

Sample Guidelines for Memorial Services

1. Plan the memorial to occur within a week of the death, if possible.
2. Keep the memorial service short. Services that are too long can have a negative impact and cause discomfort to the attendees.
3. Involve students and staff in the planning of the memorial, especially those who were close to the deceased as friends, classmates, or students. Remind them that the administration must give final approval of their plans.
4. Services should be led by school personnel.
5. Provide boxes of tissues.
6. Include music, selected by the students and particularly include student performances. Also, play soothing music as people enter to set the mood and maintain calm.
7. Preview the service with students and staff beforehand. Make sure the service is culturally sensitive and does not offer religious beliefs.
8. Prepare students about what will happen and how they should behave. Remove anyone from the service who is acting inappropriately.
9. Have several brief speakers. If students and/or staff have written poems or other tributes, students themselves or staff can read them. Readings should be practiced several times.
10. Invite family members. Be careful in allowing grieving parents/guardians to speak. If parents/guardians break down in front of the students and staff, the event can be traumatic and cause more harm than healing.
11. Involve all students and staff as much as possible.
12. Use symbols of life and hope. Balloons can be used effectively to promote positive, uplifting messages that acknowledge the sadness yet hope for the future. Use songs that speak of hope and the future.
13. Give students and staff guidance on words and/or actions that provide comfort and how to approach a grieving friend or parent/guardian.
14. Provide a quiet activity for students who do not wish to attend the service or dismiss them.
15. Have students return to their classrooms for a short time after the service. This allows them the opportunity to talk with one another and/or talk with a counselor.
16. Remind students and staff that the service does not mean their grieving should stop.
17. Allow students to attend funerals with parental/guardian permission.
18. In the event of the death of a large number of students, provide a student/family liaison to support the students and the family members at the service as well as any following reception.
19. Little positive or educational learning will take place until students and staff has had an opportunity to process the grief and shock.
20. Memorial services coordinated by the school are not recommended.
21. Memorial services for students and staff killed involving substance or other negative behavior, such as suicide, are not recommended.
22. It is not recommended that school flags be lowered in cases of suicide.

23. Set time for removal of spontaneous memorials.
24. Set guidelines for media coverage. Prepare for media arrival at memorial and provide a separate staging area in order to keep media away from grieving students, staff and/or family.