

Guidelines for teachers and other school personnel for marking the passage of another year since the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School tragedy



Day of Service and Love

2/14

#2getherInServiceandLove

As we approach the passage of another year since the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, teachers and other school personnel may wonder how best to pay tribute to the memories of those who died, what to expect of their students, and how they can be of assistance. These guidelines will help you and your school think about how to prepare for the annual Day of Service and Love and provide advice on how classroom teachers can handle this topic sensitively. When using these guidelines, it is important to keep the following things in mind:

- Students and adults, even if they were not directly impacted, may still have feelings related to the many losses associated with the school shooting.
- As more years pass, it is increasingly likely that educators and other school staff will recall living through the tragedy and remember their feelings from that day, while fewer students will recall that day personally. While it remains important to support students around this time, it becomes even more important that the needs of educators and other staff are considered.
- Students and adults may become distressed about other troubling events in their lives when they are reminded about the tragedy – even if their own experiences are unrelated, such as losses from other causes including the COVID-19 pandemic, violence within their own community, or racial inequities they continue to experience. These losses and stressors may understandably have primary importance to them.
- There is no one “best way” to acknowledge the passage of another year. But saying nothing in response to students’ questions says a lot: that adults are unaware or unconcerned about students’ feelings or unwilling or unable to help them cope with their memories.
- Helping students deal with the many losses associated with the tragedy is hard work. Teachers and school staff need to be sure to take care of themselves.

What should we expect to see in our students at this time?

Just as with adults, adolescents frequently experience a recurrence of some of the feelings associated with a tragedy and associated losses. Given the enormity of the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the ongoing media attention around the tragedy, it is likely that many students will be thinking about the tragedy on February 14th, even if they do not live in Parkland/Coral Springs and did not experience personal losses from the tragedy.

Survivors who appear to be “back to normal” may at times still be feeling sad, scared, anxious, or angry. They may have difficulties that neither they nor others around them connect to the tragedy. These difficult feelings and reactions may become more pronounced around February 14th.

If adults are going to be of assistance to students, then it is important that we figure out how to have our own needs met. It is important for all adults working with students to give some personal thought to how they have been affected by these experiences and what impact this may have on their ability to facilitate such discussions with students. You may find it useful to identify colleagues that you can talk with about any concerns or apprehensions you may have. Providing an opportunity for faculty and staff to talk about their own reactions prior to talking with students may be useful to them personally and will better prepare them to respond to students’ needs.

What other advice should we give parents?

Too much attention around the date associated with the shooting - February 14th - can also cause problems. This should be considered both in school and at home. Parents should be advised to limit the amount of television and other media coverage, especially of graphic material that may be broadcast, particularly for younger students. If older students and adolescents do view television, radio, internet or other media coverage, parents should try to watch along with them and use it as an opportunity to discuss not only what they are seeing, but how it makes them feel. Video-recording the broadcast allows parents and students to pause the recording for discussion or if they are feeling overwhelmed. Parents and teachers should work together to ensure that students aren’t overwhelmed by this material and commentary provided by the media.

Where can I find additional information?

These guidelines represent some initial points to consider in planning for the passage of another year. *A Parent’s Guide for Talking with Their Children* about the passage of another year is also available. Additional material can be found at the website of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement at schoolcrisiscenter.org and the Coalition to Support Grieving Students at grievingstudents.org, including a free booklet for parents and other adults on how to support grieving students, available in multiple languages through the “Order Free Materials” link on the homepage.

LOCAL RESOURCES

For additional local resources, please access the Broward County Public Schools Mental Health Resources site at browardschools.com/recovery.

BCPS STUDENT SUPPORT INITIATIVES & RECOVERY:

Broward County Public Schools remains committed to supporting the ongoing healing and recovery of students, faculty and the entire community.

- Employee Assistance Program: 754-322-9900
- MSD Wellness Center: 754-322-2266
- Family Counseling Office: 754-321-1590
- BCPS Mental Health Portal: bcps-mentalhealth.com

