

Association of School

PSYCHOLOGISTS

MEMORIAL ACTIVITIES AT SCHOOL: A LIST OF "DO'S" AND "DON'TS"

Memorial activities can be a valuable way for schools to help students and staff deal with trauma and loss. How a school approaches a memorial can make the difference in the healing nature of the process. Following are a few Do's and Don'ts to avoid further traumatizing students and promote a positive experience. For more information on memorials and helping children cope, go to www.nasponline.org

Do	Don'T
<i>Do</i> prepare for the needs of youth both preceding and following memorial activities in the community or school.	<i>Don't</i> underestimate the resurfacing of intense common grief reactions, including sadness and anger.
<i>Do</i> keep parents and staff informed of all upcoming activities related to the memorial plan, and allow any student, with parental permission, to attend a memorial activity.	<i>Don't</i> require all students or staff to attend a memorial activity.
Do provide staff and parents with information regarding possible related behaviors and emotions that students may display.	Don't pathologize normal grief reactions. Conversely, do not minimize serious, atypical grief reactions that may require closer clinical investigation.
<i>Do</i> focus on the needs and goals related to the students, and include parents and community members in activities as appropriate.	<i>Don't</i> try to accomplish all things in the school context; there are multiple forums to which the school staff, administration, and faculty may contribute that do not occur at school.
Do be sensitive to developmental and cultural differences when developing memorials.	<i>Don't</i> assume that "one size fits all" when it comes to developing a memorial.
<i>Do</i> develop living memorials (e.g., tolerance programs) that address the problems that lead to the crisis event.	<i>Don't</i> allow the memorial to be a forum for expressions of hatred and anger toward the perpetrators of crises.
<i>Do</i> something to prevent other crises from happening. Try to move students from the role of "victims" to the role of "doers."	<i>Don't</i> focus the memorial on the uncontrollable aspects of the crisis.
Do emphasize signs of recovery and hope in any memorial activity.	<i>Don't</i> allow a memorial to simply recount tales of the traumatic stressor.
<i>Do</i> allow students to discuss, in small group settings, such as classrooms, how they feel about their memorial experiences.	<i>Don't</i> schedule a memorial at such a time that it will not allow students to discuss or process their experiences.
<i>Do</i> encourage communication (e.g., writing letters and exchange of ideas) related to memorial activities.	<i>Don't</i> force students to participate or share feelings and ideas.
<i>Do</i> provide a referral system (school and community based) to identify youth who display complicated grief reactions and ensure appropriate support services are available.	<i>Don't</i> expect that staff and faculty will be able to independently identify individuals in need of mental health assistance.
<i>Do</i> establish an infrastructure (plans and processes) to provide assistance and support to students in immediate need.	<i>Don't</i> anticipate that students will independently seek out the appropriate professional assistance.

Adapted from J. Sandoval & S. E. Brock, 1995, The school psychologist's role in suicide prevention. *School Psychology Quarterly*. © 2002, National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Hwy #402; Bethesda, MD 20814, www.nasponline.org, phone (301) 657-0270, fax (301) 657-0275, TTY (301) 657-4155