
UNIT: SENSITIVE ISSUES**TOPIC: Death and Dying****TIMELINE: 1-2 days**

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this unit the student will:

1. Define the terms related to death and dying.
 2. Describe stages of adjustment to death/dying.
 3. Identify sources of help for one suffering the loss of a loved one.
 4. Examine personal feelings about death and dying.
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MOTIVATOR/INTRODUCTION:

TEACHER NOTE: This unit must be approached with great care. Avoid presenting this information after your school or class members have recently dealt with death on a personal basis. This unit may be broken up into several small presentations to avoid depressing or frightening the students about this important issue.

INFORMATION:

1. **Class Discussion: WHAT ABOUT DEATH?**

Ask the students to respond to the following question. Write their answers on the chalkboard. "What comes to your mind when you hear the word, death"?

There are several attitudes toward death/dying. These attitudes include:

- a. death as a normal aspect of life
- b. formulation of feelings about death
- c. fears associated with death/dying
- d. lack of communication or discussion about death/dying

Students are often frightened by this subject. It is important to emphasize the positive aspects of death/dying, such as:

- a. the more knowledge we have about death, the better we can cope with this part of life.
- b. this information is something everyone needs to know. Everyone has to deal with death at some point in his/her life.
- c. death is not gory or scary; it is a natural part of the life cycle.

Read one of the books listed in the resource section together as a class or assign the students to read one of the books and write their feelings in short essays. These books are all excellent in introducing the subject of death in a comfortable manner.

2. **DEALING WITH DEATH/DYING:** Brainstorm and list reactions to the news of death. Some common reactions include: shock, disbelief, panic, depression, loneliness, guilt, fear, physical distress. Discuss a person's actual behavior with each of these feelings.

DEATH AND DYING OVERVIEW CONTINUED

When explaining death to students, clarify the importance of expressing and talking about one's feelings. Be honest and reassuring about continued adult support. Explain that death is a normal part of life and use examples of dying flowers and pets. Be open about expressing grief and allowing the same of young people. Reassure the students that they are not to blame for the death. Children should not be told that the deceased went away on a trip, went to the hospital to die, is just sick, or went to sleep and never woke up. Each of these responses will make the students think that if they do these things, they, too, will die. (See reference books listed RESOURCES.)

GUEST SPEAKERS:

QUESTION BOX AND GUEST PANEL: Prepare a box for students to place questions they have concerning death/dying. Invite community members to participate on a panel to discuss aspects of death. Include such people as a minister, insurance agent, funeral director, psychologist, doctor, hospice director, leaders of support groups, and lawyer.

INDIVIDUALIZED ACTIVITIES:

TEACHER NOTE: THESE ACTIVITIES MUST BE CLOSELY SUPERVISED AND END WITH POSITIVE SOLUTIONS.

1. **DEATH EDUCATION ASSESSMENT** (page 4): The students will work on this activity with the purpose of trying to discover their feelings about death/dying. Be certain to discuss the activity with the students after it has been completed. A meaningful activity would be a discussion of how attitudes about death/dying differ.
2. **LEARNING ABOUT DEATH, TERMS AND DEFINITIONS** (pages 5-7): The students will complete the crossword puzzle that contains definitions and terms that deal with death/dying. Most of these words will be unfamiliar to the students. Pre and post-activities may be required. A pre-activity would be to have them read about death in a textbook or other resource, with the purpose of finding something new about the topic. The crossword puzzle would then be given and the knowledge from the text would be used. A post-activity would be to have them write about their feelings about death.
3. **A DYING PERSON'S BILL OF RIGHTS** (page 8): After reading The Dying Person's Bill of Rights, the students will select one of the rights and describe a situation in which it would be important for a patient to be awarded this particular right. What would happen if the patient did not have this right?
4. **STAGES OF ADJUSTMENTS TO DEATH/DYING** (page 9): Using the handout on stages of adjustment to death/dying, the students will decide which stage the people in each of the situations are in. (Answers: 1- Anger, 2- Depression, 3-Bargaining, 4-Acceptance, 5-Denial and Isolation.)

DEATH AND DYING OVERVIEW CONTINUED

GROUP ACTIVITIES:

1. **HELPING OTHERS COPE WITH DEATH** (page 10): Students will work in pairs as they write their responses to the given situations. After the students complete this activity, discuss some of their answers.

The best words to say are sincere feelings like: "I'm sorry", or, "If you'd like to talk, I'm a good listener". Avoid saying, "Let me know if I can help". Instead, offer help such as, "May I watch the kids, or come over and clean, or do errands, etc." Be careful not to say, "You can have more children", "It's for the best", "At least he didn't suffer", or, "I know how you feel". Usually you do not mean these things, they are just fillers.

CHALLENGE PROJECTS:

EPITAPH (page 11): Discuss the meaning of the word, epitaph, with the students. Have them complete the assignment by visiting a cemetery and recording epitaphs they think are meaningful. If time permits, have them share the epitaphs with the class.

SUMMARY:

Although death brings sorrow into many lives, there are ways to make the sorrow more easy to bear. It is important to be able to talk freely about death and know how to find support if one needs it when a death occurs in a family or to someone you feel very close to. It is difficult to ever be truly prepared for dealing with death.

RESOURCES:

- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf*, by Leo Buscaglia, Ph.D., SLACK, Incorporated ISBN 0-943432-89-8, Henry Holt and Company ISBN 0-8050-1064-5. A story about a leaf which is symbolic of the life cycle. \$9.95.
- Badger's Parting Gifts*, by Susan Varley, Mulberry Books ISBN 0-688-11518-7. A story about how the animals reflect on the good things their friend taught them before he died. \$4.95.
- The Saddest Time*, by Norma Simon, Albert Whitman and Company ISBN 0-8075-7204-7. Three short stories about the death of a young uncle, a classmate and a grandmother. \$4.95.
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