



Supporting the grieving student

David J Schonfeld, MD, FAAP

Director, National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement
schonfel@usc.edu



USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work and Pediatrics
University of Southern California and Children's Hospital Los Angeles

SchoolCrisisCenter.org | GrievingStudents.org
1-877-536-NCSCB (1-877-536-2722)



National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

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 charge to schools
- **www.schoolcrisiscenter.org**



Through an interdisciplinary 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 and timely advice via a 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



What do we do when we consult?

- Help meet needs, both short- and long-term
- Advise on models of crisis mental health services, staffing, training, policies, etc.
- Offer staff support; HR issues
- Prepare them to address educational impact and academic supports
- Suicide postvention
- Commemoration and memorialization



Loss is common in the lives of children

- Vast majority of children (9 of 10) experience the death of a family member and/or friend by the time they complete high school
- 5% of children experience death of parent by 16
- 93% of classroom educators have never received any training in how to support a grieving student



Children may not appear to be grieving

- Adults may communicate death is not discussed
- Children may
 - not yet understand what has happened or its implications
 - be overwhelmed by feelings
 - express grief indirectly through behavior or play



Often adults say nothing

- Adults are afraid to say the wrong thing, upset children, or make matters worse
- Saying nothing says a lot – it communicates that adults are unconcerned, uncaring, or unable to be of assistance
- Leaves young children confused, older children unsupported, and requires children of all ages to grieve alone



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

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), “Both my parents died when I was your age” (don’t compete for sympathy)
- Allow child/family to be upset and tolerate unpleasant affect, without trying to change it. Accept reactions while suspending judgment – intervene only when safety/health is concern



Children's guilt

- Thought processes limited by:
 - Egocentrism
 - Limited understanding of causality
 - Magical thinking
- Results in guilt
 - Reassure children of lack of responsibility

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



www.grievingstudents.org – Order Free Materials



After a loved one dies—

How children grieve and how parents
and other adults can support them.



Adolescent bereavement

- Adults assume that because adolescents have ability to think rationally they need no further explanations
- They assume since adolescents often less amenable to adult guidance, they do not need support
- In reality, adolescents do, but often left unsupported
- Parents often rely on adolescent children to provide comfort and take on adult responsibilities



Cumulative loss

- Cumulative losses are neither protective nor desensitizing – children don't get “used to” death of peers
- Students may come to learn adults are unable to establish a safe environment and unprepared to provide assistance
- They may conclude there is little value in seeking such assistance and may appear to show no reactions after a death
- They may turn to peers for support or engage in risky behaviors because they are fearful of their own mortality

Provide advice on how to support child



- Funeral attendance
- Be aware of community resources and offer them to families
- Provide follow-up – remember that grieving is long-term



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
- Let the student call a parent or family member if necessary
- Provide permission and encouragement to see school social worker, counselor, or nurse
- Offer private time with teacher to talk about feelings



www.grievingstudents.org



COALITION TO SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

Video and Downloadable Grief Support
Modules for School Personnel

Conversation & Support

Talking With Children >

What Not to Say >

Providing Support Over Time >

Peer Support >

VIEW MODULES



Conversation &
Support

Developmental &
Cultural Considerations

Practical
Considerations

Reactions & Triggers

Professional
Preparation & Self-Care

Crisis & Special
Circumstances



Modules Placed into Six Sections

- Each section contains 2-4 video modules; each video is accompanied by handout that summarizes major points
- Conversation and Support
- Developmental and Cultural Considerations
- Practical Considerations
- Reactions and Triggers
- Professional Preparation and Self-Care
- Crisis and Other Special Circumstances



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
- Training module
- Family and school staff booklets
- Articles
- Online Resources



For further information about NCSCB
visit us, call us, like us, share us:

USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck

School of Social Work

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National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

Gortimer Gibbons' Life on Normal Street



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jikz6c84O-Q>

REFLECTION QUESTION

*What wonders do I have from this
presentation?*

Jumpstart phrase to put as your first line:
**Every time you leave home, another road
takes you...**

Write for 2 minutes keeping pen moving.