High School Grief Guidelines

Developmental Level: Philosophical about life and death but believe it won’t happen to them; appear to use “adult” approaches of problem solving and abstract thinking in order to deal with grief; may fight against emotional vulnerability caused by death because they want to be independent.

Grief Behaviors:
* Withdrawal from parents and adults
* Angry outbursts
* Increased risk-taking behaviors
* Pushing limits of rules
* Lack of concentration, difficulty focusing
* Sad, evidence of crying
* Sleepiness, exhaustion
* Feeling overresponsible for taking care of others (siblings especially)

How to Help:
* Allow for some dependency
* Encourage healthy expression of feelings
* Answer questions honestly and provide factual information
* Allow choices, avoid power struggles (give back the feeling of control)
* Model appropriate responses including showing your own grief
* Allow child to talk about feelings and incident, ask questions to get an understanding of what they know/feel
* Maintain normal routines
* Make sure they do not blame themselves

Behaviors Suggesting Need for Additional Help
* Suicidal thoughts or behaviors
* Chronic physical symptoms
* Depression with poor self-esteem
* Denial of the death with delayed or absent grieving
* Isolation and lack of interest in activities
* Excessive anger and hostility
* Intense preoccupation with memories of the deceased
* Use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
* Prolonged feelings of guilt or responsibility for the death
* Major and continued changes in sleeping or eating patterns
* Risk-taking behaviors

Adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists online resources for crisis, trauma, and grief.
Piechowski, P., Coping with the Sudden Death of a Student.
Schonfeld, D, After a Loved One Dies—How Children Grieve; and The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dealing with Death.