

Addressing Grief and Loss in Staff and Students

WHOLE CHILD and FAMILY SUPPORTS

ADDRESSING GRIEF AND LOSS in STAFF AND STUDENTS

Loss and traumatic grief disrupts normal functioning and can feel never-ending. Every person needs to feel they are in a safe space to express and work through the stress, thoughts, and feelings related to grief and loss (Denckla, C. & et. al, 2020).¹

Feelings of grief and loss can apply to experiences, milestones, sense of safety, social connections, death of a loved one and more (Weir, K.,2020).² Grief and loss are very personal, but there are common responses or stages experienced through the grieving process.

Stages or reactions to loss are not experienced in a linear fashion but are part of the framework that helps us identify the feelings associated with the loss and understand that grief is part of a healing process. Educators should consider that students and families

may circle or swing back and forth through these “stages,” experiencing some feelings or reactions more than others and not necessarily in a prescribed order. (Kübler-Ross, E. & Kessler, D., 2014).³

Grief and Loss Resources

Coalition to Support Grieving Students

[Cultural Sensitivity Module](#)

Child Mind Institute, [Helping Children Cope with Grief](#)

Hollis Easter, [Grief Closet](#)

Scott Bernato, [That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief](#)

³David Kessler [Most Frequently Asked Questions about Grief](#)

National Center for School Crisis and

Bereavement, [Responding to the Death of a Student or School Staff](#)

STAGES AND REACTIONS OF GRIEF AND LOSS

				
Denial or Disbelief	Anger or Frustration	Bargaining or Guilt	Depression or Despair	Acceptance or Reintegration
Experienced as shock, numbness, withdrawal or acting as if no loss occurred to avoid painful feelings and thoughts.	Expressed as aggression or negative moods and behaviors. This can be directed towards trusted people.	Self-blame for not having expressed more caring or a belief that the loss was their fault. Try to negotiate out of the pain.	Feelings of emptiness, withdrawn from people or activities, a fog of sadness, difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly.	Learning to live with a new norm, readjust and reorganize the role of the person or connection. Listen to needs and no longer deny feelings.

Kübler-Ross Elisabeth, & Kessler, D. (2014). *On grief & grieving: finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. New York: Scribner.

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HELPING OTHERS WORK THROUGH GRIEF AND LOSS

AGES 2-4	AGES 4-7	AGES 7-13	AGES 13-18
<p>GRIEF EXPRESSIONS</p> <p>Difficulty mastering new skills Regression to earlier behaviors like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thumb-sucking Bedwetting Sleep problems Irritability Confusion 	<p>GRIEF EXPRESSIONS</p> <p>Nightmares Regression to earlier behaviors Changes in sleeping and eating Violent play Attempting to take on the role of the person who died Difficulty mastering new skills</p>	<p>GRIEF EXPRESSIONS</p> <p>Regression School problems Irritable or withdrawn Acting out; changes in eating and sleeping habits Overwhelming concerns over their own body; thoughts about their own death</p>	<p>GRIEF EXPRESSIONS</p> <p>Extreme sadness, anger, or denial School problems Risk-taking behaviors Preference for talking to peers and others outside of the family Depression, even possible suicidal thoughts Irritable or withdrawn</p>
HOW TO HELP	HOW TO HELP	HOW TO HELP	HOW TO HELP
<p>Provide honest, direct, brief answers to their questions. Provide lots of reassurance and affection. A consistent routine is also helpful. At this age, play is their outlet for grieving.</p>	<p>Encourage expression of the child's feelings through physical outlets as well as symbolic play (drawing and stories). Validate emotions that emerge throughout the grief journey. Talk about the person who died or acknowledge what has happened.</p>	<p>Encourage the expression of feelings, no matter what they are, and validate the emotions. Explain options and allow for choices around funerals and memorial services. Be present, but allow alone time, too. Encourage physical outlets. Don't avoid talking about the loss or answering questions; acknowledge what has happened.</p>	<p>Encourage them to talk to friends, teachers or therapist. Do not attempt to "make it all better" or dismiss their grief. Allow them to mourn. Be available but respect their need to grieve in their own way. Model and teach students about grief. Be prepared with what to say and do.</p>

Child Mind Institute and National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

GRIEF AND LOSS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PANDEMIC

During this crisis, children may be grieving losses through death, but social distancing may also be causing feelings of grief and loss. Through changes in routine, social connectedness, and physical mobility, we are experiencing losses. (Ishoy, 2020).⁴ Changes in athletic seasons and extracurricular activities, the unconventional ending of the academic year, and having the freedom to have meet-ups with friends and family can all be perceived as losses and warrant a grief response.

It is important to grieve these losses, but also find hope and resilience in the new normals.

- New methods of connecting with others
- Time for self-care

Many children, families, and school staff are also feeling anticipatory grief – the discomfort felt when the future is unknown. Typically this is associated with a terminal illness or

anticipated death. However, it can be applied more broadly. When things are out of our control, our sense of safety is compromised. (Bernato, 2020).

Being mindful of these types of grief and loss will help educators build connections and support for their students during these unprecedented times.

COVID-19 Resources

¹The Center for Complicated Grief at Columbia University, [Managing Bereavement around the Coronavirus.](#)

²American Psychological Association, [Grief & COVID-19: Mourning our Bygone](#)

⁴Purdue University - Counseling and Psychological Services, [Mourning the Changes Since COVID](#)