

Supporting students, staff, and ourselves in the aftermath of crisis and loss



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NATIONAL CENTER
FOR SCHOOL CRISIS
AND BEREAVEMENT

In partnership with



NEW YORK LIFE
FOUNDATION

**Initial Funding: September 11th Children's Fund
& National Philanthropic Trust**

Current Support: New York Life Foundation

- Promote appreciation of role schools can serve to support students, staff, and families at times of crisis and loss
- Enhance training in professional education programs
- Serve as resource for information, training materials, consultation and technical assistance – provided at no cost to the school



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FOR SCHOOL CRISIS
AND BEREAVEMENT

Through a transdisciplinary team of medical, mental health, and school professionals, the NCSCB provides:

- Confidential on-site/remote technical assistance and consultation for school leadership and professionals
- Practical, timely advice via 24/7 toll-free number and email
- Ongoing support in the immediate aftermath of a crisis and throughout the long-term recovery period
- Educational resources and crisis management tools
- School staff training and community presentations; professional development for range of professional audiences

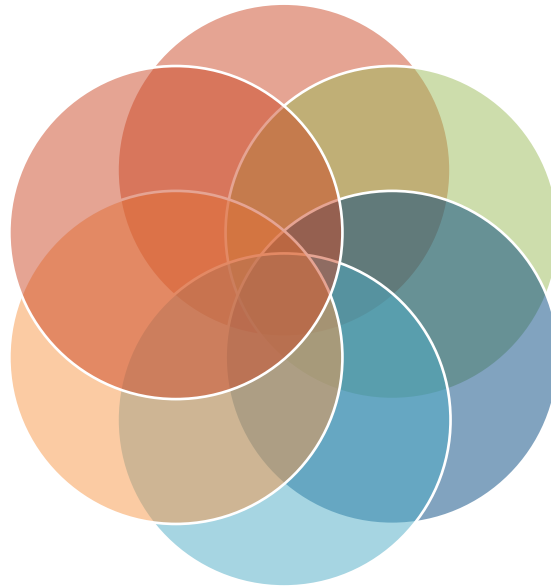
Stress/distress

Bereavement

Crisis

Grief and loss

Resilience



Trauma

Psychological First Aid

- Provide broadly to those impacted
- Supportive services to promote normative coping and accelerate natural healing process
- All adults should understand likely reactions and how to help children cope



Anyone that interacts with children can be a potential source of assistance and support – if unprepared, they can be a source of further distress.

Basic steps to support someone in crisis – Psychological First Aid

source: American Red Cross

Observation or
Awareness

Make a
Connection

Help People Feel
Comfortable and
at Ease

Be Kind, Calm, &
Compassionate

Assist with
Basic Needs

Listen

Give Realistic
Reassurance

Encourage
Good Coping

Help People
Connect

Give Accurate
and Timely
Information

Suggest a
Referral
Resource

End the
Conversation

Common Adjustment Reactions to a Crisis

Fears & Anxiety;
School
Avoidance

Sleep problems;
Change in
Appetite

Difficulties with
Concentration &
Academic
Performance

Sadness &
Depression;
Anger &
Irritability

Alcohol & Other
Substance Use

Physical
Symptoms

Post-traumatic
symptoms/PTSD

Grief

Guilt

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

- Exposure to death, serious injury, or sexual violence
- Re-experiencing traumatic event
 - Recurrent, intrusive, distressing memories
 - Recurrent, distressing dreams
 - Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks); post-traumatic play
- Avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma
- Negative alterations in cognitions and mood
- Increased arousal
 - Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
 - Irritability or anger
 - Self-destructive behavior
 - Hypervigilance or exaggerated startle

Co-occurrence of trauma and grief

- It should not be assumed that every time loss and trauma co-occur, the predominant reactions relate to trauma, nor that consideration of bereavement is less critical or time-sensitive than trauma
- Interventions designed for treatment of trauma may not be optimal for grief -- when addressing trauma you are focusing on helping the person cope with reactions to something that happened; support for grief focuses on helping people cope with the persistent absence of the person rather than the way the person died

Loss is common in the lives of children

- 5% of children experience the death of a parent
- 90% the death of close family member or friend
- Bereavement has a significant and often long-term impact on learning, social and emotional development, behavior and adjustment

Being with someone in distress

- Do not try to “cheer up” survivors
- Do not encourage to be strong or cover emotions
- Express feelings and demonstrate empathy
- Avoid statements such as: “I know exactly what you are going through” (you can’t), “You must be angry” (don’t tell person how to feel)
- Limit personal sharing; keep the focus on the grieving child
- Allow child/family to be upset while suspending judgment – intervene only when safety/health is concern

Addressing cultural diversity

- Some people are worried they will say or do the wrong thing because they feel ill informed about another culture
- Although there are differences in cultural practices, the fundamental experience of grief is universal
- When we recognize that there is a range of ways to experience and express grief, we can explore ways to bridge cultural differences in order to help grieving children and families

Supporting children of a different culture

- Ask questions when you are unsure what would be most helpful for a family or individual
- Assumptions may result in stereotypes that cloud our perceptions and make us miss opportunities to be helpful
- Approach the family with an open mind and heart
- Help families identify and communicate what is important to them about cultural practices; work with them to find solutions and compromises when realities require modifications in cultural practices

Academic accommodations

- It is common for students to experience temporary academic challenges after a death; pre-existing learning challenges often become worse
- Offer academic support proactively – don't wait for academic challenges to become academic failure
- Change an assignment, e.g.,
 - Allow student to work with a partner
 - Adapt formal research paper into more engaging assignment
- Change focus or timing of lesson
- Reschedule or adapt tests

Helpful responses to a grief trigger

- Provide a safe space or an adult the student can talk to
- Set procedures for the student to obtain support discreetly
- Staff can work with children and families to anticipate and minimize likely triggers

Misconceptions & literal misinterpretations

- For young children, thought processes are concrete and literal
- Religious explanations can be shared, but should not be only explanation of death

Challenges for children with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disabilities

- Often express distress in non-verbal ways
 - Aggressive or disruptive behavior
 - Changes in sleep, eating, or toileting behaviors
 - Increase in self-stimulating behaviors
 - More intolerant of changes in routines
- Re-establish routines quickly
- After death of caregiver or forced relocation establish new and consistent routines
- Explanations should be geared to developmental level and unique concerns and stressors

Transition to college/career is difficult when grieving

- Separated from virtually everything familiar/comforting
- Expected to make friends and have fun
- Lack privacy
- Unfamiliar with counseling and support services on campus
- Academic impact of grief → anxious about academic expectations
- May worry about parents and family members and feel it is selfish to leave home to pursue education
- School professionals can reach out to recently graduated students



COALITION *to* SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS

Lead Founding Members



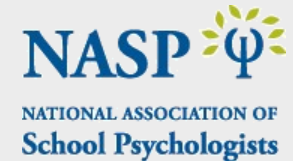
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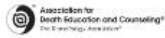
Founding Members



School Social Work
Association of America



Supporting Organizational Members



www.grievingstudents.org



DOES YOUR SCHOOL NEED ADVICE NOW? Contact us at 877-53-NCSCB (877-536-2722) or info@grievingstudents.org



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CONVERSATION & SUPPORT

DEVELOPMENTAL & CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

REACTIONS & TRIGGERS

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION & SELF-CARE

CRISIS & SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

TEACHER TRAINING MATERIALS

Children's Grief Awareness Day is November 17

This offers guidance to educators on how to recognize Grief Awareness Day in their school.

Additional Resources

GUIDES AND POLICIES

FAMILY MATERIALS

ADDITIONAL MODULES

ARTICLES & OTHER PUBLICATIONS

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

https://grievingstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Recognizing-Grief-Awareness-Day-in-Your-School-10272022.pdf



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Additional Resources

- Additional Modules (e.g., police or military deaths)
- Guidance Documents
 - Practical guidelines developed by the NCSCB on how to respond to the death of a student or staff, from all causes or from suicide
- Teacher Training materials
- Family and school staff booklets
- Articles
- Online Resources

www.grievingstudents.org – Order Free Materials



After a loved one dies—
How children grieve and how parents
and other adults can support them.

After a Loved One Dies – Parent Booklet

This guide reviews how children grieve and how parents and other caring adults can help them better understand and adjust to a death. The information this guide provides can help parents and adults who are part of the lives of children who have experienced a loss know what to expect and how to help. Download the booklet in one of the available languages. PDF format.



ENGLISH



JAPANESE



ITALIAN



SPANISH



KOREAN



TAGALOG



HAITIAN-
CREOLE



SIMPLIFIED
CHINESE



TRADITIONAL
CHINESE

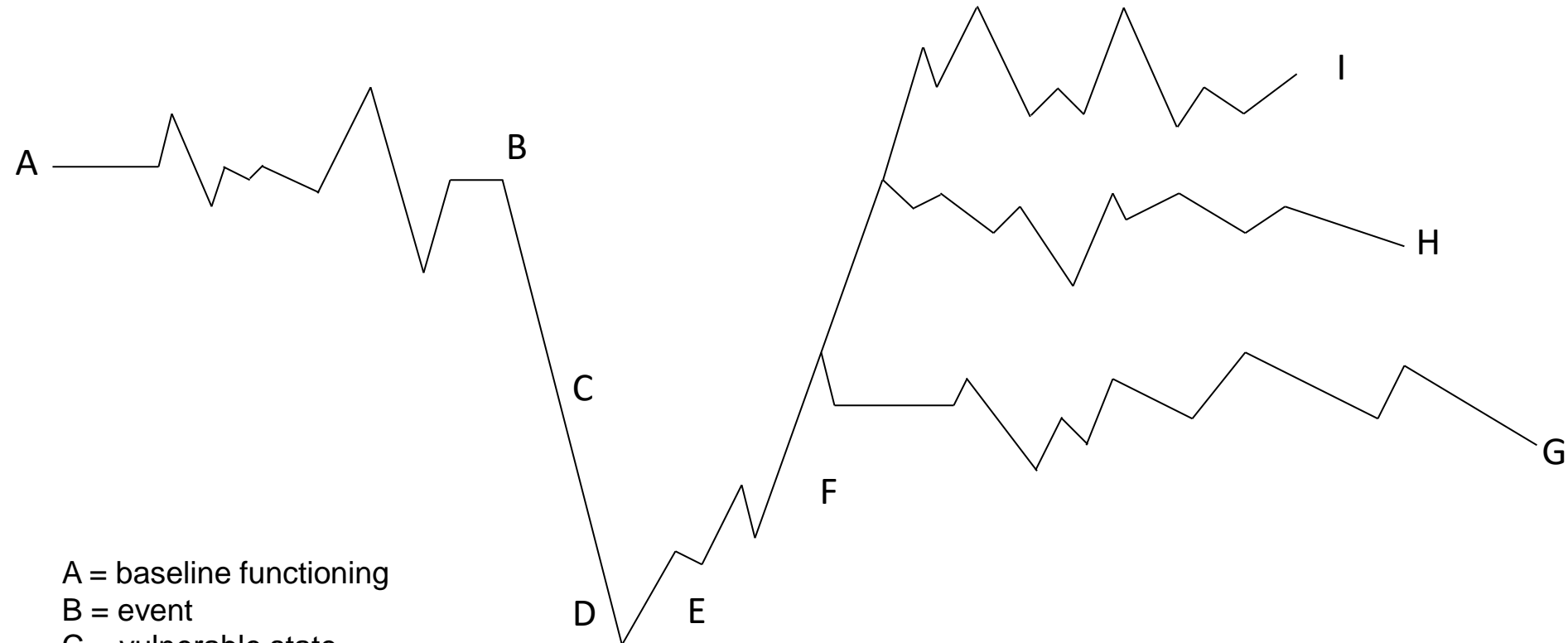
What to say and what not to say

Tips for Talking to Grieving Students



COALITION *to* SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

Adjustment Over Time in Crisis



A = baseline functioning

B = event

C = vulnerable state

D = usual coping mechanisms fail

E = helplessness, hopelessness

F = improved functioning

G = continued impairment

H = return to baseline

I = post-traumatic growth

Importance of professional self-care

- Recognize it is distressing to be with students and staff who are in distress
- It's critical we find ways to have personal needs met and appreciate and address impact of supporting our students who are grieving, traumatized, or otherwise distressed
- Create a culture where:
 - it is ok to be upset
 - members normalize asking for help and model willingness to accept assistance

Compassion fatigue

- Exposure to trauma and suffering of others can lead to compassion fatigue
 - Empathy: understanding and taking perspective of another
 - Compassion: requires empathy but includes wanting to help and/or desiring to relieve suffering – “to bear or suffer together”
- Warnings about compassion fatigue imply that compassion is necessarily tiring
- Compassionate approaches can be gratifying and bring meaning to the work

Supporting those most in need can be gratifying

- Realistic objectives of purpose of interactions
- Have skills and resources to provide meaningful assistance and are empowered and supported to provide this help to others (or risk moral injury)
- Are aware of and have sufficient support to deal with personal impact of work

Moral injury

- Professionals may experience moral injury when they feel that, in their professional role, they are not allowed to do the things most needed for students and their families, such as after a crisis or for students and families dealing with adversity.
- Moral injury can also result when we assume we, or our organization, have more control over a situation or outcome than we actually have.

Strategies for preventing moral injury

- Challenge perfectionism. In crisis situations or other situations of scarcity/adversity, you have limited choices.
- Identify ways to advocate within schools, district, or community for more services or support to those in need.
- Rethink responsibility. Responsibility is not all or nothing. We can feel some responsibility for unfortunate events and feel badly we didn't do more, but that doesn't mean we had the primary responsibility for causing them.
- Be an advocate for both the school/district AND your students. Ensure that taking on role as an advocate for students and families does not conflict with school or district policies and practices.

Benefits of memorialization

- Memorial activities help children express and cope with feelings
- By planning and taking part in a memorial event, children can exercise some control
- What you plan is far less important than how
- Children must be involved actively in planning
- The events should be relevant

Planning memorial and commemorative activities

- A memorial planned by adults for children is more likely to be helpful to the adults
- Thoughtful memorial responses often rely on symbolic activities
- Formal memorializations may establish precedent
- Formal memorials may also serve as traumatic reminders
- The goals of commemorative activities depend on the timing

Addressing different interests and disinterest

- Children and adults may have very different needs and interests
- Children not as directly impacted may not be interested in ongoing attention or resent having school experience defined by crisis
- Disinterest may be related to sense there is nothing they can do to change events or impact

Additional challenges

- Challenge balancing needs/desires of families of victims with those of broader school community
- Goal of memorialization is to remember what was lost and what we wish to preserve, rather than remember the moment or method of loss – minimize traumatic reminders
- Challenge when event transitions from recent shared experience → historical event

www.schoolcrisiscenter.org



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ABOUT RESOURCES PROJECTS NEWS EVENTS SUPPORT



HE TRAVELS TO SCHOOLS AFTER MASS SHOOTINGS. HEAR HIS ADVICE TO PARENTS.

READ MORE

TALKING TO CHILDREN AND TEENS ABOUT THE WAR IN UKRAINE

READ MORE

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT TRAGEDIES (SUCH AS SHOOTINGS AND TERROR ATTACKS) IN THE NEWS

READ MORE

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Dedicated to helping schools support their students
through crisis and loss

I Need Help Now

Help Me Prepare

For further information about NCSCB
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