



Grief-Informed Schools: From Awareness to Action

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listening to youth

Workshop Takeaways

Attendees will explore:

1. Developmentally appropriate grief support strategies for students
2. A guide on how to start the conversation about grief
3. A school-based grief support response template



Exercise

Children's Grief at Large

***Defining* Grief**

Grief *Defined*

Grief: the *natural* response to loss

Primary loss: the death of a person

Secondary loss:

- Change in lifestyle, location, relationships, finances, access to resources, identity
- Deployment, deportation, incarceration, foster care



The Prevalence

1 in 11

children in the U.S.
will experience the
death of a parent
or sibling before
age 18³

6.6M

U.S. children will
experience the
death of a parent
sibling, or caregiver
by age 18³

1 in 4

youth who die by
suicide were
bereaved⁴

Youth who are grieving are more likely to experience mental-health challenges, poor academic performance, and negative long-term outcomes than their non-grieving peers.²

The Impact in Schools

97% of teachers believe grief adversely impacts learning

92% stated childhood grief deserves more attention from schools

93% of teachers have not received bereavement training⁴



Developmental Considerations

Ages 5–8

Concrete understanding

Magical thinking

May still believe that death is reversible

Repetitive questions

Regressive behaviors

Concerns for their safety/abandonment

Ages 9 – 12

Beginning to understand abstract ideas

Death is permanent

Thinking about impact of loss over time

Focused on details

Feelings of guilt and regret

Worry of something bad happening

Wide range of emotions

Ages 13 – 18

Understand abstract ideas about death

See selves as individual

Changes in priorities, faith, appearance, etc

Reliance on social support

Reflections around meaning of life, relationships, etc

Wide range of emotions



Manifestations of Grief

Physical: stomachaches, headaches, exhaustion, changes in sleep and appetite

Emotional: sadness, worry, fear, confusion, guilt/regret

Social: leaning in/out, withdrawal, changes in role (home) and interests

Behavioral: regression, changes in energy, trouble focusing/concentrating

What kids who are grieving say...

Sometimes I
can't
concentrate

I don't want
to think
about my
grief

Just because
I'm laughing
and playing
doesn't
mean I'm not
grieving

My person
died a long
time ago,
but I still
miss her
every day

I like
when
people
ask me
about
him

I don't
want
attention

I
sometimes
get angry
that he's
gone

I don't like
when
people
ask me
about him

I feel like
nobody
understands

Ask me
what
helps

I try to be
strong so
nobody
worries

I just
want to
feel
normal

Exercise

“I’m Sorry for Your Loss”

ISN'T CUTTING IT ANYMORE



Talk About Grief

89% of Americans agree that everyone should learn to talk about grief.

But 70% of Americans say they don't know what to say or do when someone is grieving.*

Conversation Considerations

Timing

Intentional

Scheduled

Private

Optional

Language

Concrete

Dead and died

Power of reflection

Avoid euphemisms

Say something.

Support

Identifying need

Individual

School-wide

Students and staff

Outside referrals

Be present...

- **Sit in the mud**

Be where they are. Witnessing is a huge part of what helps.

- **Reflect and summarize**

Try to focus on what they feel and reflect back. "I am hearing that you miss your mom".

- **Create intentional time**

Schedule check-ins and avoid drive-by interactions. Develop a plan for consistent support.

Grief Support Template

Communication

Internal and external

Staff

Caregivers

Students

Continued
communication: support
and resources

Timeline

Confirmation from family

Staffing

Setting up support
spaces

Memorials

Support

Internal and district

Community partners

External referrals

Funeral, memorial,
celebration of life protocols

Support Cart

Individualized Grief
Support Plan

Year-round Grief Awareness

When a Student Dies: A Response Workflow

A step-by-step guide for school professionals to respond with care, clarity, and consistency in the days following a student's death.

VERIFY & ACTIVATE

COMMUNICATE

SUPPORT & CONNECT

1

**Confirm the death**

Verify through the family/caregiver or an appropriate official source before any internal or external communication begins.

VERIFICATION

2

**Activate crisis response team**

Notify the team so roles, messaging, and support logistics can be coordinated before staff or students are informed.

COORDINATION

3

**Brief staff first**

Give staff clear, direct language and the support schedule so they can hold space for students without being caught off guard.

STAFF BRIEFING

4

**Communicate to students & families**

Share direct, age-appropriate language along with the scheduled on-site support plan for the days ahead.

COMMUNITY MESSAGE

5

**Provide on-site support**

Staff a dedicated support space for 3 days so students, families, and staff have somewhere to process and be heard.

3 DAYS ON-SITE

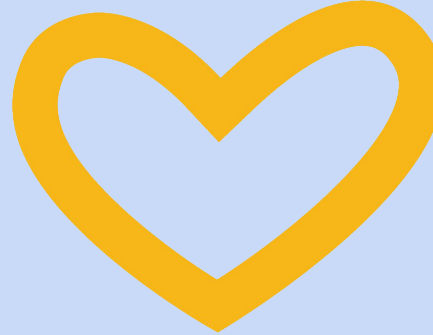
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**Refer to community support**

Connect the school community with grief-support organizations for care that continues well beyond the immediate response.

ONGOING REFERRAL

Children's Grief Awareness Month



For the month of November, could you...

- talk about grief?
- read about grief?
- dress in blue?
- add to your newsletter?
- start a tradition?

How could you get other community members involved?

Resources

Experience Camps Resources



Grief Resources



Navigating grief is hard. It's even harder when you are trying to help your kids navigate their grief too. Through our years of working with grieving families, we have created a collection of personal stories, strategies and tools to help.



Parent / Caregiver Support



Coping with a Parent's Death



Coping with a Sibling's Death



Support a Grieving Friend

Grief Resources



"Grief Quest" on Roblox

Join our virtual scavenger hunt and get grief-smart.

In February 2023, we kicked off our biggest virtual experience ever, all with the aim of grief education. It was an engaging scavenger hunt on Roblox (the social gaming platform with over 52 million daily active users) that gave players of all ages opportunities to learn about how to support kids who are grieving while doing camp-themed activities. It nods to a "classic" camp setting but with more literal magic: think outer space + neon + rainbow fields!

START PLAYING

"Grief Quest" on Roblox



Our Programs



We give grieving children experiences that change their lives forever.

Since 2009, Experience Camps has transformed the lives of thousands of children by reframing the experience of their grief and empowering them with the confidence, skills, and support to move forward with their lives. Through compassion, connection, and play, Experience Camps allows grieving children to embody a life full of hope and possibility. Below are both our in-person programs, and our virtual programs.

In-Person Programs



Summer Camps



Family Camps



Adult Grief Retreat



Meetups

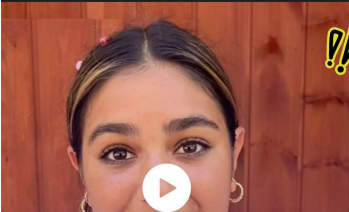
Programs



VIDEOS BLOG WHAT WE'RE LOVIN' MEET THE CREW RESOURCES SHOP



TALK TO US



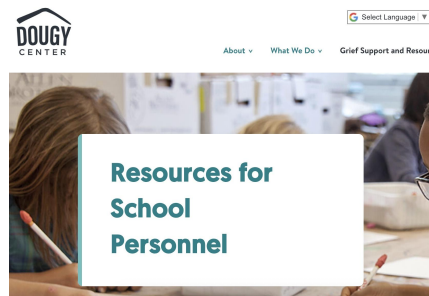


JOIN US IN A MOVEMENT TO MAKE IT SUCK LESS.

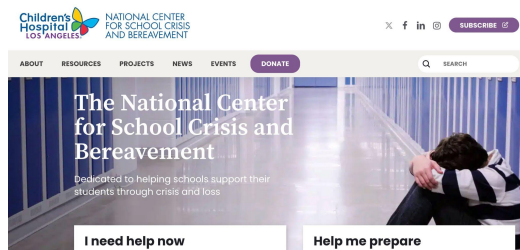
GriefSUCKS



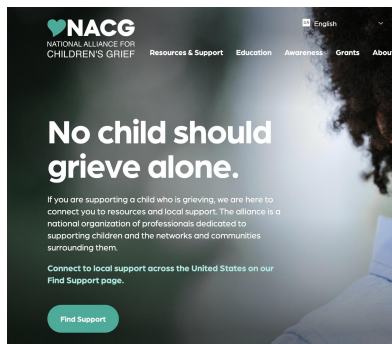
Center for Applied Research Solutions



The Dougy Center



National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

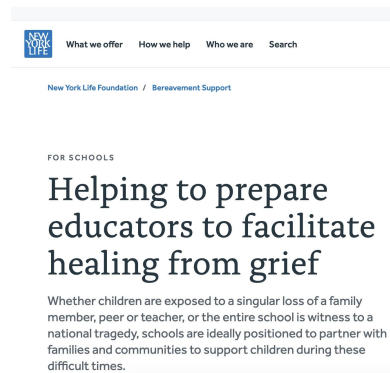


National Alliance for Children's Grief



Grief

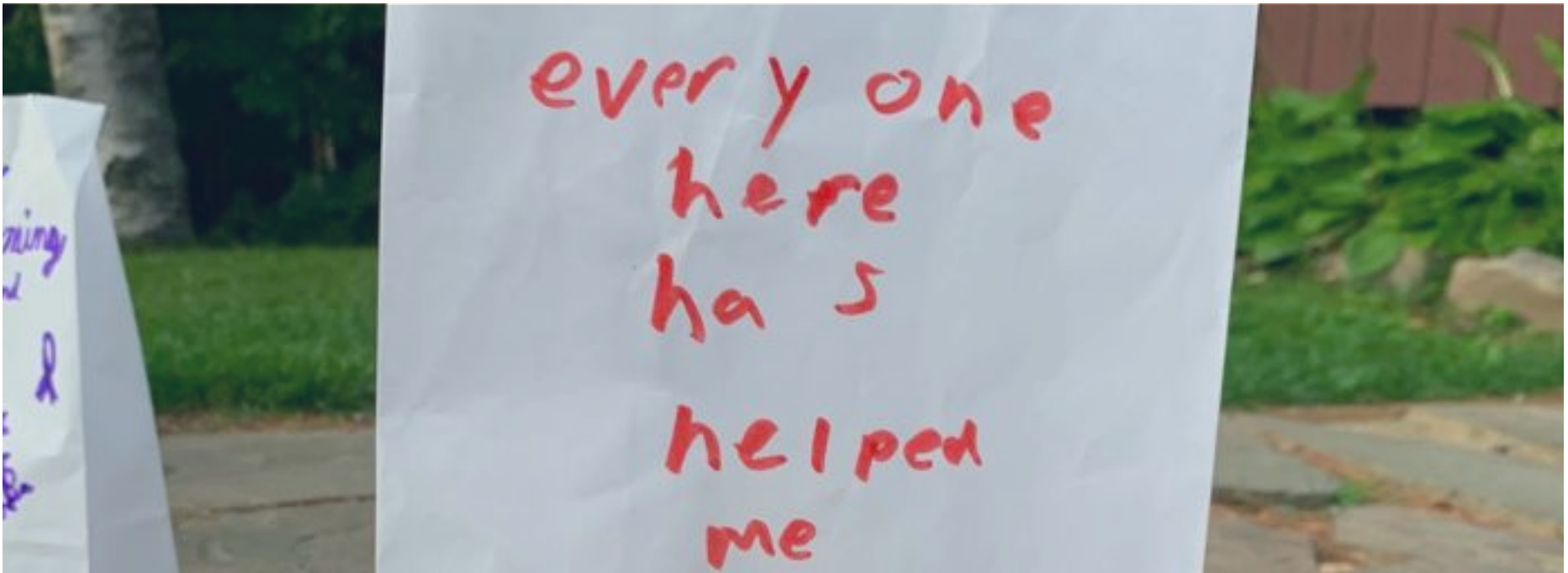
Sesame Workshop: Grief



New York Life Foundation

References

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2. *Developmental Responses to Grief*. Dougy Center. (n.d.). https://www.dougy.org/assets/uploads/Developmental-Responses-to-Grief-ages-2-18_2025-07-01-193812_inmp.pdf
3. Judi's House. (2026). *Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model*. Retrieved from www.judishouse.org/CBEM.
4. New York Life Foundation. (2024). *New York Life Foundation State of Grief Report*. <https://www.newyorklife.com/assets/foundation/docs/pdfs/2024-State-of-Grief-Report.pdf>
5. *Secondary and Cumulative losses. Death and School Crisis. Commemoration and Memorialization*. Coalition to Support Grieving Students. (2023). <https://grievingstudents.org>.



every one
here
has
helped
me


experience
camps

THANK YOU!

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