

A RESOURCE
FROM
NACG
MEMBERS



Resource Guide for Administrators Supporting Students who are Grieving

Part of Grieffalk Schools
A Toolkit for Supporting Students who are Grieving



The National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG) is a nonprofit organization raising awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who supports them. Our Vision is for **no child to have to grieve alone**. Visit [ChildrenGrieve.org](https://www.ChildrenGrieve.org) to find these and other resources.

Thank you to the following NACG members who contributed to this resource: (Listed alphabetically by last name.)

Sara Asch, The Center for Grieving Children, Portland, ME
 Nicole Barnes, LICSW, Park Nicollet Growing Through Grief, St. Louis Park, MN
 Diane Carlson LMSW, CBC, Hospice & Palliative Care Foundation, Spartanburg, SC
 Liz Carson, Kate's Club, Atlanta, GA
 Katie Wilberding Cross, LCSW, Judi's House, Denver, CO
 Timothy Dearhamer, LCSW, The Tristesse Grief Center, Tulsa, OK
 Allyson England Drake, M.Ed, CT, Full Circle Grief Center, Richmond, VA
 Michelle Gonzalez, MS, Uplift Center for Grieving Children, Philadelphia, PA
 Michelle Halm, MA, M.Ed., CT, Pillars Community Health, La Grange, IL
 Kelsey Hoepfer, LPC, NCC, CT, Willow House, Bannockburn, IL
 David C. Joswick, BS, MS Executive Dir. New Hope for Kids, Maitland, FL
 Laura Moore, EdD, CHES, CCLS, The Harbor Lights Foundation, Rye, NY
 Lisa Moreno, M.Ed., M.A., LPC, RDT, CSC, NCC, Children's Bereavement Center Rio Grande Valley, Harlingen, TX
 Jessi Morgan, LMSW, Communities In Schools of the Permian Basin, Midland, TX
 Camille Gerace Nitschky, Executive Director, Children's Grief Center GLBR, Midland, MI
 Buffy Peters, Hamilton's Academy of Grief & Loss, Des Moines, IA
 Jessica Porte, The Elizabeth Hospice, Escondido, CA
 Therese Ross, M.S., Executive Director, Rick's Place, Wilbraham, MA
 Rachel Saffer, LCSW-S, The Austin Center for Grief and Loss, Austin, TX
 Elizabeth M. Sergeant M.Ed, M.A., Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Charlotte, NC
 Colleen Shannon, LICSW, The Children's Room, Center for Grieving Children and Teens, Arlington, MA
 Shawn T. Sledzianowski, NCC, LPC, CT, Highmark Caring Place, Warrendale, PA
 Mandi Zucker, LSW, CT, Inner Harbor, Westfield, NJ

NACG Staff Team:

Adam Carter, PhD, LCPC, NCC, CCMHC, ACS, TF, National Clinical Director
 Deirdra Flavin, MSc, CFRE, National Marketing & Development Director
 Vicki Jay, Chief Executive Officer
 Megan Lopez, MSW, LMSW, National Program Director

This document is part of NACG Grieffalk: A Toolkit for Supporting Students who are Grieving.

Please visit www.childrengrieve.org for additional free resources.

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Why supporting bereaved students is necessary to their learning.

Students who are grieving face a multitude of additional potential stressors during the school day. We know they struggle with emotional, physical, behavioral, and interpersonal reactions to their grief that impact their ability to successfully navigate the school environment both in the immediate and long term.

According to the 2024 [Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model](#) (CBEM) report from Judi’s House, an estimated one in twelve children in

the U.S. will experience the death of a parent or sibling by their eighteenth birthday. Many more youths are bereaved due to the death of a grandparent, sibling, friend, or other significant person.

Evidence

Students who are grieving may experience cognitive and emotional challenges which may result in decreased school performance and social or behavioral difficulties. For students who are grieving a potentially traumatic loss, such as death by suicide or violence, the grieving process can become more



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complicated. Through the work of brain development researchers and post traumatic stress experts, we know a child's brain and nervous system can be negatively impacted when it is overworked by stress and perceived threats making it difficult to learn new information and successfully adapt to change.

In addition to the more immediate needs of students grieving, the long-term impacts of unsupported grief and persistent traumatic stress can have significant negative outcomes. Many educators are familiar with the Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study, which shows the impact of ACEs on a child's development and lifelong trajectory. This includes possible negative impacts on physical health, mental health, relationships, education, and job opportunities.

Being grief- and trauma-informed and sensitive is not only integral to supporting the whole child, but it is also instrumental in supporting students' academic and life-long goals.

A Call to Action:

Provide Grief Trainings to Staff

- 93% of educators agree that childhood grief is a serious problem that deserves more attention from schools ([A national survey of educators by the New](#)

[York Life Foundation and the American Federation of Teachers](#)).

- 92% of educators think there should be a greater focus on training educators to support students grieving (NYLF & AFT survey).

Establish Policies Related to Death and Grief

- Determine how your district will respond to deaths in the community.
- Know how to utilize resources such as those available from the [National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement](#) and the [Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#).

Model and Create a Grief-Sensitive Culture

- Understand the importance of language, normalizing grief and loss, honesty, and resources
- Consider becoming a [Grief Sensitive School](#).

School districts have the opportunity to actively work to create structures, policies, cultures, and norms which create grief-sensitive spaces. These spaces recognize the vulnerabilities of students who are grieving in order to decrease adverse responses and create increased safety as a conduit for learning.

Focus on Bereavement Policies

Recommendations for Student Bereavement Leave Policies:

In order to create a grief-sensitive school for all members of the school community, school districts should consider offering the following:

- Removing arbitrary time limits around when absences due to bereavement will be considered excused absences. Give consideration to both the increased frequency of delayed services as necessary and flexibility, e.g. some students may want to return to school the next day to have support from their friends and have structure but may find the coming weeks challenging.
- Expanding the definition of family to acknowledge the diverse range of family compositions and to better represent those significant to the bereaved.
- Collaborating with the student, their guardian(s), teachers, and counselors to coordinate the student's return to school following a death, e.g. through the use of an [Individual Student Bereavement Support Plan](#).

Recommendations for Staff Bereavement Leave Policies:

School districts across the country vary widely in their approach to bereavement leave policies. Many

incorporate bereavement leave as a subset of sick leave, with the number of days allowed typically ranging from 3 to 5 with full pay for a death in the immediate family. For a death outside of the immediate family, staff are typically allotted 1 day per academic year.

In order to create a grief-sensitive school for all members of the school community, school districts should consider offering the following:

- Minimum of five days of paid bereavement leave, separate from sick leave, for all full-time employees.
- Additional days for employees with legal responsibility for settling the affairs of the deceased, e.g. appointed as an executor of a will.
- Removing time limits around when bereavement leave must be taken, with consideration to the increased frequency of delayed services as necessary.
- Expanding the definition of a family member or loved one to better represent those significant to the bereaved.
- Providing options (additional days of leave) for staff who experience multiple deaths within a single academic year.



In the following pages you will find notes and resources to support you in defining how your school will support a student who is grieving. Text highlighted in blue can be clicked through for direct access to the resource.

Please note this document is not intended to be a resource in response to a school crisis. It is intended to assist in your planning for support of students who are grieving a death.

Procedures for becoming prepared to support students who are grieving

ACTION ITEM	CONSIDERATIONS	ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY (WHO)
Why supporting bereaved students is necessary to their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research childhood bereavement estimates in your region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • School Board
Prepare and Implement District Grief Sensitivity Protocol/Policies. Helpful Resources: National Center for Crisis and Bereavement Help me Prepare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create policies before a crisis or death happens. • Be consistent with responses to death losses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • District Mental Health staff • School-level leadership

ACTION ITEM	CONSIDERATIONS	ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY (WHO)
<p>Prepare Staff (Grief Trainings)</p> <p>Helpful Resources:</p> <p>Become a Grief-Sensitive School</p> <p>Resources available through the Coalition to Support Grieving Students</p> <p>NACG Grief Talk Resource Guides</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite your local childhood grief center to provide a training. A listing of local bereavement centers is available here. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • District Mental Health staff • School-level leadership
<p>Review: The Rights of the Student who is Grieving.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display in district and school spaces (buildings and/or websites) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • School Board • School-level leadership
<p>Prepare and train staff on using an Individual Student Bereavement Support Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate into school practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • District Mental Health/ Counseling staff • School-level leadership
<p>Prepare Staff Support Plans</p> <p>Helpful Resources:</p> <p>Bereavement Leave Policy Recommendations</p> <p>Resource from the Coalition to Support Grieving Students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain what resources will be available (where, when, how) • Provide helpful resources • If applicable: Provide information regarding employee assistance program and available services after a death. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • District Mental Health/ Counseling staff • School-level leadership
<p>Assign staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider which staff will speak with the family, community, and other stakeholders. • Consider your school's policy on staff attending funerals and memorials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-level leadership

ACTION ITEM	CONSIDERATIONS	ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY (WHO)
<p>Prepare general outline of Scripts/Letters to send out.</p> <p>Helpful Resources:</p> <p>Notification Templates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a prepared outline/script that can be individualized. • Have a prepared letter/release of information that can be individualized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • District Mental Health/Counseling staff • School-level leadership
<p>Prepare a memorialization policy.</p> <p>Helpful Resources:</p> <p>Commemoration and Memorialization</p> <p>Virtual Memorials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be consistent! What you do for one, you must do for all. It is worth considering if you can maintain this in the long-term. • Assign a staff member to keep track of memorialization. • This can be an opportunity to involve students in generating ideas within parameters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent • District Mental Health/Counseling staff • School-level leadership/counselors
<p>Create a list of community grief resources to utilize and share.</p> <p>Helpful Resources:</p> <p>NACG Community Grief Support Listing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and create a resource guide of grief and mental health resources in your community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School administrators and mental health team

Tips for the script following a death impacting a member of the school community:



- Be consistent across the different scripts.
- Acknowledge you have sad news to share.
- Be honest.
- Keep it factual (use concrete words like death, died, etc.)
- Only share information that is pertinent/information the family has approved.
- Explain what resources will be available (counseling office, safe rooms, etc.)
- Provide helpful resources. ([NACG, National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement](#), etc.)

Supporting students immediately after a death

ACTION ITEM	CONSIDERATIONS	ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY (WHO)
<p>Confirm and clarify information with the family/caregiver.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm information about the death with the caregiver. • Clarify the information that the family is comfortable being shared (cause of death, date, etc.). • A school representative can support the family in understanding the implications of their choices around what to share. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigned District Point of Contact
<p>Prepare Scripts (as applicable in the event of death of student, teacher, other stakeholder).</p> <p>Helpful Resources:</p> <p>Notification Templates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a script to share the news with staff. • Prepare a script to share the news with students/peers. • Prepare a script to share the news with other guardians/stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District Point of Contact • Director of Mental Health/Guidance and Counseling
<p>Prepare staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the news with staff as outlined in the script. • Ensure every staff member with access to the student(s) is informed of the death. • Explain what resources will be available (where, when, how). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigned District Point of Contact

ACTION ITEM	CONSIDERATIONS	ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY (WHO)
<p>Prepare peers (as applicable in the event of death of a student, teacher, other stakeholder).</p> <p>Helpful Resources: NACG Grief Talk Resource Guides NACG Community Grief Support Listing Supporting a Peer who is Grieving Peer Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the news with the bereaved students' classmates as outlined in the script. • Explain what resources will be available (where, when, how). • Provide a point of contact(s) if any student is in need of assistance. • Provide education to non-grieving peers about supporting a bereaved classmate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed School Administration • Appointed Counseling/Mental Health Team Member
<p>Prepare guardians/ stakeholders (as applicable in the event of death of a student, teacher, other stakeholder).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the news with guardians/stakeholders (as appropriate) as outlined in the script. • Explain what resources will be available. • Provide helpful resources. • Provide a point of contact to direct any questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District or School Point of Contact

Considerations following a death

ACTION ITEM	CONSIDERATIONS	ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY (WHO)
Clarify family's preferences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the family comfortable with staff attending the funeral? • Comfortable with peers attending the funeral? • Will there be flowers accepted or monetary donations only? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigned District or School Contact.
Arrangements for the Funeral/Memorial.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be consistent (with every death that occurs in the district). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigned District or School Contact.
Funeral Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What assigned staff member will attend funerals? <p>Tip: Be consistent with whether or not staff attends funerals or memorials across all student populations and causes of death.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-level leadership.
Staff Coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will be assigned to cover the missing staff's positions while they attend the funeral? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-level leadership.

Return to school considerations (immediate and long-term)

ACTION ITEM	CONSIDERATIONS	ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY (WHO)
Notify staff of student's planned return.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notify all appropriate staff that will have contact with the student (teachers, counselors, librarians, cafeteria staff, bus drivers, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigned District or School Contact
Implement the Individual Student Bereavement Plan .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use this tool when the student initially returns to school. Reevaluate as needed to reflect the changing needs of the student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigned District Staff Assigned School Counseling Program
Other considerations: Supporting Bereaved Youth with Disabilities resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the student have any disabilities? Are there any religious practices to keep in mind? What racial and cultural components need to be considered? What socio-economic impacts should be considered? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigned District Staff Assigned School Counseling Program
Document the Individual Student's Bereavement Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upload into the district system. Provide the Individual Student's Bereavement Plan or At-a-Glance version to appropriate staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigned District or School Contact

Review and evaluate

ACTION ITEM	CONSIDERATIONS	ROLE/ RESPONSIBILITY (WHO)
Reflect on the impact of grief interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What worked well for the student, family, school, and community?• What could be improved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All involved ranging from the bereaved student to the District.



Inclusive Gender Statement: In the context of this document, the use of the term “child(ren)” encompasses both boys and girls, as well as any other gender identity or gender expression that falls within the spectrum of childhood. This language choice is intended to promote inclusion and respect for the diversity of gender identities and non-binary genders.