	4	2	Withdrawal, anger, sadness
6) Do you feel classmates treat the bereaved student differently?	38	20	2	Withdrawal, avoidance, concern
7) Do you feel the need to receive information on working with bereaved students?	43	6	1	-----
8) You are now invited to comment about your concerns for bereaved students.	21	0	0	-----

the highest number of responses in the negative. Forty-five respondents have not received any instruction on how to work with bereaved students. This relates to question 7, where forty-three respondents felt the need to receive information. In addition, twenty-one responses to question 8 were related to the teachers' concern of how to discuss death with their students. In essence, through this questionnaire, teachers have requested information on how to work with bereavement so they can be prepared to deal with grieving students.

For question 3, those who feel prepared to work with bereaved students noted that their own personal experiences with death were most helpful. Those who do not feel prepared listed "lack of experience" and "no instruction" as their responses.

Thirty-seven varied responses were given for question 4, concerning teachers' behavior towards grieving students. "Have a stiff upper lip," "give extra help," and "listen" were some of the comments. However, the response, "understanding," was listed fifteen times, along with "patience" and "compassion," which were noted with eight responses each.

The forty-four respondents to question 5, who feel there are possible behaviors demonstrated by bereaved students, listed "withdrawal" as the most frequent response, followed by "anger." Other comments were individually given, such as "rebellious," "confusion," and "preoccupation."

Avoidance by withdrawing was the most common response given to question 6, which related classmates' behavior towards bereaved students. Some respondents explained that students are not sure of what to say or how to act.

Where teachers were invited to comment about their concerns for bereaved students (question 8), twenty-one responded. The most frequent concerns listed were the need to receive information on how to deal with the subject of death with students, and that more students suffer from divorce rather than death. Teachers requested help with both of these concerns. Respondents provided suggestions, such as "teacher education courses should include information about student bereavement" and "school systems need to have teacher in-service programs addressing the issue of grieving students."

Although personal experiences with grief and involvement with some form of bereavement information proved to have aided some of the teacher respondents, the results of this questionnaire showed a need for teachers to be better prepared for the bereavement process which may occur within their classrooms.

Interviews

The interviewee population consisted of twelve students from kindergarten, third, fourth, fifth, seventh, ninth, tenth, and twelfth grades. Eleven students experienced the

death of a father, while one student experienced the death of a sibling. The deaths occurred during the academic years of 1981 through 1986. Six parents were interviewed: five mothers and one father. The school personnel interviewed were two secondary principals, one elementary principal, one secondary counselor, and seven classroom teachers. Unstructured and structured interviews were held with each participant, yielding fifty-eight total interviews.

Unstructured Interviews

The categorical data taken from the unstructured interviews are displayed by providing the question and the responses from first, the students, then the parents, and finally the teachers. Following that, noncategorical information is then summarized in a separate paragraph.

Students. Table 2 displays the unstructured interview questions asked of student participants.

Table 2. Students' unstructured interview questions.

Question
1) What were your reactions to the death?
2) What were your family's reactions to the death?
3) What were the reactions to the death by people other than your family?

"Shocked" and "sad" were stated as the most common reactions to question 1, "What were your reactions to the

death?" Several students, who experienced the progressive illness and then the death of their father, noted that they had experienced shock at the time they were told their father would not live. When the actual death occurred, these students said they were saddened rather than shocked. Two students had no comment to the question; they felt it was too painful to discuss. The kindergarten students said they were afraid and tried to understand what happened to their dads.

"Crying" was identified as the initial reaction to question 2, "What were your family's reactions to the death?" Some students expounded by relating reactions which occurred several weeks after the death. For example, the surviving parent began drinking alcohol or the siblings were perceived as not caring. Others responded, "each handled it alone and in their own way."

Question 3 asked, "What were the reactions to the death by people other than your family?" Relatives were mentioned as reacting by crying. Friends and classmates expressed their care by telling the student that they were sorry about the death; some attended the funeral services. Three interviewees did not want others to talk about the death because it was private and sad for them.

Parents. Table 3 displays the unstructured interview questions asked of parent participants.

Table 3. Parents' unstructured interview questions.

Question
1) What were your reactions to the death?
2) What were your family's reactions to the death?
3) What were the reactions to the death by people other than your family?

Most parents stated "shock" and "disbelief" in response to question 1, "What were your reactions to the death?" Those who experienced the prolonged illness previous to the death responded with "being relieved" and "empty." Several weeks after the death, a few parents said they reacted by turning to alcohol, frivolous spending, and/or anger.

Question 2 asked, "What were your family's reactions to the death?" "Denial" and "evasion" were the reactions parents observed in their children and spouse. Some parents discussed sleep disturbances (nightmares), severe crying outbursts, sickness, and/or anger as additional reactions from their children.

Question 3 asked, "What were the reactions to the death by people other than your family?" Relatives, friends, and neighbors were viewed as reacting to the death with much support and crying. The parents discussed how friends took charge of the affairs by making arrangements for incoming relatives and taking care of funeral procedures.

Teachers. Table 4 displays the unstructured interview questions asked of teacher participants.

Table 4. Teachers' unstructured interview questions.

Question
1) Who informed you of the death in the student's family?
2) What were your reactions?
3) What were your responses to the bereaved student once he/she returned to school?
4) What were your responses to the classmates of the bereaved student?
5) What were the classmates' reactions toward the bereaved student once he/she returned to school?
6) Have you received any education in working with bereaved students?
7) What concerns do you have pertaining to school behaviors (academic, social, emotional) of bereaved students?
8) What concerns do you have pertaining to school behaviors of the classmates to bereaved students?
9) Are there specific behaviors, on the part of the teacher, needed to assist with the educational goals of the bereaved student?
10) How can teachers assist bereaved students in achieving desired academic goals?
11) What resources are available to you in working with a bereaved student?
12) Since your experience of working with a bereaved student, what recommendations do you have for your colleagues?

Question 1 asked, "Who informed you of the death in the student's family?" Five educators were informed of the death

by other school personnel. Other informants included a student, friends of the bereaved family, and the newspaper.

All respondents said they felt sadness for the grieving student in response to question 2, "What were your reactions?" Some teachers were concerned about how they were to handle the grieving student when he/she returned to school. "Disbelief" was described by others. Teachers who were informed of the family member's critical illness months before the death reacted by stating, "no surprise"; however, they still felt concerned for the student.

Question 3 asked, "What were your responses to the bereaved student once he/she returned to school?" Most teachers welcomed the student back to school and offered to be available to the student should he/she want to talk about the bereavement. Other responses were: "comforted the grieving student," "prayed for them," and "treated the student the same as though nothing had happened."

In response to question 4 ("What were your responses to the classmates of the bereaved student?"), all but one teacher indicated they informed the classmates of the death. Several teachers spoke with their students about their grieving classmate returning to school after the funeral. They advised the students not to be overprotective and cautioned them not to discuss the bereavement unless the student initiated the subject. Some encouraged the students to comfort and console the grieving classmate.

Question 5 asked, "What were the classmates' reactions toward the bereaved student once he/she returned to school?" Most teachers observed the classmates' behavior as treating the grieving student as normal. Some teachers believed individual students were supportive and caring, as demonstrated by helping the grieving student with school-work, including him/her in activities, and writing sympathy cards. Other educators viewed classmates as being "stand-offish" because they did not know how to handle the situation.

There were eight "no" responses to question 6, "Have you received any education in working with bereaved students?" Two interviewees received information through university counseling courses and one obtained help through self-study. All the respondents felt a need to receive education about bereaved students. They stated that they need to know how to work with grieving students and suggested workshops and courses. A counselor recommended role-playing through the use of scenarios to demonstrate practical methods. An administrator warned that a packaged approach could be dangerous since each death experience is unique and needs to be handled differently.

Question 7 asked, "What concerns do you have pertaining to school behaviors (academic, social, emotional) of bereaved students?" Several respondents noted they have much concern about all three school behaviors and they believe that a

close watch on the grieving student is essential. Others stated that bereaved students lose their motivation temporarily and they cannot be expected to concentrate on their schoolwork. Some teachers experienced aggressiveness and withdrawal by bereaved students; they suggested that school counselors need to be available for the grieving students. "Follow the normal routine" was advised by a few educators; others did not observe any changes in the grieving students.

In response to question 8 ("What concerns do you have pertaining to school behaviors of the classmates to bereaved students?"), the greatest concern was classmates displaying inappropriate behaviors, such as saying hurtful things. The teachers agreed that students need to be informed and guided in how to respond with grieving peers. Other educators shared that classmates discussed their fears about the death experience happening to them.

Question 9 asked, "Are there specific behaviors, on the part of the teacher, needed to assist with the educational goals of the bereaved student?" "Continue with normal activities unless you observe changes" was the response of most interviewees. Other behaviors included: "take time to listen and talk," "express your own grief to the student," "modify schoolwork for a time," and "encourage the bereaved student." Five teachers expressed the need to discern between the grieving student taking advantage of their bereavement and being responsible for their learning.

To question 10 ("How can teachers assist bereaved students in achieving desired academic goals?"), the most frequent response given by the educators was "listen." Others stated the need to be sensitive to the individual needs of the bereaved student. Practical ideas were noted, such as "provide tutorial assistance," "assign a student partner," and "work with the parents." "Patience," "concern," and "understanding" were other suggestions for assisting bereaved students in achieving academic goals.

Question 11 asked, "What resources are available to you in working with a bereaved student?" Five respondents mentioned that no resources were available. Three stated that the minister of their church was helpful. Some interviewees said the school's principal, other students, private and state agencies, books, one's faith in God, and personal experiences were resources available.

Numerous responses were provided by each educator to question 12, "Since your experience of working with a bereaved student, what recommendations do you have for your colleagues?" As an example, these recommendations were noted: "listen to the student," "be careful of what you say," "let the bereaved student talk," "be empathetic and compassionate," "give him/her time to adjust," "don't be afraid to talk about death," "have contact with the family," "prepare classmates before the grieving student returns," "share your own experiences," and "put your priority on observing--be alert."

Concluding remarks were given; they addressed areas of noncategorical information. First, one school system has a written policy dealing with student crises. Bereaved students are cared for by the policy. It functions by having the school principal call a meeting to inform the school staff about a bereaved student. The teachers are advised to be alert to the student's behavior, provide tutorial assistance, and to contact the counselor and principal should any concern arise. Another school's bereavement method utilized by an administrator is called "Campus Patrol." The Campus Patrols (CP's) are student leaders selected by the principal. Their responsibilities include assisting bereaved students once they return to school. Their actions are to be discreet in relating to the grieving student and their classmates. Specifically, the CP's arrange their schedules so that someone is with a bereaved student throughout the day. The principal determines when the services of the CP's are no longer necessary. The administrator initially devised this plan in response to students who had attempted suicide.

Structured Interviews

The data obtained from the structured interviews are presented in a tabular format where the question is stated and the most frequent response is given. A summary is included for each table.

Students. Table 5 displays the structured interview questions asked of student participants.

Table 5. Students' structured interview questions.

Question	Most Frequent Response
1) What concerns did you have about returning to school after the death of your family member?	How the other students would act towards me; did not want to go back to school.
2) When you returned to school, how did your teacher respond?	Talked to me.
3) When you returned to school, how did your classmates respond?	Said they were sorry; kind to me; normal day at school.
4) Did your teacher help you?	Talked to me; helped me with my work.
5) Did your classmates help you?	Said they were sorry; talked and did things with me.
6) Did you have school problems once you returned to school?	It was difficult to concentrate on schoolwork; grades dropped.
7) At school, who was the most helpful to you and why?	Friends helped me talk and do my work.
8) Did you have any resources that were helpful for you?	Six responded, "no one"; three said family counselor; one resource was given for the principal, prayer cards, classmates.
9) In what ways might you help other students who may be grieving?	Share my experience.
10) What suggestions do you have for teachers who work with grieving students?	Show you care by listening; attending the funeral; let me talk when I'm ready; don't give me all the makeup work right away.

Concluding remarks by the interviewees were: they appreciated their teachers and classmates attending the funeral services, they suggested that teachers need training in order to know how to act with the different bereaved students, and three said they wanted to be treated normally, as if nothing had happened to them. One student discussed a positive, unique experience she had with a teacher. This teacher responded to the student's bereavement by calling and visiting at the home, attending the funeral, providing tutorial help, and, most unusual, the teacher continues to periodically check on this student although the death experience was nearly six years ago.

Parents. Table 6 displays the structured interview questions asked of parent participants.

Table 6. Parents' structured interview questions.

Question	Most Frequent Response
1) At the time of the death experience, who contacted the teacher of your bereaved children?	Relatives, parent, pastor.
2) Did you have any contact with your child's teacher once he/she returned to school following the death?	Three responded "no"; three responded "yes."
3) Did your child discuss with you concerns he/she had in returning to school?	Four responded "no"; two responded "yes"; six students did not want to return to school.

Table 6--continued.

Question	Most Frequent Response
4) Did you have concerns about your child's school behavior?	Academics--grades went down; would not do the schoolwork. Emotional--withdrawal, sleep disturbances. Two parents had no concerns.
5) Did your child have problems with his/her academics and/or special adjustments?	Did not see problems; children hid feelings to protect their parents.
6) Did you have resources available to you in helping your bereaved child?	Three parents received professional family counseling; other sources--books, Hospice, family, church community.
7) What recommendations do you have for teachers when working with bereaved students?	Have student support groups; give empathy, time, and patience.
8) How might you assist other bereaved parents who have bereaved school-aged children?	Share own experience and the different ways of grieving; participate in support groups.
9) How was the school most helpful to you and your bereaved children?	Five of the parents felt that teachers did not know how to act or what to say. One parent felt her child's teacher was helpful.

Concluding remarks by the interviewees were: educators need training to know how to help grieving students return to school and readjust because the family is in much pain and unable to help; teachers, parents, and students need to have a conference to face the bereavement together and have a common plan.

Teachers. Table 7 displays the structured interview questions asked of teacher participants.

Table 7. Teachers' structured interview questions.

Question	Most Frequent Response
1) Was this your first experience of working with a bereaved student?	Four responded "yes"; seven responded "no."
2) What was this experience like for you?	Difficult; painful; not sure how to act; sad.
3) While the bereaved student was a member of your class, did you ever contact the parents?	Seven responded "yes"; four responded "no"; not necessary; no concern.
4) If so, what was your concern about the bereaved student?	To stay informed on how the student was doing; offered help.
5) Did the parents at any time contact you about the student?	Six responded "yes"; five responded "no."
6) What was their concern?	How the student was doing; informed the school of father's illness.
7) Did you ever initiate the contact with the student to discuss his/her bereavement?	Eight responded "yes"; three said "no"; the teacher invited the student to talk.
8) Did the bereaved student ever come to you to discuss his/her bereavement?	Eight responded "no"; three said "yes" (one student was concerned about his/her mother; one was sad and wanted to cry; one wanted to talk about the illness of his/her father).
9) Were there school problems related to the student's bereavement?	Eight responded "no"; four said "yes." Absenteeism; withdrawal, schoolwork.

Table 7--continued.

Question	Most Frequent Response
10) Were some academic areas of the bereaved student affected more than other academic areas, such as math, physical education, science, etc?	Seven responded "no"; four said "yes." Students excelled in physical education, art, and computers. One student withdrew from physical education.
11) Were there school problems of classmates' behaviors related to the bereaved student?	Ten responded "no"; one responded "yes." Classmates were upset with a student's antisocial behaviors such as temper tantrums.
12) Did any classmate demonstrate concern for the bereaved student?	Eleven responded "yes." Attended the funeral; helped with schoolwork; wrote cards; befriended the grieving student. One responded "no." Treated student as normal.
13) Did you receive any assistance from other school personnel in working with the bereaved student?	Eight responded "no"; three said "yes." Fellow teachers modified work; principal and counselor provided assistance.
14) In your experience working with this bereaved student, what has been the most valuable learning aspect for you as an educator?	To truly listen by understanding the grieving student's feelings; the experience will be helpful in the future; teachers need to know how to deal with grieving students.

Concluding remarks by the educators were: teachers need to establish a relationship with students before a crisis occurs; teachers need to be aware of the bereavement process and how to deal with it. One teacher's statement expressed

the most important concern by the interviewees. The statement was, "I know there are ways to help; I just didn't know how or what to do."

Interpretation of the Data

Two general interpretations of the data are given. First, the research findings showed that most school personnel are not prepared to deal with student bereavement, and that they desire assistance. As an example, when the educators identified behavioral changes in the student, no specific plan was used to appropriately deal with the behavior. In the case of absenteeism, the school personnel continued to allow the behavior rather than dealing with it. Another example was a student who discussed the hurt she experienced when certain school activities in the classroom were insensitive to her grief. The classroom teacher was unaware of this problem. Therefore, the student's active grief was unattended.

Second, in cases where the bereaved students and parents were in frequent contact with the educator, problems related to the bereavement were generally dealt with in a caring, helpful manner. However, when contact between the school and home was nonexistent, problems relating to the bereavement tended to be ignored.

The interpretations obtained from all the data speak directly to the basic concern: How do grieving students,

their parents, and their teachers appropriately identify the academic, emotional, and social behaviors related to bereavement? Additionally, once the behaviors have been identified, then what is to be done in order to bring healthy responses to their grief?

Student Case Studies

The unique personal data collected from the interview process was used to develop the individual student's case study. The information is organized into three major categories: (1) respondent's profile, (2) circumstances of the loss, and (3) summary of the student's perceptions of the death experience. The symbol "S" denotes "student," and a subscript numeral is used to identify each of the twelve student interviewees.

Case Study of S₁

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Male, age seventeen.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Fifteen.
- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Tenth grade.
- (d) Family member deceased: Sibling (brother).
- (e) Surviving family members: Mother and father.
- (f) Participating educators' number of years teaching experience: One educator has eighteen years experience as an English teacher; the other

educator has thirty-one years experience as an administrator.

- (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: English teacher did not know him personally; administrator knew him for two years.
- (2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died in a sudden car accident.
- (3) Summary: S₁ was a tenth grader at the same high school as his brother at the time of his brother's death. His brother was a senior and was highly respected by the faculty and his peers. This was demonstrated by the number of students who participated in the funeral service and by a sports memorial that was purchased and dedicated in his honor. S₁ responded to the death experience by withdrawing initially; however, his brother's classmates befriended S₁. These students became involved with S₁'s life by driving him to and from school and keeping him busy with sports activities. S₁ stated that the help given by these students was most beneficial during the first year of bereavement. His two most painful experiences occurred when: (a) classmates would say unkind things, and (b) he experienced the memories of his brother. S₁ recalled one such memory shortly after returning to school. He had to go to the gym to prepare for a class. While going to his locker, he passed by his brother's locker and saw his

personal belongings. S₁ described this memory as "ripping me apart." S₁ and his parents requested a teacher and the school's principal to participate in the study. The teacher who was interviewed experienced the death of her high school son in a similar tragic accident. Her empathy proved to be helpful, especially to the parents. She sent projects and school assignments done by the deceased boy to the parents; this helped to ease their grief. The principal became involved through phone calls, home visits, and organizing a school memorial program in honor of S₁'s brother.

Case Study of S₂

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Female, age seventeen.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Fourteen.
- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Ninth grade.
- (d) Family member deceased: Father.
- (e) Surviving family members: Mother and one brother.
- (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching experience: Five years as a school counselor and ninth grade study skills teacher.
- (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: One year.

- (2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died four months after being diagnosed as having cancer. He was hospitalized the last two weeks before his death.
- (3) Summary: S₂ received professional counseling to help process her initial bereavement. She viewed her grieving experience at school as being hurtful and confusing. The rejection by her peers was traumatic. S₂ explained that previous to her father's death, she had many friends who would socialize and study with her. Once S₂ returned to school following the death experience, these friends would not look at her, speak to her, or include her in their activities. In addition, S₂'s family members dealt with their grief individually and in isolation. The security of S₂ at home and at school was altered; confusion and rejection were felt by S₂. Through the help of family counseling, she and her family have restructured their lives. S₂ has established other friendships. She reflected on the past as being an opportunity to help other bereaved students.

Case Study of S₃

- (1) Profile
- (a) Gender and age: Male, age thirteen.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Ten.

- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death:
Fifth grade.
 - (d) Family member deceased: Father.
 - (e) Surviving family members: Mother and one sister.
 - (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching
experience: Eighteen years.
 - (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the
death: One year.
- (2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of
death: The family member died four months after being
diagnosed as having cancer. He was hospitalized the
last two weeks before his death.
- (3) Summary: S₃ reacted to the death of his father in a
quiet, reserved manner. He felt that he should return
to school and follow the same routine. S₃ desired to be
treated like the other students. He recalled seeing
friends and his teacher at the funeral; he stated that
this was thoughtful and caring. The teacher interviewed
noted that S₃ appeared to have adjusted well to the
bereavement process. S₃ and his surviving family
members did receive group counseling for the first year
of bereavement.

Case Study of S₄

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Female, age fifteen.

- (b) Age at the time of death: Nine.
 - (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death:
Third grade.
 - (d) Family member deceased: Father.
 - (e) Surviving family members: Mother and one brother.
 - (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching
experience: Twelve years.
 - (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the
death: Seven months.
- (2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died three months after being diagnosed as having aplastic anemia. He was hospitalized for that entire time prior to his death.
- (3) Summary: S₄ and her mother believed the key factor in S₄'s readjustment to school while grieving was due to the work of the classroom teacher. This teacher provided care in several ways. For example, she guided the classmates in showing ways to comfort S₄, assigned a study partner, and contacted the mother each time S₄ demonstrated grief through prolonged crying spells. S₄ said the hurtful times happened when other students would share about their fathers; she felt alone because she did not have a father to talk about during class discussions. The student received professional counseling due to sleep disturbances or nightmares.

Case Study of S₅

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Male, age twelve.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Six.
- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Kindergarten.
- (d) Family member deceased: Father.
- (e) Surviving family members: Mother and one sister.
- (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching experience: Ten years.
- (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: Six months.

(2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died three months after being diagnosed as having aplastic anemia. He was hospitalized for that entire time prior to his death.

(3) Summary: S₅ remembered trying to understand what the death of his father meant. He recalled relatives staying at their home and the sad emotional reactions he observed. S₅ attended a private Christian kindergarten for three hours per day. He recalled his teacher talking with him about his father and Christian beliefs about life and death. The teacher stated that S₅ reentered his kindergarten class without much concern, although she mentioned that he often wanted to be held

and read to; S₅'s mother noted the same behavior at home. The teacher believed this was a way for S₅ to receive reassurance. Both mother and teacher kept each other informed about S₅'s bereavement. The mother discussed how she and the children worked through some grief by doing activities on special days in remembrance of their father. For example, on the birth date of the father, they decided to prepare their daddy's favorite meal. S₅ and his mother stated that these experiences were helpful ways to talk about their grief.

Case Study of S₆

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Female, age ten.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Nine.
- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Fourth grade.
- (d) Family member deceased: Father.
- (e) Surviving family members: Mother and two brothers.
- (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching experience: Ten years.
- (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: Four months.

- ##### (2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died two years after being diagnosed as having cancer. During the two years, he

was periodically hospitalized; he died at home under Hospice care.

- (3) Summary: "Crying a lot" was the reflection stated by S₆. S₆ talked openly about her feelings of grief; however, the teacher observed her as withdrawn and quiet at school. This student experienced the progressive illness of her father since he stayed at home until his death. The mother noted that as a family they spoke about their father's disease and his life expectancy. When the death occurred, the student remained at home for one week before returning to school. S₆ said it was difficult for her to do her schoolwork because she kept thinking about her father. Her teacher observed a behavior change in S₆; each day before and after school she would give the teacher a tight hug. This continued through the last day of the school year. The educator viewed this action of S₆ as a need for security and assurance. When the researcher contacted the school secretary to arrange an appointment with the teacher, the secretary volunteered that each day S₆ would stop by her office and give her a hug. S₆ recalled her classmates as being helpful and kind to her when she returned to school.

Case Study of S₇

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Male, age fourteen.

- (b) Age at the time of death: Twelve.
 - (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Fifth grade.
 - (d) Family member deceased: Father.
 - (e) Surviving family members: Mother, one brother, and one sister.
 - (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching experience: Ten years.
 - (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: Four months.
- (2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died two years after being diagnosed as having cancer. During these two years, he was periodically hospitalized; he died at home.
- (3) Summary: S₇ had a very traumatic time dealing with the illness and death of his father. At home, his mother viewed him as being defiant and aggressive, so she had him receive professional counseling. While at school, his teacher did not observe behavioral problems. S₇ said that the hardest time of his grief is when he misses having his dad around to do fun things with him, such as fishing. During the interview, S₇ responded to the questions about school with brief answers; he stated that he disliked school. S₇ recalled his classmates telling him they were sorry his dad died and that they included him in activities.

Case Study of S₈

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Male, age sixteen.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Fourteen.
- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Seventh grade.
- (d) Family member deceased: Father.
- (e) Surviving family members: Mother, one brother, and one sister.
- (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching experience: Three years, learning disabled.
- (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: One year.

(2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died two years after being diagnosed as having cancer. During the two years, he was periodically hospitalized; he died at home.

(3) Summary: S₈ refused to participate in the interview. At one point, he made a comment about his teacher talking with him and helping get his schoolwork done. S₈ perceived his bereavement as private and stated that he did not want to talk about it. His mother noted that he did not want anyone in the family to discuss his father's death and when a family member did so, S₈ would leave. The mother related that towards the end of the

father's illness, the father called S₈ into the room and spoke with him privately. She believed that since that conversation with his father, her son has attempted to become a father to his siblings. In other words, he has become "the man of the house," as stated by his mother. The educator observed absenteeism as the greatest change in S₈ since the death experience. Whenever he did come to school, he would often leave early in the day because of sickness. His absenteeism was serious enough for the school principal to consider not allowing him to continue to the next grade level. The teacher also noted that S₈ never spoke about his grief, although she encouraged him to do so.

Case Study of S₉

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Male, age twenty.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Seventeen.
- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Twelfth grade.
- (d) Family member deceased: Father.
- (e) Surviving family members: Mother, two brothers, and one sister.
- (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching experience: Twenty years.

- (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: Two years.
- (2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died seven months after being diagnosed as having cancer. He died at home.
- (3) Summary: S₉ participated in the interviews; this was the first time he had spoken about his bereavement. He felt the death of his father was private to him and desired that others not discuss it. S₉ was a senior at a small parochial high school when the sickness and death of his father occurred. He stated that his classmates and teachers attended the funeral and were helpful at times, although he tired of people stating their sympathy. The most challenging time of S₉'s bereavement was when students would question him about his father and his father's career. S₉ preferred to avoid these painful times by not discussing this private area of his life.

Profile of S₁₀

- (1) Profile
- (a) Gender and age: Male, age eighteen.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Fifteen.
- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Tenth grade.
- (d) Family member deceased: Father.

- (e) Surviving family members: Mother, two brothers, and one sister.
 - (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching experience: Twenty years.
 - (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: One year.
- (2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died seven months after being diagnosed as having cancer. He died at home.
- (3) Summary: S₁₀ perceived his bereavement process to have occurred during the father's illness. He stated when the death occurred he was prepared because he and his father had had time to talk through issues together. They had said their goodbyes. S₁₀ had an exceptional classmate. This classmate shared his father with S₁₀. All three would participate in activities together. S₁₀ shared several experiences in which the classmate's father would have "father-son" talks with him. S₁₀ noted that when he was introduced by the friend's father, he would address him as his "son." These experiences were positive and memorable during S₁₀'s bereavement. S₁₀ recalled the school principal as being caring and taking time with him during his difficult times. He stated that the school counselor had him act as a peer counselor with other students who had become

bereaved. S₁₀ expressed gratitude in being able to use his grief experience to assist others.

Case Study of S₁₁

(1) Profile

(a) Gender and age: Male, age fourteen.

(b) Age at the time of death: Eleven.

(c) Student's grade level at the time of the death:
Fifth grade.

(d) Family member deceased: Father.

(e) Surviving family members: Mother, two brothers,
and one sister.

(f) Participating educator's number of years teaching
experience: Twenty years.

(g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the
death: One year.

(2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died seven months after being diagnosed as having cancer. He died at home.

(3) Summary: S₁₁ responded to a few interview questions, even though he listened to his siblings participate in the study. He believed that his father's death was personal and private to him. His mother stated that he was receiving professional counseling to help him process the grief. The teacher noted that there were no concerns about S₁₁'s behavior at school. S₁₁ said

that he did not want any of his classmates to know about his father's death. He desired to return to school and to be treated like his peers.

Case Study of S₁₂

(1) Profile

- (a) Gender and age: Female, age nine.
- (b) Age at the time of death: Five.
- (c) Student's grade level at the time of the death: Kindergarten.
- (d) Family member deceased: Father.
- (e) Surviving family members: Mother and three brothers.
- (f) Participating educator's number of years teaching experience: Twenty-one years.
- (g) Time frame of knowing the student previous to the death: Several months.

(2) Circumstances of the loss, cause, and suddenness of death: The family member died seven months after being diagnosed as having cancer. He died at home.

(3) Summary: S₁₂ was just beginning her first year of school as a kindergartner when her father died. She recalled being confused and left out immediately following the death. She was also confused because of the emotional responses displayed by others and the activities involved with the funeral service. At the

time of the death, she saw her siblings go into her father's room; she was encouraged not to do so. This made S₁₂ feel alone. S₁₂ mentioned that while trying to do her schoolwork, she kept reviewing the funeral service in her mind. This made concentration difficult for her. At school she experienced two challenges with her bereavement. First, the teacher spoke with her privately and did not inform the classmates of her father's death. S₁₂ viewed her classmates as not caring because they acted as though nothing happened, and yet her daily life had been traumatized by death. Second, when the students created holiday art projects for their mothers and fathers, S₁₂ said she became saddened and distressed because she did not have her daddy to receive her gift.

Summary of Case Studies

In summary, each student's case study described some of his/her individual experiences with bereavement. The narrations of the case studies showed the unique impacts that bereavement can have on students of different ages and grade levels. In essence, student bereavement is personal, individual, and unique.

Development of the Educator's Handbook

The development of the educator's handbook involved three phases: (1) the actual writing of the manuscript, (2) the results of the authoritative critiques on the handbook, and (3) the contracting of a professional artist for preparation of illustrations.

The purposes of the handbook are to address the needs of grieving students, to provide a knowledge base about student bereavement, and to propose guidelines to assist educators in helping students with their personal losses. It is written for three specific groups directly involved in the bereavement process of school-aged children: (1) the grieving students, (2) their parent(s), and (3) the schools' educators. The handbook contains a discussion, the results of the study, and recommendations, followed by a summary and a listing of resources. The introduction to the handbook is contained in the final part of this chapter. The complete handbook is found in Appendix P of this study.

Results of Authoritative Critiques

The handbook was sent to three authorities in the field of "grieving children and the educator." They were invited to use their expertise to provide a critique of the handbook. Those professional authorities who were sent the handbook and responded with their critiques were: (1) Karen Story,

chapter leader for The Compassionate Friends, Montgomery, Alabama; (2) Joy Johnson, co-director of Centering Corporation, Omaha, Nebraska; and (3) Sara Rich Wheeler, Director of Education for Resolve Through Sharing, LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

Mrs. Karen Story, a bereaved parent, is The Compassionate Friends chapter leader for Montgomery, Alabama. The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is a non-profit national organization with several hundred local chapters. Its purpose is to be a self-help organization providing friendship and care to bereaved parents and siblings. Mrs. Story was referred to this researcher by the national TCF chairperson, Therese Goodrich. As the chapter leader, Mrs. Story oversees the monthly meetings for its members, provides personal and professional guidance for members and potential members of TCF, and directs the publication of a monthly newsletter which is circulated to approximately four hundred families. Mrs. Story was asked to provide her expertise for this handbook because of her personal experience with the death of her child and because of her involvement with the teachers of her four bereaved school aged children. As the local TCF leader, Mrs. Story has had experience assisting many bereaved families. This involvement has given her a wide base of credible experiences in the area of student bereavement.

Joy Johnson is the co-director of Centering Corporation, which is a non-profit organization committed to providing resources for professional caregivers who touch the lives of grieving families. The specific resources available through Centering and supervised by Johnson include: (1) conducting bereavement workshops throughout the United States for schools, hospitals, churches, and other organizations; (2) publishing a monthly newsletter entitled, Caring Concepts; (3) assisting a staff of seven directors who represent specific areas of bereavement care, such as the Director of Education and the Director of Pediatrics; and (4) editing resources published by Centering Corporation. Joy Johnson is noted for books and other supportive bereavement resources she has written. She has authored such books as Healing Grief, Am I Still a Sister?, Children Die, Too, and Tell Me, Papa.

Sara Rich Wheeler, M.S.N. (Master of Science in Nursing) is the Director of Education for Resolve Through Sharing. Resolve Through Sharing is a national organization dedicated to helping bereaved families and the professionals who give care to these families. Wheeler speaks nationally on grief and loss and has been featured on radio, television, and in newspapers. She serves as a consultant to other bereavement programs, has published on grief, adolescent growth development, and pregnancy, and is involved in bereavement research. Wheeler's most noted book, which she co-authored, is

entitled, When a Baby Dies: A Handbook for Healing and Helping.

The critiques provided by Story, Johnson, and Wheeler were compiled into two main categories. The first category represented the recommendations and statements common among the three authorities. The second category was established by sorting the individual statements unique to each authority. The suggestions common to the reviewers consisted of ten supportive statements of particular sentences within the handbook's text. For example, the reviewers responded with a "yes" and exclamation marks to such statements as, "a family is in much pain and unable to help," "students will not seek out help," and "each family member is working through his/her own grief and is really unprepared to actually help each other." The authorities noted statements confirming items within the text. For example, sleep disturbance was an experience they found to be common in grieving children. They stated that certain sentences needed to be emphasized, such as: "Grief is a lifetime process" and "grief is unique and individual for each person."

After the critiques from the second category were tabulated, fourteen different statements from the reviewers were implemented by revising the handbook.

In concluding the authoritative critiques, the individuals wrote several affirming comments. Each expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review the handbook and

requested a final copy. Johnson and Story stated that this resource is greatly needed and felt it would be very helpful. In addition, Wheeler noted that the teachers using the handbook would receive practical approaches for helping students. Johnson and Wheeler requested permission to write a confirming statement for the final manuscript, once it is accepted for publication.

Illustrator and Illustrations

Mark Sullivan is the illustrator for the handbook. He was asked to do the drawings for two specific reasons. First, Mr. Sullivan is a professional artist and a certified educator who presently is a master teacher and instructor at the University of Northern Colorado Laboratory School, Greeley, Colorado. Because of his personal and professional experiences as a classroom teacher and his published artwork, Mr. Sullivan's drawings in this handbook add a personal touch. Secondly, the writer of the handbook is a consumer of Mr. Sullivan's professional work which is published in several educational resources and other forms of literature. This writer feels that his art accurately and beautifully illustrates the emotional content of the written word, which is essential for this handbook due to the nature of the subject, SAD (Students and Death).

Figure 1, on the following page, is shown as an example of the handbook's illustrations. This drawing portrays a

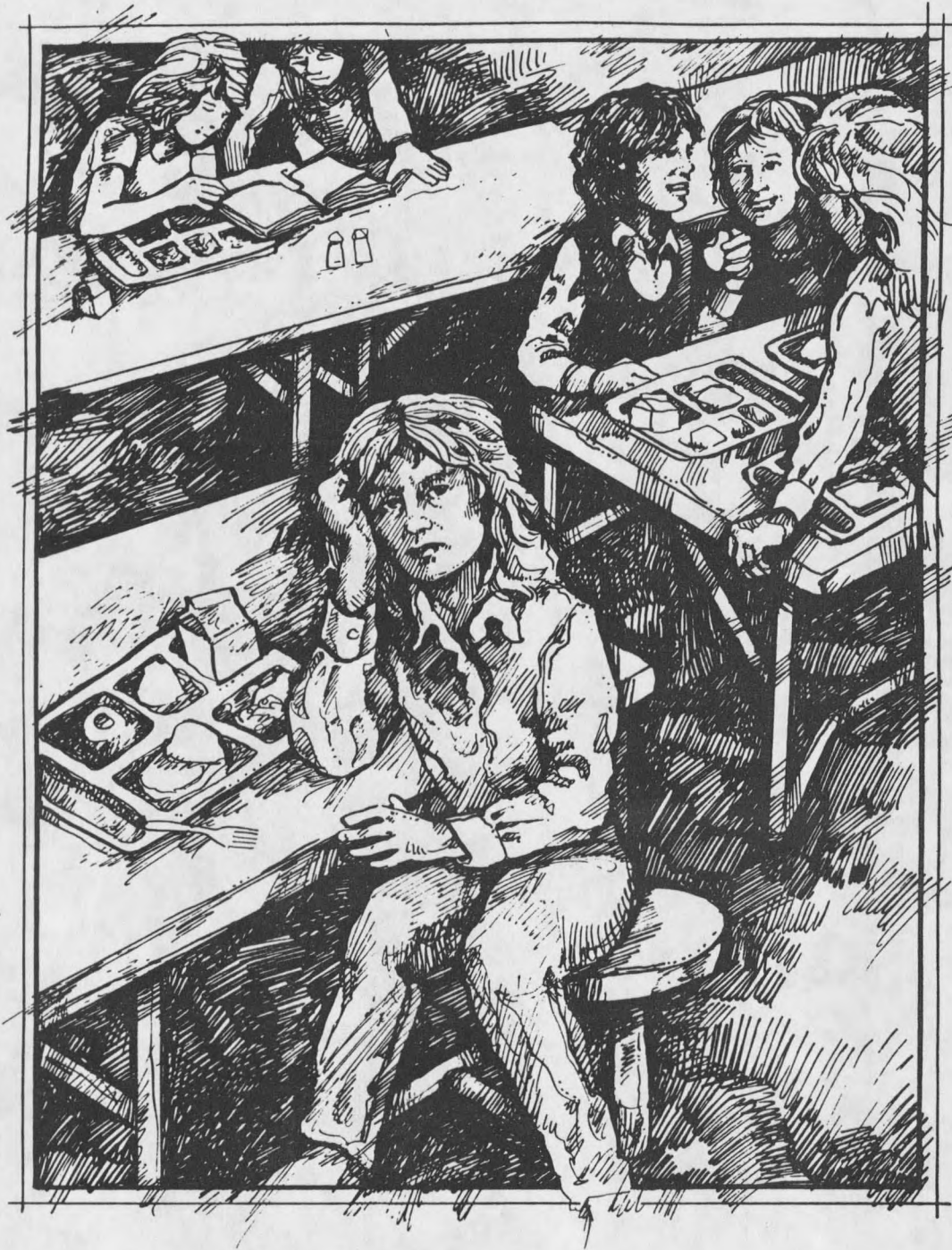


Figure 1. Handbook illustration 1: A bereaved student feeling rejection and isolation from classmates.

bereaved student sitting in the school lunchroom, alone and rejected by classmates. The completed illustrations can be found in Appendix Q of this study.

The introduction of the handbook concludes Chapter 4.

Handbook Introduction

SAD

Students and Death: An Educator's Handbook

Introduction

In ancient times a grieving peasant asked the monk, "How long will I grieve?" Instead of an answer, the monk gave him an instruction: "Go today from home to home and ask for one-half cup of rice from those who have not experienced grief." The peasant did as he was told. At the end of the day, he had no rice, but he had met many happy people. He found his answer.

This parable illustrates the reality of grief most of us have experienced in some form. Loss of employment, physical disabilities, moving to an unfamiliar neighborhood, divorce, and other losses or separations of many kinds are events in life that can lead us into emotional and physical responses known as grief. However, most people consider the loss of a loved one through death as the greatest grief known to humankind. Perhaps it is because of its finality.

When children experience the death of a parent and/or sibling, grief can be active in their lives for a long period of time. Initially, supportive and loving friends and relatives are most often the caregivers for bereaved children. Later on, classroom teachers may become the ones grieving children turn to as they attempt to restructure their lives after the trauma of death's effects.

The purpose of this handbook is to assist the school personnel, primarily the classroom teacher, in being a positive, significant caregiver for

bereaved students. This book is also meant to aid parents of grieving students and to provide help for the student as he/she reenters the school setting following the death experience.

The genesis of this writing came about as a result of a study which I did through the College of Education at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana. The study focused on two specific areas related to the role of the educator with grieving students: (1) A survey was done with teachers to obtain their perceptions and feelings about bereaved students, and (2) a set of interviews were conducted with bereaved students from grades kindergarten through twelve, parents, and the teachers of these students at the time of the family member's death. The data compiled from the surveys and interviews gave birth to this handbook.

Tears and pain were experienced during the interviewing process. It took a great deal of strength and courage for the students and parents to share so intimately. Educators expressed their fears and inadequacies candidly. A cry for help was issued by teachers and parents as they both attempted to assist their bereaved child/student. One parent commented, "Teachers need training to know how to help grieving students return to school and readjust; the family is in so much pain, we are unable to help." With twenty years of teaching experience, a teacher stated that she knows there are ways to help, but she just didn't know which way to go. Telephone calls and letters from educators requesting guidance gave further affirmation that this handbook could meet a need in education.

As I began collecting resources, it became clearly evident that little has been written for educators and their vital roles in assisting bereaved students. Thus, it is my hope that this handbook will be a service to them, the parents, and students.

Chapter 5 will conclude this study with a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONSSummary

This study addressed the issue of grieving students and the role of the educator. One hundred teachers were solicited to participate in a questionnaire about their perceptions of student bereavement. The fifty teachers who responded felt unprepared to deal with grieving students. Any preparation they had received was due to their personal experiences with grief. Most teachers requested help in preparing them for student crises related to bereavement.

Twelve students from elementary and secondary grade levels, who experienced the death of a parent or sibling within the past five years, participated in this study. The parents and students were also members involved in the interview process which discussed the bereavement of the students.

The student participants related experiences which showed that their grief was an individual matter. Some suffered from sleep disorders, others experienced a lack of concentration and energy, while a few wanted their grief to

remain private. The parents' response to the death was shock. Events immediately surrounding the death experience caused them to be occupied with concerns other than those of the surviving family members. Their own personal grief at times was difficult. However, some parents became involved with the schools concerning their child's bereavement, while other parents had no contact with their child's teacher. The educators showed varying approaches in dealing with the grieving student. Some teachers responded to the student by comforting and modifying academic expectations, while others reacted with concern but were careful to treat them without differences.

Grief which accompanies death is experienced by students in their homes and at their schools. The parents and teachers of these grieving students expressed a need to help them with the bereavement process and its possible effects on the academic, social, and emotional lives of the students.

The final phase of this research was a response to this need. An educator's handbook was written in an attempt to address the necessary understandings of the grieving process and to propose services for the bereaved student.

Conclusions

Based on the review of literature, teacher surveys, interviews, and case studies, the following conclusions were reached:

- (1) Educators were found to be unprepared in helping bereaved students. None of the teachers had received any formal education during their teacher preparation courses at the college level. Personal experience with bereavement was a source of help to some educators, as well as independent lectures they had attended. Teacher responses to grieving students were varied. This may be due to personal issues in their own lives, such as fear or being limited personally and professionally to the exposure of grief.
- (2) When frequent communication existed between the home and school, the effects of bereavement on a student's performance were dealt with by teachers and parents in a positive, helpful manner. Where no communication existed between the home and school, more often than not the effects of the bereavement on a student's performance were unattended. For example, sleep disorders could influence a student's concentration in learning without the teacher being aware of such an effect on a student's performance. Hopefully, teachers would be informed of these effects and respond to the student and parents with frequent communication.
- (3) The circumstances of the death, grade level, and personality of the grieving student showed influence on the student's response to bereavement. The kindergarten students were confused; older students expressed other

emotional responses. Some personalities preferred their grief to remain private; others wanted to discuss it. A few students had time to process their grief before the death because of a prolonged illness of the family member; others experienced a sudden death with no opportunity to grieve previous to the death. Others observed their family member's dying and death process in the home environment; some had the hospital environment as their circumstance of death for their family member. These factors of grade level, personality, and the circumstances of the death impacted the students in different ways. Hopefully, parents and teachers can use this information to help individual grieving students.

- (4) The way their classmates were going to respond to them was the greatest concern grieving students had about returning to school after the death experience. Teachers likewise were concerned about the classmates' behavior, as well as their own. Having the teacher prepare and guide the classmates in responding to grief was a key factor for the bereaved students' healthy readjustment to the school environment.
- (5) Parents were in shock after the death. They mentioned that their own grief crippled them from being attentive to their children. Parents requested help because they view the school as being the link to them in observing possible unhealthy grieving behaviors in their child.

Mutual sharing about the grieving student proved to be beneficial to the student, parent, and teacher.

- (6) Printed resources were limited or not available for the members of this study. A few teachers had other peers assist them. The students mentioned that the school did not provide any resources; their friends were their greatest assets. Half the parents sought professional family counseling as a resource for their grief. Hopefully, school personnel would aid students, parents, and teachers with the accessibility of printed and nonprinted resources.

Recommendations

This study identified twelve bereaved students who participated in the research. It would be valuable to expand this study to a larger population of students in order to obtain additional pertinent data and confirm the findings of this study and others.

This study could be altered by modifying a specific type of student population, such as only elementary grade level students or those who experienced a certain death experience of a family member, such as a suicide or AIDS. Two administrators participating in this study suggested research to be done on the effects of suicide on surviving siblings. The research could be expanded by studying differences of grief responses over time.

It could be educational and beneficial for teachers to receive units of study on bereavement through university education courses. This was requested by several teachers interviewed for this study.

It is apparent, as demonstrated through this study, that resources are not available for school personnel or bereaved families. It is recommended that schools provide resources and in-service training to assist those who work with bereaved students. The resources might consist of a fact sheet listing materials or a copy of the educator's handbook inclusive in this study.

Student bereavement is an issue in education needing the attention of school personnel and other professionals, such as mental health. It is recommended that these student-centered agencies cooperatively provide individual and/or group care to bereaved students and their families.

The summary, conclusions, and recommendations address the educator's role in the bereavement process of students. The educational needs of these students may go unattended by school personnel; yet the educator's role in the academic, social, and emotional lives of grieving students is of vital importance. This study provides information for teachers as they help bereaved students to meet success with their school life.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMATION NEWS RELEASE:

EXPLANATION LETTER

TO: Compassionate Friends Members

FROM: Majel Braden, Doctoral Student,
Montana State University

REF: Description of a Case Study Research Project

THEME: Bereaved Students and the Role of the Educator

The grieving student is an important issue in education. Most classroom teachers are not prepared to deal with the bereaved student who returns to the classroom after the death of a sibling and/or parent. This research will study the teacher's role and the needs of the grieving sibling/student. Three types of important people in the lives of the grieving student, the parents, the bereaved student, and the classroom teacher, will be needed for this study. Through this study, the researcher will collect information from these three groups of people. The information collected will be used to assist teachers in working with their grieving students:

Participants for the Study. For this study, the researcher needs families who have experienced the death of a sibling and/or parent. The child/children from these families need to have been students at grade level kindergarten through twelfth during the death of the family member. Other factors determining participation will be discussed with each family; one such factor is the contacting of the past school teacher and confidentiality.

Commitment of the Participants. This research will involve three contacts with the parents, students, and researcher. These three contacts consist of: (1) an informal meeting to explain the study, review guidelines, discuss confidentiality, and a question and answer time; (2) an unstructured interview for the parents and students to share their personal experiences; and (3) a structured interview of predetermined questions asked by the researcher. Each of these three contacts will be scheduled within a one-hour time span. The "when" and "where" for these contacts will be addressed with the participants by telephone and a letter of confirmation.

Compassionate Friends Members
Page Two

Please consider this opportunity for your family to contribute to this study of assisting our classroom teachers with their role and the grieving student.

For further information, please contact:

Majel Braden
615-D Oak Street
Maxwell Air Force Base, AL 36113
(205) 834-3678

I thank you for your cooperation and assistance with this research.

APPENDIX B

TEACHER'S EXPLANATION LETTER

February 18, 1988

Dear Teacher,

I am asking for your help in working with a special population of our school students, namely the grieving students.

Each year, approximately one million school-aged students experience the death of a parent and/or sibling. These grieving students are in our classrooms attempting to process their bereavement. With your help, we can assist the grieving student and expand our understanding as educators of how to work with this special population.

I am conducting a study about grieving students, grieving parents, and teachers' perceptions about working with this population. This study is approved through the Department of Education, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana, where I am a doctoral student.

What I need from you is a few minutes of your time to complete the attached questionnaire. The valuable information gathered from your responses to the questionnaire will be used in my study about grieving students. In conjunction with this study, a resource guide for educators will be developed to assist teachers who are working with bereaved students. In appreciation for your participation with this study, a copy of this resource guide will be sent to you upon your request, as indicated below.

As enclosures with this letter you will find: (1) a questionnaire; (2) a stamped, self-addressed envelope for you to enclose and mail the completed questionnaire to me; and (3) an appreciation pencil for you to use and keep while completing the questionnaire. I will appreciate receiving your completed questionnaire by February 25, 1988.

If you have any concerns, please contact me at this telephone number: (205) 834-3678.

Teacher's Explanation Letter
Page Two

I thank you for your time, your care, and valuable assistance.

With appreciation,

Majel J. Braden

Please check one of the boxes below:

Yes, I request the educator's resource guide and it may be sent to this address:

Name: _____

Address: _____

No, I do not request the educator's resource guide.

Approved for distribution:

Clinton Carter
Associate Superintendent
Montgomery Public Schools

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
ABOUT BEREAVED STUDENTS

QUESTIONNAIRE

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT BEREAVED STUDENTS

Directions: Please respond to the following questions by checking the appropriate response and using short answers where requested. Thank you.

- (1) To your knowledge, have you had the experience of working with a bereaved student in your classroom?
 Yes No
If yes, please describe how you felt about the experience.
- (2) Have you received any instruction on how to work with bereaved students?
 Yes No
If yes, please describe the experiences or materials that have been helpful to you in working with bereaved students.
- (3) Do you feel prepared to work with bereaved students?
 Yes No
If yes, please describe why you feel prepared. If no, please describe why you do not feel prepared.
- (4) Are there specific teacher behaviors needed to assist the bereaved student?
 Yes No
If yes, what do you feel these behaviors are?
- (5) Do you feel there are behaviors you can anticipate from a bereaved student?
 Yes No
If yes, what do you feel these behaviors are?
- (6) Do you feel classmates treat the bereaved student differently?
 Yes No
If yes, in what way?

Teachers' Questionnaire
Page Two

- (7) Do you feel the need to receive information on working with bereaved students?
 Yes No
- (8) You are now invited to comment about your concerns for bereaved students. Thank you.

APPENDIX D

AGENDA: INITIAL CONTACT MEETING

TO:
DATE:
TIME:
LOCATION:
FROM: Majel Braden

Agenda Items

- (1) Introduction of members.
- (2) Description and purpose of this study.
- (3) Process and explanation of procedure for this study:
 - (a) Unstructured interviews;
 - (b) Structured interviews.
- (4) Discuss confidentiality and forms to be signed:
 - (a) Permission to use information in the study;
 - (b) Permission to tape the interviews and have them transcribed.
- (5) Discuss contributions from participants and researcher.
- (6) Schedule for unstructured interviews.
- (7) Questions and concerns.
- (8) Closing remarks.

APPENDIX E
CONFIRMATION LETTER

Date:

Dear _____,

Greetings to you!

This is a letter of appreciation to you for volunteering to participate in the study about bereaved students.

As we had discussed on the telephone (date), an initial meeting is to be set. At this meeting, we will meet the other participants and discuss the study.

Our meeting has been scheduled for (day), (date), (time), at (location). Attached to this letter is the agenda to be discussed.

I certainly appreciate your acts of care and kindness in participating in this study, and I look forward to seeing you at our meeting. If you have any concerns, please call me at (205) 834-3678.

Sincerely,

Majel Braden

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION FOR TAPING AND
TRANSCRIBING INTERVIEWS

TO: (Interviewee)

FROM: Majel Braden, Interviewer

REF: Form granting permission to:

- (1) Confidentially tape and transcribe the unstructured and structured interviews;
- (2) Use information from these interviews in this study without divulging the identities of the participants.

I, _____, do hereby give my permission to Majel J. Braden to tape and transcribe my interviews for this study. I also give my permission for her to use this information in this study with the understanding that all written information used in this study will receive my complete and final approval.

(signature)

(date)

cc: Interviewee
Interviewer

APPENDIX G

LETTER FOR DIRECTIONS OF TRANSCRIPTS

June 1, 1988

Dear _____,

I thank you greatly for participating in my study about student bereavement. Your gift of time and the sharing of your personal experiences during our interviews have been significantly beneficial to this study.

At our initial contact meeting, I had a discussion with you about the interviews being transcribed and your involvement with these transcripts. There are three enclosures which will need your assistance with these transcripts. They are: (1) transcripts, (2) Agreement of Transcript Accuracy Forms, and (3) an envelope. I need you to please complete the following steps with these enclosures:

- (1) Please read your transcript.
- (2) If needed, modify any of your comments
- (3) Where blank spaces exist, complete your response by writing it in the blank space. (NOTE: The blank spaces occurred because the transcriber was not able to hear the tape properly or the interviewee did not have a comment at the time of the taping.)
- (4) Sign and date both copies of the agreement form. Retain one copy for you and return the other one to me.
- (5) Place the transcript and the agreement form into the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope and mail it back to me. The transcriber will then complete the modified transcript and I will mail you a copy of the final transcription.

I appreciate your cooperation with this last stage of the interviewing process. Please call me if you have any concerns.

Sincerely,

Majel J. Braden
(205) 834-3678

APPENDIX H

AGREEMENT OF TRANSCRIPT ACCURACY OF THE
UNSTRUCTURED AND STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

REF: Bereaved Students Study
FORM: Agreement of Transcript Accuracy of the
Unstructured and Structured Interviews
TO: (Interviewee)
FROM: Majel J. Braden, Interviewer

I, _____ (your name) _____, have read the transcription of my interviews and have made modifications as needed. I agree with the accuracy of it. I grant permission to Majel J. Braden to use information from this transcript in her study.

(signature)

(date)

cc: Interviewee
Interviewer

APPENDIX I

APPRECIATION LETTER

August 10, 1988

Dear _____,

Greetings to you!

I thank you for returning your modified transcripts to me. The changes you have made were implemented so that the transcripts read exactly as you have written. Enclosed with this letter is your copy of the final interview transcripts.

Hopefully, my next correspondence with you will be a copy of the book that is being written to assist students, parents, and teachers with the bereavement journey.

Your participation in this study has been a tremendous benefit for me as well as many other educators.

May you have a pleasant autumn.

With appreciation,

Majel J. Braden

APPENDIX J
UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW

UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT INTERVIEW

TO:

DATE:

TIME:

LOCATION:

FROM: Majel Braden

Agenda Items--Student:

- (1) Review purpose of unstructured interview.
- (2) Interview questions.

Questions Involving Circumstances of the Family Member's Death:

- (1) Age of interviewee at time of the death.
- (2) Age of the family member who died.
- (3) Gender of the deceased family member.
- (4) Cause of death.
- (5) Time frame before the death (no knowledge of pending death, preparation before the death).
- (6) Who informed you of the death?
- (7) Did you have a funeral service? Did you attend?
- (8) Are there other family members? Their ages?

Unstructured Questionnaire--Student Interview
Page Two

Questions Involving Your Response to the Death:

- (1) What were your reactions to the death?
- (2) What were your family's reactions to the death?
- (3) What were the reactions to the death by people other than your family?

Concluding remarks.

Closure to the unstructured interview.

Schedule for the structured interview.

APPENDIX K
STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT INTERVIEW

TO:

DATE:

TIME:

LOCATION:

FROM: Majel Braden

Agenda Items--Student:

- (1) Review purpose of structured interview.
- (2) Interview questions.

Questions:

- (1) What concerns did you have about returning to school after the death of your family member?
- (2) When you returned to school, how did your teacher respond?
- (3) When you returned to school, how did your classmates respond?
- (4) Did your teacher help you? Please discuss.
- (5) Did your classmates help you? Please discuss.
- (6) Did you have school problems once you returned to school? Please discuss academic (schoolwork), social (friends), and emotional (feelings).
- (7) At school, who was the most helpful to you and why?

Structured Questionnaire--Student Interview
Page Two

- (8) Did you have any resources that were helpful for you?
Please discuss.
- (9) In what ways might you help other students who may be
grieving?
- (10) What suggestions do you have for teachers who work with
grieving students?

Concluding remarks.

Closure to the structured interview.

Final appreciation.

APPENDIX L

UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR PARENT INTERVIEW

UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

PARENT INTERVIEW

TO:

DATE:

TIME:

LOCATION:

FROM: Majel Braden

Agenda Items--Parent:

- (1) Review purpose of unstructured interview.
- (2) Interview questions.

Questions Involving Circumstances of the Family Member's Death:

- (1) Age of interviewee at time of the death.
- (2) Age of the family member who died.
- (3) Gender of the deceased family member.
- (4) Cause of death.
- (5) Time frame before the death (no knowledge of pending death, preparation before the death).
- (6) Who informed you of the death?
- (7) Did you have a funeral service? Did you attend?
- (8) Are there other family members? Their ages?

Unstructured Questionnaire--Parent Interview
Page Two

Questions Involving Your Response to the Death:

- (1) What were your reactions to the death?
- (2) What were your family's reactions to the death?
- (3) What were the reactions to the death by people other than your family?

Concluding remarks.

Closure to the unstructured interview.

Schedule for the structured interview.

APPENDIX M

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR PARENT INTERVIEW

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

PARENT INTERVIEW

TO:

DATE:

TIME:

LOCATION:

FROM: Majel Braden

Agenda Items--Parent:

- (1) Review purpose of structured interview.
- (2) Interview questions.

Questions:

- (1) At the time of the death experience, who contacted the teacher of your bereaved child(ren)?
- (2) Did you have any contact with your child's teacher once your child returned to school following the death?
- (3) Did your child discuss with you concerns he/she had in returning to school? Please discuss.
- (4) Did you have concerns about your child's school behavior? Please describe your academic, social, and emotional concerns.
- (5) Did your child have problems in any of these areas? Please discuss.
- (6) Did you have resources available to you in helping your bereaved child? Please discuss.

Structured Questionnaire--Parent Interview
Page Two

- (7) What recommendations do you have for teachers when working with bereaved students?
- (8) How might you assist other bereaved parents who have bereaved school-aged children?
- (9) How was the school most helpful to you and your bereaved child(ren)?

Concluding remarks.

Closure to the structured interview.

Final appreciation.

APPENDIX N
UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR TEACHER INTERVIEW

UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

TEACHER INTERVIEW

TO:

DATE:

TIME:

LOCATION:

FROM: Majel Braden

Agenda Items--Teacher:

- (1) Review purpose of unstructured interview.
- (2) Interview questions.

General Information Needed:

- (1) What grade level was being taught when the student experienced the family death?
- (2) Number of years teaching experience?
- (3) Length of time knowing the student before he/she experienced the death?

Questions Involving Circumstances of the Student's Bereavement:

- (1) Who informed you of the death in the student's family?
- (2) What were your reactions?
- (3) What were your responses to the bereaved student once he/she returned to school?

Unstructured Questionnaire--Teacher Interview
Page Two

- (4) What were your responses to the classmates of the bereaved student?
- (5) What were the classmates' reactions toward the bereaved student once he/she returned to school?

General Questions:

- (1) Have you received any education in working with bereaved students? [] Yes [] No
If yes, has this education been helpful and in what way? If no, do you feel a need to receive education about bereaved students?
- (2) What concerns do you have pertaining to school behaviors (academic, social, emotional) of bereaved students?
- (3) What concerns do you have pertaining to school behaviors of the classmates to bereaved students?
- (4) Are there specific behaviors, on the part of the teacher, needed to assist with the educational goals of the bereaved student?
- (5) How can teachers assist bereaved students in achieving desired academic goals?
- (6) What resources are available to you in working with a bereaved student?
- (7) Since your experience of working with a bereaved student, what recommendations do you have for your colleagues?

Concluding remarks.

Closure to the unstructured interview.

Schedule for the structured interview.

APPENDIX O
STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR TEACHER INTERVIEW

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

TEACHER INTERVIEW

TO:

DATE:

TIME:

LOCATION:

FROM: Majel Braden

Agenda Items--Teacher:

- (1) Review purpose of structured interview.
- (2) Interview questions.

Questions:

- (1) Was this your first experience of working with a bereaved student?
- (2) What was this experience like for you?
- (3) While the bereaved student was a member of your class, did you ever contact the parents?
- (4) If so, what was your concern about the bereaved student?
- (5) Did the parents at any time contact you about the student?
- (6) What was their concern?
- (7) Did you ever initiate the contact with the student to discuss his/her bereavement? Please describe.

Structured Questionnaire--Teacher Interview
Page Two

- (8) Did the bereaved student ever come to you to discuss his/her bereavement? Please describe.
- (9) Were there school problems related to the student's bereavement?
- (10) Were there academic areas of the bereaved student affected more than others? Please discuss.
- (11) Were there school problems of classmates' behaviors related to the bereaved student? Please discuss.
- (12) Did any classmate demonstrate concern for the bereaved student? Please describe.
- (13) Did you receive any assistance from other school personnel in working with the bereaved student? Please discuss.
- (14) In your experience, working with this bereaved student, what has been the most valuable learning aspect for you as an educator?

Concluding remarks.

Closure to the structured interview.

Final appreciation.

APPENDIX P

EDUCATOR'S HANDBOOK

S A D
 (STUDENTS AND DEATH)
 AN EDUCATOR'S HANDBOOK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

Acknowledgements

Introduction

CHAPTER I	SAD: A View of History
CHAPTER II	SAD: One's Environment
CHAPTER III	SAD: An Overview of Developmental Stages
CHAPTER IV	The School
	Teachers
	Classmates
	Counselors
	Administrators/Principals
CHAPTER V	The Bereaved Student: Study Results
CHAPTER VI	The Bereaved Parent: Study Results
CHAPTER VII	Educators of the Bereaved Students: Study Results

Summary

Resources

Bibliography

S A D

(STUDENTS AND DEATH)

AN EDUCATOR'S HANDBOOK

Introduction

In ancient times a grieving peasant asked the monk, "How long will I grieve?" Instead of an answer, the monk gave him an instruction: "Go today from home to home and ask for one-half cup of rice from those who have not experienced grief." The peasant did as he was told. At the end of the day, he had no rice, but he had met many happy people. He found his answer.

This parable illustrates the reality of grief most of us have experienced in some form. Loss of employment, physical disabilities, moving to an unfamiliar neighborhood, divorce, and other losses or separations of many kinds are events in life that can lead us into emotional and physical responses known as grief. However, most people consider the loss of a loved one through death as the greatest grief known to humankind. Perhaps it is because of its finality.

When children experience the death of a loved one, i.e., parent, grandparent, sibling, and/or friend, grief can be

active in their lives for a long period of time. Initially, supportive and loving friends and relatives are most often the caregivers for bereaved children. Later on, classroom teachers may become the ones grieving children turn to as they attempt to restructure their lives after the trauma of death's effects.

The purpose of this handbook is to assist the school personnel, primarily the classroom teacher, in being a positive, significant caregiver for bereaved students. This book is also meant to aid parents of grieving students and to provide help for the student as he/she reenters the school setting following the death experience.

The genesis of this writing came about as a result of a study which I did through the College of Education at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana. The study focused on two specific areas related to the role of the educator with grieving students: (1) A survey was done with teachers to obtain their perceptions and feelings about bereaved students, and (2) a set of interviews were conducted with bereaved students from grades kindergarten through twelve, parents, and the teachers of these students at the time of the family member's death. The data compiled from the surveys and interviews gave birth to this handbook.

Tears and pain were experienced during the interviewing process. It took a great deal of strength and courage for the students and parents to share so intimately. Educators

expressed their fears and inadequacies candidly. A cry for help was issued by teachers and parents as they both attempted to assist their bereaved child/student. One parent commented, "Teachers need training to know how to help grieving students return to school and readjust; the family is in so much pain, we are unable to help." With twenty years of teaching experience, a teacher stated that she knows there are ways to help, but she just didn't know which way to go. Telephone calls and letters from educators requesting guidance gave further affirmation that this handbook could meet a need in education.

As I began collecting resources, it became clearly evident that little has been written for educators and their vital roles in assisting bereaved students. Thus, it is my hope that this handbook will be a service to them, the parents, and students.

CHAPTER I

SAD: A VIEW OF HISTORY

Student: "When I see her locker at school with all her things in it, I break into tears." Parent: "I dreaded them going back to school, having to face those kids and wondering what the teachers would say." Educator: "It's very painful; death in a student's family has been the most difficult problem I have ever handled in my thirty years in education." (Comments from personal interviews with participants in this study, April 1987.)

Within this half century, the experience of death has changed for most school-aged students in America. Previous to this time, death and dying were viewed as a natural part of life. From infancy, children lived with the fact of death and nothing was strange about it. School teachers were active with the family when a death occurred in a child's life. They participated in the grieving process by helping the bereaved family in practical ways, with chores, preparing meals, and sharing in the rituals surrounding the burial. The bereaved students saw their teachers involved; they experienced the teacher's tears and words of comfort. This relationship between the teacher and grieving child was bonded in ways unknown to the majority of teachers in our classrooms today.

Several key factors have influenced society's view of death as it relates to children and the bereavement process. Today's physical distance of the immediate family from the extended family has affected the grief process. It is not as common for children to be raised around grandparents and other relatives. An annual visit may be the extent of a child's relationship with grandma and grandpa. Learning to model healthy grief from one's family has often been denied to the child. When the feared call comes informing the family of a death, the student is then taken to the place of bereavement where he/she observes grieving responses and the funeral process. This all happens with relatives or family friends who are more often than not strangers to the child.

The familial support systems for bereaved people can be altered due to the geographical distance of the extended family and because parents tend to isolate, protect, and shelter their children from the experience of death. Children's bereavement has become removed and sheltered from daily life, thereby preventing children from being prepared to deal with the deaths of significant people.

Another distance exists. Most often, the sick and dying are kept in hospitals and nursing facilities. Visiting hours to these institutions are posted and, at times, children are not allowed. This distance of removing the sick and dying has shown an effect on students. They feel isolated. Lack of exposure and experience to the dying process has created fears in students.

I recall a presentation on bereavement which was given for a class of undergraduate students. I opened the talk with the question, "How many of you have attended a funeral, wake, shiva, memorial service, or other death ritual?" Approximately ten students of one hundred responded by a show of hands. Most of them had never had the experience. They confessed fear as a major issue for them; others said family members, mostly parents, discouraged their attendance at such a service. Removal of the sick and dying has hindered students from experiences which could prepare them for later pain and suffering during their life's journey.

To most students, the once held view of death as a natural process of life has become a monster to be feared and avoided. However, a revival of sharing the dying process within the family is taking place. Hospice groups have done much to restore the dignity of the family's right and privilege of caring for the dying at home. Hospice is a family-centered system designed to care and assist the ill person to be comfortable and to maintain a satisfactory lifestyle during the process of dying.

In the study, seven students shared in the care of their dying fathers at home. Some cases had Hospice personnel assist and guide them as they observed this stage of living. The fact remains that the roles of the teacher and the bereaved student have little if any common ground. Perhaps Hospice will extend care to the educator of the grieving

student by inviting the teacher to be a Hospice team member or assign a member to inform the teacher of the dying experience and its effects on the students. Informing and assisting the teacher with the bereaved student could give positive benefits to the teacher-student relationship as the child continues to attend school before and after the death of a family member. Hopefully, the cliché "history repeats itself" will be brought about through the use of Hospice and other organizations committed to preserving the life experience of death within the home environment.

For those who do not have the services of Hospice available, or if your lives are touched by sudden deaths, there are other national support groups available to provide you with loving care. These support groups, in many ways, are meeting the needs of the bereaved family which once were cared for by the immediate and extended family. A listing of these groups is located in the resource section of this handbook.

CHAPTER II

SAD: ONE'S ENVIRONMENT

Many variables within a student's environment affect his/her interaction with death. Variables such as a child's personality, past experiences with death, the circumstances surrounding the death experience (a prolonged illness or a sudden death), the relationship a student has with him/herself and the family, one's ethnic-cultural background, and the beliefs and rituals of a family are some of the environmental factors attributed to affecting students' bereavement.

Students, like John and Tim, who received Hospice assistance during their father's prolonged illness, discussed the environmental factor of a timeframe before the actual death. They, along with their dying father, used the time to talk about their fears, regrets, and concerns. When the death occurred, the students felt their grief had been processed before the death. Both boys did not experience the death as frightening, but as a relief of suffering for their beloved dad.

In cases of sudden tragedy, those students did not have that opportunity to process any feelings or thoughts with the family member. Thus, their grief work began post-death of the family member.

Anna, a university student, shared her unusual story which demonstrates the environmental factor of post-death experiences. She was a freshman at college when the first death happened; her oldest brother was killed in a flying accident. When the news reached their father, he died instantly of a heart attack. Anna left school to attend both funerals. Several months after her return to school, her second brother was killed in a boating accident. Once again she returned home to participate in the funeral services. She decided to return to the university and resume her studies. When she explained to one of her professors what had happened, he said to her, "Now, I've heard many excuses from students for why they haven't attended classes, but this has got to top them all!" Anna experienced other unfeeling remarks from classmates. Realizing her need to be with her surviving mother, she dropped out of school and returned home. There, she and her mother, with the help of professional counseling, began to work through their grief from these death experiences. When I met Anna, she had once again returned to the university after a one-year absence. She explained that because of these bereavements she is now better prepared when death will once again touch her life.

A student's cultural background influences his/her grief reactions. Different cultures have defined rituals which assist them in expressing their bereavement. For example, some Irish families view death as a transition from this life

to eternal life with God. When a person dies, the family becomes involved with the preparation of the body for the wake. During the wake, the family members can be seen as processing their bereavement by celebrating the final stage of this life with their deceased. They celebrate by having a meal and praying. Some members openly state their feelings and memories of their relationship with the deceased, such as, "I'll never forget the time you. . . ." Expressions of laughter and crying are observed. The ritual of the Irish wake is a process allowing the bereaved to grieve together. Children also participate and learn grief patterns associated with their heritage.

One close relative, Catherine, born and raised with Irish traditions, told of her first experience with death as a very small child. She said when a relative died, it was common for children to be asked to touch the deceased because the Irish tradition teaches that this act of touching a dead person drains the fear of death from children. When Catherine's grandfather died, the nearby family members, along with her, prepared the body. She recalls the event as being positive and "the thing to do."

Other cultures view death in other ways. Each culture has its traditions of death rituals rooted through the passing of many generations. Some of these rituals are retained and involve children, while other practices have been discarded and not replaced with other examples for

children to emulate. This can affect the responses of grief in children since they do not know that grief can evoke healthy responses to death.

Because some children have not actively participated in a death experience in order to observe and model grieving behaviors, the responsibility to guide these students often times rests with the teacher. Information gathered from this study showed that teachers feared what classmates would say and do when the bereaved student returned to school. This fear was manifested in the lives of some student members of the study. They said some of the comments made and actions done by their classmates were hurtful and unkind. Educators felt that students do not know how to respond appropriately to a bereaved student. This lack of preparation can be attributed to the cultural heritages which have prevented children in sharing in the death experiences.

Another factor of one's cultural background includes belief systems. These beliefs, if taught to the student, can be an asset for a child's bereavement process. Three students from this study shared how their religious beliefs helped them cope with death. They have been taught that when one dies, the surviving family members, provided they live a good, spiritual life, will see them again in a new world. This faith principle and the way the mother taught it, gave the family much comfort in believing that, one day, they will see their father again.

In contrast, one must be careful in teaching children religious concepts which may lead to fear and anxiety. Some children who perceive the statement, "Daddy's happy being with God," as really saying it is better for them to also die so as to be with their father and happy. A discerning adult, hopefully the parent, will apply their faith's principles with an understanding of children's perceptions about death. A brief overview of children's perceptions about death is addressed in Chapter VI.

Various cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs are channels for expressing one's grief. A prepared educator will properly guide grieving students and their classmates in respecting different cultural rituals and religious beliefs concerning death.

Personality factors vary from child to child. Generally, personality factors of students in the study showed that children whose personalities tended to be quiet, nontalkative, and reserved responded likewise to the death experience. However, those personalities which were talkative and overt were consistent with their personality traits after the death experience of a family member. An observing parent or teacher needs to watch for any personality changes that may occur -- from several months to many years following a death experience. Some professionals are trained in the field of grief counseling, and the student along with the family should be referred for this care if the need exists.

School counselors will assist teachers and parents in determining the need and the appropriate referral.

Bereavement, regardless of environmental factors, is personal and individual. No one's grief profile is exactly the same as another.

CHAPTER III

SAD: AN OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGES

Some researchers in the field of children and death have concluded that developmental stages, the mental age (cognitive) and the chronological age of children, may influence their reactions to death. Studies on students' responses to death have been grouped into age ranges; yet this is merely a framework to assist others in understanding children's bereavement. It is important for educators and parents to realize that a child's grief is individual and unique due to many personal variables in the life, and that just because a child is a certain age does not mean he/she must react and respond in a particular way. Other personal variables could include a child's past experiences with loss and the way in which the family members handled it, including their responses to his/her questions about death.

Generally, children preschool to age five view death as a form of sleep and perceive the emotional responses and changes in the family. For example, a young widow, Maria, shared her story about her youngest child of four. Her son was about two years old at the time of her husband's death. The family decided to have an open casket funeral. While the priest was addressing the large congregation, her son

announced to her that he was going to take a nap with his daddy. He hopped from Maria's lap, dashed to the casket, and climbed in to take a nap next to his father. This child's response to death was perceived to be a form of sleeping and, for him, he was doing what was natural for this developmental stage.

Children aged five to early adolescence most often see death as final and understand that living things die. Their experiences with plants and animals have given them examples of death as being final. Students in this age group do not see death as personal in relationship to their own existence. That is, they are not able to believe that death will happen to them.

Another common response found in this age group, and sometimes with younger children, is that they tend to take responsibility for the death. Jean, who is now an adult, recalled her mother's death when she was eight years old. Her mother had been home sick for a few days before she was hospitalized with a nontreatable medical problem. Within weeks her mother died. Previous to the sudden illness, Jean and her mother had a tiff about Jean's messy bedroom. Jean refused to clean her room up as her mother requested, so her mother proceeded to clean Jean's room. It was immediately after cleaning the room that her mother became quite sick. Jean's perception about her mother's illness and death was that her disobedient behavior killed her mom. It took years

for Jean to accept that her behavior was disassociated from the cause of her mother's death.

From early adolescence through late teens, children usually understand that death is final. Students in this age group tend to be risk takers and perceive death as not happening to them. This growth stage can be challenging to teenagers as they formulate their own thoughts and feelings about death and the meaning of life. A seventeen-year-old student, Bill, showed how he responded to his father's recent death. Bill is the oldest of five siblings. During the later stages of dying, his father was kept at home with the services of Hospice. Bill decided to move a bedroll into his father's room and sleep beside his father's bed. He wanted to be the first caregiver for his father's needs. Ten months provided Bill and his dad time to discuss personal issues between them. Following his father's death, Bill's actions towards his brothers and sisters changed. Before, he had been too involved with other interests to even bother with the family. During his experience with his father's dying, Bill redefined his views of life. He became interested in his siblings' activities and became more involved with them.

Although children grow and mature through developmental stages, they will continue to deal with their grief. Their responses to death will be modified as additional life changes and experiences touch them in new and different ways.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCHOOL

In addition to a student's home, the school environment is the next most important habitat. A great time investment of a young person's life is spent within the walls of a classroom. By the time students are eighteen years old, they will have spent twelve to thirteen years in school, nearly ten out of twelve months per year, five days of seven per week, and six of their most alert hours per day. The amount of time students spend with their teachers and classmates is more than that shared at home. This commitment of time points to the tremendous responsibility schools have in influencing America's youth.

Like most institutions of our contemporary society, schools have become highly specialized. There are specially educated teachers for the developmentally disabled, learning impaired, emotionally disturbed, and physically handicapped. One specialized area, the grieving student, remains somewhat untouched.

In 1976, 3.5 million children in the United States under the age of nineteen lost one or both parents to death (Koch, 1977). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (1985) stated that by the time they reach eighteen,

five children out of one hundred will have lost a parent through death. Far more students will have experienced the death of a sibling, relative, or close friend. These thousands of students are members of American classrooms in which there are no specialists trained to work with the grieving child. Teachers, administrators, and school counselors have received little or no formal education related to the grieving student. Yet, schools have the responsibility to care for the educational needs of all their students.

Bereaved students require a well-informed educational staff to assist them in adjusting to death and its effects on them. With grief education, teachers can once again restore the historical perspective wherein the family is nurtured and comforted by an extended family, namely the school.

When students return to school following a death experience, they have contact with four groups of school personnel: (1) teachers, (2) classmates, (3) counselors, and (4) the principal. More likely than not, the classroom teacher and classmates are those most directly involved with the bereaved student.

Teachers

A questionnaire completed by teachers concerning their perceptions about student bereavement revealed that most

teachers felt unprepared to deal with bereaved students. They indicated feelings of fear and inadequacy. Those few individual educators who did not have these feelings of inadequacy attributed their preparedness to personal experiences with bereavement. However, they, too, requested information to assist them with bereaved students in their classrooms. Results of this survey on teacher perceptions can be found on page 172.

Several teachers interviewed said it was safer for them to ignore the grieving student because they did not know what to say or how to act. Other teachers advised fellow educators to "keep a stiff upper lip," be firm, and get the student back into the routine of being a student. Some teacher behaviors, such as isolating the student, suppressing the child's need to talk, and unrealistic expectations of the student, can be harmful and detrimental to the bereaved student. A listing of some helpful ways teachers might respond to bereaved students is found on page 174. A variety of other responses illustrated that some form of training is needed to assist educators in assisting the bereaved student.

Presently, in colleges of education, students preparing to become teachers are not required to take any courses dealing with student crises like bereavement, even though the facts show that more students deal with bereavement than any other identified educational need. It is my hope that

teacher preparation courses at the college level will address the role of the educator and the grieving student.

In-service training, seminars, and workshops are other resources educators need in order to gain information and skills for assisting students in the bereavement process.

Until the time comes that teachers receive bereavement education, something must be done to assist our school personnel with the grieving student. A parent participant in the study suggested that a school conference should take place soon after the bereaved student returns to school. This mother of four school-aged children recommended that the teacher, the parent(s), and the student discuss a plan which all of them can follow while aiding the student's transition back into the school environment. Through the use of a conference, the teacher then can become a vital source for the parents in observing behaviors of the students. Parents and teachers can keep the lines of communication open. How the child behaves in school is going to give parents valuable clues as to how well their child is coping with his/her grief.

It is important to note that the recommendation of a conference is not always appropriate. Another parent, a study participant, felt that her grief was too painful. She indicated she would be afraid to expose her emotions in a public way during a conference. Thus, other creative alternatives can be used to involve the parent and the

student in assisting the educator in helping with the grief process. Written correspondence, home visits, or phone calls are alternatives to be used. A sample conference plan is found on page 176 to provide guidance for teachers, parents, and students.

Within the last few decades, studies have addressed the effects of bereavement on students' academic performance. Students' emotional and social lives have also been altered due to bereavement. Absenteeism, dropping of grades, withdrawal, and aggression are some of the effects associated with students' bereavement. It was not uncommon for teachers of the study to note similar behaviors. One teacher discussed several behavior incentives she gave for a grieving student to keep him in school. Nothing worked. The student continued to be absent and, whenever he did come to school, he would end up leaving because he became ill with headaches and an upset stomach. This on-and-off behavior lasted for seven months of the academic year. School personnel made the decision to pass him on to the next grade level. The student's grief, manifested in the absenteeism, was never addressed until the mother asked me to contact the school because she, like the school, felt helpless. An appointment was made with school personnel and myself. After discussing the nature of this student's grief, the administrator requested that the school's counselor get directly involved with the student. Perhaps if the teacher and principal had

received some form of bereavement education, seven long months of painful grief would not have gone unattended. Incidents like the one just described frequently occur in the lives of bereaved students as they attempt to fit back into the routine of school. A checklist of behaviors that could be related to student bereavement is included on page 177.

Survey Results of Teachers' Perceptions
and Feelings about Grieving Students

The purpose of the questionnaire used in the study was to obtain information from teachers concerning their perceptions and feelings about working with grieving students. One hundred elementary and secondary teachers from a population of two thousand were randomly selected to receive the questionnaire. Fifty responses were completed and returned. The questionnaire results are shown in the table on the following page.

The responses given to question 1 were varied. However, most of them were grouped under the description of "inadequate" and "uncomfortable." For example, some respondents wrote "helpless," "not prepared," "awkward," and "uncertain."

Question 2 received the highest number of responses in the negative. Forty-five respondents have not received any instruction on how to work with bereaved students. This relates to question 7, where forty-three respondents felt the

Teachers' perceptions and feelings about grieving students.

Question	Yes	No	No Response	Most Common Response
1) To your knowledge, have you had the experience of working with a bereaved student in your classroom?	26	24	0	Uncomfortable, inadequate, concerned
2) Have you received any instruction on how to work with bereaved students?	5	45	0	Attended lectures/workshops
3) Do you feel prepared to work with bereaved students?	21	27	2	Yes: Personal experience, education
4) Are there specific teacher behaviors needed to assist the bereaved student?	38	6	6	Understanding, patience, and compassion
5) Do you feel there are behaviors you can anticipate from a bereaved student?	44	4	2	Withdrawal, anger, sadness
6) Do you feel classmates treat the bereaved student differently?	38	20	2	Withdrawal, avoidance, concern
7) Do you feel the need to receive information on working with bereaved students?	43	6	1	-----
8) You are now invited to comment about your concerns for bereaved students.	21	0	0	-----

need to receive information. In addition, twenty-one responses to question 8 were related to the teachers' concern of how to discuss death with their students. In essence, through this questionnaire, teachers expressed their need for information on how to work with bereavement so they can be prepared to deal with grieving students.

For question 3, those who felt prepared to work with bereaved students noted that their own personal experiences with death were most helpful. Those who did not feel prepared listed "lack of experience" and "no instruction" as their responses.

Thirty-seven varied responses were given for question 4, concerning teachers' behavior towards grieving students. "Keep a stiff upper lip," "give extra help," and "listen" were some of the comments. However, the response "understanding" was listed fifteen times along with "patience and compassion," which were noted each with eight responses.

The forty-four respondents to question 5, who felt there are possible behaviors demonstrated by bereaved students, listed "withdrawal" as the most frequent response, followed by "anger." Other comments were individually given, such as "rebellious," "confusion," and "preoccupation."

Avoidance by withdrawing was the most common response given to question 6, which related classmates' behavior towards bereaved students. Some respondents explained by

stating that students are not sure of what to say or how to act, so it's safer to withdraw.

When the teachers were invited to comment about their concerns for bereaved students (question 8), twenty-one responded. The most frequent concerns listed were for teachers to receive information on how to deal with students about the subject of death, and that more students suffer from divorce rather than death. Teachers requested help with this latter concern. Suggestions by the respondents were provided, such as teacher education courses should include information about student bereavement or school systems need to have teacher in-service programs addressing the issue of grieving students.

Although personal experiences with grief and involvement with some form of bereavement information proved to have aided some of the teacher respondents, the results of this questionnaire showed a need for teachers to be better prepared for the bereavement process which may occur within their classrooms.

Recommendations for Teachers in Assisting Bereaved Students

(1) Prepare yourself by:

- Exploring your own feelings and attitudes about death.
- Understanding the grief process.
- Learning to identify specific reactions of bereaved students and their effects on the learning process.

- Knowing the resources available within your school and community (i.e., library materials, professionals, counselors, ministers, support groups).
- (2) Express your care by:
 - Attending the memorial service.
 - Calling the student/parents.
 - Home visits.
 - Preparing and delivering a treat the student may like.
 - Expressing what you feel (i.e., sad, bewildered, tears).
 - (3) Create an atmosphere of openness and acceptance within the classroom; respect the student's personal reactions to the death.
 - (4) Allow for reassurance (i.e., in younger students, permit them to call home for their assurance needs).
 - (5) Do not overprotect or be overpermissive; include the student as you normally would.
 - (6) Prepare and guide classmates before the student returns to school.
 - (7) Do not avoid the student, but acknowledge the death. For example, express your sadness, show concern and care, touch. (Appropriate grade levels will determine touch, i.e., hug, pat on the shoulder.)
 - (8) Seek help from parents or others in dealing with the student's grief; be willing to modify your expectations.
 - (9) Inform parents about how the student is doing (i.e., conference, call, note).
 - (10) Assign a student partner to aid the student with school-work.
 - (11) Be an empathetic listener (sensitive, patient, and understanding).
 - (12) Encourage the student to express his/her grief and to process feelings by talking, writing, drawing, drama, bibliotherapy, etc.

- (13) Pray for the student, and remember that grief is personal and unique; it has no time schedule and is a lifetime process.

Sample Conference Plan for
Teachers, Parents, and Students

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Sample</u>
(1) Welcome the parent and student.	Hello, _____ (name) _____, and welcome.
(2) Express your care for the student.	I want to tell you that I care about your (son/daughter), _____, and the sadness you are all going through. I feel sad, too, because of your (family member, i.e., father, mother, etc.) death.
(3) Explain the purpose for the conference.	I invited you to this conference because I want to help (student) through this time of sadness.
(4) Assure the parent and student of your help with the student's academic, social, and emotional well-being.	Sometimes when students go through a death experience, it is difficult to get back into the routine of school. It might be hard to concentrate and get your schoolwork done; you might become very sad at times and cry when these things happen. I want to help. I can change some of your schoolwork assignments, assign a student helper, or give you some private time. Sometimes you may even want to call home for encouragement.
(5) Ask the student and parent for their suggestions of how you might help.	Maybe you have some ideas and suggestions for me so I will know how I can better help.
(6) Discuss the services available through the school.	At our school, we have other people who care for you, too. The librarian has some books about people who have had a death in their family. The school counselor

Agenda ItemSample

- (7) Closing: Review the discussion, thank parent and student for attending. Tell the parent you will inform him/her of the student's progress in 3-4 weeks, and/or the parent is invited to call you at the school.

is another person who can help. If you would like to talk with the counselor or librarian about the information they have, I will arrange that.

Thank you for coming and sharing with me. Hopefully, the things we have discussed will help us work together with (student's) adjustment back to school. I will contact you (parent's name) in 3-4 weeks to inform you of his/her progress. Please feel free to call me here at the school if you have any concerns.

Grief Responses Related
To Bereaved Students

If any of the following responses are prolonged, that is, within two to three months, please seek counsel from the school counselor, administrator, or parent.

Bodily Distress:

- Headaches
- Crying
- Regressive changes in bowel and/or bladder control
- Sleep disturbances
- Restlessness
- Disrupted eating patterns
- Illness
- Confusion
- Lack of concentration
- Lack of energy
- Lack of attention

Emotional Responses:

- Shock
- Anger
- Hostility
- Temper tantrums
- Guilt
- Sadness
- Loneliness
- Panic
- Clinging
- Withdrawal
- Blame
- Depression
- Mood swings
- Fear of being teased and rejected by classmates

Effects on Learning:

- Lower grades
- Absenteeism
- Less productive work
- Loss of interest in school and activities
- Peer relationships

Classmates

When the bereaved students of this study were asked, "At school, who was the most helpful to you?" the majority of students said their classmates were the most helpful. Numerous examples were given about how classmates reached out to the grieving student.

Sixteen-year-old David's story is heart touching. Several of his friends, also classmates, attended his father's funeral. After the service, they took David out to eat and to a basketball game. One special classmate-friend decided to share his own father with David; together they

began including him in their father-son activities. A particular fond memory recalled by David occurred when his "adopted father" would introduce him to others as his son. To this day, this relationship continues and David values the "fatherly" wisdom he receives.

Not all the students had such a positive experience with their classmates. Mary, age fifteen, returned to school following a family member's death. She discussed rejection and confusion as painful experiences from her classmates. The first day back at school, her thought-to-be friends turned away from her when she walked through the halls. At the lunchroom, she was left to eat alone, when before she and her friends would visit and plan their weekend activities. These experiences added to the pain of her grieving so that she began having sleep disturbances. Mary's mother observed these changes and had her receive professional counseling to process her grief. Mary has now turned this pain of rejection into a positive motivation; she hopes someday to become a child psychologist so that she can work with bereaved students. She can now give new light to her confusion and better understand why her friends rejected her. Mary said that they could be afraid that the same thing could happen to them, or probably they just didn't know how to act.

Classmates' fears can be related to the concern that what happened to the bereaved student could, in fact, happen to them. Avoidance can occur because of the fear of not

knowing what to say or how to act. When some peers make upsetting comments to the grieving student, it can be an attempt to communicate in some way; however, not knowing appropriate responses, the students may make comments that are hurtful, yet innocent.

A kindergarten student shared one of her sad moments at school. It was nearing the Christmas holidays. Shawna's class was having art projects to make that day. They were creating gifts for their mothers and fathers. Shawna recalled the sadness and tears as she listened to her jolly classmates talk about their gifts for their mommas. Her momma had been buried just three months ago and Shawna wished she had a momma to give her present to. Shawna's story illustrates one example where the other students meant no harm in their open discussion. However, a sensitive teacher might have found another method to assist this child in her moment of grief. Perceptive teachers need to spend time preparing the class for the child's return, perhaps discussing death and what it means to them, and ways the classmates can help their fellow student.

Classmates have been known to express their care for the bereaved peer in simple, yet meaningful ways. A brief checklist is now provided for classmates to use as they share in the bereavement of a fellow student.

Recommendations for Classmates
in Helping Bereaved Students

- (1) Express your care by:
 - Sending cards
 - Calling
 - Visiting
 - Taking a treat
 - Expressing your feelings (i.e., tell them you're sorry)
- (2) Welcome them back to school when they return; resume your normal relationship with them.
- (3) Listen when the student may want to talk about his/her grief.
- (4) Be patient, understanding, and supportive.
- (5) Permit the student to share about his/her grief if and when he/she wants to. Do not force them to talk about it.
- (6) Ask the student how you can be of help and seek advice from your teacher.
- (7) Do not overprotect or avoid the student; rather, involve the student with activities and assist him/her with schoolwork.

Counselors

Although the teacher and classmates may provide a positive, loving environment for a grieving student, there are some children who need additional care outside the classroom. The support services of a school counselor often become the appropriate channel for this care.

As prescribed for teachers, counselors also need preparation for dealing with bereavement in children. Once a counselor is prepared, previously learned counseling

techniques and skills necessary for the counseling process of bereavement can be adapted and applied. Individual and/or group counseling, consultation, and referrals to other health agencies are some of the networking roles of the school counselor. The counselor's responsibilities may carry over into other school personnel such as the teachers, parents, classmates, and others who are significantly involved with the child.

Brief recommendations are now provided for school counselors to use when working with bereaved students.

Recommendations for Counselors in Assisting Bereaved Students

- (1) Prepare yourself by:
 - Exploring your own feelings and attitudes about death.
 - Understanding the grief process.
 - Learning specific reactions of bereaved students and their effects on the learning process.
 - Knowing the resources available within your school and community (i.e., library materials, professionals, counselors, ministers, support groups).
- (2) Express your care by welcoming the student back to school. Inform the parents and students of how you can help and invite them to use the counseling services.
- (3) Provide services and resources to the classroom teacher and classmates; give support and encouragement to them.

Principals

Although most school principals are not directly involved with student bereavement, they do have the opportunity to

extend their care indirectly by such gestures as adding support and encouragement to other school personnel who may be more directly involved with the grieving student.

Principals, like teachers and counselors, need to be prepared in handling bereavement in the schools. Several steps in their preparation need to include understanding the developmental phases of bereavement in grieving children, being knowledgeable about the general grieving process, and facing their own feelings about death.

There are general behaviors all school personnel, inclusive of the principal, should use with bereaved children. A bulletin distributed by The Compassionate Friends (The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 1983) recommended behaviors to be expressed by school personnel:

If a student seeks you out to talk, be available and really listen. Hear with your ears, your eyes, and your heart. Respect a student's need to grieve. Help students realize that grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss. Have resources available in the library about death and grief. Become a part of a caring team by establishing lines of communication with the parents.

Some recommendations for administrators/principals are now provided to assist them in their important role with bereaved students.

Recommendations for Administrators/
Principals in Their Role with
Bereaved Students

(1) Prepare yourself by:

- Exploring your own feelings and attitudes about death.
- Understanding the grief process.
- Learning specific reactions of bereaved students and their effects on the learning process.
- Knowing the resources available within your school and community (i.e., library materials, professionals, counselors, ministers, support groups).

(2) Express your care by:

- Welcoming the student back to school.
- Depending upon your familiarity with the family, call and/or send a card of care to the family.
- Provide support, encouragement, and guidance to the school personnel (counselors, teachers, students) as they assist the student and family; frequently check with the teachers to see how the student is doing.

Summary

Educators (teachers, counselors, and principals) have a responsibility to help grieving children deal with the death experience in their lives. With this help, bereaved children can continue to grow in all their learning areas, both within and outside the four walls of the school.

It is my hope that through the examples and the resources provided in this chapter, teachers, classmates, counselors, and principals will have learned something of value to them as they continue to be sharers in the process of student bereavement.

CHAPTER V

THE BEREAVED STUDENT

When someone you love has died, you become a bereaved person. The most common experience with death in a student's life is the loss of a parent, brother, sister, or grandparent.

Bereavement causes people to feel and act differently than before the death occurred. When these feelings and actions occur, it is called grief. Grief is a way someone tries to understand that their life has changed and it will never be the same again. Some students' grief has been expressed by crying, not eating, being angry, withdrawing, and having problems with sleeping. There are many other ways people may grieve.

As bereaved students return to school, some other different grief reactions may take place. Schoolwork may not get done. Confusion, lack of energy, and temper tantrums may occur.

A group of bereaved students from grade levels kindergarten through twelve shared their experiences of being a student during their grieving process. The students participated in interviews where they talked about their feelings and actions once they returned to school.

It is my belief that people learn through the experiences of others. This learning can bring comfort, support, and encouragement. For this reason, the questions from the two interviews are now listed, along with the students' responses. It is my hope that bereaved students will be able to relate to the feelings and actions shared by these students.

First Interview with Students (Unstructured):
Questions and Answers

Question 1. "What were your reactions to the death?" "Shocked" and "sad" were stated as the most common reactions. Several students, who experienced the progressive illness and then the death of their father, noted that they had experienced shock at the time they were told their father would not live. When the actual death occurred, these students said they were saddened rather than shocked. Two students had no comment to the question; they felt it was too painful to discuss. The kindergarten students said they were afraid and tried to understand what happened to their dads.

Question 2. "What were your family members reactions to the death?" "Crying" was identified as the initial response. Some students told of reactions which happened several weeks after the death. For example, the surviving parent began drinking alcohol and the siblings were perceived as not caring. Others responded, "Each handled it alone and in their own way."

Question 3. "What were the reactions to the death by people other than your family?" Relatives were mentioned as reacting by crying. Friends and classmates expressed their care by telling the student that they were sorry about the death; some attended the funeral services. Three interviewees did not want others to talk about the death because it was private and sad for them.

Second Interview with Students (Structured):
Questions and Answers

Question	Response
(1) What concerns did you have about returning to school after the death of your family member?	How the other students would act towards me; did not want to go back to school; the hardest thing was to walk through the door; scared; thought about all the schoolwork I had to get done; wanted things back to normal; I saw my friends at the funeral, so it was no problem going back.
(2) When you returned to school, how did your teacher respond?	Talked to me; welcomed me back; said nothing; ignored me; said they were sorry.
(3) When you returned to school, how did your classmates respond?	Said they were sorry; kind to me; normal day at school; said hurtful things; rejected me; asked me questions.
(4) Did your teacher help you?	Talked to me; helped me with my work; did not help me; was easier on me and my grades; let me cry.
(5) Did your classmates help you?	Said they were sorry; talked and did things with me; gave me more attention; they all wanted to sit near me.

Students' questions and answers--continued.

Question	Response
(6) Did you have school problems once you returned to school?	It was difficult to concentrate on schoolwork; grades dropped; P.E. class was hard because I didn't have any energy; I hated being there; worried that I would be treated differently; afraid I would die; I had problems with my temper; when I would fail with my schoolwork, I felt like I let my dad down, because I really wanted to do well for him.
(7) At school, who was the most helpful to you and why?	Friends helped me talk and do my work; the principal talked with me; my teacher helped me with my work.
(8) Did you have any resources that were helpful for you?	Six responded "no one." Three said family counselor. One each said principal, prayer cards, classmates. One said, "My best friend's dad helped me."
(9) In what ways might you help other students who may be grieving?	Share my experience; can't help them because I don't know what to do; give them ideas; offer my help; write them a card; try to help them understand.
(10) What suggestions do you have for teachers who work with grieving students?	Show you care by listening; attending the funeral; let me talk when I'm ready; don't give me all the makeup work right away; acknowledge what happened; talk with me privately; don't force me to talk.

Concluding remarks by the students interviewed were that they appreciated their teachers and classmates attending the funeral services; they suggested that teachers need training

in order to know how to act with the different bereaved students. Three said they wanted to be treated normally, as if nothing had happened to them. One student discussed a positive, unique experience she had with a teacher. This teacher responded to the student's bereavement by calling and visiting at the home, attending the funeral, providing tutorial help, and, most unusual, the teacher continues to periodically check on this student although the death experience was nearly six years ago.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEREAVED PARENT

Those who have gone before us in the journey of bereavement have a personal and unique gift to offer. This gift is their individual experience with the grieving process. Members of this study shared their bereavement experience during two interviewing sessions. The information gathered from these interviews is presented with the questions asked and the responses given.

Hopefully, those who read this section will receive a sense of empathy, understanding, and help, whether one is presently grieving or one is a caregiver for a bereaved parent.

First Interview with Parents (Unstructured):
Questions and Answers

Question 1. "What were your reactions to the death?" Most parents stated "shock" and "disbelief." Those who experienced the prolonged illness of the loved one previous to the death responded with "felt relieved" and "empty." Several weeks after the death, a few parents said they reacted by turning to alcohol, frivolous spending, and anger.

Question 2. "What were your family members' reactions to the death?" "Denial" and "evasion" were the reactions parents perceived, in both their children and their spouse. Some parents discussed sleep disturbances (nightmares), severe crying outbursts, sickness, and anger as additional reactions from their children.

Question 3. "What were the reactions to the death by people other than your family?" Relatives, friends, and neighbors were viewed as reacting to the death with much support and crying. The parents discussed how friends took charge of the affairs by making arrangements for incoming relatives and taking care of funeral procedures.

Second Interview with Parents (Structured):
Questions and Answers

Question	Response
(1) At the time of the death experience, who contacted the teacher of your bereaved child?	Relatives; parent; pastor; no one called the school.
(2) Did you have any contact with your child's teacher once he/she returned to school following the death?	Three responded "no"; three responded "yes." No, they went back to school and I had to go back to work. I dreaded them going back to school; they had more courage than I; parent-teacher conference time was when I had contact; stayed in close contact to know how my children were doing.

Parents' questions and answers--continued.

Question	Response
(3) Did your child discuss with you concerns he/she had in returning to school?	Four responded "no"; two responded "yes." Students did not want to return to school. Reassured my children that we would take it one day at a time. I wasn't able to talk about it right then; avoided the issue. I was concerned and wondered what my children were going through, but I never discussed it.
(4) Did you have concerns about your child's school behavior?	Academics: grades went down; would not do the schoolwork. Emotional: withdrawal, sleep disturbances. Two parents had no concerns. One child looked for excuses to stay home. We didn't talk as a family. Sought professional help because everything went downhill when we were informed that our dad would die. Neighbors noticed changes and tried to help. No concern because I saw them interacting well with their friends. Stayed in close contact with the teacher and she was very helpful.
(5) Did your child have problems in any of these areas?	Did not see problems; children hid feelings to protect their parents. Problems started to occur in the second year; then I saw anger and a negative attitude about school.
(6) Did you have resources available to you in helping your bereaved child?	Three parents received professional family counseling. Other sources: books, Hospice, family, church community.
(7) What recommendations do you have for teachers when working with bereaved students?	Have student support groups; give empathy, time, and patience. Be informed; understand what the student is going through. Please contact the parents when you see problems.

Parents' questions and answers--continued.

Question	Response
(8) How might you assist other bereaved parents who have bereaved school-aged children?	Don't be afraid to get involved with the student's grief. Don't single the child out. Respect the student's wishes about talking.
(9) How was the school most helpful to you and your bereaved child?	Share own experience and the different ways of grieving; participate in support groups. I wasn't able to concentrate at first, but later I found books very helpful. Wait for your readiness; give yourself healing time; do special things in memory of your loved one; be there for your children; don't use destructive ways to grieve.
	All the parents felt that teachers did not know how to act or what to say. Teachers made home visits, sent cards, helped the children in school, attended the funeral service, sent flowers; the school personnel sent gifts.

Concluding remarks by the parents interviewed were that educators need training to know how to help grieving students return to school and readjust because the family is in much pain and unable to help; teachers, parents, and students need to have a conference to face the bereavement together and have a common plan.

As a final note, one parent wrote the following letter explaining her grief process. I feel this letter is beautifully written, as it addresses many issues a bereaved parent can have to face. I trust that this letter will provide empathy, insight, strength, and encouragement for the reader.

The hardest time I had with my grief process is that so many people I came into contact with kept pushing me to get on with my life. I know now that I just wasn't ready to get on with my life. These people all meant well, but that just wasn't what was right for me at that point in time. There are too many emotions I had to work through and it took me a year and a half to become halfway human again and not dread getting out of bed in the mornings. I was working full-time when the death occurred and when I returned to work just a few weeks after, my concentration level was next to nothing. This brought on another problem, because from all I understood, I should have been further along in my grief at that point, and so I started pushing myself. I actually resented all my coworkers going through the day as if everything was the same. I finally resigned because I couldn't cope emotionally. It was really dragging me down (even though everyone told me I needed to work to take my mind off things). Then people started pushing me to socialize and get involved in volunteer work. What I really needed (I realize this now) was to take things slower and do exactly what I wanted to do. I kept trying to please others. As I was going through all of this, I kept watching the other family members. They seemed to me to be handling everything so much better. The children didn't talk much about going back to school and I was hurting so much for them. I didn't know how to help them. I think this is where the educators should come into the picture. The whole family is working through his or her grief and is really unprepared to actually help each other. I believe teachers should have some sort of training to know how to counsel grieving students on their return to school, and not just for 2 or 3 weeks, but for as long as it takes for the student to again lead a normal life (under the circumstances). I think the teachers should be trained to see when the student needs help (the student is not going to seek it out), and know how to help the student without even seeming to be doing it. (Personal letter from bereaved parent, 1988)

CHAPTER VII

EDUCATORS OF BEREAVED STUDENTS

The educators (classroom teachers, principals, and counselors) participated in two interviews. It is my hope that the reader, especially the classroom teacher, will receive insight and direction from the experiences of these educators.

First Interview with Educators (Unstructured):
Questions and Answers

Question 1. "Who informed you of the death in the student's family?" Five educators were informed of the death by other school personnel. Other informants included a student, friends of the bereaved family, and the newspaper.

Question 2. "What were your reactions?" All felt sadness for the grieving student. Some teachers were concerned about how they were to handle the grieving student when he/she returned to school. "Disbelief" was described by others. Teachers who were informed of the family member's critical illness months before the death reacted by stating, "no surprise; however, concerned for the student."

Question 3. "What were your responses to the bereaved student once he/she returned to school?" Most teachers welcomed the student back to school and offered to be available for the student should he/she want to talk about the bereavement. Other responses were: "comforted the grieving student," "prayed for them," and "treated the student the same as though nothing had happened."

Question 4. "What were your responses to the classmates of the bereaved student?" All but one teacher informed the classmates of the death. Several teachers spoke with their students about their grieving classmate returning to school after the funeral. They advised the students not to be overprotective and cautioned them not to discuss the bereavement unless the student initiated the subject. Some encouraged the students to comfort and console the grieving classmate.

Question 5. "What were the classmates' reactions toward the bereaved student once he/she returned to school?" Most teachers observed the classmates' behavior as treating the grieving student as normal. Some teachers believed individual students were supportive and caring, which was demonstrated by helping the grieving students with schoolwork, including them in activities, and writing sympathy cards. Other educators viewed classmates as being "stand-offish" because they did not know how to handle the situation.

Question 6. "Have you received any education in working with bereaved students?" Eight responded "no." Two interviewees received information through university counseling courses and one obtained help through self-study. All the respondents felt a need to receive education about bereaved students. They stated the need to know how to work with grieving students; they suggested workshops and courses. A counselor recommended role-playing through the use of scenarios to demonstrate practical methods. An administrator warned that a packaged approach could be dangerous since each death experience is unique and needs to be handled differently.

Question 7. "What concerns do you have pertaining to school behaviors (academic, social, emotional) of bereaved students?" Several noted they have much concern about all three school behaviors and they believe that a close watch on the grieving student is essential. Others stated that bereaved students lose their motivation temporarily and they cannot be expected to concentrate on their schoolwork. Some teachers experienced aggressiveness and withdrawal by bereaved students; they suggested that school counselors need to be available for the grieving student. "Follow the normal routine" was advised by a few educators; others did not observe any changes in the grieving student.

Question 8. "What concerns do you have pertaining to school behaviors of the classmates to bereaved students?"

The greatest concern was classmates displaying inappropriate behaviors such as saying hurtful things. The teachers agreed that students need to be informed and guided in how to respond to grieving peers. Other educators shared that classmates discussed their fears about the death experience happening to them.

Question 9. "Are there specific behaviors, on the part of the teacher, needed to assist with the educational goals of the bereaved student?" "Continue with normal activities unless you observe changes" was the comment offered by most interviewees. Other behaviors included: "take time to listen and talk," "express your own grief to the student," "modify schoolwork for a time," and "encourage the bereaved student." Five teachers expressed the need to discern between the grieving students taking advantage of their bereavement and being responsible for their learning.

Question 10. "How can teachers assist bereaved students in achieving desired academic goals?" The response given by most educators was "listen." Others stated the need to be sensitive to the individual needs of the bereaved student. Practical ideas were noted such as "provide tutorial assistance," "assign a student partner," and "work with the parents." "Patience," "concern," and "understanding" were other suggestions for assisting bereaved students in achieving academic goals.

Question 11. "What resources are available to you in working with a bereaved student?" Five mentioned that no resources were available. Three stated that the minister of their church was helpful. Some interviewees said the school's principal, other students, private and state agencies, books, one's faith in God, and personal experiences were resources available.

Question 12. "Since your experience of working with a bereaved student, what recommendations do you have for your colleagues?" Numerous responses were provided by each educator. As examples, these recommendations were noted: "listen to the student," "be careful of what you say," "let the bereaved student talk," "be empathetic and compassionate," "give them time to adjust," "don't be afraid to talk about death," "have contact with the family," "prepare classmates before the grieving student returns," "share your own experiences," and "put your priority on observing--be alert."

Second Interview with Educators (Structured):
Questions and Answers

Question	Response
(1) Was this your first experience of working with a bereaved student?	Yes = 4; No = 7.

Educators' questions and answers--continued.

Question	Response
(2) What was this experience like for you?	Difficult, painful, not sure how to act, sad. Helpless, concern about their fears, felt I had to keep a reign on my emotions for the sake of the student and family; hoped I was doing the right thing; very emotional.
(3) While the bereaved student was a member of your class, did you ever contact the parents?	Yes = 7; No = 4, not necessary, no concern.
(4) If so, what was your concern about the bereaved student?	To stay informed on how the student was doing, offered help. To get feedback from parents in reference to appropriate discipline for the student's negative behavior.
(5) Did the parents at any time contact you about the student?	Yes = 6; No = 5.
(6) What was their concern?	How the student was doing; informed the school of father's illness.
(7) Did you ever initiate the contact with the student to discuss his/her bereavement?	Yes = 8; No = 3. To invite the student to talk. To discuss his schoolwork.
(8) Did the bereaved student ever come to you to discuss his/her bereavement?	Yes = 3; No = 8. Concerned about one's mother; sad and wanted to cry; to talk about the illness. A student came only once to me and said, "There's nothing left," and began crying.

Educators' questions and answers--continued.

Question	Response
(9) Where there school problems related to the student's bereavement?	Yes = 3; No = 8. Absenteeism, withdrawal, schoolwork. Silence; grades fell; distraught; lack of class participation; aimless and lack of energy.
(10) Were some academic areas of the bereaved student affected more than others?	Yes = 4; No = 7. Students excelled in physical education, art, and computers. One student withdrew from physical education.
(11) Were there school problems of classmates' behaviors related to the bereaved student?	Yes = 1; No = 10. Classmates were upset with a student's antisocial behaviors, such as temper tantrums.
(12) Did any classmate demonstrate concern for the bereaved student?	Yes = 11. Attended the funeral, helped with schoolwork, wrote cards, befriended the grieving student. No = 1. Treated student as normal.
(13) Did you receive any assistance from other school personnel in working with the bereaved student?	Yes = 3; No = 8. Fellow teachers modified work; principal; counselor.
(14) In your experience working with this bereaved student, what has been the most valuable learning aspect for you as an educator?	To truly listen by understanding the grieving student's feelings; will be helpful in the future; have a need to know how to deal with it. Pay attention to grieving signs; can't ignore it; get help; there is a need for counselors; provide ways in which student can receive recognition; not be afraid.

Concluding remarks by the educators were that teachers need to establish a relationship with students before a crisis occurs; teachers need to be aware of the bereavement process and how to deal with it. One teacher's statement expressed the most important concern by the interviewees. The statement was, "I know there are ways to help; I just didn't know how or what to do."

SUMMARY

The objective of this educator's handbook (SAD, Students and Death) is to make a contribution to the field of education in assisting school personnel as they experience the bereavement process in students.

The basic information discussed in the handbook was the result of a study about the role of the educator with student bereavement. The study included: (1) a survey questionnaire of teachers' perceptions and feelings about student bereavement, and (2) personal interviews with bereaved students, their parents, and their teachers.

The results of the questionnaire, interviews, recommendations, and resources are provided as a learning tool for the reader. Hopefully, teachers will obtain helpful recommendations; students will relate in a positive, helpful way to the bereavement of their peers; and parents will receive empathy and encouragement from the contributions of the bereaved parents of this study.

It is my prayer that this handbook does meet the needs requested by teachers in their efforts to help bereaved students. In closing, I leave with you one of my favorite inspirational writings which I have found to be helpful in the bereavement process of others.

Lord, make of me an instrument of Thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me put love.
Where there is resentment, let me put forgiveness.
Where there is discord, let me put unity.
Where there is doubt, let me put faith.
Where there is error, let me put truth.
Where there is despair, let me bring happiness.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
Where there is darkness, let me bring light.

* * * * *

Master, grant that I may desire:

To console rather than to be consoled;
To understand rather than to be understood;
To love rather than to be loved.

Because it is in giving that we receive;
In forgiving that we obtain forgiveness;
In dying that we rise to eternal life.

(St. Francis of Assisi, 1182-1226)

RESOURCES

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS

The groups listed below provide bereavement support and resources for those bereaved and for those who care to help them. Other national organizations are available for assistance; however, these groups were selected as a starting point for educators to use in obtaining pertinent resources. For a comprehensive listing of educational resources, please refer to:

- (1) Gordan, A., and D. Klass. They Need to Know: How to Teach Children About Death. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979.
- (2) Grollman, E.A. Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976.

Listing of Support Groups

- (1) Centering Corporation
P. O. Box 3367
Omaha, NE 68103-0367
- (2) The Compassionate Friends
P. O. Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60521
- (3) National Hospice Organization
1901 North Fort Myer Drive
Suite 307
Arlington, VA 22209

- (4) Resolve Through Sharing
LaCrosse Lutheran Hospital
1910 South Avenue
LaCrosse, WI 54601
- (5) National Make Today Count
P. O. Box 303
Burlington, IA 52601
- (6) The Ronald McDonald House
419 East 86th Street
New York, NY 10028
- (7) Center for Death Education and Research
University of Minnesota
1167 Social Science Building
Minneapolis, MN 55455

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Reading List for Students and Educators

- Berenstein, Joanne E. When People Die. Provides young children with a simple, sensitive explanation of the process and physical and spiritual effects of dying. (Grades K-3)
- Buck, Pearl Syndestricker. The Big Wave. His family and village swept away by a tidal wave, Jiya learns to live with the ever-present dangers from the sea and volcano. (Grades 4-6)
- Cleaver, Bill and Vera. Grover. A ten-year-old adjusts to the change in his life after his mother dies. (Grades 4-7)
- Dobrin, Arnold. Scat. When Scat gets a harmonica and wants to become a musician like his father, Grandma doesn't like the idea too well, but she tells Scat to "listen to what your heart says, not your head." He finally realizes what Grandma said when, unable to cry over her death, Scat goes to her grave and plays the blues. (Grades K-4)
- Fassler, Joan. My Grandpa Died Today. After his grandfather dies, David overcomes his fear and loneliness and becomes aware of the meaning and joy of life. (Grades K-3)
- LeShan, Eda J. Learning to Say Goodbye. The noted educator and writer discusses the questions, fears, fantasies, and pains experienced by children when a parent dies, counseling children and guiding them toward understanding. (Grades 3 and up)
- Miles, Miska. Annie and the Old One. The sun rises over the Navajo world. Then it sets. The cactus blooms and then its flower fades. There is a time for all things to return to the earth. The Old One understands, but Annie cannot. She cannot imagine her world without the Old One. (Grades 1-4)

Molloy, Anne Stearns. The Girl from Two Miles High. After her father's death in Peru, a young girl must adjust to life with her grandparents on the coast of Maine. (Grades 5-7)

Stein, Sara Bonnett. About Dying. Reactions of a child to death, and how an adult might cope with the situation. (Grades K-3)

Talbot, Toby. Away Is So Far. When Pedro's mother dies, his griefstricken father decides that they must leave their home. (Grades 3-6)

Zolotow, Charlotte Shapiro. My Grandson Lew. Together Lewis and Mother remember Grandpa, who used to come in the night when Lewis called. (Grades K-2)

Death of a Friend

Smith, Doris B. A Taste of Blackberries. A sensitive portrayal of a young boy's attempt to understand and accept his best friend's sudden death. (Grades 3-6)

White, E.B. Charlotte's Web. The story of a little girl who could talk to animals, but especially the story of the pig, Wilbur, and his friendship with Charlotte, the spider, who could not only talk but write as well. (Grades K-4)

Death of a Pet

Armstrong, William H. Souder. Stark, deeply moving story of a black sharecropper and his family who endure cruel injustice with courage and dignity. (Grade 4)

Brown, Margaret Wise. The Dead Bird. A child finds a dead bird and other children join in giving it a suitable burial, placing spring flowers on the grave, and singing a song, then returning to their play. (Grades K-2)

Carrick, Carol. The Foundling. Although it has been weeks since Bodger was killed, Christopher cannot bring himself to choose another dog from the animal shelter. (Grades K-3)

Kantrowitz, Mildred. When Violet Died. A beautifully illustrated book about a group of friends and the burial of their pet bird. Handled in a most sensitive manner, the book ends with an important moral for all young children. (Grades K-3)

Rawls, Wilson. Where the Red Fern Grows. Ten-year-old Billy Colman wanted a dog more than anything else in the world. After two years of scrimping and saving, he attained his goal--two dogs named Old Dan and Little Ann. (Grade 4)

Stein, Sara Bonnett. About Dying. Reactions of a child to death, and how an adult might cope with the situation. (Grades K-3)

White, E.B. Charlotte's Web. The story of a little girl who could talk to animals, but especially the story of the pig, Wilbur, and his friendship with Charlotte, the spider, who could not only talk but write as well. (Grades K-4)

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APPENDIX Q

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR THE
EDUCATOR'S HANDBOOK

The illustrations shown in this section were used throughout the Educator's Handbook. Centering Corporation, the publisher of the handbook, determined where the illustrations were to be appropriately placed in the layout of the handbook. These illustrations are listed as figures. Below each figure, captions are given to show which context of the handbook is depicted by that illustration.



Figure 2. Handbook illustration 2: Bereaved parents were concerned that their grieving children hid their feelings in order to protect their parents from further hurt.



Figure 3. Handbook illustration 3: Grieving students said some of the comments made and actions done by their classmates were hurtful and unkind.



Figure 4. Handbook illustration 4: Absenteeism is one effect grief can have on bereaved students. (This illustration depicts a bereaved student who continued to be absent; whenever he did come to school, he would end up leaving because he became ill.)

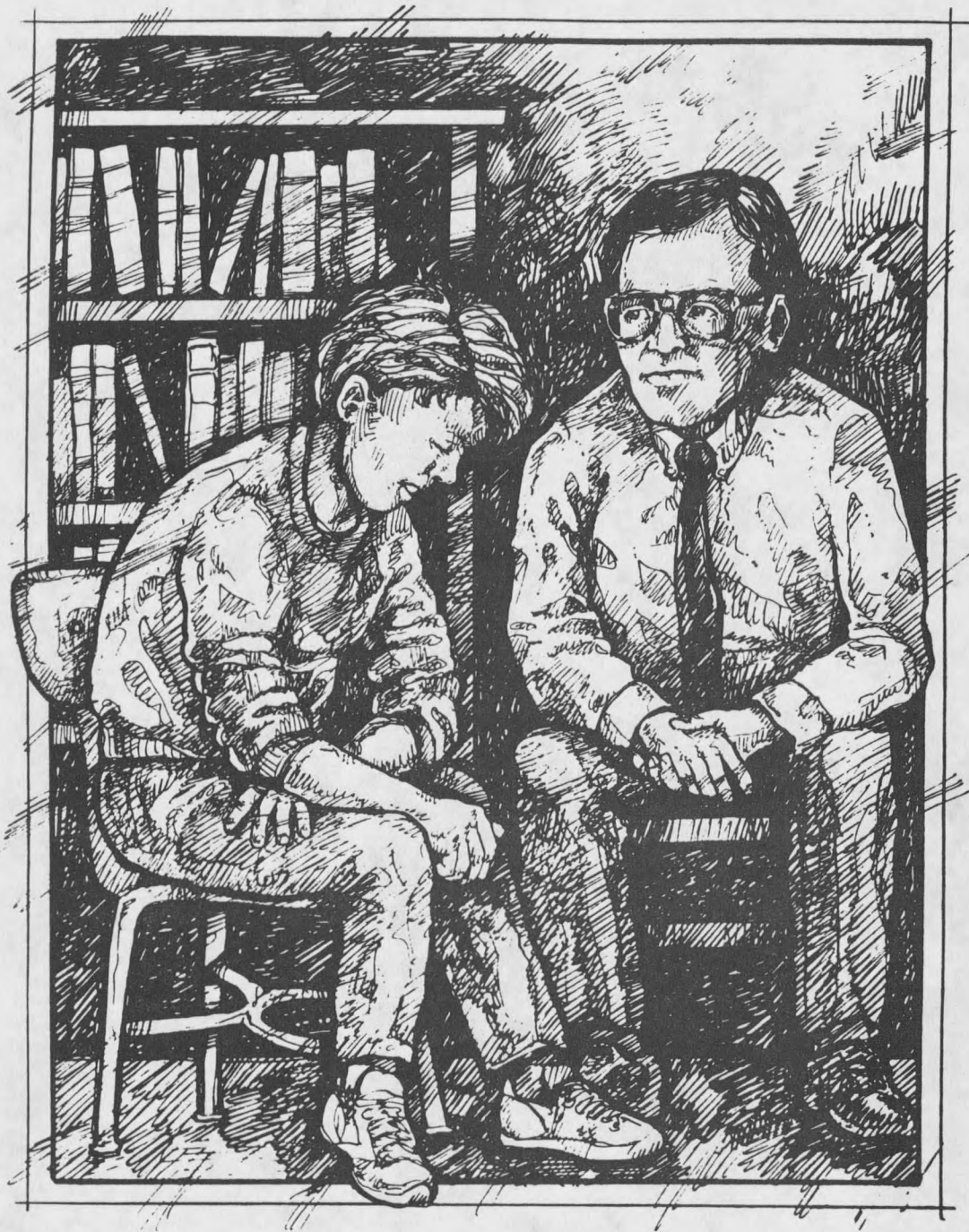


Figure 5. Handbook illustration 5: A helpful way teachers can assist grieving students is to be an empathetic listener when the student may want to talk.



Figure 6. Handbook illustration 6: It is recommended that classmates express their care by visiting a bereaved student.

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