

Supporting students coping with grief and loss during the COVID-19 pandemic



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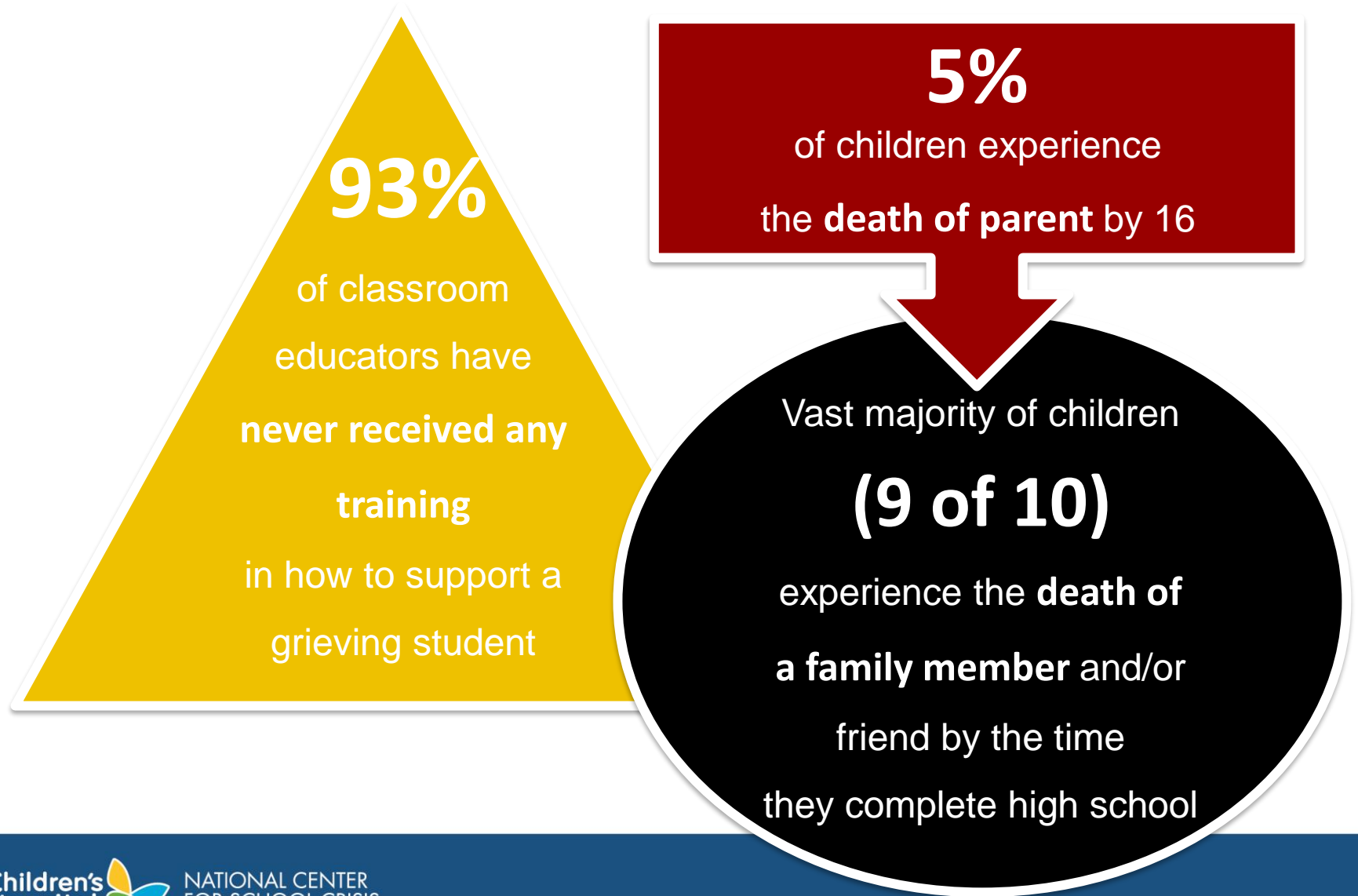
**NATIONAL CENTER
FOR SCHOOL CRISIS
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In partnership with



**NEW YORK LIFE
FOUNDATION**

Loss is Common in the Lives of Children



Children may not appear to be grieving

- Adults may communicate death is not discussed
- Children may
 - not yet understand what has happened or its implications
 - be overwhelmed by feelings
 - express grief indirectly through behavior or play

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

Peer support

- Most children want to help friends, yet often have limited experience
- May make insensitive comments, ask repetitive or detailed questions, or tease grieving peer
- Study of children ages 6-15 who experienced death of parent: 20% “experienced direct, raw taunting about their loss”
- Educators can help students develop skills to support a peer who is grieving

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

Helpful responses to a grief trigger

- Provide a safe space or an adult the student can talk to
- Set procedures for the student to obtain support
- Let the student call a parent or family member if necessary
- Provide permission and encouragement to see school nurse, counselor, or social worker
- Offer private time with teacher to talk about feelings

Grief during a pandemic

- After a death, children often concerned about the health of themselves or others close to them
 - Important to help children deal with fears/concerns about the pandemic
- Physical distancing/school closure increase social isolation; makes it difficult to provide support
- Secondary losses become even more of an issue
- Family members may be overwhelmed by the pandemic in addition to their own grief
- Some grief may not be related to death
- Supporting grieving students can be difficult in the best of times; this is not the best of times



COALITION *to* SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS

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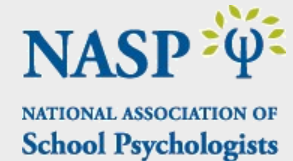
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www.grievingstudents.org

DOES YOUR SCHOOL NEED ADVICE NOW?

Contact us at [877-53-NCSCB \(877-536-2722\)](tel:877-53-NCSCB) or info@grievingstudents.org



Search

Special Resource: COVID-19 Pandemic Response - [Click here.](#)



COALITION *to* SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

Video and Downloadable Grief Support
Modules for School Personnel

Conversation & Support

Talking With Children >

What Not to Say >

Providing Support Over Time >

Peer Support >

VIEW MODULES



Modules Placed into Six Sections

- Each section contains 2-4 video modules; each video is accompanied by handout that summarizes major points
- Conversation and Support
- Developmental and Cultural Considerations
- Practical Considerations
- Reactions and Triggers
- Professional Preparation and Self-Care
- Crisis and Other Special Circumstances

Additional Resources

- Additional Modules (e.g., police or military deaths)
- Guidance Documents
 - Practical guidelines developed by the NCSCB on how to respond to the death of a student or staff, from all causes or from suicide
- Training module
- Family and school staff booklets
- Articles
- Online Resources

www.grievingstudents.org

Order Free Materials (download)



After a loved one dies—

How children grieve and how parents
and other adults can support them.

Grief-Sensitive School Initiative

A Grief-Sensitive School is an accredited K-12 public or private institution that commits to help provide a supportive environment for students who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Grief-Sensitive School pledge

- Provide specific professional learning opportunities
- Share information with school community about www.grievingstudents.org
- Increase awareness of issue of grief at school
- Review relevant school policies and procedures

Examples of grief-sensitive school policies

- Attendance policies that don't penalize students (or staff) for absences related to funerals and other rituals
- Communications with families of deceased students
- Commemoration and memorialization, including considerations related to death by suicide
- Virtual memorials
- What to do related to graduation (e.g., granting posthumous degrees)
- Yearbook and other end of the year activities
- On-site funerals, wakes, and related services

For further information about NCSCB
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