

Sorry Business and Sad News

Access arrangements and reasonable adjustments (AARA)

This factsheet has been prepared by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority's (QCAA's) Cultural Intelligence team in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

The QCAA recognises students may experience circumstances that are unforeseen and outside of their control and may present a barrier to their performance in assessment, e.g. bereavement. Access arrangements and reasonable adjustments (AARA) may be approved to assist these students.

For Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, the period before and after a death are subject to several customary practices. These practices have meanings that are sacred to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These practices are known as Sorry Business in Aboriginal communities, and Sad News in Torres Strait Islander communities. In Torres Strait Islander culture, there are also Tombstone Openings, which happen up to a year or more after a death.

Sorry Business

There are hundreds of diverse Aboriginal groups across Australia, each with unique protocols and traditions for practicing Sorry Business. As a result, AARA requirements for Sorry Business must be considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on where the student is from.

Generally, the Sorry Business period begins on the day of death or during the period leading up to death (if it is expected) and concludes after the funeral. This period can last between 1–4 weeks, or longer if the funeral date is delayed.

During this time of mourning, families and communities come together to undertake traditional and cultural practices, as a mark of respect. This means avoiding making any significant decisions or holding celebrations and events.

Sorry Business extends beyond close family members and friends. Aboriginal communities are strongly interconnected and the death of a community member — particularly a respected Elder or leader — warrants a period of Sorry Business.

Given the sensitivity of this time for families and communities, it is recommended that communication with the student's family is conducted through an Indigenous Liaison Officer, Community Education Counsellor or another person familiar to the family.

Sad News

When a person dies in a Torres Strait Islander community there is a Sad News period during which a series of ceremonial practices take place, for which certain members of the community are responsible. These practices will take place between the time of death and the funeral. This period can also last between 1–4 weeks or more. It is possible that a student will be responsible for a ceremonial practice or will need to be present to learn and observe.

Traditionally, it is the responsibility of an in-law to coordinate all aspects of the mourning period, funeral and communication. This person is known as a 'mari gedth'.

The mari gedth is the point of contact and contacting any other person during this time can be seen as disrespectful and cause further grief. It is recommended for the Indigenous Liaison

Officer, Community Education Counsellor or community contact to find out who this person is, share their condolences and make respectful enquiries.

Tombstone Openings

A Tombstone Opening is a Torres Strait Islander cultural tradition where a tombstone is ceremoniously opened a year or so after a burial. This is a special family occasion, which some Torres Strait Islander students may be obligated to attend.

Students may also be required to observe or participate in ceremonial practices, planned 1–2 weeks before the Tombstone Opening. Depending on the student's age and gender, these practices may include decorating the headstone and burial areas, hunting for traditional food, preparing traditional foods, rehearsing dances and songs, and connecting with family and community.

This is part of the mourning and grieving process and communication with the family should be treated as Sad News.

AARA

Students engaged in Sorry Business or Sad News may be eligible for AARA, as these are important cultural obligations. Schools may approve extensions and comparable assessments if participation in internal assessment is adversely affected.

An illness and misadventure application may be submitted to the QCAA if a student is adversely affected at the time of external assessment. Supporting documentation is required — contact the QCAA for further information or assistance as needed.

See Sections 6.2 (AARA eligibility) and 6.5 (Illness and misadventure) of the *QCE and QCIA policy and procedures handbook* and the [Illness and misadventure factsheet](#) available on the QCAA website for further information.

More information

If you would like more information, please visit the QCAA website www.qcaa.qld.edu.au and search for 'AARA'. Alternatively, phone 1300 381 575 or email at aara@qcaa.qld.edu.au or cultural.intelligence@qcaa.qld.edu.au.



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