



COALITION *to* SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS

www.grievingstudents.org

Contacts:

Arielle Densen
(212) 358-8515, ext. 5
adensen@tillerllc.com

Lacey Siegel
212-576-7937
lacey_s_siegel@newyorklife.com

Groundbreaking “Coalition to Support Grieving Students” Releases First-Ever Bereavement Resource for Educators

**National Research Shows Only 7% of Educators Have Ever Received Bereavement Training,
Yet Nearly All Believe Childhood Grief Needs More Attention in Schools**

**Coalition Convened by New York Life Foundation; Part of Foundation’s
Longstanding Commitment to Support Grieving Children and Their Families**

**Founding Members Include America’s Two Largest Teachers’ Unions and Eight Professional
Organizations Representing Administrators, Principals, Student Support Personnel**

Washington, D.C., January 13, 2015 – In a groundbreaking initiative to reach the millions of grieving students in classrooms across the nation, the Coalition to Support Grieving Students today launched grievingstudents.org, an innovative multimedia resource designed to empower educators and school professionals in their efforts to support grieving students.

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students, convened in 2013 by the New York Life Foundation, is a collaboration among the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement and ten of the leading professional organizations in the K-12 education space. The Coalition is comprised of organizations whose members play an important role in reaching grieving children at school, including teachers, administrators, principals, school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, and school nurses. It is a lynchpin in the New York Life Foundation’s longstanding efforts to fund initiatives and organizations supporting grieving children and their families. Total commitments since 2007 have exceeded \$20 million.

LEAD FOUNDING MEMBERS

National Center for School Crisis & Bereavement • New York Life Foundation

FOUNDING MEMBERS

AASA, The School Superintendents Association • American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA) • American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
American School Counselor Association (ASCA) • National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) • National Association of School Nurses (NASN)
National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) • National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Education Association Health Information Network (NEA HIN) • School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA)



COALITION *to* SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS

www.grievingstudents.org

“The immense need for schools to deliver better support to their grieving students is reflected in the Coalition members’ impressive commitment to this initiative,” said New York Life Foundation President Heather Nesle. “Although school professionals have long confronted the issue of student grief, for the first time, all of the right stakeholders are formally working together to address this issue in a concerted, interdisciplinary way.”

The Coalition unveiled its new website – a first-of-its-kind, industry-endorsed set of resources for school professionals – today in a special briefing at George Washington University.

Unbeknownst to Many, Grief’s Impact Is Deeply Felt at School

The Coalition’s work stems from educators’ first-hand experience with the widespread, poignant nature of childhood bereavement: in the United States, approximately one in 20 children will lose a parent by the time they reach 16 years of age, and the vast majority of children will experience the loss of a family member or friend by the time they complete high school.

“The national spotlight will shine briefly on grieving children during newsworthy school crises. But grief at school is an unrelenting day-in, day-out problem, and most educators say they feel under-resourced and not fully prepared to support the grieving students in their midst,” said Nesle.

Grief frequently has a negative impact on learning and classroom behavior. In a survey of educators conducted in 2012 by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the New York Life Foundation, a majority of teachers said they frequently witnessed a negative effect on academic performance and classroom behavior when a student lost a parent or guardian. Even further, these students faced greater emotional challenges such as anxiety and loneliness.

“Educators are in a unique position to provide support to grieving students,” said David Schonfeld, MD, director of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement and a leading childhood bereavement expert. “At home, a child may be reluctant to upset family members who are also grieving. Schools are a place for bereaved children to receive support from trusted adults who have a safe emotional distance from their loss.”

Deborah Pannell, who lost her husband when her son Josiah was six years old, has experienced first-hand how impactful a supportive school environment can be for a grieving student. “Josiah became very sensitive after he lost his dad,” said Pannell. “Support from the school let him know that it was okay for him to go through the emotional experiences related to his dad’s death. He didn’t have to feel like it was a secret. In the classroom, teachers encouraged Josiah to talk about his dad. Their sensitivity and willingness to give him space to talk about his loss when he wanted to made a big difference.”



Groundbreaking Coalition Emphasizes Interdisciplinary Approach to Grief Support

The 2012 AFT/New York Life survey demonstrated that while nearly all educators believe childhood grief needs more attention in schools, a lack of resources and training hinders them. In fact, while 69 percent of teachers reported having at least one grieving student in their classroom, only seven percent had received any training on how to support grieving children.

In response to the needs of grieving students and interest among the school community to meet those needs, the Coalition to Support Grieving Students has met regularly in Washington, D.C. for the past two years to develop a set of grief resources tailored to school professionals. Its goal: empowering school communities across America in the ongoing support of their grieving students.

“Support for a grieving child should be coordinated among the various adults who interact with that child at school, working as a team to provide effective support,” explained Dr. Schonfeld. “The Coalition’s breadth of membership allows us to advocate meaningfully for a team-based support model for grieving students.”

Coalition’s Site Sets New Standard for Educators

The Coalition’s flagship resource, grievingstudents.org, captures best practices for addressing grief at school in an easy-to-use, multimedia platform. Designed as a practitioner-oriented toolkit, the site facilitates self-directed professional development, equipping educators with the information, insights, and practical advice needed to better understand and meet the needs of their grieving students.

“The site was created with the understanding that teachers and other school professionals do not need to act as grief counselors to support their grieving students. They can make a big difference by taking relatively simple measures to express care and understanding,” said Dr. Schonfeld.

The website was created in partnership with Scholastic Inc., a longstanding supporter of teachers and children, and informed by the expertise of Dr. Schonfeld and the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement.

Looking Forward to More Grief Support in Schools

In 2015 and beyond, the Coalition will implement activities designed to raise awareness of grief in school and encourage greater support for grieving students. These include robust communication efforts to inform the members of the Coalition’s partner organizations about the new site as well as webinars and



COALITION *to* SUPPORT GRIEVING STUDENTS

www.grievingstudents.org

articles in the organizations' publications and conference presentations. In addition, new content will be added to the site over the course of the year.

"By the end of 2015, we anticipate that the Coalition's resources will have reached 4.7 million American school professionals. New York Life will also employ our field force of more than 12,000 agents and 9,000 employees to raise awareness of grievingstudents.org across the country." said Nesle. "Too many of our nation's school children are grieving in isolation. We can't eliminate their grief journey, but we can ease the path."

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students

The founding member organizations of the Coalition to Support Grieving Students are the School Superintendents' Association (AASA), American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), American School Counselor Association (ASCA), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), National Association of School Nurses (NASN), National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), National Education Association Health Information Network (NEA-HIN), and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA). The lead founding members are the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement and the New York Life Foundation.

About the New York Life Foundation

Inspired by New York Life's tradition of service and humanity, the New York Life Foundation has, since its founding in 1979, provided \$185 million in charitable contributions to national and local nonprofit organizations. The Foundation supports programs that benefit young people, particularly in the areas of educational enhancement and childhood bereavement. The Foundation also encourages and facilitates the community involvement of employees, agents, and retirees of New York Life through its Volunteers for Good program. To learn more, please visit www.newyorklifefoundation.org.