



February 15, 2021

Dear Equality Scholars, Families, and Staff,

It is with great sadness that I write to you to inform you of the devastating loss of an Equality alumni, Jermaine Paul, who died in a horrific car accident this past weekend.

Jermaine started at Equality in 2011 as a 6th grader and graduated from our High School in 2018. We watched him grow from a shy boy into a confident, warm, kind young man. If you knew Jermaine, you understand that it was a pleasure and honor to know him. It is truly a devastating loss for our school community.

We extend our deepest thoughts and prayers to his family on behalf of our entire school community. Jermaine was very special to us all. We will ensure that his spirit is always kept alive as we find a special way to honor him on our high school campus.

Our scholars and alumni may need support in handling this news. We recommend that our parents talk with their children about what has happened and we urge everybody to pay careful attention to how the latter are feeling in the days and weeks ahead. We have added some tips on the next page of the letter, and additional resources are provided through the National Association of School Psychologists, that may help guide any conversations:

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/addressing-grief>.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at any point in the coming days if you would like to talk. Once again, we offer our most heartfelt condolences and compassion to any one in our school community who has been affected by the untimely death of Jermaine.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Franco  
Founder & Executive Director

[www.equalitycharterschool.org](http://www.equalitycharterschool.org)  
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MS: 718-517-3169

**High School**  
2141 Seward Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10473

**Middle School**  
4140 Hutchinson River Parkway East  
Bronx, NY 10475



### Supporting Scholars with Grief

**1. Grieving is the teen's natural reaction to a death.** Grief is a natural reaction to death and other losses. However, grieving does not feel natural because it may be difficult to control the emotions, thoughts, or physical feelings associated with a death. The sense of being out of control that is often a part of grief may overwhelm or frighten some teens. Grieving is normal and healthy, yet may be an experience teens resist and reject. Helping teens accept the reality that they are grievers allows them to do their grief work and to progress in their grief journey.

**2. Each teen's grieving experience is unique.** Grieving is a different experience for each person. Teens grieve for different lengths of time and express a wide spectrum of emotions. Grief is best understood as a process in which bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors surface in response to the death, its circumstances, the past relationship with the deceased and the realization of the future without the person. For example, sadness and crying may be an expression of grief for one teen, while another may respond with humor and laughter.

**3. There are no "right" and "wrong" ways to grieve.** Sometimes adults express strong opinions about "right" or "wrong" ways to grieve. But there is no correct way to grieve. Coping with a death does not follow a simple pattern or set of rules nor is it a course to be evaluated or graded.

**4. Every death is unique and is experienced differently.** The way teens grieve differs according to personality and the particular relationship they had with the deceased. They typically react in different ways to the death of a parent, sibling, grandparent, child, or friend. For many teens, peer relationships are primary.

**5. The grieving process is influenced by many issues.** The impact of a death on a teen relates to a combination of factors including: Social support systems available for the teen (family, friends and/or community), the circumstances of the death - how, where and when the person died, whether or not the young person unexpectedly found the body, the nature of the relationship with the person who died - harmonious, abusive, conflictual, unfinished, communicative, the teen's level of involvement in the dying process, the emotional and developmental age of the teen, the teen's previous experiences with death.

**6. Grief is ongoing.** Grief never ends, but it does change in character and intensity. Many grievers have compared their grieving to the constantly shifting tides of the ocean; ranging from calm, low tides to raging high tides that change with the seasons and the years.

As always, there are members of the school community here to support you and your child through this difficult time. Please do not hesitate to reach out to discuss specifics with your child.

**Middle School: Gina Wright x3530**

**High School: Jessica Bersani x4050**

**NYC WELL is free, confidential and available 24/7**

**1-888-NYC-WELL or text "WELL" to 65173**

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