

A Parent's A–Z Guide for My Child's Return to School

After the Sudden and Unexpected Death of Their Sibling

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for welcoming my child back to school. We know you care deeply about your students, and we recognize that supporting a grieving child can feel overwhelming. There is no "right" way to grieve, and there is no timeline for healing. This guide offers a glimpse into what my child may need as they return to the classroom after the sudden, unexpected, and unexplained death of their sibling.

A — Acknowledge

Please don't avoid mentioning our child's loss. A simple, private acknowledgment lets my child know you care.

B — Be Patient

Grief changes from day to day. Some days my child may seem like themselves; other days may feel much harder.

C — Check In

A quiet "How are you doing today?" can mean more than you realize.

D — Don't Expect Them to Be the Same

My child has experienced something life-changing. They may respond differently than they did before.

E — Emotions Can Change Quickly

Sadness, laughter, anger, anxiety, and even excitement can all exist on the same day.

F — Flexibility Helps

Grief affects sleep, concentration, memory, and motivation. Flexibility with assignments and expectations can reduce unnecessary stress.

G — Give Grace

Behavior may reflect grief rather than defiance.

H — Honor Their Sibling

If my child mentions their sibling, please don't change the subject. Hearing their sibling's name reminds them their brother or sister is remembered.

I — Include Them

Please continue inviting my child to participate, even if they sometimes decline.

J — Just Listen

You don't need to have the right words. Simply listening is often enough.

K — Keep Me Informed

If you notice changes in behavior, friendships, or academics, please let me know. We are navigating this together.

L — Let Them Take Breaks

Sometimes grief becomes overwhelming. A quiet space or trusted adult may help.

M — Memories Matter

Talking about their sibling is not a setback. Remembering is part of loving.

N — Notice Important Dates

Birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and school celebrations may bring renewed grief. Ask parents/caregivers about important dates—such as the sibling's birthday or anniversary—and make a confidential note so you can provide additional understanding, flexibility, or a simple check-in.

O — Offer Choices

Providing small choices can help my child regain a sense of control after a world-changing loss.

P — Please Don't Compare

Every child's grief is unique. There is no "normal" timeline.

Q — Questions Are Welcome

If you're unsure how to support my child, please ask me. I'd rather answer questions than have assumptions made.

R — Routines Bring Comfort

Predictable routines help create a sense of safety.

S — Say Their Sibling's Name

Please don't worry about "reminding" my child. They have not forgotten. Knowing others remember their sibling can be comforting.

T — Triggers Are Everywhere

Family projects, holidays, classroom celebrations, or conversations about siblings may unexpectedly be difficult.

U — Understand That Grief Evolves

My child's grief will change as they grow. Their needs may look different months or even years from now.

V — Validate Their Feelings

There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

W — Watch for Quiet Changes

Not all grieving children cry. Some become quieter, more distracted, perfectionistic, or withdrawn.

X — eXtra Support May Help

There may be times when my child benefits from visiting the school counselor or another trusted adult.

Y — Your Kindness Will Be Remembered

Long after assignments and grades are forgotten, my child will remember how you made them feel.

Z — Zero Pressure to "Move On"

My child is learning how to carry their grief while continuing to grow. Your patience and understanding make that journey a little less lonely.

Things That May Help

- Say, "I'm glad you're here."
- Use my child's sibling's name if it comes up naturally.
- Allow flexibility on difficult days.
- Let my child know it's okay to step out if they need a moment.
- Continue to include them in classroom activities and friendships.

Things That May Not Help

- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "At least you have your other siblings."
- "They're in a better place."
- "It's time to move on."
- "Be strong for your parents."

A Final Note from Our Family...

Thank you for caring for our child during one of the most difficult times in their life. We know you cannot take away their grief, and we do not expect you to. What we hope for is a classroom where our child feels safe, supported, understood, and remembered.

Your kindness, patience, and willingness to walk alongside our family will make a lasting difference—not only in my child's education, but in their healing journey.

With gratitude,

Parent/Caregiver

The SUDC Foundation offers free educational resources to support families, educators, and schools following the sudden death of a child.

Available resources include:

- ★ **Sibling Toolkit** – Guidance and activities to support grieving siblings.
- ★ **Children's Grief Book Recommendations** – Curated book lists for children, teens, and adults.
- ★ **Educational Resources** – Information about Sudden Unexpected Death in Childhood (SUDC) and supporting bereaved families.
- ★ **Family Support Resources** – Information about our complimentary trauma and grief informed support programs and services available through the SUDC Foundation.

To access these resources, please visit: sudc.org

