Building a Grief-Sensitive Community Webinar
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www.grievingstudents.org
Many Types of Losses During the Pandemic

Death of family members & neighbors

Financial security & quality of life

Experiences & Activities
• time with friends
• classroom instruction
• vacations, travel
• participation in sports, theater, restaurants, concerts, religious services...

Events / Milestones
• graduations, birthdays, anniversaries...

Social & Emotional Learning

Safety & Security
## Unique Stressors during the Coronavirus Pandemic

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Frequent hand washing &amp; sanitizing</th>
<th>Exercise difficulties due to loss of access to health clubs &amp; recreational sites</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protective gear when leaving home, shopping…</td>
<td>Physical distancing &amp; isolation</td>
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<td>Medical tests for the virus or antibodies</td>
<td>Opening of only “essential” business</td>
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<td>Distal/remote learning</td>
<td>Food and supply shortages</td>
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<td>Eye &amp; neck strain from computer use</td>
<td>Being together with family members all the time</td>
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<td>Changed sleep, eating &amp; family routines</td>
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Worries about the Future Due to the Pandemic

<table>
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<th>Question</th>
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<td>Will I or my family members or friends get sick?</td>
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<tr>
<td>When will a vaccine or cure be found?</td>
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<td>Will society ever return to normal?</td>
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<td>Will the economy recover?</td>
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<td>What about the future of my retirement funds/plans?</td>
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<td>Will our children’s future be harmed?</td>
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<td>Will I be able to transition back from working at home?</td>
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<td>How will my work performance be judged?</td>
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Grief Is Different for Each Child Based on...

• Personal relationship or perceived connection with the deceased

• Prior experience with loss

• Age and level of understanding about death

• Preexisting coping mechanisms

• Method of expressing strong emotions

• Available support systems

• Level of empathy for the needs of others
Cultural Sensitivity

• Remember that the fundamental experience of grief is universal

• Ask questions

• Ask openly when you are unsure what would be most helpful for a family or individual

• Watch out for assumptions

• Be empathic, thoughtful and sensitive
Reactions of Children to Loss

- Little or No Reaction
- Nonverbal Communication
- Anger
- Risky Behaviors

- Preexisting learning, emotional, or behavioral challenges may resurface or worsen
- Acting Younger
Guilt is Very Common After a Death…

• When something bad happens, children often assume they have caused the problem by acting badly

• Children may worry that they will repeat their bad behavior & cause the death of someone else

Guilt is More Likely When…

• The preexisting relationship with the person who died was ambivalent or conflicted

• A death is preceded by a lengthy illness

• There may be some logical reason to experience guilt feelings
Shame Can Be Experienced when Children Believe

- Their questions or comments about the deceased make a family member or adult upset.

- The person who died did something wrong that resulted in his or her death
Supporting Children with Guilt and Shame

• Discuss guilt and shame explicitly with grieving children

• Ask about the kinds of thoughts, questions, or feelings they have been having

• Describe the kinds of reactions related to guilt and shame that people often have

• Normalize the experience of guilt and shame while creating a safe environment

• Talk to a school mental health professional if these emotions are persistent or causing marked distress
Impact on Learning

• Difficulty concentrating and distractibility

• Limitations in learning and/or remembering new facts or concepts

• Failing to hand in assignments or study for exams because of reduced family supervision

• Preexisting learning challenges become worse
Offer Academic Support Proactively

- Change an assignment
- Change the focus or timing of a lesson
- Reschedule or adapt tests
Grief Over Time

- Grief proceeds on its own terms
- As children grow and develop, even normative transitions and changes in their lives will remind them of the loss
- As children develop, they become more capable of understanding and adjusting to their loss
- Children experience grief differently over time, and often revisit deep feelings at special events and times of transition
Barriers for Children in Talking About Loss

Children may...
• Conclude they have done something wrong by talking about death and avoid raising the subject again
• Hold in their feelings as a way to support their family
• Try to look fine and reassure family they are okay when they really need support
• Not fully understand death and loss
• Have problems expressing their complicated feelings
• Feel overwhelmed by the experience and their strong feelings
How to Act

• Be present and authentic

• Listen more, talk less

• Avoid trying to “cheer up” students or their families

• Accept expressions of emotion

• Show empathy

• Don’t be afraid to show emotions

• Step in to stop harmful behaviors when safety is a concern
Initiating the Conversation

- Express concern
- Be genuine
- Invite the conversation
- Listen and observe
- Limit personal sharing
- Offer practical advice
- Offer reassurance
- Maintain contact
## What not to say...

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Don’t Say This</th>
<th>Say this instead</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I know just what you’re going through.”</td>
<td>“Can you tell me more about what this has been like for you?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You must be incredibly angry.”</td>
<td>“Most people have strong feelings when something like this happens to them. What has this been like for you?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“This is hard. But it’s important to remember the good things in life, too.”</td>
<td>“What kinds of memories do you have about your sister?”</td>
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<td>“At least he’s no longer in pain.”</td>
<td>“What sorts of things have you been thinking about since your father died?”</td>
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<td>“I lost both my parents when I was your age.”</td>
<td>“Tell me more about what this has been like for you.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You’ll need to be strong now for your family. It’s important to get a grip on your feelings.”</td>
<td>“How is your family doing? What kinds of concerns do you have about them?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“My cousin died last week. I know how you must be feeling.”</td>
<td>“I know how I’ve felt when someone I loved died, but I don’t really know how you’re feeling. Can you tell me something about what this has been like for you?”</td>
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Grief Triggers

• Hearing a song or seeing a TV show
• Special occasions
• Transitions
• Lost opportunities
Preparing Students to Manage Grief Triggers

• Identify a safe space or location where the student can go
• Provide the child with an adult he or she can see when feeling upset or wishing to talk
• Set up procedures that allow the student to obtain support
• Allow the child to call a parent or family member
• Give permission and encouragement for the child to speak with other school staff
• Offer private time to talk over feelings, questions, or other concerns
Anticipate & Minimize Triggers

• Expect that triggers may occur around holidays, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, the child’s birthday, the birthday of the deceased, or the anniversary of the person’s death

• Introduce class activities in a way that acknowledges absences and offers alternatives

• Make an effort to reach out to grieving students at school events where the absence of a loved one may be especially noticeable

• Introduce subjects such as serious illness, accidental death, war, or violence with sensitivity
For further information about NCSCB visit us, call us, like us, share us

1-888-53-NCSCB (1-888-536-2722)

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National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement
Supporting Grieving Students During a Pandemic – A guide to using the Coalition to Support Grieving Students materials
Six topic sections contain 2 - 4 video modules with each video accompanied by downloadable handouts that summarize the major points covered.

* Links to additional resources for schools and families
Parent Booklet: After a Loved One Dies – English

Free guidance for parents and other caring adults on how to support grieving children, available in English and Spanish.

Order Hardcopy ➤ Download English PDF ➤

Parent Booklet: After a Loved One Dies – Spanish

Free guidance for parents and other caring adults on how to support grieving children, available in English and Spanish.

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