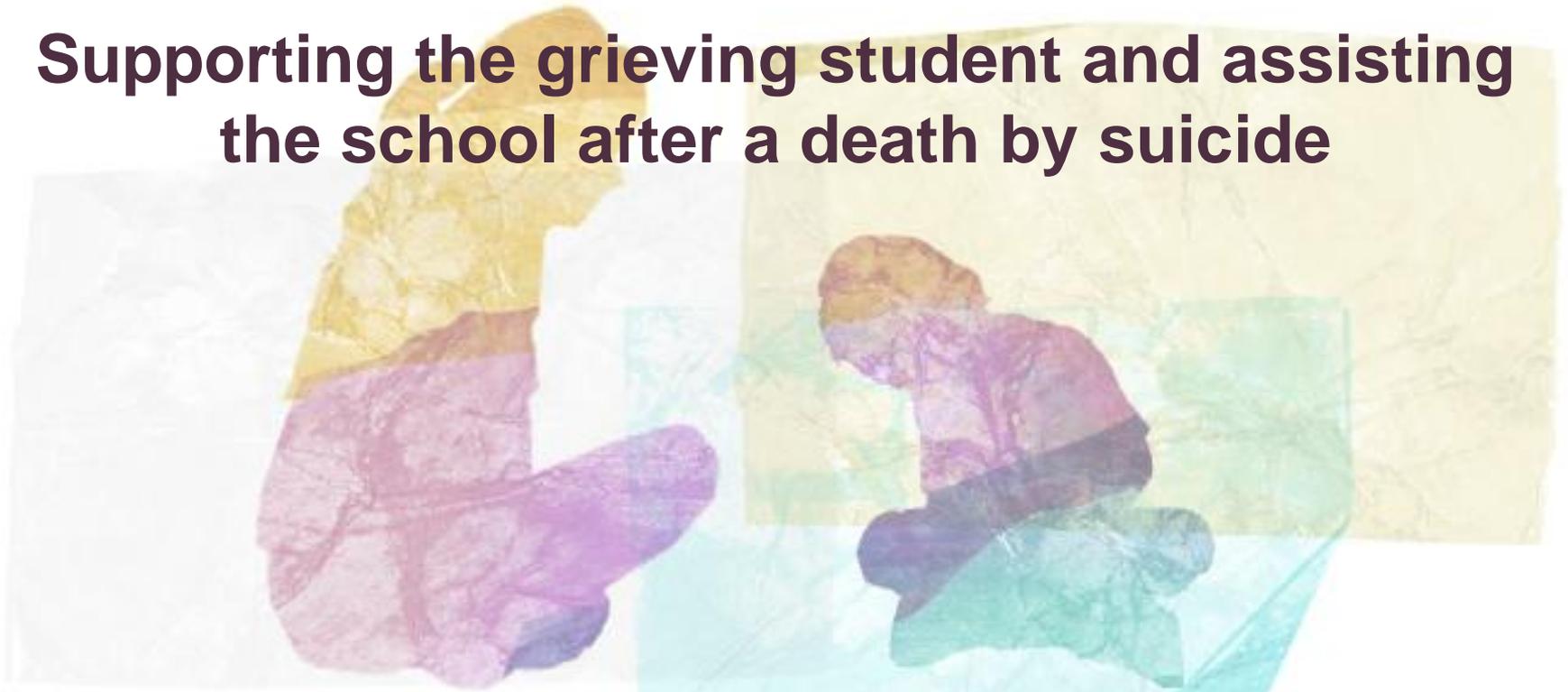


Supporting the grieving student and assisting the school after a death by suicide



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COALITION *to* SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

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No disclosures

- I have no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturers(s) of any commercial products(s) and/or provider of commercial services discussed in this Continuing Medical Education activity.
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Loss is common in the lives of children

- Vast majority of children 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



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



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



<http://www.achildgrief.com>



**AFTER A LOVED ONE
DIES - HOW CHILDREN
GRIEVE AND HOW
PARENTS AND OTHER
ADULTS CAN SUPPORT
THEM**



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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
- Importance of interviewing child alone and need for adult to obtain support so as not to depend on child



Importance of professional self-care

- Recognize it is distressing to be with children who are in distress
- It's critical staff find ways to have their own personal needs met and appreciate and address impact of supporting children who are grieving or traumatized
- Create a culture where:
 - it is ok to be upset
 - members normalize asking for help and model willingness to accept assistance
 - people see the benefit of supporting children





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
- <http://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org>

For further information

USC School
of Social Work

*National Center for School
Crisis and Bereavement*

Toll Free: 877-53-NCSCB (877-536-2722)

<http://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org>



COALITION to SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

Coalition to Support Grieving Students

- American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- American School Counselors Association (ASCA)
- National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
- National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
- National Association of School Nurses (NASN)
- National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
- National Education Association (NEA)
- School Social Workers Association of America (SSWAA)
- School Superintendents Association (AASA)



<http://www.grievingstudents.org>



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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



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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

- Guidance Documents
 - Practical guidelines developed by the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement on how to respond to the death of a student or staff (all causes or suicide)
- Parent booklet: *After a Loved One dies – How Children Grieve and How to Support Them*
- Articles
- Online Resources
 - <http://www.achildgrief.com>



Reluctance of staff to discuss suicide openly with students

- Many members of the school community have personal experiences with suicide
- Persistent, but unfounded, concern that discussion about suicide may prompt others to harm themselves
- Stigma associated with suicide
- Families reluctant to have suicide mentioned as possible cause of their child's death



Death by suicide shouldn't be sensationalized

- Students should be guided to remember what made the student special and not focus on way the student died
- Media coverage should be minimized, avoiding front page coverage or details
- Focus on importance of talking to trusted adult if considering harming yourself or suspect someone is potentially suicidal
- Information about suicide hotlines and programs for suicide prevention should be prominent



Additional issues to consider in presentations with students

- Avoid explanations that are vague or simplistic
- Destigmatize seeking help for depression, other mental health problems, substance abuse
- Never agree to keep suicidal intentions secret
- Avoid formal acts to commemorate



Provide additional support to those most at risk of another suicide

- Those closest to deceased
- Individuals who may have neglected or mistreated the individual may feel guilty or be blamed
- Individuals experiencing depression, those who contemplated or attempted suicide, those with family members at risk or who died by suicide
- Communicate with other schools and community agencies to monitor if there is an increase in suicide attempts

