

Supporting students through grief and trauma

Following the loss of Eduardo Duarte, this guide helps you hold space for your students — with honesty, compassion, and Adventist faith — across the days and weeks ahead.

YOUR MOST IMPORTANT ROLE RIGHT NOW

You don't need the right answers — you need to show up. Acknowledging the loss by name, in every classroom, on the first day back, signals to every student that this school is a safe place to grieve. Students notice when adults avoid hard things. Don't avoid this.

The first days back — what to do immediately

highest priority

DO THIS

- Acknowledge Eduardo's death by name at the start of class
- Open with prayer or a brief lament — don't rush to the lesson
- "This classroom is a safe place for how you're feeling"
- Coordinate with colleagues — students need consistent messaging
- Suspend academic pressure for at least the first week
- Offer extensions to all students without requiring them to ask

AVOID THIS

- Proceeding with normal class as if nothing happened
- Inconsistent acknowledgment across classrooms
- Grading aggressively during the first week
- Telling students how they should feel
- Making students ask individually for extensions

If you had Eduardo in class: You are allowed to grieve too. Briefly acknowledging your own sadness models healthy grief for students. Connect with a colleague or counselor for your own support — you cannot pour from an empty vessel.

In the classroom — day-to-day practices

HELPFUL APPROACHES

- Offer structured expression: journaling, art, small group reflection
- Let students choose quiet work over discussion if they need it
- Create a simple "I need a moment" signal that doesn't disrupt class
- Have a designated quiet space students can go to
- Check in privately with unusually withdrawn students
- Keep routines — predictability is comforting during chaos

THINGS TO KNOW

- Grief impairs concentration, memory, and motivation — this is normal
- Some students grieve loudly; others go silent — both are valid
- Students who seem "fine" may be the most at risk
- Teens who become caregivers for grieving friends often suffer quietly
- Secondhand trauma is real — friends of survivors need support too

Tip: Structured activities — journaling prompts, creative writing, art — work better than open-ended "share your feelings" moments, which can feel exposing to teens. Give them a container, not just an opening.

Warning signs — when to refer to a counselor

REFER IMMEDIATELY IF YOU OBSERVE ANY OF THESE

Sudden withdrawal

Previously engaged student goes silent or absent

Hopeless statements

"What's the point" or "I don't want to be here"

Sleep deprivation

Falling asleep in class, extreme irritability

Prolonged inability to function

Can't complete any work weeks after the loss

Signs of trauma in survivors

Flashbacks, panic, avoidance of triggers

Caretaker collapse

A student holding others up while visibly breaking down

Never manage a mental health crisis alone. Your role is to notice and refer — not to assess or treat. Tell the counselor what you observed specifically: "Jaylen said 'I don't see the point' twice today." Specifics help.

Looking ahead — grief doesn't follow the calendar

THIS WEEK

- Acknowledge the loss in every class
- Suspend grading pressure
- Send counselor info home to parents
- Hold a faculty support meeting

NEXT FEW WEEKS

- Continue watching for warning signs
- Check in with close friends and survivors
- Allow creative expression in class
- Gradually restore academic expectations

MONTHS AHEAD

- Remember Eduardo's birthday
- Acknowledge the accident anniversary
- Honor his absence at graduation
- Watch for delayed grief responses

End of year: Graduation and end-of-year celebrations may bring a complex mix of joy and grief for students who feel Eduardo should be there. A quiet, optional moment of acknowledgment in chapel or a class setting can help close the year with integrity.

SDA FAITH AND THE CLASSROOM

Open class with prayer or lament — Psalms 22, 34, and 46 offer honest language for grief that does not rush to resolution. Allow students to bring hard "why" questions without rushing to theological answers. The resurrection hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) is a genuine comfort when offered gently — Eduardo is resting, not suffering — but it should anchor grief, not shortcut it. Bible class teachers carry a particular responsibility here: model honest faith that makes room for doubt and sorrow alongside hope.

You are not alone in this — and neither are your students.

Connect with your school counselor, administration, and the Florida Conference pastoral team.

Crisis support for students or staff: call or text **988** — available 24/7.