



Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS
AND ADMINISTRATORS

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Created by the Family Guidance and Bereavement Program,
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Introduction

This handbook for teachers was written from our work with grieving children. We listened to their stories about navigating educational and social complexities at school and heard how important their teachers were to them. We noticed opportunities for teachers to positively influence children's grief experiences at school, and after we conducted a survey with Bay Area teachers it became clear to us that teachers also crave more knowledge and skills to be genuinely helpful to their grieving students. So, to meet these needs, this manual was created.

Grief is truly an individual experience. Every person has a unique subset of physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual reactions to loss, and these reactions vary in intensity and quality throughout time for the rest of his or her life. People of all ages, even babies, grieve in their own way, and it's important for the adults in children's lives to be sensitive to their unique grief and supportive as they journey forth.

Children's grief in general differs from adult grief in a few ways. Children's understanding of death, their ability to talk about it, and the manifestations of their grief can all look different at different developmental levels. Young children often cannot express their mixed-up feelings of grief well verbally, so it comes out in their behaviors, play, and/or artistic expression. In addition, young children generally cannot sustain a near constant level of intense feelings such as despair and longing the way grieving adults do. Young children need breaks from grief to play, laugh, and hope for the future; they dip in and out of their grief. Teens are more verbal and tend to process loss similarly to adults, but they also need breaks to just be a kid at times.

In our experience, what grieving children need most is the presence of understanding adults, the experience of being loved and cared for, opportunities to exert some control in their lives, and time to express their feelings (verbally, physically, behaviorally, artistically, etc.). If you can provide any of these, you will help your student in his or her healing. We hope this manual will be a guide.

Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

MODULE 1 | Understanding Grieving Children

- Typical grief responses
- When to refer for professional mental health care

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Grieving is very hard work for students. It influences all areas of the student's life—academic, social, physical, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral. Students cannot control where or when they will be affected by their grief. Although some students will be able to talk about their feelings, many others may express their grief primarily through their behavior and play. You may see a student who becomes more aggressive on the playground or who shows no fear, or another who becomes withdrawn and quiet. Still others may show grief with physical symptoms such as stomachaches or headaches. Because each student grieves differently, we cannot predict how an individual student will grieve.

It is important to remember that many grieving students will focus on their grief first and schoolwork second. They cannot change this response, even if they would like to. Consequently, teachers who allow their students time and support for healing provide a real gift to them. Those who imply that the child has been grieving long enough can create additional problems, since the child not only feels unheard but has additional, unneeded stress about her school performance.

Because each student will express grief uniquely, some students will exhibit several of the behaviors listed below and others may show none.

Common Responses of the Grieving Child or Teen

Academic

- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Failing or declining grades
- Incomplete work or poor quality of work
- Increased absences or reluctance to go to school
- Forgetfulness, memory loss
- Overachievement, trying to be perfect
- Language errors and word-finding problems
- Inattentiveness
- Daydreaming

Behavioral

- Noisy outbursts, disruptive behaviors
- Aggressive behaviors, frequent fighting
- Noncompliance with requests
- Increase in risk-taking or unsafe behaviors
- Hyperactive-like behavior
- Isolation or withdrawal
- Regressive behaviors that hark back to a time when life felt safer and under control
- High need for attention
- Hypervigilance about the surviving parent

Emotional

- Insecurity, fear of abandonment, safety concerns
- Concern about being treated differently from others
- Fear, guilt, anger, rage, regret, sadness, confusion
- “I don’t care” attitude
- Depression, hopelessness, intense sadness
- Overly sensitive, frequently tearful, irritable
- Appears unaffected by the death
- Preoccupation with death, wanting details
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

Social

- Withdrawal from friends
- Withdrawal from activities or sports
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Changes in relationships with teachers and peers
- Changes in family roles (e.g. taking on the role of a deceased parent)
- Wanting to be physically close to safe adults
- Sexual acting out
- Stealing, shoplifting
- Difficulty being in a group or crowd

Physical

- Stomachaches, headaches, heartaches
- Frequent accidents or injuries
- Increased requests to visit the nurse
- Nightmares, dreams or other sleep difficulties
- Loss of appetite or increased eating
- Low energy, weakness
- Hives, rashes, itching
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Increased illnesses, low resistance to colds or flu
- Rapid heartbeat

Spiritual

- Anger at God
- Questions of “Why me?” and “Why now?”
- Questions about the meaning of life
- Confusion about where the person is who died
- Feelings of being alone in the universe
- Doubting or questioning previous beliefs
- Sense of meaninglessness about the future
- Change in values, questioning what is important

How to Tell When Students Need Additional Help

Most children and teens are in and out of their grief. They experience sadness, anger, and fear, but also are able to have fun and engage in activities. This is a normal grief response. Prolonged or chronic depression, anger, withdrawal, or fear over a period of several months may indicate that the student needs professional help in dealing with the loss.

If a child or teen displays severe reactions or you notice disturbing changes in behavior, professional intervention should be sought. Although it is not unusual for children or teens to talk about wanting to join the deceased or to die, any signs

of suicidal talk or other self-destructive behavior or language should be taken seriously. The student should be referred for an evaluation. If a child or teen is experiencing physical pain or problems and doctors have not found an organic reason for the pain, professional counseling or therapy may be helpful. Having physical symptoms following a death is not unusual. However, if they become problematic or debilitating, or persist over time, professional help from a qualified mental health professional is in order.

Behaviors that suggest complications in the grieving process and indicate the need for a referral to a mental health professional include:

- Suicidal thoughts or behaviors
- Chronic physical symptoms without organic findings
- Depression with impaired self-esteem
- Persistent denial of the death with delayed or absent grieving
- Progressive isolation and lack of interest in any activity
- Resistant anger and hostility
- Intense preoccupation with memories of the deceased
- Taking on the symptoms of the deceased
- Prolonged changes in typical behavior
- The use of alcohol and/or other drugs
- Prolonged feelings of guilt or responsibility for the death
- Major and continued changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Risk-taking behaviors that may include identifying with the deceased in unsafe ways

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MODULE 2 | Developmental Issues of Grieving Students

- The Grieving Infant and Toddler
- The Grieving Preschool Child
- The Grieving Elementary School Student
- The Grieving Middle School Student
- The Grieving High School Student

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The developmental level of the student, rather than the chronological age, will determine how a child grieves. If the student's behavior does not match his or her appropriate age or developmental level, it does not mean

that the student has a problem or is doing something wrong. It is important to remember that each student grieves in his or her own way and on his or her own timeline.

The Grieving Infant and Toddler

Infants and toddlers who are grieving have an intuitive sense that something very serious has happened, even if they don't fully understand what it is. They are able to read the expressions and sense the emotions in their environment. Their reactions are sensory and physical. Any child old enough to smile or express emotional reaction is old enough to grieve. Infants and toddlers don't have sophisticated verbal skills, but they will still express their grief through their behaviors and play.

Common behaviors to expect

- General anxiety
- Crying
- Sleeplessness
- Excessive sleeping
- Stomach problems
- Clinginess, needing to be held
- Separation anxiety
- Biting
- Throwing things
- Regression through baby talk, bed-wetting
- Irritability
- Temper tantrums
- Clumsiness

How to help

- Lots of holding, additional nurturing, and physical contact.
- A consistent routine, including regular meal- and bedtimes.
- Rules and limits that are concrete and specific.
- Short, truthful statements about what has happened.
- Making time for play, both physical and imaginative.

The Grieving Preschool Child

Preschool children are naturally egocentric. They believe that the world revolves around them and that they cause things to happen. Without a developed cognitive understanding of death, they often experience death as abandonment. Their “magical thinking” may lead them to believe that they have somehow caused the death or can bring the deceased back. Their grief responses are usually intense but brief and often experienced at specific times, such as missing Daddy at bedtime, when he would tuck them in. Because preschool children learn by repetition, they will ask repeatedly about the death. They also learn by play, and their main grief work will be accomplished through playing rather than talking.

Frequently, grieving preschoolers regress to earlier behaviors.

Common behaviors to expect

- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Wanting to be dressed or fed
- Thumb-sucking
- Baby talk
- Wanting a bottle
- Bed-wetting
- General irritability
- Concerns about safety and abandonment
- General confusion

How To Help

- Give simple, honest answers.
- Be prepared to answer the same questions over and over.
- Include the child in the rituals around the death.
- Support the child in his or her play.
- Allow for anger and physical expression.
- Maintain consistent structure and routines.
- Allow the child to act younger for a while.
- Hold and nurture the child, giving lots of physical attention.
- Encourage and allow for fun and happy times.
- Have books and posters on death and grief available.
- Have toys, dress-ups, and other props that facilitate expression during playtime.
- Address grief issues in a group setting without focusing on the grieving child, like reading a story or using a doll or stuffed animal.
- Model by sharing personal anecdotes as appropriate.



The Grieving Elementary School Student

Elementary-school-aged students are concrete thinkers who are beginning to develop logical thinking patterns along with increased language and cognitive ability. After a death, they begin questioning how their lives will be different, what will be the same, and how one knows the person is really dead. They are usually interested in how the body works and ask specific questions like: “Did his blood get all over the windshield?” Or, “Will her hair fall out now that she’s dead?” It is not unusual for their questions and play to be graphic and gory, displaying a fear of bodily harm and mutilation. Although their discussions and play can be unsettling to teachers and parents, it is important to give simple, honest answers to their questions.

The overwhelming concern with the body and what is happening to it may bring about the desire to be with the deceased person. For example, it is not unusual for children to say things like “I wish I was dead so I could be with Daddy.” Statements like

this do not necessarily mean the child is suicidal or really wants to die; rather, they are most often expressions of deep longing for the deceased. However, anytime a child talks about wanting to die, it should be taken seriously and explored. Discerning whether the child is expressing a normal, common desire to be with the lost loved one, or is truly at risk of endangering her own life, may be difficult. If you have any concerns, request professional intervention immediately.

While 6-to-12-year-olds want to see death as reversible, they are also beginning to understand that it is final. Because they are beginning to understand the permanence of the death, they may begin to worry about their own and others’ deaths. They often perceive death as a punishment for something they did, and therefore they associate guilt with death. They may think, “If only I’d been a better daughter or son, maybe my mom would still be alive.” They are beginning to become

more socially aware, and look to others to see if they are acting or responding correctly. While their family is still their main security and support, the death may trigger anxiety about just how safe it is now. Their role in the family has changed, and they need to figure out what their new role is.

Despite the fact that school is such an integral part of the student's life, you may notice that grieving students have difficulty attending, staying focused, remembering what was said, and completing assignments. All of these activities may seem irrelevant to the profoundly grieving child. Reassurance that you understand their changed performance and do not condemn them, coupled with your confidence that this will get easier over time, will do more good than pep talks about working harder. These are normal grief responses and should be expected and planned for.

Many grieving students have difficulty getting to sleep, wake up during the night, have night terrors, or awaken very early. Teachers may notice these students coming to school tired, which also contributes to a diminished school performance.

Common behaviors to expect

- Regression to earlier behaviors
- Fighting, anger
- Difficulty in paying attention and concentrating
- Daydreaming
- Not completing homework or assignments
- Sleepiness
- Withdrawal

How to help

- Answer questions as clearly and accurately as possible.
- Provide art, journal, music, and movement activities.
- Make time for physical outlets: sports, games, walks, etc.
- Help the student identify and use support systems.
- Work with the student around academic assignments.
- Encourage the student to take a break and have some alone time.
- Allow for expression of feelings and emotions.
- Maintain routines and structure but allow for flexibility.
- Give the student choices whenever possible.
- Let the student know you care and are thinking about her.
- Assign the student a buddy who can work with her.
- Create a safe space where a student can go when needed.
- Provide constant and consistent reassurance that you understand and that you know it will eventually get better.

The Grieving Middle School Student

Middle school students are, under the best conditions, experiencing a great deal of turmoil from the physical and hormonal changes in their bodies. Death complicates this situation immeasurably. Grieving preadolescents may therefore experience physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach problems, sleep disturbances, and changes in eating patterns, as well as a wide range of emotional reactions.

The normal preadolescent identification with the peer group rather than the family as the significant unit of support is complicated when a family death occurs. These students want very much to be like their peers and not to be treated differently just because of the death in their family, but they may feel isolated and stigmatized instead. They often become confused about how and from whom they can get support, since they may be reluctant to further upset grieving family members but afraid of looking emotionally vulnerable to their peers, with the result that they are further isolated at a time of maximum need.

Preteen students are able to process more abstract information and comprehend that death is final and unavoidable. This recognition may provoke feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and may increase risk-taking behaviors. These students are apt to exhibit concerns about the survivors and what their future holds, which reflects the insecurity that death has introduced to their world.

Common behaviors to expect

- Argumentative
- Withdrawal, sullenness
- Anger, fighting
- Sleepiness
- Lack of concentration and attentiveness
- Risk-taking behaviors (drugs, sexual acting out, stealing)
- Unpredictable ups and downs, or moodiness
- Erratic, inconsistent reactions

How to help

- Expect and accept mood swings.
- Provide a supportive environment where the student can share, when needed.
- Anticipate increased physical concerns, including illness and body aches and pains.
- Allow the student choices, including with whom and how she gets support.
- Encourage participation in a support group.
- Allow flexibility in completing schoolwork.
- Encourage exercise, whether through organized sports or individual activity.

The Grieving High School Student

High school students are often philosophical about life and death but may simultaneously believe that death won't happen to them. They are beginning to function at the formal operational stage of cognitive development, and may appear to use adult approaches to problem-solving and abstract thinking in dealing with their grief. However, it is important to remember that high school students are not yet adults. In their attempts to make sense of the world and what has happened to them, you may see depression, denial, anger, risk-taking, and acting-out behaviors. You may see teens fighting against their vulnerability because they want very much to be independent. It is not unusual for people to assume that a teen will become responsible for the family. A boy whose father has died may be told that he is now "the man of the family." Or, a girl whose mother has died may find out that she is expected to "take care" of her dad and brothers.

After her brother died, a 15-year-old dropped out of school for three months and never left the house. She spent a lot of time wearing his clothes and sitting in his closet. The parents were terrified, but a wise therapist said, "Be patient with her, she is grieving her way." When she returned to school, she resumed her role as a good student.

Common behaviors to expect

- Withdrawal from parents and other adults
- Angry outbursts
- Increased risk-taking behaviors (substance use, reckless driving, sexual behaviors)
- Pushing the limits of rules
- Lack of concentration; inability to focus
- Hanging out with a small group of friends
- Sad face, evidence of crying
- Sleepiness, exhaustion

How to help

- Allow for regression and dependency.
- Encourage expression of feelings such as sorrow, anger, guilt, regret.
- Understand and allow for variation in maturity level.
- Answer questions honestly and provide factual information.
- Model appropriate responses, showing the students your own grief, but avoid conveying the belief that you fully understand theirs.
- Avoid power struggles and allow choices.
- Help students understand and resolve feelings of helplessness.
- Assist students with plans for completion of assignments.
- Allow for some flexibility in assignments—e.g., be willing to adapt assignments to topics relevant to the student's current experience.

End Dougy Center publication excerpt.

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MODULE 3 | How Teachers Can Help Grieving Students

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Your Important Role In Helping Students Cope With a Death

Perhaps you feel ill-prepared and somewhat overwhelmed by the prospect of helping your students cope with a death. If so, you're not alone. You already have plenty of responsibilities without adding the unique challenges of assisting a grieving student. Most likely in your education as a teacher, you did not receive any training in helping your students cope with death.

If this is true for you, please understand that the most important qualities for assisting a grieving student are ones that you already have: good listening skills and the ability to understand what your students are dealing with.

Groundwork for Dealing With Grieving Students in Your Class

The following steps help ensure that a grieving student is comfortable with your approach to providing support. They also help you prepare your class for making the grieving student feel comfortable and supported.

First, ask the grieving student what he wants the class to know about the death, funeral arrangements, etc.

If possible, call the grieving student's parent(s) prior to his return to school so that you can provide support. Let him know that you are thinking of him and want to help make his return to school as helpful as possible.

Talk to your class about how grief affects people and encourage them to share how they feel.

One way to do this is to discuss what other types of losses or deaths the students in your class have experienced and what helped them cope. It is important to provide a safe environment where students in your class can talk about how they're feeling and have the opportunity to ask questions.

You can encourage constructive outlets for the expression of feelings through art, journal writing, or other activities.

Discuss how difficult it may be for their classmate to return to school and how they may be of help.

You can ask your class for ideas about how they would like others to treat them if they were returning to school after a death, pointing out differences in preference. (Some students would like to be left alone; others want the circumstances discussed freely.) Most grieving students say that they want everyone to treat them the same way that they were treated before. As a rule, they don't like people being "extra-nice." While students usually say they don't want to be in the spotlight, they also don't want people acting like nothing happened.

Provide a way for your class to reach out to the grieving classmate and his or her family.

One of the ways that students can reach out is by sending cards or pictures to the child and family, letting them know the class is thinking of them. If students in your class knew the person who died, they could share memories of that person. Many students learn new things about their family member who died through memories shared by friends and acquaintances. These shared memories are important because they provide a meaningful remembrance of a loved one.

Provide flexibility and support to your grieving student upon his or her return to class.

Recognize that your student will have difficulty concentrating and focusing on schoolwork. Allow the bereaved student to leave the class when she is needing some quiet time. Make sure that the student has a person available to talk with, such as the school counselor.

End Dougy Center publication excerpt.

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MODULE 4 | Optimal Support for Grieving Students at School

- Establish a foundation of understanding about death in general
- How to help your grieving student
- How to help the grieving family

Helping All Students Understand Death

Death is a challenging topic to talk about with kids. It's understandable that teachers might feel intimidated about addressing this topic with students—everyone else is, too. However, it is important to help all students understand death, clarify misconceptions, and think about the implications of death. Establishing a foundation of understanding about death will make it more likely that students will respond more sensitively to a grieving peer and will give them tools to respond to their own challenges in life. In addition, opening communication about death may give permission to a student with a history of loss to approach the teacher about his experience.

Here are a few things teachers can do to help establish a foundation of understanding for all students:

- Coursework that specifically addresses life cycles, death, grief, strong emotions in general (for older children this might take place in a relevant class such as Health, Psychology, etc.). The field of social-emotional learning may be helpful in finding coursework for teaching about emotions. There are many excellent novels that include death that can be safe starting points for discussion.
- Teachable moments at the class level, such as current events involving death or when a class pet dies.
- Teachable moments with individual students. For example, many students are devastated by the death of a family pet. Acknowledging the loss and talking to the student about his feelings are good ways to begin discussing death in general and the feelings associated with grief.

Finally, pave the way for students to approach you to talk about death (or any other sensitive topic)

by letting students know that they can always ask you about anything, even if it seems like something difficult, early on.

Ongoing Support for a Grieving Student

Be present. As stated previously, the most important things you can do to help your grieving student are to be available and to be a good listener. If she is in the mood to tell the story, listen and ask questions to help her richly describe it. Reflect back what she said, and validate any emotions you heard (e.g., “That does sound scary to see your sister having a seizure”), demonstrating empathy. When you have the chance, ask what she needs from you or the class to feel supported, and offer options if necessary. Sometimes children just want to sit in the company of a trusted adult, so be cognizant that silent presence might be what's needed at times, too (e.g., “Would you like to sit here with me and just read together during the break?”).

Be authentic. First and foremost, always tell the truth. With children, avoid euphemisms and use accurate words such as *died*, *killed*, *suicide*, etc. Second, children can tell if someone is being dishonest or manufacturing a response. So, find a way to show your concern that feels genuine for you and would ring true for the child given his personality. Third, listen genuinely, being intellectually and emotionally present (not multitasking). Avoid unhelpful comments (see below.)

Facilitate ongoing communication. We encourage teachers to proactively approach students who they know are grieving, as students may not have the energy or confidence to approach a teacher to talk. Most children will appreciate the opportunity to talk and connect with their teacher. That said, each child's needs for support at school are different, so follow the child's lead. If a parent

has told you that the student does not want to be approached at school, respect that request. If he is amenable to talking, open the conversation one-on-one in a setting that affords some privacy, such as inviting him to visit during lunch.

1. Express your concern and say that you are thinking of the student and family.
2. Invite the conversation by asking a simple, open-ended question like “How are you doing?” or “How are you holding up?”
3. Listen to the student, and watch nonverbal communication too. Allow him an opportunity to talk about thoughts, feelings, and other experiences. Your response should be open and nonjudgmental.
4. If the student is not sure what to say, continue to ask open-ended questions to help him open up, such as “How is your family doing?” “What’s it like coming back to school?” or “What kinds of things are you thinking about these days?”
5. If the student asks questions, answer them in simple, honest, age-appropriate ways. If the student asks a rhetorical question, such as “Why do people have to die?” you can provide a statement that encourages further self-expression, such as “It’s hard to understand why these things happen.” Sometimes “I don’t know” is the best response.
6. Offer reassurance that the student’s feelings of grief are normal.
7. Offer to be available if the student wishes to talk again.

Continue to check in with the student, as the grief experience will change over time. Initiating conversations about death and grieving will help build the student’s confidence and skills in talking with peers and other adults as well.

Balance approaching the child with giving space.

Grieving students often say that they don’t want to be treated differently, but the truth is, they have experienced something that is utterly transformative and they have a different lived experience than children who do not know intense grief. Striking the right balance between approaching the child to talk about how he’s doing versus giving him space to feel “normal” is tough, and it requires patience, trusting your instincts, considering the temperament and personality of the student, and staying aware of what’s happening around the student. You could ask the student ahead of time if it’s OK if you check in with him from time to time and how the student might like you to approach him (give some options). When approaching a student to talk, be mindful of not exposing him in front of peers or taking him away from a fun social experience. With each check-in, you can ask if the conversation felt OK and if your timing was OK.

Stick to routines. Children thrive on routine, and the familiarity of routines is especially important for grieving children. Having the reassurance that they know what will happen next lets them devote more of their energy to their inner grief work. That said, it is important too to know when to be flexible with the routine to accommodate an unexpected grief reaction or a teachable moment about death.

Follow the rules as usual. Grieving children should be expected to follow the rules that they have always known to be set for them. Reinforcing familiar limits provides a sense of emotional security, brings clarity about expected behaviors, and keeps children safe in the context of potentially risky grief reactions.

Enhance social support for the student. Stay attuned to the social atmosphere surrounding the grieving student. When a child is first returning to the class after the death, enlist the help of the class to make the student feels like she has friends who care. Help classmates brainstorm ways to support their peer. For younger classes, this might mean making sure that she's invited to play games, has a buddy in line, sits next to someone at lunch, etc. For older students, this might mean including the student in after-school pick-up games, walking with the student to the next class, helping with homework, sitting with her at lunch, etc. Watch out for teasing (see “[Module 6 | Teasing and Rejection](#)”). Teaching children how to be sensitive to someone who is grieving is a learning experience that will serve them well throughout their life.

Contact the child's grief counselor. If, from your conversation with the family, you know that a child is seeing a grief counselor, consider contacting the counselor to share your observations of the child at school if there is anything you feel is important for the counselor to know. Simply providing information to the grief counselor does not require signed permission. It's important to emphasize that if you are concerned the child is having suicidal thoughts or behaviors, you should inform the school counselor immediately. If suicidal actions seem imminent, remain with the student until the counselor or other support person arrives.

Start a support group. It is very powerful for a child to talk with peers who have gone through the same experience, as it reduces their sense of isolation. Many schools offer a support group for kids who have lost someone they love. If there isn't one at your school, ask if the school social worker/

psychologist would be amenable to facilitating such a group. (They may ask for assistance from staff.)

Provide a safe space for mourning. A safe space is a place where a grieving child can go to calm himself or herself if there is a need to cry, or if the child is feeling upset, needs quiet, or generally seeks comfort or guidance in moving through a triggering situation. Establish in advance with the child a safe place to go during the school day, such

as the school counselor's office, school nurse, vice principal's office, etc. If many students at the school have been affected by a death, perhaps a classroom or office can be open for several days dedicated for students to come to mourn, and overseen by the school

counselor or another capable staff member. For a young child, perhaps a space can be identified in the class such as a reading nook or the chair next to the teacher's desk. Also, let grieving students call a parent when they need the security of talking to their family.

Identify a process that allows children to go to the safe space. During the initial phase of intense grieving, it will be useful for the student to know that she can leave the class at any time if she is feeling overwhelmed. Knowing this will alleviate fears of losing composure in front of peers and can make it easier for students to decide to return to school. So, identify a simple way for the child to communicate to the teacher that she wants to go, without drawing much attention, such as a hand signal, a note, or a phrase such as “I need to go to the office now.” Have a plan for younger children to be attended by an adult as they leave the classroom.

“Since grief affects so many aspects of mental functioning, it is reasonable to expect that most grieving children will have difficulty staying on track academically.”

Adjust academic expectations. Since grief affects so many aspects of mental functioning, it is reasonable to expect that most grieving children will have difficulty staying on track academically. Each child will be different in this regard; some will welcome flexibility in turning in assignments, and some will want to match prior performance and/or do everything the classmates do. It's important for kids to understand that these are common reactions to grief. Teachers, working with the student and the parents/caregivers, can consider the following ideas to help the student stay on track during the early period of grief.

1. Maintain or increase contact with the child's family to normalize grief's impact on academics, address any concerns, identify a safe space, and plan accommodations. Having this kind of conversation provides security to all in knowing that strategies are in place to support the student.
2. If you determine that your student can benefit from temporary academic accommodations, offer the child/family options such as extra tutoring, reduced homework, extra time for tests or open-book testing, extended due dates, simplified projects, postponed tests, etc., for a reasonable amount of time.

Stop harmful reactions. Anger is part of the natural expression of grief, and some children may have angry outbursts as part of their grieving process. Some anger-related behaviors can be cathartic, such as shouting, stomping on a box, kicking a ball, throwing down a book, etc. However, other behaviors can be a safety risk to the child or others, and these behaviors should be stopped. Also, if a child tells you about a high-risk behavior such as cutting, reckless driving, etc., you should intervene immediately to get the child help (i.e., see a mental health clinician).

Talk with other staff. Talk with fellow staff about your interactions and impressions of the grieving student. Different teachers might have different information about how the student is coping or what supports and stressors are in his life. Taken together, these observations may suggest a specific kind of support that can be offered to the student and family.



How Teachers Can Help Grieving Families

First phone call to acknowledge the loss

- Call the family (or send a card if they've indicated no phone calls) to offer condolences and support after you first hear of the death. See the next section for advice about what to say/not to say. Communicate that you are thinking of your student and that she can take the time that's needed out of school. (If appropriate, let the family know what they need to do to officially request time off.) As stated above, ask what the parents and student would like the class to know about the death and funeral plans, and then communicate this to the class.
- Let the family know you are available to talk when they are ready about how to make the school reentry as comfortable as possible for the student.
- This first phone call might be brief, as families are usually overwhelmed with condolence calls in the beginning. Don't take it personally if they seem like they want to get off the phone quickly.

Sending a card

- Consider helping the class make condolence cards for their classmate. This is extremely meaningful to grieving children, and the parents will read these cards and feel immensely supported as well.
- If you have any positive memories of the person who died, especially if that person impressed you in some way or if you had a heartwarming interaction, try to include that memory in your condolence card and conversations.

Ongoing support and communication

- When the student is ready to return to school, have a discussion with her parents about establishing a safe space to go to during the school day, adjusting academic expectations for a time, and reviewing any specific concerns about the child's coping.

- Families often report that they receive a lot of support from their family and community for the first month or two following a death, but support wanes significantly after that. Family and friends seem to return to their normal lives, while the grieving individuals are left to grapple with an enormous hole in their hearts with no guidebook about how to heal. So, continue to check in with the family about how they are doing to the extent you can. Here are a few ideas:
 - Send another card to let them know you are thinking of them on month three or six, during the holidays, or on the birthday of the person who died.
 - Call the family after a few months to see how they are doing, including asking how the grieving child is doing at home.
- If the person who died was a current student at the school, make sure that all students are given the same information, and establish a safe space for them to go during the school day to process this. Consider healthy ways to memorialize the child as a class or school. It's a good idea for schools to have a policy on memorialization, though, so that all student deaths are treated in the same way. Also, keep in mind that physical memorialization such as a tree or art installation is not recommended for deaths due to suicide, so it might be best to avoid physical memorialization for all deaths. Here are a few ideas:
 - Give the family a scrapbook with written memories or pictures of the student after a few months or as a holiday gift. Be sure that students know the timeline to prepare this.
 - Add a memorial section to the yearbook or video.
 - Encourage activities that raise awareness regarding the patient's illness or cause of death that are aimed at prevention, such as clubs on

campus focused on health issues or fundraisers that support prevention efforts.

- Set up a scholarship in the name of the deceased.
- Create or enhance a section in the school library in honor of the deceased (such as more books about animals if the child loved wildlife) or establish a grief section.
- Provide frequent progress reports. Stay in communication with the family about how their child is doing in school. Often parents are so inundated by their own grief and trying to manage the basic needs of their family that they are not thinking about how their child is performing in school. Sometimes kids act out in school but are very well behaved at home because they don't want to upset their parents

more than they already are. This can lead to a parent mistakenly thinking that their child is coping with the loss better than the child really is. Likewise, the opposite situation can happen, where a child is well behaved at school and keeping up academically but falls apart emotionally at home. So, let the parents know how their child is doing, and take note about what the parents experience at home. If you sense that the child is struggling emotionally and your school has counseling available, let the parents know what they need to do to access counseling (if the child is open to it). Staying in touch with parents in this way will reassure them that you are a team and they can count on you to look after their child's well-being at school. Also, teachers are often in a position to provide much-needed positive feedback to parents about their child, a light of hope in a time of despair.



Words and Actions That Offer Comfort and Invite Communication

“Can you tell me more about what this has been like for you?”

What kinds of memories do you have about _____?

What sorts of things have you been thinking about since _____ died?

How is your family doing? What kinds of concerns do you have about them?

I don't know what to say, but I know this must be very difficult for you.

I'm so sorry.

(If crying) It is so natural to cry at this time.

One of my favorite memories of _____ is...

Do you feel like talking for a while?

I'm here for you, whatever you are feeling right now.

- **DO** acknowledge the loss.
- **DO** use the name of the person who died.
- **DO** be aware that children grieve differently from adults and from each other.
- **DO** expect that the student will likely not be able to complete all assignments on time.
- **DO** listen as much as you can; talk less.
- **DO** accept emotional expression.
- **DO** show empathy.
- **DO** intervene to stop harmful behaviors when there is a safety concern.

Words and Actions That Don't Offer Comfort

I know how you feel. (You can't know exactly.)

You must feel [insert emotion].

Time will heal you.

Just be happy that _____ is not in pain anymore.

Be strong. You're holding up well.

Keep busy.

_____ was suffering. Now he/she is in a better place.

Now you have an angel in heaven.

It could be worse, you still have [insert survivors].

You'll be stronger because of this.

I know this must be difficult, but it's important to remember the good things in life as well.

You'll need to be strong now for your family. It's important to get a grip on your feelings.

-
- **DON'T** ever suggest that the student has grieved long enough.
 - **DON'T** try to cheer up the student or family. Powerful, painful feelings will be present for quite a while as a natural part of grief. Allowing feelings to be present is an important part of the healing process.
 - **DON'T** overshare about your own personal experiences with loss. Keep the focus on the student.



Common Difficult-to-Manage Behavioral Grief Reactions

Acting out aggressively. Children, like adults, sometimes bottle up emotions, leading to an explosion at some point, directed at themselves or others. Gently let the student know what behavior is and isn't acceptable in the classroom, especially if the behavior could harm others, but try to allow the student to have the feelings that he has. If there is another way to safely release aggressive energy, such as stomping on a box or pillow, let the child know and help him do it safely. Let parents know if harmful aggressive behavior continues despite efforts to set limits and efforts to support their child in class. Talking to a counselor may be an appropriate way for the student to express emotions and get needed support.

Crying. Crying is a natural, healing part of the grieving process. As mentioned above, sometimes bottling up emotions can lead to a sudden explosion of tears and frustration. Identify ahead of time a place where a grieving child can go to when he is feeling sad or feels like he is going to

cry. This could be a special spot in the classroom or another location at school, such as the office. Some children may need to reconnect with their parent during the school day by phone, and that should be allowed.

Withdrawing. Withdrawing or a lack of engagement with others (peers especially) is common among the bereaved. This is often outwardly seen as isolating oneself (e.g., walking alone, declining social invitations, rarely smiling or laughing, more quiet than before, absent emotionally, etc.). If you notice your bereaved student starting to withdraw from peers, ask the child how he is doing. Find out, if you can, if something is going on socially (i.e., he feels rejected or is being teased or just feels too different). See if you can find ways to help the child reconnect with peers, but don't force it. For younger students, call the parents or caregivers to let them know. Finding a counselor may be appropriate.

Disruptive behaviors. Some children will use disruptive behaviors as a way to get needed attention or to dissipate pent-up energy. Make sure to set limits for safety first and foremost (see the next section on limit pushing); then, in a calmer moment, connect with the child (i.e., talk to the child about how she is doing). This loving attention might help reduce the disruptions during class. Let the student's parents know if the disruptive behavior continues despite efforts to set consistent limits and support the child.

Limit pushing.

Grieving children who push limits might be doing so for needed attention, or it could be a reflection of the softening of rules and limits at home, which commonly happens when a family is in turmoil. As infuriating as it may be, try not to react too negatively. Be consistent with your classroom rules, and be sure to convey your care for the student (and all students) by keeping the classroom safe. Let the parents know if the behavior continues in a way that jeopardizes anyone's safety.

Lack of concentration. It is very common for concentration and memory to be impaired for quite a while when someone is grieving. Find ways to help the student stay on top of her coursework as much as possible, and understand that the lack of concentration is not the child's fault.

Developmental regression. Regressive behaviors are also very common in grieving children as they reach for a time in their life that was simpler, when less was expected of them, and when they received more caregiving. Examples of regressive behaviors might include: young children soiling their pants after they've already been successfully

potty trained, older children whining more than usual, teenagers becoming more demanding that things be done for them, etc. When you notice your grieving student doing something that seems developmentally younger than she is, remember that regression is a common reaction to stress, and be patient. Refrain from judging, and give the child the loving care that is needed in that moment.

Other challenging behaviors you might notice are fixation on rules, being short-tempered, and putting less effort into academics. When grades start dropping, let the family know as soon as possible, and coordinate help for the student.

You may also notice that a grieving student seems totally fine. While it's great that a child is able to be functional

at school, she will still need your availability for support. Don't avoid checking in with the student because she seems to be coping well.

Overall, having a bereaved student in your class requires sensitivity, empathy, and flexibility.

Key Points to Remember

- The best things you can do for a child who has recently lost someone special are to let the student know you care and be available to listen if the child wishes to talk. Do not pretend that nothing has happened.
- There is no right way that a child should grieve or react to losing someone that he loves.
- There is no set timeline for grief. Major losses stay with a person emotionally for the rest of their life. That said, after the initial phase of intense grief, most children can return to usual functioning at school and at home. The time it takes for this to happen is very individual, and

it can be influenced by the functioning of the child's parents, by how secure and loved he feels, by his own coping skills, and by the nature of the death.

- Children will reprocess their loss, and perhaps reexperience intense grief, as they reach new developmental milestones. With each leap in cognitive and abstract thinking, they will gain a new understanding of the death and the significance of the loss in their lives. Knowing this, be prepared for the possibility of a student who lost a family member years ago to suddenly show signs of having a hard time again while in your class.
- Follow the child's lead. It is OK if a child does not want to talk about feelings, his loved one who died, or how he is doing. Don't force it. It's important that each child's unique grief experience is respected. Find out what the child does want to talk about.
- Each grieving person, children included, is in a process of making meaning from their loss in the context of their life story, their family history, and the greater cultural milieu in which they live. Children will take time to arrive at this meaning making. Be especially open to listening when they are sharing this with you.
- Young children tend to go in and out of their grief. They may feel sad for a short time and then resume playing. This is normal and does not mean that they are disinterested in what is happening or are unaffected by the loss. They are not capable of withstanding strong feelings as long as adults can. Returning to something normal like play helps them feel secure in the midst of so much change around them.
- Older students should be involved in deciding when to return to school, deciding how to inform peers, and setting up a plan for emotional support during the day (e.g., a safe space to go when feeling overwhelmed).
- At the start of the year, think about how you can find out whether any of your students have lost a parent, a sibling, or another beloved person. Knowing this will be helpful in being sensitive to any teaching material that may be triggering to the grieving student. Also, it may help in understanding why any problematic behaviors are present.
- Overall, having a bereaved student in your class requires sensitivity, empathy, and flexibility. Offer ways to help the student achieve academic goals. Watch for signs of emotional or social struggle. Check in with the student and be a good listener.
- Take care of yourself too. Dealing with the intense sadness of a bereaved child may trigger feelings for you about your own losses or fear of loss in the future. Make sure you can discuss these with a family member, friend, or fellow teacher so that you feel cared for and that your feelings are safely contained when you are listening to a student.

Frequently Asked Questions

Should I visit the home of a bereaved child?

This is a personal decision. It can feel incredibly supportive to a child and family to have a cherished teacher come visit during a difficult time, but it can also blur the boundaries between the professional and the personal. It is important to consider your own capacity for such an intense situation. If you decide to do a home visit, plan time beforehand to prepare yourself by talking with a school counselor or grief counselor, reading a book about supporting grieving people, and centering yourself.

Don't rush to a home visit right after a busy school day. Then, plan time afterward to process the experience and tend to your own heart. Also, be aware that what you do for one child is something you should be prepared to do for any child in the same situation (if logistically possible). It is OK to decide not to do a home visit and instead to provide support in the form of sending a card, talking on the phone, checking in with the student, and creating a safe and supportive classroom atmosphere. Be honest with your own wants and needs.



What do I say when talking to a bereaved child about how he or she feels or about what happened?

There are no “right” words to say; rather, your supportive listening presence is the most valuable way to communicate. The most important thing is to show an interest in the child’s lived experience and listen to what she has to say. If the child doesn’t want to talk, that’s OK; take your cues from the child. Do not avoid the subject. If you feel unsure of what to say or how to open a conversation, ask the school counselor or a trusted colleague for advice and/or to do a role-play with you to practice.

What if the child enacts some of what happened during free play?

This is developmentally appropriate for younger children. If the other children go with it, it’s fine. If it upsets the other children (such as enacting something scary or threatening), intervene gently and redirect the play. Stay close to all the kids for reassurance. Let the bereaved child’s parents know, since it may be helpful to connect him with a counselor.

What Administrators Can Do to Help Grieving Students and Families

Administrators can do the following:

1. Reach out to the family to offer condolences.
2. Expedite any paperwork required for the child’s absence.
3. When the child is getting ready to return to school, help the teacher and family identify a safe space for the child to go during the day if he is feeling overwhelmed or needs time to be with a trusted adult.

4. Allow the child to call his parent if he needs reassurance during the day.
5. Make sure that the following year’s teacher knows about the loss.
6. If the person who died was a student at the school, organize a group to coordinate doing something in memory of the student at the school (though probably best to avoid physical monuments and memorials because this is not recommended for deaths due to suicide). Create a policy on this ahead of time so that all student deaths are treated equally.
7. Provide opportunities for teachers to learn about children’s grief.
8. Invite school psychologists and other mental health clinicians to hold special groups or individual sessions if the entire school is impacted by a death.

Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

MODULE 5 | Grief Triggers

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Be Aware of and Sensitive To “Trigger Events”

As the grieving student returns to class, there will be times when something will trigger thoughts or feelings about the deceased person. These triggers may include any or all of the five senses: seeing a person who looks like the deceased, hearing a song or other sound, smelling a favorite cologne, tasting something the person loved, or just remembering something about that person.

When the student remembers something about the deceased, it often elicits a powerful response. Individuals have no control over when they will be triggered or how strong their reaction will be. These moments are often embarrassing for the student. When this occurs, it is helpful to allow the student some private time and to have a compassionate listener available if the student needs one. Allow the student to express her feelings without trying to talk her out of them or “fix things.” Remember that any feeling is OK; they are not right or wrong, good or bad.

Certain school activities and holidays can create strong reactions for a grieving student.

Holidays are often difficult because they bring up memories and renewed sadness that the person is not here. They may also underline the sad reality that the student is different from her friends. Father’s Day, Mother’s Day, and activities such as father-daughter dances, mother-daughter teas, and even parent night can put the student in a difficult position. Difficult questions arise: “How can you make a Mother’s Day card when your mom is dead?” Or, “I don’t have a father to take me to the dance.” On such occasions, the student feels left out, embarrassed, angry, or not sure what to do. If you are sensitive to these potential issues, you can suggest making a Father’s Day memory card for a deceased father, including the special things that she and her father did together; or, for the mother-daughter tea, you could encourage the student to invite an aunt instead.

After a death, many students feel confused or awkward about special days and how to handle them. They question whether they should still celebrate the birthday of the deceased. Birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries are especially hard for grieving students because they do not want to be different or stand out, yet they are faced with just that reality. Using the name of the deceased and sharing memories about the person is helpful to the grieving student. On the anniversary date of the death, children often have strong reactions. It is important to acknowledge the date and let the student know that you are thinking of her during this difficult time

End Dougy Center publication excerpt.



Things a Teacher Can Do to Minimize Triggers

- Expect that certain holidays will be triggers for grieving students: Mother's and Father's Day, the child's birthday, the birthday of the person who died, the anniversary of the person's death or diagnosis, and the fall and winter holidays.
- Since the fall and winter holidays can be an especially difficult time for grieving children and their parents, watch for signs of distress, and check in with the student about how he is doing.
- Make sure that all of the student's teachers know about his loss. When the student is ready to move on to the next grade, make sure that the new teachers are informed as well. Consider placing a note in the student's chart so that all future teachers can be sensitive to the student's grief history.
- Introduce class activities in a way that acknowledges (subtly) the absence of a grieving child's loved one and that offers alternatives. For example, for a class of young children preparing to make a Mother's Day card, you could offer everyone the option of making a card for their mother or any important female adult in their lives. Likewise, you could suggest that if their mother is not living or not living with them, they

can still create a card with her in mind. For older students, think ahead about whether certain class lessons and activities could trigger a grief reaction (e.g., talking about a historical war with a high mortality rate when the student's father died as a result of serving in the military), and keep an eye on the grieving student when presenting the lesson. Check in with the student in a subtle way if you are seeing signs of distress during the lesson, and suggest that he go to a safe place (e.g., the counselor's office or office) if needed. You might consider giving the student a heads-up privately a few days before a potentially triggering lesson so that he will not be caught off-guard. If a schoolwide activity will be announced that could be potentially triggering (e.g., a father-daughter dance), let the child's family know ahead of time so that they can provide the appropriate support at home and think through their response.

- Keep a reminder in your calendar of the birthday and the date of death of the deceased after talking with the student's family. Know that these dates will be especially difficult for the child, including the month approaching these dates. If the death was caused by an illness, for example, often the child will have stressful memories of the final weeks of life involving lots of medical staff and equipment in the home and/or confusing visits to the hospital, haunting images of how their loved one looked, scary memories of their loved one almost dying, etc. A grieving student might experience physical symptoms as well as (or in lieu of) emotional symptoms around an anniversary, as our bodies have a tendency to remember the timing of stressful events.

Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

MODULE 6 | Teasing and Rejection

Unfortunately, bereaved children sometimes experience deep hurt at the hands of other children from teasing or bullying, especially young bereaved children. Though the literature on this topic is sparse, roughly 20 percent of children aged 11 and younger experience being taunted specifically regarding the death of their family member (e.g., “I have a mom and you don’t!”), and 5 percent of children aged 12 and older experience it. There seems to be only a modest difference in teasing based on gender, with girls being teased slightly more often than boys. Teasing also can occur by making fun of the bereaved child’s coping process (e.g., “You’re such a crybaby!”). The effects of teasing are multilevel. Not only is the teasing emotionally painful in terms of the child’s grief process, but it causes social embarrassment and thwarts a bereaved child’s desire to be seen as “normal.”

Another painful type of interaction with peers is rejection. Bereaved children have reported that their peers, sometimes even “friends,” avoided them or kept their distance following a death. Children may avoid a bereaved peer because of their own discomfort with what to say, because they worry they could “catch” losing a family member, or because the bereaved child is now socially viewed as “weird.” Also, a bereaved child’s extreme sadness and vulnerability may feel overwhelming to his peers. Whatever the reason, this social rejection and subsequent sense of isolation adds more stress and loss to an already fragile grieving child.

Among young children, teasing often occurs in public and is audible and visible to others. Though socially devastating for the bereaved child, this visibility offers an opportunity for other students to step in to support him or for school personnel to take steps to address it.

Among older children, teasing and bullying can happen in public, in private, or on social media. It’s harder for parents and teachers to know when it

is happening and to intervene, because it is more difficult to observe. This is another reason to check in with the student frequently about how he is doing, especially if you notice a change in behavior that is worrisome.

Teasing can prompt a grieving child to act out aggressively, as there is usually already a well of anger within that can easily be triggered. For safety reasons, it is important to maintain rules for proper behavior in the classroom for all students. At the same time, allow the grieving child the chance to cool off and process how he was hurt by the peer’s teasing before talking about any rules that were broken.

Things a Teacher Can do to Minimize Teasing and Rejection

- When preparing your class or student body for the child’s reentry to school, include talking about teasing in a larger conversation about ways to support the child. Let students know what they can do if they witness teasing, such as offering sympathetic reassurance to the child, directly intervening, or alerting school staff. Help students brainstorm ways they can remain socially inclusive to the child.
- If you become aware of teasing, take steps to stop it. This could mean privately talking to the teaser and encouraging the child to think about what it might feel like to be in the bereaved child’s shoes. If both children have been engaged in reciprocal teasing, talk to them together to find the root of the problem.
- If a child who you know is bereaved is getting into fights, find out if the cause might be from being teased.
- Observe the social atmosphere surrounding the grieving student. Take special notice of peer-relationship changes, and consider either alerting the child’s parent or counselor or checking in with the student about it. Intervene early if you see teasing.

Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

MODULE 7 | Delayed Grief Reactions and Cumulative Loss

Delayed Grief Reactions

Children by nature are constantly changing—growing physically and maturing intellectually, socially, and emotionally. As kids gain greater understanding of the meaning of death and the circumstances surrounding their loved one’s death, they reprocess their loss again and again as the picture of what happened becomes clearer. With each new level of cognitive ability, children will understand what happened at the time of their loved one’s death with greater nuance. For this reason, it is important to be aware that years after a death, children can have an intense uptick in their grieving. For example, as a teen boy learns about the biology of cancer, he may have a resurgence of memories and sadness about his sister’s death from a brain tumor. Or, a young girl’s sadness about losing her mother can intensify years later when she suddenly understands the impact of not having a mom to turn to during adolescence. Major life milestones, such as starting middle or high school, first dates, first dances, and graduation, can be an especially sensitive time for a bereaved child.



Things a teacher can do to respond to delayed grief

- If you know that any of your students are bereaved, even if the loss happened many years prior, be on the lookout for increased symptoms of grieving (see Modules 1 and 2).
- If you sense that a child is having a tough time, talk to him and the parents about it. It’s important to normalize the student’s experience of having a resurgence of grief, as it could be confusing for the child (and parent).
- Parents can help by taking time to talk with their grieving child about what happened, reminisce together, look at photo albums, visit the gravesite, process feelings, etc.
- Additional outside support, such as a grief counselor, may be helpful at this time.

Cumulative Loss

Some children, unfortunately, experience the death of more than one person they love. Each new loss opens the wound of prior losses, and the grieving is compounded. Children may also experience significant losses of other types, such as parents getting divorced, a parent getting remarried, death of a beloved pet, moving, or homelessness, which can also compound and complicate feelings of grief. Extra care should be given to children who have experienced cumulative loss to watch for signs of distress. Offer timely interventions when needed.

Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

MODULE 8 | Cultural and Religious Considerations

Though death is a part of every culture and religion, the beliefs and traditions that surround death differ among cultural groups and among families within those groups. Rather than trying to familiarize yourself with the specific practices and beliefs of all the different cultural and faith communities around you, remember these two things: (1) become familiar with the practices and beliefs of your own culture and religion and (2) check in with each child and family about what their particular practices and beliefs are, as they may differ from the norms of their culture.

If you are able to support a grieving child who shares the same culture or religion as your own, you will be able to do it for any child regardless of background, since children commonly have the same fears and questions according to their developmental level (e.g., “What will happen to me if my other parent dies?”). Be open to asking students about their families’ beliefs and traditions. Then you will be able to combine the information you receive with your loving presence in a way that resonates with all children.

Schools that have a religious education component should take special care to consider the potential impact of certain religious material on a grieving child, especially young children who entertain more magical thinking. For example, learning about miracles that occurred in times past may encourage a child to pray for a miracle (their dead parent’s return) and to feel rejected by God when this does not happen. Or, if praying is encouraged to effect change (such as praying for other sick

children to be healed), a child may feel guilty that she did not pray hard enough to save her sibling. It is important for parents to be informed about what is being discussed in religion class and to check in with their child about how the teachings are understood and interpreted in the context of the death that has occurred in the family. Many families don’t realize that they need to do this, so our advice to schools with a religious education component is to share the curriculum in advance with parents and encourage them to talk with their children about topics that may be sensitive or confusing.

Día de los Muertos

Día de los Muertos is a holiday that is celebrated widely in Mexico and by Latino cultures in the United States. The Day of the Dead, which falls on November 1 each year, is a day to remember one’s ancestors. It is common to create an altar of favorite objects and foods of the deceased and place photos of them throughout. The popular belief is that the spirits of one’s ancestors are able to visit them on Earth on this day. If you suspect that a grieving student is a part of a cultural group that celebrates Day of the Dead, ask your student if she celebrates the holiday. If so, see if the child wants to talk about it (e.g., Do you know what pictures you want to put on the altar? Will you put any of your mom’s favorite foods on the altar?). If the school has plans to allow students to celebrate Day of the Dead, see if your student plans on participating. If she doesn’t want to participate or talk about it, though, that’s OK.

Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

MODULE 9 | Special Considerations

- Suicide
- Homicide
- Accidental death
- Deaths that affect the school

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Death by Suicide

Death by suicide often evokes issues of abandonment, shame, and social stigma in families. Students impacted by a suicide need to understand that they are not alone; learn how to manage anxiety that may result from the suicide; and have the opportunity to openly talk about why a person dies by suicide.

In the case of a death by suicide, the surviving family members are often confused about why the person died. They may experience guilt over not having prevented the death, or they may be extremely angry at the deceased for having taken his or her own life. Students affected by a suicide may have more chaotic energy or physical complaints, especially stomachaches. They often avoid the area where the death occurred and are fearful of being alone. For some students, there is a sense of relief at the death because of prior tension or anxiety that had surrounded the relationship with the deceased.

Because deaths by suicide are often judged harshly by our society, children and teens impacted by a suicide frequently do not want others to know how the person died. However, in most cases, people find out anyway. You should be alert for signs that the student is being teased or avoided by other students, and make an extra effort to provide support and understanding. Frequently, children and teens who have had a parent or sibling die by suicide and are acting out are experiencing teasing from others.

If a student in your school dies by suicide, it is important to share that information honestly and forthrightly. Many adults are under the mistaken impression that talking about suicide will “put the idea in kids’ minds” or increase the likelihood of an attempt. Speaking honestly about this act, its consequences and impact on others, may actually

draw out students who are feeling suicidal and enable them to receive help. While many parents are uncomfortable with their children being exposed to the topic of suicide, it is important for children to hear the truth from trusted adults and educators. When a suicide occurs, students are talking about it among themselves, whether adults know it or not. It’s better to share the factual information and provide help for hurting students rather than try to sweep it under the rug.

Murder or Violent Death

Death from a murder often evokes issues of safety, loss of control, fear, rage, powerlessness, and public humiliation. Children need to be able to share their fears and feelings of wanting revenge. They also need assistance in managing the anxiety that may result and to be given choices for accessing their own sense of control and power.

If children have witnessed a murder, they will have symptoms of trauma. Teachers will need information on these symptoms and will need to know how to respond. Those who are impacted by a death from homicide are often judged negatively by others. In an effort to protect themselves from believing that someone they love could be murdered, people sometimes believe that the family of the murder victim must have, in some way, contributed to the event. They feel safer if they think that “bad things only happen to bad people.” Obviously, this attitude alienates those who are impacted by a homicide.

Other factors that may make coping more difficult after a homicide are the impact of media attention, ongoing legal investigation, and a potential trial. If the murderer is caught, there is someone to be angry at, but families seldom feel that justice has been done, no matter what the verdict is. Even if the accused is found guilty and sentenced to life in prison, that person gets to eat, breathe, and sleep,

while the person close to them who died doesn't. If a suspect is never caught, many children and teens express fear that the person will come and harm them.

Accidental Death

Death from an accident often evokes issues of safety, loss of control, fear, powerlessness, and unpredictability. Accidental deaths may occur in a variety of circumstances, such as car accidents, work-related injuries, or sports-related accidents. Students need to share what they have been told about the accident and what they think actually happened. If the death was caused by a car crash, for example, and the student was involved, she will have symptoms of trauma. Teachers will need information on trauma symptoms and to know how to respond.

Deaths That Traumatize the School Community

When a death affects a large number of the staff and/or students, it becomes difficult for the school to adequately or appropriately deal with the impact. For example, if the principal is killed in an automobile accident, the entire school is impacted. If, on a school outing, several children are injured or die in a school bus accident, the entire school community is affected. If an earthquake causes the gym wall to collapse, killing the basketball coach and several students, everyone is impacted. At these times, it is important for the administration to recognize the impact and bring in outside help to process the death. The help could come from a neighboring school crisis team or the local mental health community.

End Dougy Center publication excerpt.





Supporting Grieving Students

A HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

MODULE 10 | A Teacher's Grief

By the time we are adults working professionally, it's likely that we have already experienced the death of at least one person whom we have loved. Even if loss of this kind has not happened yet, everyone experiences worry at times about their own and their loved ones' mortality, since we are socially hardwired to be emotionally attached to our loved ones. So, when a teacher has a grieving student in the classroom, he may understandably experience a resurgence of personal grief from prior losses or heightened fear about possible death in the future. A teacher may also simply feel heartbroken for the bereaved child and experience an upwelling of sadness or anger about the situation. This is all normal and to be expected. Our advice to teachers is to notice their thoughts and feelings, reflect on them rather than push them away, and honestly assess whether they have the potential to affect how a teacher interacts with a grieving child. Seek support and nurturing experiences as needed.

If a teacher has experienced a previous loss, it is especially important to be self-reflective and aware of potential triggers in the classroom. Having known grief previously can be useful in one's ability to relate to the experience of a grieving child; but if it interferes with a teacher's ability to lean in and genuinely provide support, professional guidance can be very helpful.

Here are self-reflective questions that teachers can ask themselves if they have a grieving student in their class:

- What are the significant losses in my life? What was my grief experience like? What parts were the most painful? Where am I on my healing journey?
- How is my bereaved student's situation similar to or different from my own losses in the past?
- How would my experience of grief help me to be supportive to a grieving student and his or her grieving family members? How might it pose a challenge?
- What makes me afraid or hesitant when I think about how I might support my grieving student?
- What comforts me when I feel down in general? What specifically would help me when I feel my own sadness or discomfort in the midst of supporting grieving students?
- How do I wish to be helpful to this particular grieving student?



Resources

Books and Websites for Teachers

1. ***The Grieving Student: A Teacher's Guide***, by David J. Schonfeld and Marcia Quackenbush. This book was written by a physician and a marriage and family therapist. It is a beautifully written, in-depth guide for teachers about how to be an emotional support to grieving students.
2. ***Children, Teens and Suicide Loss***, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Dougy Center, <https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/flipbooks/childrenteenssuicideloss/index.html?page=1>
3. **Coalition to Support Grieving Students**, <https://grievingstudents.org/>
4. ***K-12 Toolkit for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention***, Heard Alliance, <https://www.heardalliance.org/help-toolkit/#web>
5. ***Addressing Grief: Tips for Teachers and Administrators***, National Association of School Psychologists, <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/addressing-grief/addressing-grief-tips-for-teachers-and-administrators>
6. **“Supporting the Grieving Student,”** American Federation of Teachers, <https://www.aft.org/childrens-health/mental-health/supporting-grieving-student>
7. **“Talking With Teens and Kids About Dying and Death,”** KidsGrief.ca, <https://kidsgrief.ca/>
8. **The Dougy Center**, National Center for Grieving Children & Families, <https://www.dougy.org/>
9. **The National Alliance for Grieving Children**, <https://childrengrieve.org/>
10. **Child Bereavement UK**, <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>



Death and Dying Booklist for Children

Picture Books

Abuelita's Paradise, by Carmen Santiago Nodar
Although her grandmother has died, Marita sits in Abuelita's rocking chair and remembers the stories Abuelita told of life in Puerto Rico.

Alfie and the Birthday Surprise, by Shirley Hughes
The death of Bob's cat prompts his friends and family to give him a surprise birthday party and a very special present.

And What Comes After a Thousand? by Anette Bley
Lisa and the elderly Otto spend their days rambling around his farm. Otto always seems to have an "emergency" cookie in his pocket, knows how to make a slingshot, and loves to count the stars. When Otto dies, Olga tries to comfort Lisa by telling her that "Otto is like numbers. He's inside of us, and that will never end."

Annie and the Old One, by Miska Miles
A Navajo girl unravels a day's weaving on a rug whose completion, she believes, will mean the death of her grandmother.

Badger's Parting Gifts, by Susan Varley
Badger's friends are overwhelmed when he dies, but as time goes on, they begin to treasure their warm and loving memories of when he was living with them.

Charlotte's Web, by E.B. White
Classic story about the friendship of Wilbur the pig and Charlotte the spider. Charlotte teaches Wilbur much, including that all life must end.

Daddy and Me: A Photo Story of Arthur Ashe and His Daughter Camera,
by Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe
Text and photographs provide insight into the relationship of tennis great Arthur Ashe and his 6-year-old daughter, Camera, showing how young children and their families deal with AIDS.

Eleanor, Arthur, and Claire, by Diana Engel
Claire, a young mouse, loves spending her summers with her grandparents, and although she finds things changed after her grandfather's death, she and her grandmother find the strength to go on without him.

Everett Anderson's Goodbye, by Lucille Clifton
Everett Anderson has a difficult time coming to terms with his grief after his father dies.

Fireflies, Peach Pies & Lullabies, by Virginia Kroll
When Francie's Great-Granny Annabel dies of Alzheimer's disease, Francie finds a way to help people remember the real person rather than the shell she had become as the disease ran its course.

The Foundling, by Carol Carrick
Memories of his dog, killed in an accident, cause Christopher to resist his parents' efforts to adopt a puppy.

Ghost Wings, by Barbara Jooose
While celebrating the Day of the Dead, a young Mexican girl remembers her wonderful grandmother who sang songs, made tortillas, chased monsters away, and loved butterflies.

Goodbye Max, by Holly Keller
Ben blames his parents for the death of his dog, Max, and does not want the new puppy they brought home.

Granpa, by John Burningham
A little girl and her grandfather share very special moments.

Helen the Fish, by Virginia L. Kroll
When 6-year-old Hannah's beloved goldfish dies after a relatively long life, she seeks comfort from her older brother Seth.

I'll Always Love You, by Hans Wilhelm

Elfie, a dachshund, and her special boy progress happily through life together. One morning, Elfie does not wake up. The family grieves and buries her.

Jasper's Day, by Marjorie Blain Parker

Jasper, an old dog with cancer, and his family celebrate his last day doing all of Jasper's favorite things. The book is sensitive to the family's decision to euthanize Jasper at the end of his special day and shows a family that loves and supports each other.

Jim's Dog Muffins, by Miriam Cohen

When Jim's dog is killed, the other first graders experience with him his natural reactions to death.

Kinda Blue, by Ann Grifalconi

Sissy feels lonely and blue until her Uncle Dan cheers her up by explaining that everything, even corn, needs special attention every now and then.

Mrs. Huggins and Her Hen Hannah,

by Lydia Dabovich

Mrs. Huggins' contented relationship with her hen Hannah comes to an unfortunate end but is reborn in an unexpected way.

My Grandfather's Hat, by Melanie Scheller

A boy recalls his special relationship with his grandfather by playing with his grandfather's old hat.

Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs,

by Tomie sePaola

Every Sunday, 4-year-old Tommy's family goes to visit his grandparents. His grandmother is always busy downstairs, but his great-grandmother is always to be found in bed upstairs. Tommy is desolate when his upstairs nana dies, but his mother comforts him by explaining that "she will come back in your memory whenever you think about her."

The Next Place, by Warren Hanson

An inspirational journey of light and hope to a place where earthly hurts are left behind. An uncomplicated journey of awe and wonder to a destination without barriers.

On Call Back Mountain, by Eve Bunting

Ben and Joe are thrilled when Bosco, the fire watchman, comes back for the summer. They enjoy reading with Bosco and listening to his music. When Bosco heads to the tower, Ben and Joe say good-bye to him every night with their lantern. After Bosco dies, the two brothers encounter a lone wolf on the spot where they had signaled their friend up on the mountain tower.

Saying Goodbye to Daddy, by Judith Vigna

Emotions of confusion, resentment, grief, and fear are highlighted after Clare's father is killed suddenly in a car accident. Clare's mother and grandfather, themselves grief-stricken, help her through the funeral and her sorrow.

Sophie, by Mem Fox

This is a book about aging. As Sophie grows bigger and her grandfather gets smaller, they continue to love each other very much.

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney,

by Judith Viorst

In an attempt to overcome his grief, a boy tries to think of the 10 best things about his dead cat.

Too Far Away to Touch, by Leslea Newman

Zoe has an especially close relationship with her uncle, Leonard, who is now sick. Following a visit to the planetarium, he explains to her that when he dies, he will be like the stars: too far away to touch.

Up in Heaven, by Emma Chichester Clark

Arthur's dog Daisy dies and goes to dog heaven. Arthur learns to deal with his loss.

What's Heaven? by Maria Shriver

This is the story of Kate, a little girl whose great-grandma has just died. She seeks answers, and her

mother helps her learn about Heaven. The childlike and thought-provoking questions in this book are real, coming from Maria Shriver's own children, nieces, and nephews when her grandmother Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy passed away.

You Hold Me and I'll Hold You, by Jo Carson
When a great-aunt dies, a young child finds comfort in being held and in holding her father. Words and pictures express both worry and comfort with heartfelt simplicity. This book will help explain funerals for younger children.

Fiction

The Black Dog Who Went Into the Woods, by Edith Thacher Hurd
The various members of a family react to the death of their dog.

Blue Eyes Better, by Ruth Wallace-Brodeur
When her older brother is killed in an accident, 10-year-old Tessa and her parents find it difficult to overcome their grief and return to living normally.

Cat Heaven, by Cynthia Rylant
God created Cat Heaven, with fields of sweet grass where cats can play, and there are kitty toys for them to enjoy and angels to rub their noses and ears.

Cousins, by Virginia Hamilton
Concerned that her grandmother may die, Cammy is unprepared for the accidental death of another relative.

Daddy's Chair, by Sandy Lanton
When Michael's father dies, his family sits shiva, observing the Jewish week of mourning and remembering the good things about him.

The Day Chubby Became Charles, by Achim Broger
Afraid that her grandmother might be dying, Julia discovers a new friend with whom she can talk about her fears.

Dear Napoleon, I Know You're Dead, But..., by Elvira Woodruff
Marty receives a surprising reply when he writes a letter describing his spirited but sick grandfather to Napoleon Bonaparte.

Earthshine, by Theresa Nelson
Slim watches over her father, a disarmingly charismatic man, as his struggle with AIDS reaches its climax.

Emma Says Goodbye: A Child's Guide to Bereavement, by Carolyn Nystrom
Coming to terms with the death of someone close is hard. But Emma and her family have time to work through their hurt. This story explains what is happening to Aunt Sue as her illness progresses—and how Emma, her family, and Aunt Sue herself react.

Everett Anderson's Goodbye, by Lucille Clifton
The story of a young boy who is trying to come to grips with his father's death. This book portrays his struggle through many stages, from denial and anger to depression and, finally, acceptance.

Eye of the Wolf, by Daniel Pennac
An Alaskan wolf and an African boy, meeting at a zoo in "The Other World," read in one another's eye the hardships each has faced, and their understanding helps to bring healing to them both.

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf, by Leo Buscaglia
As Freddie experiences the changing seasons along with his companion leaves, he learns that death is a part of life.

Flip-Flop Girl, by Katherine Paterson
After their father dies, 9-year-old Vinnie, her mother, and her younger brother, mute since the funeral, move to a small town where Vinnie meets Lupe, a tall, confident, yet odd girl who also has suffered great tragedy.

Fox Song, by Joseph Bruchac

After the death of her Indian great-grandmother, Jamie remembers the many special things the old woman shared with her about the natural world.

The Friends, by Kazumi Yumoto

Curious about death, three sixth-grade boys decide to spy on an old man, waiting for him to die, but they end up becoming his friends.

Frog and the Birdsong, by Max Velthuis

When Frog finds a blackbird lying still on the ground, his friend Pig thinks the bird is asleep, Goose thinks he is ill, but Hare knows the bird is dead. Together the animals bury the small bird, learning how to grieve but also to keep living.

Goodbye Max, by Holly Keller

Ben's dog, Max, is old and sick. One day Ben goes to school and Max dies. With the help of his friend Ben is able to remember the fun times with Max.

Grandad Bill's Song, by Jane Yolen

After Grandad Bill dies, everyone in the family remembers him differently. But reminiscences do nothing to help a young boy cope with his loss, until he recalls his own feelings on the day his grandfather died—and his memories of a best friend who was much beloved indeed.

Hang Tough, Paul Mather, by Alfred Slote

Twelve-year-old Paul Mather, hospitalized with leukemia, sneaks out to pitch a Little League game, doing very well until he gets into a collision and is returned to the hospital. A sympathetic doctor helps him participate in another game even as his condition worsens.

The Happy Funeral, by Eve Bunting

Laura is a young Chinese-American girl who attends the "happy funeral" of her grandfather. Laura remembers the happy times she shared with her grandfather. Laura realizes that the funeral is happy for her grandfather, as he had lived a good life and was happy to go.

How Do I Feel About When People Die?

by Sarah LeVete

This book encourages children to explore their feelings about the personal issues that may affect them. This book joins a group of friends as they talk about how they cope with the death of loved ones of all ages.

How to Live Forever, by Colin Thompson

Every night for two years Peter searches in the library for the lost book on how to live forever, and when he finds it, he makes an important decision.

I Had a Friend Named Peter, by Janice Cohn

When Betsy learns about the death of a friend, her parents and kindergarten teacher answer questions about dying, funerals, and the burial process.

Lifetimes, by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen

A pet, a friend, or a relative dies, and it must be explained to a child. This sensitive book is a useful tool in explaining to children that death is a part of life and that, eventually, all living things reach the end of their own special lifetimes.

Loving Ben, by Elizabeth Laird

Anna's teen years bring maturity and fulfillment as she experiences the birth and death of a loved and loving hydrocephalic brother, changing ideas about character in both boyfriends and girlfriends, and working with a child with Down syndrome.

Molly's Rosebush, by Janice Cohn

When Molly's mother miscarries, Grandma compares a miscarriage to events in nature; not every robin's egg hatches and not every rosebud blooms. Through open communication, Molly and her parents work through their grief and look forward to the beautiful blossoms their newly planted rosebush will yield.

Mustard, by Charlotte Towner Graeber

Eight-year-old Alex and his family try to come to terms with the old age and death of their beloved cat.

Pearl's Marigolds for Grandpa,

by Jane Breskin Zalben

When Pearl's grandpa dies, she wonders how she'll get along without him. Who will send her marigold seeds in the spring? During this difficult time, Pearl struggles to get through her daily routine and tries to remember her grandfather. Finally, Pearl discovers that she's able to keep him alive in the simplest of ways—by bringing life to marigolds planted in his memory.

The Saddest Time, by Norma Simon

Three short stories on the deaths of an uncle, a school friend, and a grandmother. Although these stories mention events leading to each death and some shared moments with this person, children do not learn how to talk to someone who is dying, why the death is so strongly felt, or what the long-term coping process is really like for family and friends.

Some of the Pieces, by Melissa Madenski

A year after the death of the father, two children and their mother try to come to terms with their loss.

Stacy Had a Little Sister, by Wendie C. Old
Stacy has mixed feelings about her new sister, Ashley, but when the baby dies of sudden infant death syndrome, Stacy is sad and misses her.

Sun and Spoon, by Kevin Henkes

After the death of his grandmother, 10-year-old Spoon observes the changes in his grandfather and tries to find the perfect artifact to preserve his memories of her.

Unbroken, by Jessie Haas

Following her mother's death in the early 1900s, 13-year-old Harry lives on Aunt Sarah's farm, where an accident with her spirited colt leaves her a changed young woman.

Walk Two Moons, by Sharon Creech

After her mother leaves home suddenly, 13-year-old Sal and her grandparents take a car trip

retracing her mother's route. Along the way, Sal recounts the story of her friend Phoebe, whose mother also left.

Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children, by Doris Stickney

After a water bug suddenly leaves her pond and is transformed into a dragonfly, her friends' questions about such departures are like those that children ask when someone dies.

When Someone Dies, by Sharon Greenlee

This book explores all the feelings one goes through when someone dies, from anger to sadness, and with simple analogies tries to relate them as a natural part of life. The illustrations depict scenes in nature, which give us joy, seem somewhat dated, but are meant to validate life and death as a natural cycle.

Nonfiction

DeShawn Days, by Tony Medina

This is a story crafted by loving memory in heartfelt poetry, as soft as a lullaby and as tough as Boyz n the Hood. Ten-year-old DeShawn deals with the death of his grandmother in an inner-city neighborhood that buzzes with life.

The Final Mystery, by Stanley Klein

Explores the meaning of death; how people of different times, regions, and religions have coped with it; and the progress and effects of the war waged against it by researchers, physicians, and surgeons.

The Five People You Meet in Heaven,
by Mitch Albom

One by one, from childhood to soldier to old age, Eddie's five people revisit their connections to him on Earth, illuminating the mysteries of his meaningless life and revealing the haunting secret behind the eternal question: Why was I here?

The Foundling, by Carol Carrick

Memories of his dog, killed in an accident, cause a young boy to resist his parents' efforts to adopt a puppy. Parents try to rush their son through grief but come to realize that the child's feelings are deep and long-lasting.

Good Answers to Tough Questions About Death,

by Joy Wilt Berry

A broad-ranging book written to help children understand the many issues surrounding death.

Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies,

by Janis Silverman

An art therapy and activity book for children coping with death. Children are encouraged to express in pictures what they are often incapable of expressing in words.

Holding On to Hope, by Nancy Guthrie

Guthrie shuns platitudes and easy answers and deals head-on with issues of suffering and loss encountered when she lost her infant daughter, Hope.

How It Feels When a Parent Dies, by Jill Krentz

Eighteen young people ranging in age from 7 to 16 discuss the questions, fears, and bereavement they experienced when one of their parents died.

I Found a Dead Bird: The Kids' Guide to the Cycle of Life and Death, by Jan Thornhill

The death of a bird is just the start of this book dealing with the life cycle.

The Invisible String, by Patrice Karst

Specifically written to address children's fear of being apart from the ones they love, this book delivers a particularly compelling message in today's uncertain times that although we may be separated from the ones we care about, love is the unending connection that binds us all.

The Kids' Book About Death and Dying,

by Eric Rofes

Fourteen children offer facts and advice to give young readers a better understanding of death.

The Last Lecture, by Randy Pausch

Pausch was given a terminal diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. After receiving this diagnosis, he gave an upbeat lecture titled "The Last Lecture: Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams."

Let's Talk About When a Parent Dies,

by Elizabeth Weitzman

This book emphasizes the importance of love in helping one through traumatic times in life—the initial shock, self-blame, fear of losing other loved ones, sharing feelings, and eventual adjustment. It also provides advice on surviving the death of a parent and suggests what feelings and behavior to expect from others.

Life and Death, by Herbert S. Zim

Discusses the physical facts, customs, and attitudes surrounding human life and death.

Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children, by Bryan Mellonie

A book to help young children understand that death is a part of life.

Living With Death, by Osborn Segerberg

Explores humankind's attitude toward death throughout history, the implications of modern technology on when and how we die, the acceptance of death, the treatment of the dying and the dead, and the ways that the living cope with death.

Locomotion, by Jacqueline Woodson

In a series of poems, 11-year-old Lonnie writes about his life after the death of his parents, separated from his younger sister, living in a foster home, and finding his poetic voice at school.

Mrs. Hunter's Happy Death, by John Fanestil
This is Tuesdays With Morrie with a historical twist. The book focuses on lessons on living from people preparing to die. The chapters of this book progress from relatively simple deaths, such as the loss of a pet or the anticipated death of an aged grandparent, to more complex deaths, such as the loss of a sister and a mother to AIDS or the death of an abusive father.

No New Baby, by Marilyn Gryte
After her unborn sibling dies, a young child tells how she feels about the baby's death. Her grandma explains that she's not to blame, we don't always have answers, and it's OK to ask questions.

Part of Me Died Too, by Virginia Fry
Eleven true stories about young people who experienced the loss of family members or friends. The chapters progress from relatively simple deaths, such as the loss of a pet or the anticipated death of an aged grandparent, to more complex deaths, such as the loss of a sister and a mother to AIDS or the death of an abusive father.

Remembering Mum, by Ginny Perkins
Mandy died from pneumonia at age 27, leaving her two young sons, Sam and Eddy, feeling hurt and confused. This book emphasizes the importance of talking about bereavement and of remembering the people who have passed away. The book reminds the reader of the need to express grief in a society, which all too often sees death as a taboo subject.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes, by Eleanor Coerr
Based on the true story of a young Japanese girl who contracted leukemia as a result of the atom bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, the book follows Sadako as a healthy schoolgirl winning relay races, through her diagnosis with the atom bomb sickness, to her long stay in the hospital. It is in the hospital that she first begins making origami cranes to pass the time. Her ultimate goal is to

make 1,000, but she dies with only 644 completed. Sadako's classmates finish making the remaining cranes, and all 1,000 are buried with her.

Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing With Loss, by Michaelene Mundy
This book helps comfort children facing of worst and hardest kind of reality, telling children what they need to know after a loss—that the world is still safe, life is good, and hurting hearts do mend.

Silvie's Life, by Marianne Rogoff
This book chronicles a tortured parenthood during the birth and brief life of a severely brain-damaged female infant, Silvie.

Tuesdays With Morrie, by Mitch Albom
This is a magical chronicle of a young man and old man's time together, through which Albom shares Morrie's lasting gift with the world: lessons in how to live.

Walking Taylor Home, by Brian Schrauger
This is the heartbreaking story of a father learning to let go of his young son, who was diagnosed with cancer.

When a Pet Dies, by Fred Rogers
The affable star of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood helps children share feelings of loss, frustration, sadness, and loneliness while offering reassurance that grieving is a natural, healing thing to do.

When People Die, by Joanne Bernstein
Explains in simple terms the reasons for death, theories on afterlife, burial practices, grief, and the naturalness of death in the chain of life.

Where's Jess? by Joy Johnson
A small boy's sibling dies, and he notices she is gone. The parents tell him what death is about and how it is all right to remember and talk about Jess.

Bibliotherapy (Young Adult)

About David, by Susan Beth Pfeffer

When her close friend since childhood murders his adoptive parents and kills himself, 17-year-old Lynn is haunted by the tragedy.

The Afterlife, by Gary Soto

Chuy is a 17-year-old boy, born in Mexico and raised in Fresno, California. Although he is tragically murdered in the bathroom of a nightclub, his sudden death brings about many revelations about life, falling in love, and relationships. Average in looks and in life, Chuy narrates his short life and newly acquainted afterlife as he details his experiences, his feelings, and what he learns as a ghost.

After the Wreck, I Picked Myself Up, Spread My Wings, and Flew Away, by Joyce Carol Oates

Jenna Abbott separates her life into two categories: before the wreck and after the wreck. Before the wreck, she was leading a normal life with her mom in suburban New York. After the wreck, she is alone, desperate to forget what happened that day on the bridge.

At the End of Words, by Miriam Stone

In her memoir, Miriam Stone, currently an undergraduate student at Columbia University, tells a powerful story about mothers and daughters and pain and healing. In the form of poetry and diary entries, Stone shares the difficulty of watching her mother die from cancer and her personal struggle to cope with the everyday issues that many teenage girls face.

Autobiography of My Dead Brother, by Walter Dean Myers

Jesse fills his sketchbook with drawings and portraits of his blood brother, Rise, and his comic strip, Spodi Roti and Wise, as he makes sense of the complexities of friendship, loyalty, and loss in a neighborhood where drive-bys, vicious gangs, and abusive cops are everyday realities.

Bang!, by Sharon G. Flake

Mann is only 13, yet he has already had to deal with more than most go through in a lifetime. His family is still reeling from the tragic shooting death of his little brother, Jason, each person coping with grief in his or her own way.

Because of Winn-Dixie, by Kate DiCamillo

Because of Winn-Dixie, a big, ugly, happy dog, 10-year-old Opal learns 10 things about her long-gone mother from her preacher father. Because of Winn-Dixie, Opal makes new friends among the somewhat unusual residents of her new hometown, Naomi, Florida, and she begins to find her place in the world and let go of some of the sadness left by her mother's abandonment seven years earlier.

Before I Die, by Jenny Downham

Tessa has just months to live. Struggling with hospital visits, endless tests, and drugs with excruciating side effects, Tessa compiles a list. It's her "To Do Before I Die" list. And number one is Sex. Released from the constraints of "normal" life, Tessa tastes new experiences to make her feel alive while her failing body struggles to keep up.

A Begonia for Miss Applebaum, by Paul Zindel
Henry and Zelda are stunned to discover that their favorite teacher, Miss Applebaum, won't be back at school teaching because she hasn't very long to live. Henry and Zelda become the Saturday companions of their beloved teacher, and her exuberance for learning, having fun, and helping the homeless is contagious.

The Book Thief, by Markus Zusak

Set during World War II in Germany, this is the story of Liesel Meminger, a foster girl living outside of Munich. Liesel scratches out a meager existence for herself by stealing when she encounters something she can't resist—books.

Bridge to Terabithia, by Katherine Paterson

The life of a 10-year-old boy in rural Virginia expands when he becomes friends with a

newcomer who subsequently meets an untimely death trying to reach their hideaway, Terabithia, during a storm.

Catalyst, by Laurie Halse Anderson
Eighteen-year-old Kate, who sometimes chafes at being a preacher's daughter, finds herself losing control in her senior year as she faces difficult neighbors, the possibility that she may not be accepted by the college of her choice, and an unexpected death.

Cellular, by Ellen Schwartz
When Brendan is diagnosed with leukemia, his life is turned upside down. With a smothering family and distant friends, all seems hopeless until he meets Lark, terminally ill yet full of life.

Choices, by Deborah Lynn Jacobs
Overcome with guilt over her brother's death, a teenage girl shifts between multiple universes in an attempt to find one in which he is alive.

Deadline, by Chris Crutcher
Ben Wolf has big things planned for his senior year. Had big things planned. Now what he has is some very bad news and only one year left to make his mark on the world.

Durable Goods, by Elizabeth Berg
Katie and her sister, Diane, struggle to cope with the burdens of growing up with an abusive father and the recent loss of their mother.

Ellen Foster, by Kaye Gibbons
Having suffered abuse and misfortune for much of her life, a young child searches for a better life and finally gets a break in the home of a loving woman with several foster children.

Elsewhere, by Gabrielle Zevin and Alison McGhee
Elsewhere is where 15-year-old Liz Hall ends up, after she has died. Here Liz will age backward from the day of her death until she becomes a baby again and returns to Earth. But Liz wants to turn 16, not 14 again. She wants to get her driver's license. She wants to graduate from high school

and go to college. And now that she's dead, Liz is being forced to live a life she doesn't want with a grandmother she has only just met. And it is not going well. How can Liz let go of the only life she has ever known and embrace a new one?

Escaping Tornado Season, by Julie Williams
With her father dead; her mother run off to heaven knows where; and her twin brother, seven years buried, just a ghost in her memory, Allie settles in with her grandparents for a cold Minnesota winter.

Esperanza Rising, by Pam Muñoz Ryan
Esperanza's expectation that her 13th birthday will be celebrated with all the material pleasures and folk elements of her previous years is shattered when her father is murdered by bandits. Esperanza's mother then decides to join the cook and gardener and their son as they move to the United States and work in California's agricultural industry.

Gathering Blue, by Lois Lowry
Kira is a girl who has lost both of her parents. The book opens with her mourning her mother. Because of her deformed leg, Kira is now at risk of being killed herself, as she can no longer "contribute" to her society. Her unequalled skill with a needle and thread, however, keep her alive and get her close enough to the power of her society to see its secret horrors.

The Girl Death Left Behind, by Lurlene McDaniel
Numb with grief when an accident kills her entire family, 14-year-old Beth suddenly finds herself living with her spoiled cousin Terri and trying to make friends at a new school.

Grief Girl, by Erin Vincent
When a speeding tow truck hits Erin Vincent's parents, her mom dies instantly. Her dad dies one month later after doctors assure Erin and her sister and brother that he's going to make it. The girls are left to raise their baby brother, Trent—and each other.

The Hanged Man, by Francesca Lia Block
Having stopped eating after the death of her father, 17-year-old Laurel feels herself losing control of her life in the hot, magical world of Los Angeles.

The Heart of a Chief, by Joseph Bruchac
Elderly Auntie and Doda care for Chris Nicola and his little sister with affection and wisdom. Their mother is deceased, and their father is away battling alcoholism. The stories and traditions of Chris's people give the boy the courage and conviction to deal with life.

The Hemingway Tradition, by Kristin Butcher
Shaw grew up with the same skill and passion for writing as his famous author father; they had planned to write a book together. His dad's sudden suicide changed everything. Shaw is stunned to read of his father's homosexuality in his suicide note and shocked to read that his father felt that he could no longer live in the closet. Shaw questions how much of his relationship with his father had been "a lie."

How It Feels When a Parent Dies, by Jill Krentz
Eighteen young people ranging in age from 7 to 16 discuss the questions, fears, and bereavement they experienced when one of their parents died.

If I Stay, by Gayle Forman
Mia has no memory of the accident that changed her life. The last normal moment that Mia can remember is being in the car with her family. Then she is standing outside her body beside their mangled Buick and her parents' corpses, watching herself and her little brother being tended by paramedics.

Island of the Blue Dolphins, by Scott O'Dell
When she realizes that her brother is missing, Karana, a young Indian girl, runs off the boat that is taking her people away from their island. The boat goes off without them, leaving them both

permanently stranded. After her brother dies, she learns to survive alone, finding food and shelter and avoiding the threat of seal hunters who come from big ships.

Joy School, by Elizabeth Berg
Katie, still mourning the death of her much-loved mother, is further upset when she must leave her friends to move with her father to Missouri, but then she meets Jimmy, a handsome, decent married man and learns about the joys and pain of first love. (Sequel to *Durable Goods*, but a good stand-alone read.)

Keeper of the Night, by Kimberly Willis Holt
Thirteen-year-old Isabel, a girl living on the island of Guam, and her family try to cope with the suicide of Isabel's mother.

Kira-Kira, by Cynthia Kadohata
Glittering—that's how Katie's sister, Lynn, makes everything seem. Lynn, with her special way of viewing the world, teaches Katie to look beyond tomorrow. When Lynn becomes desperately ill, it is up to Katie to find a way to remind her that there is always something glittering—kira-kira—in the future.

Kit's Wilderness, by David Almond
Thirteen-year-old Kit goes to live with his grandfather in the decaying coal-mining town of Stonegate, England, and finds both the old man and the town haunted by spirits of the past.

The Last Summer of the Death Warriors, by Francisco X. Stork
One is dying of cancer. The other's planning a murder. When Pancho arrives at St. Anthony's Home, he knows his time there will be short: If his plans succeed, he'll soon be arrested for the murder of his sister's killer. But then he's assigned to help D.Q., whose brain cancer has slowed neither his spirit nor his mouth.

The Lone Sentinel, by Jo Dereske

At his father's untimely death, a teenager assumes control of a light tower at the bleak and lonely outpost of the universe—a job he feels capable of handling until the arrival of two teenage girls and a group of aliens.

A Love Story Starring My Dead Best Friend,

by Emily Horner

For months, Cass has heard her best friend, Julia, whisper about a secret project. When Julia dies in a car accident, her drama friends decide to bring the project—a musical called Totally Sweet Ninja Death Squad—to fruition. But Cass isn't a drama person. So she takes off. In alternating chapters, she spends the first part of summer on a cross-country bike trip and the rest swallowing her pride and making props.

Maniac Magee, by Jerry Spinelli

Maniac Magee is a folk story about a very excitable boy—one who can outrun dogs, hit a home run off the best pitcher in the neighborhood, and tie a knot that no one can undo. “Kid's gotta be a maniac” is what the folks in Two Mills say. It's also the story of how this boy confronts racism in a small town, tries to find a home where there is none, and attempts to soothe tensions between rival factions on the tough side of town.

Many Stones, by Carolyn Coman

After her sister Laura is murdered in South Africa, Berry and her estranged father travel there to participate in the dedication of a memorial in her name.

Maroo of the Winter Caves, by Ann Turnbull

Maroo, a girl of the late Ice Age, must take charge after her father is killed and lead her little brother, mother, and aged grandmother to the safety of the winter camp before the first blizzards strike.

Memory, by Margaret Mahy

On the fifth anniversary of his older sister's death, 19-year-old Jonny Dart, troubled by feelings of

guilt and an imperfect memory of the event, goes in search of the only other witness to the fatal accident and, through a chance meeting with a senile old woman, finds a way to free himself of the past.

Missing May, by Cynthia Rylant

Twelve-year-old Summer, her classmate Cletus, and her grieving Uncle Ob seek out a medium in Putnam County, West Virginia, in hopes of reaching Aunt May beyond the grave.

Moonglass, by Jessi Kirby

Anna has always known that something was missing in her life: her mother, who walked out into the ocean one night and never came back. When Anna and her father, a professional lifeguard, move to a different California beach after a job promotion, Anna meets people who know all about her parents, their courtship and early marriage, and her mother's death.

A Music I No Longer Heard, by Leslie Simon

Contains 70 true stories of men and women who lost one of their parents while they were still in their teens and describes how the children coped with the loss.

No More Us for You, by David Hernandez

Isabel is still reeling from the pain of her boyfriend's tragic death exactly one year ago. Carlos loves red licorice and his friends, and works at a fancy art museum for some extra cash. The two have no connection until they both meet Vanessa, an intriguing new transfer student with a mysterious past. While Vanessa is the link that brings these two very different lives together, will she be the one that can also tear them apart?

November Blues, by Sharon M. Draper

When November Nelson loses her boyfriend, Josh, to a pledge stunt gone horribly wrong, she thinks her life can't possibly get any worse. But Josh left something behind that will change November's life forever, and now she's faced with the biggest

decision she could ever imagine. How in the world will she tell her mom? And how will Josh's parents take the news?

One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies,
by Sonya Sones

Fifteen-year-old Ruby Milliken leaves her best friend, her boyfriend, her aunt, and her mother's grave in Boston and reluctantly flies to Los Angeles to live with her father, a famous movie star who divorced her mother before Ruby was born.

Out of the Dust, by Karen Hesse

Billie Jo reveals the grim realities of living during the years of constant dust storms. Billie Jo's silent, windblown father is literally decaying with grief and skin cancer before her very eyes. When she decides to flee the lingering ghosts and dust of her homestead and jump a train west, she discovers a simple but profound truth about herself and her plight.

The Outsiders, by S.E. Hinton

Three brothers struggle to stay together after their parents' death. This is the story of their quest for identity among the conflicting values of their adolescent society.

Part of Me Died Too, by Virginia Fry

Eleven true stories about young people who experienced the loss of family members or friends. The chapters progress from relatively simple deaths, such as the loss of a pet or the anticipated death of an aged grandparent, to more complex deaths, such as the loss of a sister and a mother to AIDS or the death of an abusive father.

Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned,
by Judd Winnick

In graphic art format, this book describes the friendship between two roommates on the MTV show *Real World*, one of whom died of AIDS.

Phoenix Rising, by Karen Hesse

Nyle's life with her grandmother is thrown into chaos the night of the accident at the Cookshire

nuclear power plant. Ezra Trent and his mother, refugees from the heart of the accident, take temporary shelter in the back bedroom of Nyle's house. Nyle doesn't want to open her heart to Ezra. Too many times she's let people in, only to have them desert her.

The Pigman, by Paul Zindel

When sophomores John and Lorraine played a practical joke a few months ago on a stranger named Angelo Pignati, they had no idea what they were starting. Virtually overnight, almost against their will, the two befriended the lonely old man. But now Mr. Pignati is dead. And for John and Lorraine, the only way to find peace is to write down their friend's story—the story of the Pigman.

Please Ignore Vera Dietz, by A.S. King

Vera's spent her whole life secretly in love with her best friend, Charlie Kahn. And over the years she's kept a lot of his secrets. Even after he betrayed her. Even after he ruined everything. So when Charlie dies in dark circumstances, Vera knows a lot more than anyone—the kids at school, his family, even the police. But will she emerge to clear his name? Does she even want to?

Riley Park, by Diane Tullson

After a party at Riley Park, Darius and Corbin are attacked. Darius is killed; Corbin is seriously injured. Corbin fights his clouded memory—he can't identify the assailants. He fights his weakened body—he can no longer play hockey. He fights the loss of his friend. But when he gives up the fight, he finds strength in acceptance.

A Ring of Endless Light, by Madeleine L'Engle

During the summer her grandfather is dying of leukemia and death seems all around, 15-year-old Vicky finds comfort with the pod of dolphins with which she has been doing research.

The Secret Life of Bees, by Sue Monk Kidd

Fourteen-year-old Lily and her companion, Rosaleen, an African American woman who has

cared for Lily since her mother's death 10 years earlier, flee their home after Rosaleen is victimized by racist police officers and find a safe haven in Tiburon, South Carolina, at the home of three beekeeping sisters, May, June, and August.

Shizuko's Daughter, by Kyoko Mori

After her mother's suicide when she is 12 years old, Yuki spends years living with her distant father and his resentful new wife, cut off from her mother's family and relying on her own inner strength to cope with the tragedy.

So Shelly, by Ty Roth

After stealing Shelly's ashes from her wake at Trinity Catholic High School, the boys set a course for the small Lake Erie Island where Shelly's body had washed ashore and to where she wished to be returned. As they navigate around the obstacles and resist temptations during their odyssey, Keats and Gordon glue together the shattered pieces of Shelly's and their own pasts while attempting to make sense of her tragic and premature end.

A Stone in My Hand, by Cathryn Clinton

Eleven-year-old Malaak and her family are touched by the violence in Gaza between Jews and Palestinians when first her father disappears and then her older brother is drawn to the Islamic jihad.

A Summer to Die, by Lois Lowry

Thirteen-year-old Meg envies her sister's beauty and popularity. Her feelings don't make it any easier to cope with Molly's strange illness and eventual death.

Tales of the Madman Underground, by John Barnes

For years, Karl's been part of "the Madman Underground"—kids forced to attend group therapy during school. Karl has decided that he is going to get out of the Madman Underground for good. He is going to act—and be—Normal. But Normal, of course, is relative. Karl has two after-school jobs, one dead father, one seriously unhinged drunk mother ... and a huge attitude.

Tears of a Tiger, by Sharon Draper

The death of high school basketball star Rob Washington in an automobile accident affects the lives of his close friend Andy, who was driving the car, and many others in the school.

A Time for Dancing, by Davida Hurwin

Seventeen-year-old best friends Samantha and Juliana tell their stories in alternating chapters after Juliana is diagnosed with cancer.

Toning the Sweep, by Angela Johnson

Fourteen-year-old Emily learns the ritual of "toning the sweep," a way of drumming a plow to create a sound that honors the deceased, in this tale of mourning and healing. Emily, her mother, and her terminally ill grandmother, Ola, are the three extraordinarily strong females whose stories of grief and hardship have undoubtedly fostered the inspirational resilience in each of their personalities.

Tuck Everlasting, by Natalie Babbitt

Ten-year-old Winnie Foster is on the run from her stifling and lonely family life when she stumbles upon a young man sipping water from a spring at the base of a giant oak tree. The young man is Jesse Tuck, the youngest member of a family blessed—or cursed—to live forever. While Winnie stays with the Tucks for just a few days, she learns more about their secret and what it really means.

Two Moons in August, by Martha Brooks

Kieran, a new boy visiting her small town for the summer, helps Sidonie and her family come together again following the death of Sidonie's mother.

Walk Two Moons, by Sharon Creech

Thirteen-year-old Salamanca Tree Hiddle's mother has disappeared. While tracing her steps on a car trip from Ohio to Idaho with her grandparents, Salamanca tells a story to pass the time about a friend named Phoebe Winterbottom, whose mother vanished and who received secret messages after her disappearance.

Ways to Live Forever, by Sally Nicholls

Sam loves facts. He wants to know about UFOs and horror movies and airships and ghosts and scientists, and how it feels to kiss a girl. And because he has leukemia, he wants to know the facts about dying.

When Dad Killed Mom, by Julius Lester

Jenna and Jeremy knew their parents' marriage was in trouble. But no one could have predicted what would come next. Now with Mom dead and Dad in jail, Jenna and Jeremy must re-create a family of their own. But each guards a secret that could send their fragile new lives into a tailspin.

Whirligig, by Paul Fleischman

While traveling to every corner of the country to build a whirligig in memory of the girl whose death he caused when he was trying to commit suicide, 16-year-old Brian finds forgiveness and atonement.

Wintergirls, by Laurie Halse Anderson

Lia and Cassie were best friends, wintergirls frozen in matchstick bodies. But now Cassie is dead and the voice inside Lia's head keeps telling her to remain in control, stay strong, lose more, and weigh less. If she keeps on going this way—thin, thinner, thinnest—maybe she'll disappear altogether.



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Family Guidance and Bereavement Program

Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford

The Family Guidance and Bereavement Program at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford recognizes that there is no greater loss than that of a child. Our program offers bereaved families of Packard Children's Hospital patients supportive services to help guide them through this difficult time. All of our services are offered at no cost in English and Spanish. Parents, siblings, and grandparents are welcome to participate.

Our services include:

- Anticipatory grief support for families
- Individual, family, and group counseling for children and adults
- Referrals to community support (groups and individual)
- Follow-up outreach, through phone calls and mailings, and resources for bereaved families
- Staff support and educational materials
- Newsletter written by and for bereaved families

This handbook for teachers was written from our work with grieving children. We listened to their stories about navigating educational and social complexities at school and heard how important their teachers were to them. We noticed opportunities for teachers to positively influence children's grief experiences at school, and after we conducted a survey with Bay Area teachers it became clear to us that teachers also crave more knowledge and skills to be genuinely helpful to their grieving students. So, to meet these needs, this manual was created.

LEARN TO...

- Identify the grieving student.
- Deal with issues specific to the needs of grieving infants, preschoolers, elementary, middle and high school students.
- Help students understand death.
- Support grieving families.
- Offer words that comfort.
- Become sensitive to "Trigger Events."
- Minimize teasing and rejection.
- Handle the holidays and religious differences.

Includes a wealth of resources:

- Books and websites for teachers.
- Death and dying annotated booklist for children.
 - Picture Books
 - Fiction
 - Nonfiction
- Bibliotherapy (Young Adult).
- Professional literature review.