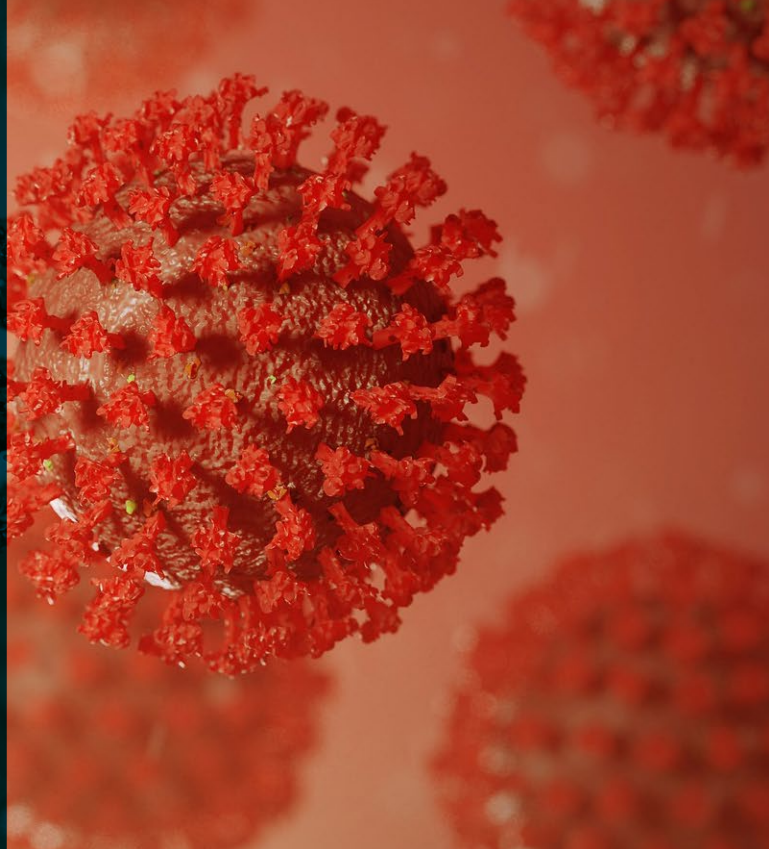


Supporting Grieving Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Grieving children are part of your school community. This was true even before the COVID-19 pandemic. By age 16, five percent of students will experience the death of a parent. By the time they finish high school, 90 percent will experience the death of a family member or close friend. Communities deeply affected by COVID-19 are working with students who have recently lost family members to the pandemic.

Grieving students often experience difficulties in learning. Their emotional and social life may be challenging. Educators and schools can provide powerful support to these students—support that is distinct from what is available within their families. Schools can also take steps to educate all students about death and grief so they better understand how to support their classmates at times of loss. Not unlike adults, peers want to provide support and assistance, but often feel unprepared and unsure. They may withdraw from peers because of this discomfort or inadvertently ask intrusive or repetitive questions. Many children report that they experienced direct, raw taunting from peers after the death of a parent.

Educators agree with these conclusions. In several surveys of educators, over 90% identified grief as a serious problem that deserved more attention from schools. Yet less than 10% of educators report that they had received any training on bereavement.

Here are 5 steps educators and school administrators can take to create a supportive, grief-sensitive environment for students.

1. INCREASE YOUR OWN AWARENESS OF ISSUES RELATED TO GRIEF AT SCHOOLS.

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students (www.grievingstudents.org) offers a range of free, brief video-modules, handouts, and other learning materials that can effectively build your understanding. Professional organizations representing educators (AFT and NEA) and school administrators (AASA, AFSA, NAESP, and NASSP) were among the founding members of the Coalition and helped develop and endorsed the materials. The Coalition currently has more than 100 professional organizational members.

2. SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND ONGOING TRAINING FOR ALL SCHOOL PERSONNEL. EMPHASIZE THAT THESE ARE VALUED, ESSENTIAL SKILLS.

Resources at the [Coalition website](#) are also ideal for group-based training. The website offers a fully prepared teacher training module, including video, PowerPoint slides and notes. Pledge to become a [grief-sensitive school](#).

3. SUPPORT A REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO ENSURE THAT SCHOOLS ARE FOLLOWING BEST PRACTICES FOR BEING GRIEF-SENSITIVE.

These might include policies related to attendance and academic accommodations during acute grief, commemoration and memorialization on campus, and addressing student death at graduation and other end of year activities.

4. TALK WITH STUDENTS ABOUT GRIEF AND LOSS, AS WELL AS OTHER SENSITIVE TOPICS, IN AN ONGOING WAY.

Grieving students may not realize they can speak with teachers or administrators about these matters. They may not think of educators as part of their support network. They may worry that the conversation will be burdensome. If students already know you are comfortable discussing challenging issues, they will be more likely to reach out to you. Help them with temporary academic accommodations and how to anticipate and address grief triggers in the classroom.

5. MAKE A PLAN FOR SELF-CARE.

Educators choose their profession because they care about children and want to help students learn. Offering support to grieving children can be especially gratifying. It also means bearing witness to students' pain. Identify friends, family and colleagues you can talk to about your own feelings as you do this work.

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Grief that students experience today is layered over our national experience of anxiety and grief related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators, students and families all struggle with the burdens of this event. A student's loss may be directly related to COVID-19 or result from some other cause. In either case, the baseline stress created by the pandemic may well complicate both a student's reactions and others' responses.

Now more than ever, educators play a unique and powerful role in having a meaningful and lasting impact on grieving children as they cope with one of life's most difficult challenges.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO TALK TO
AND SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC,
VISIT THE [COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE RESOURCES](#)
[WEBPAGE](#) OF THE [NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOOL](#)
[CRISIS AND BEREAVEMENT.](#)

FOR INFORMATION AND FREE RESOURCES ON HOW TO
SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS, VISIT THE [COALITION TO](#)
[SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS.](#)