

Practical Coping Strategies

Encourage students to think about specific things they can do when intense emotions such as worry or sadness begin to well up, including:

- simple relaxation and distraction skills, such as taking three deep slow breaths, counting to 10, or picturing themselves in a favorite calm and relaxing place
- engaging in favorite activities or hobbies such as music, talking with a friend, reading, or going to a movie
- exercising
- thinking about how they've coped with difficulties in the past and reminding themselves that they can use those same coping skills now
- writing a list of people they can turn to for support
- writing a list of things they're looking forward to
- focusing on individual goals, such as returning to a shared class or spending time with mutual friends

Often, youth will express guilt about having fun or thinking about other things. They may feel that they somehow need permission to engage in activities that will help them feel better and take their mind off the stressful situation.

Students should also be encouraged to think about how they want to remember their friend. Ideas range from writing a personal note to the family, to attending the memorial service, to doing something kind for another person in honor of their friend. Be sure to educate students about the school's guidelines regarding **memorialization**. Acknowledging their need to express their feelings while helping them identify appropriate ways to do so can begin the process of returning their focus to their daily lives and responsibilities