

Helping Your Grieving Child Go Back to School

A simple guide for parents and caregivers • Aspen's Angels Grief Outreach



There's no perfect script for this — but a little preparation goes a long way. Here's what grief experts and childhood bereavement organizations recommend, in plain language.

Before They Go Back

- Decide together what the school should know — and how much. Even young kids often have their own opinion about this.
- Talk through how they might answer a surprise question like "what did you do this summer?" so they're not caught off guard.
- If the loss happened over the summer, help them feel ownership over telling their own story — rather than finding out others already know.

Once They're Back

- Keep routines steady. Structure and predictability are genuinely comforting, even when part of your child wants to stay close to you.
- Let grief show up without treating it like a problem to fix. Sad days, quiet days, and "fine" days are all normal — grief isn't a straight line.
- When they bring up the person who died, reflect their feelings back ("You really miss him — that makes sense") instead of changing the subject.
- A small comfort item — a piece of clothing, a photo, a small keepsake kept safely at school — can ease the transition.

What Grief Can Look Like at School

- Not always tears. Watch for irritability, trouble focusing, stomachaches, or a shorter fuse than usual — these can be grief in disguise.
- If your child already sees a therapist, loop them in on the loss so they can watch for it — grief and trauma aren't the same thing and don't need the same response.

Keep Checking In — This Isn't a One-Time Talk

- Grief resurfaces with new milestones all year — holidays, birthdays, a family-tree project, the anniversary of the death. Expect it, and check in around those times.
- Stay in loose contact with a teacher or counselor at school so support doesn't stop after the first week back.

When to Reach Out for More Support

- Grief that seems to be getting heavier instead of easing, several months of real difficulty functioning, or a child who feels completely stuck are all signs it may help to talk to someone.
- None of these mean something is wrong with your child. They mean your child deserves more support than they're currently carrying alone — and that's exactly what we're here for.

You don't have to figure this out alone.

Aspen's Angels offers grief support for families in Billings, MT. If you'd like to talk through what your child needs this school year, we're here.

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