Toolkit for A Hand to Hold

Overview:
As educators, we can never be sure of what we will face in our classrooms. This toolkit will help you and your colleagues think about how to be best prepared for your students’ needs.

The story at the heart of “A Hand to Hold” is poignant and painful. It speaks to one of the little-discussed realities in the life of a teacher: we never know for sure what hardships and issues students are going to bring into our classrooms each day. After reading “A Hand to Hold,” use this toolkit to work with colleagues to think through how you can prepare for events like the one the author confronted. How can you prepare yourselves and each other to feel supported when faced with difficult—and even traumatic—events.

Essential Questions
1. What resources can you and your colleagues offer one another when difficult moments unfold in your classroom?
2. What do you need in order to feel safe and supported when emotionally straining or immediately traumatic moments arise in your teaching life?
3. What do you and your colleagues see as the role of educators when students undergo traumatic experiences?

Procedure
1. Along with your colleagues, read the story “A Hand to Hold.” Take some time to talk about the story and the issues that it raises for you. Make sure to listen to the emotions that come up for your colleagues. They may be similar to or different from your own reactions.

2. With your colleagues, generate an emergency action plan—including emotional, logistical and material resources—you could use if faced with a student undergoing an immediate traumatic experience. What would you need to be present and prepared to help your student? How could you be a support to this student without becoming overwhelmed? After talking about what you would want and need, compile a list of actual resources available in your school and community. Some questions to think about include:

- Who can you turn to if you need emotional support?
- Who can you turn to if your student(s) needs emotional support beyond what you can provide?
- Who can you turn to if you have legal questions about rights and responsibilities?
- Where can you look if your student(s) needs material support?
- Where can you turn if your student is in immediate danger?
- What long-term support options are available to help you and your student recover from the event after the immediate circumstances have passed?

These questions are only starting points; you and your colleagues might take the conversation in other directions.

Related Resources:
Partners in Grief
Helping Students Navigate a Violent World
When Bad Things Happen
Shelter from the Storm

Related Feature: A Hand to Hold

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