



April 30, 2025

Dear Ballard Parents/Guardians,

It is with a heavy heart that I share the news of the passing of one of our beloved students. In the time Xander Rothrock was part of our Ballard community, he made a profound and positive impact on others in our building. Our sincere thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time. We thank them for allowing us to share in his life.

This situation might raise many emotions, concerns, and questions for our entire school, especially among our students. Our goal is to assist our school family in understanding what has happened and provide helpful suggestions for coping. Tomorrow, our school-based mental health professionals and the district crisis team will be available to offer support and resources as needed. Please feel free to reach out to discuss any concerns/questions with any of the professionals listed below. You can email them directly.

School Counselors:

Strauzie Collins, strauzie.collins@jefferson.kyschools.us

Nicholas Heberlein, nicholas.heberlein@jefferson.kyschools.us

Alissa Hebermehl, alissa.hebermehl@jefferson.kyschools.us

Jenny Lin, jenny.lin@jefferson.kyschools.us

Ashley Poore, ashley.poore@jefferson.kyschools.us

Amy Sarmiento, amy.sarmiento@jefferson.kyschools.us

Mental Health Practitioner: Margaret Riddick, margaret.riddick@jefferson.kyschools.us

Youth Service Center Coordinator: Sean Smith, sean.smith2@jefferson.kyschools.us

School Psychologist: Megan Vitan, megan.vitan@jefferson.kyschools.us

As parents/guardians, you may choose to share the information about this death with your child. At the bottom of this letter, you will find suggestions for talking with your child about trauma and a list of community resources. Thank you for your support and for being an important part of the Ballard school family.

Sincerely,

Jason Neuss, Ed.D.
Ballard High School
Principal

Helping Children Cope with Grief

Your child's reaction to death will be determined by his/her developmental level and age.

Ages 5-9: Children are beginning to understand that death is permanent, but not universal. Death is often personified as a ghost or boogeyman. Children will often express their grief through play.

Ages 9-12: Children understand that death is permanent, personal, and universal. They understand they, too, will die someday. Death is seen as happening to only the old or the very sick. They are often fascinated with the details of death. Grief may be exhibited through physical complaints, moodiness, changes in sleeping and eating patterns, or isolation from peers.

Ages 12+: Most adolescents have reached adult levels of understanding about death. Many have very intense emotions about death and do spend time thinking about death. Some adolescents challenge death by participating in dare-devil activities, such as drag racing or drug experimentation.

The following are some suggestions for helping your child cope with the death of a loved one:

- Understand the kinds of feelings that your child may have. Fear, sadness, anger, and confusion are all normal reactions. Your child may express these feelings in conversation or through his/her actions.
- Allow your child to talk about the death and ask questions. Answer questions as simply as you can. It's ok to say that you don't know how to answer all of the questions.
- Have your child draw pictures of his/her feelings.
- Explain the ritual of funeral ceremonies. Have your child participate in supervised grief rituals as he/she desires. Remember, your child's imagination about death may be more frightening than the reality.
- Resume your regular family/school activities and schedules as soon as possible. Routines are one good way to help your child feel secure.
- Reassure your child that you are healthy, you are careful when you drive, and that you expect to be around for a long time.
- Monitor and evaluate your child's stress level. During these times stress is expected but extreme levels of stress can compromise the immune system.
- Seek help if you have questions about your child's behavior. Express your concerns with your school's counselor, teacher, or principal.
- Seek help from the list of community partners below should your child exhibit signs of crisis or extreme stress.