

Special assemblies: saying “Goodbye”

Most schools feel that organising some sort of special assembly or remembrance service after a death in a school community is a helpful thing to do. It can put back a sense of normality into what may have been a very unsettled time. Below are some ideas to help you organise something appropriate.

Why hold a special assembly?

- To bring the school together to acknowledge what has happened.
- To reflect on, and remember, the life of the person who has died.
- To normalise and share grief.
- To give the message that it is OK to be sad but equally OK to not be affected.
- To inform pupils and staff of any support that is available.

Who should attend?

Anyone who wishes to be there: teaching and non-teaching staff, pupils, any family who feel able to do so. In a very large school it may not be possible to get everyone together and a year group assembly might be more appropriate. Many families find comfort in other people organising something special and appreciate being there. Others may not wish to participate but should be given the opportunity to do so.

Who should be involved?

Anyone who wants to be. Pupils have produced some very moving assemblies about friends who have died. It helps them to feel involved and gives a sense of doing something positive. Very young children will need greater amounts of adult input but can still participate in a way appropriate for their age and understanding.

How to structure a special assembly

Have a clear beginning, middle and an end. Start by explaining the purpose and length of the assembly. Follow with a brief reminder of the circumstances surrounding the death and when it happened. Explain that everyone is different and some people will be more affected than others, but whether deeply sad, just a bit thoughtful, or anything inbetween, that is fine.

The middle section could include:

- Lighting a special remembrance candle.
- Favourite songs or poems of the person who has died.
- Pupils or staff taking it in turns to recount stories or memories.
- Photographs of the person or child who has died to give a visual reminder, but remember a large image can be too much for any grieving family attending.
- Placing objects associated with the dead person into a special memory box. This can then be given to the family.

- Talking about a memory tree or collage made by sticking a collection of drawings that pupils have created onto a large sheet of paper or onto a tree outline. This can be added to during the assembly.
- In a primary school, reading a story. Suggestions of suitable books are given at the end of this sheet in the Resources section.

The end needs some thought and is better if it can leave everyone with a sense of looking forward. Some suggestions include:

- Giving a memory book to the family.
- Blowing out the remembrance candle.
- Going outside to release balloons. These could have a message attached.
- After leaving the assembly, pupils who wish to, plant a bulb to create a special memory garden.
- Asking pupils to bring a farewell message to the person who has died to put into a special box as they leave. This can help pupils to personalise a goodbye.
- Reflective but uplifting music helps to create the right atmosphere.

Afterwards

It is best to arrange the assembly before a break. Pupils and staff will need space to reflect before carrying on with the normal school timetable. Some schools time it for the end of lessons but the build up throughout the day can be difficult to handle. If arranged for the end of the school day, leave time for pupils to compose themselves before leaving for home. Be prepared for different responses, some pupils may be deeply affected, others not at all, or behave out of character. Ensure they all know where to go for support if required.

Resources

Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavementuk.org

Suggested words to use for an assembly can be found in the [Schools](#) section.

www.iflshoulddie.co.uk

A website with a link to poems which might give ideas for appropriate texts to use.

Story books

The Lonely Tree by Nicholas Halliday

Little tree is sad when his friend the old oak dies. A gentle, sensitively written story based on the life cycle in the natural world.

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

Old Badger's friends are sad when he dies but they smile again when remembering all he taught them.

No Matter What by Debbie Gliori

A book about unconditional love with the message that love doesn't stop, even after someone dies.