REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

August 2018

Question:

What are promising strategies for educating students suffering from mental health issues such as grief or anxiety resulting from loss or abuse?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on strategies for students suffering with mental health issues resulting from loss or abuse.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Chafouleas, S. M., Johnson, A. H., Overstreet, S., & Santos, N. M. (2016). Toward a blueprint for trauma-informed service delivery in schools. *School Mental Health, 8*, 144–162. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED575023

> *From the ERIC abstract*: "Recognition of the benefits to trauma-informed approaches is expanding, along with commensurate interest in extending delivery within school systems. Although information about trauma-informed approaches has quickly burgeoned, systematic attention to integration within multitiered service delivery frameworks has not occurred yet is essential to accurate, durable, and scalable implementation. In addition, there is a critical need to concurrently build a strong evidence base regarding trauma-informed service delivery in schools. In this paper, the literatures on trauma-informed approaches and multitiered frameworks for school-based service delivery are connected with the goal to provide suggestions toward building blueprints for trauma-informed service delivery in schools. Drawing from the literature on implementation blueprints for school-wide positive behavior supports, sections are

organized around current knowledge about trauma-informed approaches with regard to blueprints for (a) implementation, (b) professional development, and (c) evaluation. Critical issues, strategy recommendations, and directions for research are discussed.

Cohen, J. A., & Mannarino, A. P. (2011). Supporting children with traumatic grief: What educators need to know. *School Psychology International, 32*(2), 117–131. Retrieved from https://tfcbt.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/SPI4008271.pdf

> *From the abstract*: "Following traumatic deaths children may develop Childhood Traumatic Grief (CTG), a condition in which trauma symptoms interfere with adaptive child grieving. Educators have an important role in supporting children who have CTG. Key contributions that educators can make are to (a) recognize CTG symptoms in school settings; (b) refer children for mental health evaluations when appropriate; (c) recognize reminders that trigger trauma symptoms and identify ways to manage these triggers and responses in school settings; (d) support CTG treatments in school by reinforcing children's use of stress-management strategies; (e) respect confidentiality; (f) recognize the importance of cultural issues in CTG; and (g) maintain good communication with parents and other helping professionals."

Guidry, K., Simpson, C., Test, T., & Bloomfield, C. (2013). Ambiguous loss and its effects on children: Implications and interventions for school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling, 11*(15). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1034744

> *From the ERIC abstract*: "School counselors are regularly tasked with managing student's emotions and behaviors that impede school performance. This daunting assignment can be overwhelming for school professionals. With the many diagnoses that may provide an explanation for dysfunctional behavior amongst students, the possibility of grief is frequently overlooked. The purpose of this article is to define and describe the concept of grief and how it may explain challenging behaviors with students. Additionally, this definition will be expanded by introducing the definition of ambiguous grief. Examples of ambiguous grief scenarios will be provided, as well as implications for school counselors."

Heath, M. A., & Cole, B. V. (2012). Strengthening classroom emotional support for children following a family member's death. *School Psychology International, 33*(3), 243–262. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240187108_Strengthening_classroom_emotional_support_for_children_following_a_family_member's_death

> *From the abstract*: "National and international organizations have identified schools as having an 'unparalleled' potential to offer supportive services for children's mental health needs. This article reviews research and practice related to children's grief and specifies strategies for classroom-based interventions. In particular, school psychologists are encouraged to assist teachers in addressing the needs of children following the death of a family member. A list of resources is included to assist school psychologists in sharing critical information with teachers, preparing them to implement suggested

strategies. Additionally, two ready-to-use classroom lesson plans integrate classroom discussion and activities with grief-themed children's literature."

Heath, M. A., Sheen, D., Leavy, D., Young, E. L., & Money, K. (2005). Bibliotherapy: A resource to facilitate emotional healing and growth. *School Psychology International 26*(5), 563–580. Retrieved from
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258189177_Bibliotherapy_A_Resource_to_Facilitate_Emotional_Healing_and_Growth

> *From the abstract*: "Children's literature is a therapeutic tool for facilitating emotional growth and healing. Stories provide a catalyst for change, providing children with other perspectives and options for thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Appropriately shared stories provide opportunities for children to gain insight and learn healthier ways to face difficulties. To increase familiarity with bibliotherapy the following information is reviewed: a background of literature's therapeutic use; the stages of involvement, identification, catharsis, insight and universalism; suggestions for effectively selecting and sharing stories and strategies for creating a positive and productive learning experience. A list of children's books is provided to support counselling interventions."

Johnson, C., Eva, A. L., Johnson, L., & Walker, B. A. (2011). Don't turn away: Empowering teachers to support students' mental health. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 84*(1), 9–14. Retrieved from
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241741092_Don%27t_Turn_Away_Empowering_Teachers_to_Support_Students%27_Mental_Health

> *From the abstract*: "Adolescence is a challenging time for most young people, but for those with or at-risk of developing emotional or mental health conditions, it can be particularly harrowing. Studies indicate that 1 in 5 adolescents have some sort of serious emotional, behavioral, or mental health problem. Early identification and treatment can make a substantial difference in the lives of these troubled young people. Aware and knowledgeable teachers can play a critical role in this helping process. This article focuses on ways that classroom teachers can recognize warning signs for these problems and provide developmentally appropriate support to students who are struggling."

Mumbauer, J., & Kelchner, V. (2018). Promoting mental health literacy through bibliotherapy in school-based settings. *Professional School Counseling, 21*(1), 85–94.
https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1163847

> *From the ERIC abstract*: "Considering that one in five children has or has had a mental disorder in a given year (National Institute of Mental Health, 2010), the demand for mental health services within the school setting is immense. Bibliotherapy can serve as a preventative and responsive treatment for increasing mental health literacy within the school setting. The authors review relevant bibliotherapy and mental health literacy research, introduce the concept of mental health literacy in the school setting, and provide counselors and educators with practical tools to implement the concept."

O'Conner, R., De Feyter, J., Carr, A., Luo, J. L., & Romm, H. (2017). *A review of the literature on social and emotional learning for students ages 3-8: Characteristics of effective social and emotional learning programs (Part 1 of 4)* (REL 2017-245). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic. Part 1: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED572721; Part 2: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED572722; Part 3: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED572723; Part 4: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED572724.

> *From the ERIC abstract*: "Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process by which children and adults learn to understand and manage emotions, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. This is the first in a series of four related reports about what is known about SEL programs for students ages 3-8. The report series addresses four issues raised by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Mid-Atlantic's Early Childhood Education Research Alliance: characteristics of effective SEL programs (part 1), implementation strategies and state and district policies that support SEL programming (part 2), teacher and classroom strategies that contribute to social and emotional learning (part 3), and outcomes of social and emotional learning among different student populations and settings (part 4). This report identifies key components of effective SEL programs and offers guidance on selecting programs. The following are appended: (1) Literature search methodology and coding results; (2) Publications included in the review; and (3) Additional resources for selecting a social and emotional learning program."

Additional Organization to Consult

National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments—
https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/

> *From the website*: "The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments offers information and technical assistance to States, districts, schools, institutions of higher learning, and communities focused on improving student supports and academic enrichment. We believe that with the right resources and support, educational stakeholders can collaborate to 1) provide all students with access to a well-rounded education, 2) improve school conditions for student learning, and 3) improve the use of technology so all students have the opportunity to realize academic success and digital literacy in safe and supportive learning environments."

> Additional relevant links:
> - https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/hot-topics/responding-trauma-k-12-schools
> - https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-and-healthy-students

> School Mental Health Project/Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA—
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/

> *From the website*: "Our mission is to improve outcomes for students by helping districts and their schools enhance how they address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

One way we do this is by providing information and links for leaders and practitioners to access a range of no-cost resources developed by us and others that can be used for

- school improvement
- professional development
- direct student/learning support

… We also are playing a role in transforming student and learning support by helping districts move away from what typically is a fragmented, piecemeal approach to providing student and learning supports. Our emphasis is on unifying student/learning supports and [redeploying] what already is budgeted for such activity to develop a comprehensive and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. To this end, we pursue an action agenda and provide free technical assistance and coaching for systemic change to SEAs and LEAs."

Additional relevant links:

- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/selectedjournal.htm
- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/resources.htm
- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/guidestopolicy.htm
- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/guidestopolicy.htm#tools
- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/trainingpresentation.htm
- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/resourcepackets.htm
- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/policyprogram.htm

Newsletter archives: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newsarchive.html

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- Educating students with grief or anxiety
- Supporting students with grief
- Supporting students with anxiety
- Supporting student with grief and anxiety
- Students grieving loss
- Student learning supports after loss
- Teaching strategies for abused students
- Emotional Healing and Growth
- Mental health in schools
- Mental health

- Trauma

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched Google Scholar and PsychInfo.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2003 to present, were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.