Welcome to Session 3

When School Starts Back: Helping Students Cope with Crisis and Loss During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Session Guide:

• You are muted and your video is turned off.
• Please enter your questions to the host or presenters in the Q&A window only.
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Thank you for joining us today!
You will not be on video during today’s session.
When School Starts Back: Helping students cope with crisis and loss during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Outline

• Psychological first aid
• Common reactions to a crisis
• Helping children cope with the pandemic
• Supporting grieving students
• Coalition to Support Grieving Students
Psychological First Aid

- Provide broadly to those impacted
- Supportive services to promote normative coping and accelerate natural healing process
- All adults should understand likely reactions and how to help children cope
Anyone that interacts with children can be a potential source of assistance and support – if unprepared, they can be a source of further distress.
PFA Actions

source: American Red Cross

- Observation or Awareness
- Make a Connection
- Help People Feel Comfortable and at Ease
- Be Kind, Calm, & Compassionate
- Assist with Basic Needs
- Listen
- Give Realistic Reassurance
- Encourage Good Coping
- Help People Connect
- Give Accurate and Timely Information
- Suggest a Referral Resource
- End the Conversation
Watch your media consumption

• Make sure it is a healthy diet; don’t consume too much
• Keep informed through focused/periodic attention to trusted sources of information
• If you aren’t getting reassured or learning practical actions to take, then disconnect from media
• Limit amount of media exposure – this is a good time to unplug and connect instead with children and family
# Potential Symptoms of Adjustment Reactions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fears &amp; Anxiety; School Avoidance</th>
<th>Sleep problems; Change in Appetite</th>
<th>Difficulties with Concentration &amp; Academic Performance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadness &amp; Depression</td>
<td>Anger &amp; Irritability; Distrust &amp; Suspiciousness</td>
<td>Alcohol &amp; Other Substance Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Symptoms</td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
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Talking with and supporting children

• Don’t pretend everything is OK – children pick up when parents/adults are not genuine and honest
• Children may pick up on concerns primarily of adults
• Provide appropriate reassurance, but don’t give false reassurance
• Find out individual child’s fears, concerns, skepticism
• Don’t tell students that they shouldn’t be worried; help them learn to deal with their uncertainty and fear
• Include positive information; present a hopeful perspective
Strategies for dealing with distress

- Reading or hobbies that promote healthy distraction
- Journaling, blogging, art, music to promote expressions of feelings
- Exercise, yoga
- Appropriate use of respectful humor
- Relaxation techniques, mindfulness
- Help children identify steps they can take personally to protect their own health and to help others
Some children may need more assistance

- The pandemic and discussion about the impact on families may remind children of other difficulties – events in the past, ongoing challenges, or concerns about future losses or crises
- Students who were anxious or depressed before the pandemic will likely need more support
- Children may need to focus first on their own needs before they are able to think of needs of others; try not to make them feel guilty for thinking about how this crisis impacts them personally
What you are doing is of value

• Just because we don’t know everything, doesn’t mean we know nothing of value
• You know strategies that have helped in the past to decrease distress – try them now
• Reach out to colleagues/resources in school district and community when more is critically needed
• Celebrate positive contributions you make
• Set reasonable expectations
• The curriculum has changed – teaching students how to cope → helping them learn life skills that will make them more resilient
Being with someone in distress

- Do not try to “cheer up” survivors
- Do not encourage to be strong or cover emotions
- Express feelings and demonstrate empathy
- Avoid statements such as: “I know exactly what you are going through” (you can’t), “You must be angry” (don’t tell person how to feel), “Both my parents died when I was your age” (don’t compete for sympathy)
- Allow child/family to be upset while suspending judgment – intervene only when safety/health is concern
Addressing cultural diversity

• Some people are worried they will say or do the wrong thing because they feel ill informed about another culture
• Although there are differences in cultural practices, the fundamental experience of grief is universal
• When we recognize that there is a range of ways to experience and express grief, we can explore ways to bridge cultural differences in order to help grieving children and families
Supporting children of a different culture

• Ask questions when you are unsure what would be most helpful for a family or individual
• Assumptions may result in stereotypes that cloud our perceptions and make us miss opportunities to be helpful
• Approach the family with an open mind and heart
• Help families identify and communicate what is important to them about cultural practices; work with them to find solutions and compromises when realities require modifications in cultural practices
Initiating the conversation

- Express concern
- Be genuine
- Invite conversation
- Listen and observe
- Limit personal sharing
- Offer practical advice
- Offer reassurance without minimizing concerns
- Maintain contact
Children’s guilt

• Young children tend to be:
  – Egocentric
  – Have limited understanding of cause of death
  → Magical thinking

• Results in guilt
  – Reassure children of lack of responsibility
Academic accommodations
• It is common for students to experience temporary academic challenges after a death; pre-existing learning challenges often become worse
• Offer academic support proactively – don’t wait for academic challenges to become academic failure
• Change an assignment, e.g.,
  – Allow student to work with a partner
  – Adapt formal research paper into more engaging assignment
• Change focus or timing of lesson
• Reschedule or adapt tests
Founding Members

American Federation of School Administrators
AFSA, APL-CIO

National Association of Secondary School Principals

American School Counselor Association

National Association of School Nurses

NASP

National Association of School Psychologists

School Social Work Association of America

NEA
National Education Association

naesp
National Association of Elementary School Principals

Lead Founding Members

New York Life Foundation

Children’s Hospital Los Angeles
National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement
Supporting Organizational Members
www.grievingstudents.org

Conversation & Support
Talking With Children
What Not to Say
Providing Support Over Time
Peer Support

VId o and Downloadable Grief Support Modules for School Personnel
www.grievingstudents.org

Order Free Materials (download)

After a loved one dies—
How children grieve and how parents and other adults can support them.
For further information about NCSCB visit us, call us, like us, share us

1-888-53-NCSCB (1-888-536-2722)

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