

Supporting Our Children During Difficult Times

Looking at the above title, I realize the meaning of “difficult times “ encompasses a great deal. There are daily occurrences that startle, anger, frighten, or sadden all of us, highlighted through the media. I will share more thoughts on this at a later date.

But recently within our OLG Community, the loss of Mr. Brendan Evasick (Mr. E), reminds us how precious life is, how unexpected challenges appear, how sudden loss can be. Just back from Christmas break, the 6th grade quietly listened as Mr. Kramer shared how Mr. E’s condition changed rapidly. As a means of honoring Mr. E, students were encouraged to write notes, or draw pictures to be given to his family. This allows students an opportunity to reflect, and to individually acknowledge his passing.

As I spoke to 6th grade, and later to all middle school students, I reminded them that everyone moves through grief differently. If they need help working through feelings, and a need to talk to someone, there are supportive adults at home and school. Depending on the connection students had with Mr. E., some students may be a bit quiet and to themselves more than usual. Others may choose to be “busy” and stay connected to those around them. Loss can bring to mind other losses of family members or friends. Grieving can affect concentration, mood, and energy levels. Questions regarding death may come up periodically...

When children experience a death, it can be difficult to know what to say and how to help. As stated in *Helping Children Cope With Tragedy or Death*, Dr. Robin F. Goodman suggests the following, keeping in mind your child’s developmental level.

Talk to your child: Start with a general statement or question then listen to what they say or ask. Look for opportunities to check in more than once.

Be honest: Use appropriate language, share basic information, and correct misinformation. It’s ok to say, “I don’t know” and focus on what you do know.

Reassure: Using routine and structure to reassure children they will be all right, you are all right, and things in their world will continue. Getting back to school and activities, even if they do not feel the same provides predictability. Remind them of the people who take care of them and how to get help.

Return to the familiar: Getting back to familiar tasks and distracting or even fun activities provides balance and perspective.

Encourage expression: Children may more easily express their thoughts and feelings in pictures, music, play and poems.

Stay connected: Being connected to others- friends, family, a faith community- can be especially healing and powerful when feeling upset, overwhelmed and alone.

Find the good: Look for stories of hope, share memories of this special person. Reach out to others to give comfort.

Realize reactions change over time: In the first few days and weeks it is expected that children will not be themselves. They may experience a range of feelings; sadness, worry, anger, guilt, and they may be more or less intense. Problems with sleeping, eating, activity level, and behavior at home and school may occur but subside over time.

We care for our children, through good times and difficult times. We support one another as a community. Mr.E's time here at OLG is something to be thankful for, and warmly celebrated! Please join us as we do so this Friday at our ALL School Mass, at 9:00 a.m.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!

Heidi Ehrenberg
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