



Q&A

What is the Coalition to Support Grieving Students?

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students is a unique collaboration of the leading professional organizations representing teachers, principals, school administrators, school support personnel, and other school professionals who have come together with a common conviction: grieving students need the support and care of the school community. The Coalition's purpose is to create and share a set of industry-endorsed resources that will empower school communities across America in the ongoing support of their grieving students.

Who are the Coalition members?

The lead founding members of the Coalition are the New York Life Foundation and the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement. The following professional organizations constitute the founding members of the Coalition:

- [AASA, The School Superintendents Association](#)
- [American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\)](#)
- [American Federation of School Administrators \(AFSA\)](#)
- [American Federation of Teachers \(AFT\)](#)
- [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 Health Information Network \(NEA-HIN\)](#)
- [School Social Work Association of America \(SSWAA\)](#)

What prompted the formation of the Coalition?

The Coalition, formed in 2013, was created in response to a research initiative that polled educators nationwide on the subject of grief at school. This research, conducted jointly by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and New York Life Foundation in 2012, revealed that America's educators were keenly interested in helping the large number of grieving students in their classrooms, yet were in urgent need of more training and resources regarding childhood bereavement.

It became clear that in order to most effectively address the gap between educators' desire and ability to help the grieving students in their midst, the professional organizations representing K-12

LEAD FOUNDING MEMBERS

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

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educators needed to come together in unified support of the issue. To that end, New York Life invited key players in the profession to address the lack of support for grieving students, forming a first-of-its-kind education coalition.

The Coalition was created to elevate the national conversation around childhood grief and to encourage entire communities to take action to support the grieving children in their midst – while recognizing that schools have a critical role to play in addressing grief.

Why is the Coalition focused on the issue of childhood grief?

The Coalition was founded to focus on the issue of childhood grief because prior to its formation, no organization or body existed that exclusively addressed the acute problem of how grieving children fare at school. Yet schools have a critical role to play in the grief journey of children who have lost a loved one. Schools are an ideal site at which to deliver care to grieving children: they are a safe and known setting for students, with a variety of trained staff available to address issues of grieving and death. The response of teachers and classmates to a student's grief can either serve as an important source of support and stability during a difficult time, or as an additional hurdle to surmount. And importantly, grief can have a serious impact on learning, as bereavement can manifest itself in decreased academic performance, social withdrawal, and new behavioral problems.

Why is this initiative geared towards the educational community specifically?

In the U.S., approximately one in 20 children will lose a parent by age 16, and the vast majority of children will experience the loss of a family member or friend by the time they complete high school. Yet grieving children are vastly overlooked – both in society at large and in schools in particular. By offering support, educators have an enormous opportunity to improve outcomes for their students. However, recent research from the New York Life Foundation suggests that the single greatest barrier preventing educators from reaching out to the grieving students in their midst is knowledge of how best to support them. Thus, the Coalition has specifically targeted the educational community in order to provide it with greater grief resources and support structures.

What makes this Coalition so unique?

The highly collaborative and interdisciplinary spirit of the Coalition, as well as its members' sustained dedication to working together, has enabled this group to be uniquely effective in reaching a broad spectrum of educators and school community members across America. The Coalition's members attest that the degree of agreement on this issue between professional organizations across the field is truly extraordinary.



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Importantly, the Coalition members are united by the conviction that now is the time to provide an integrative, comprehensive approach to supporting grieving children at school. Because the group includes educational players who touch across the entire school framework, the Coalition is able to advocate for a cohesive team-based model to grief support.

What is the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, and what is its role in this initiative?

The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement serves as a national resource for schools in supporting students, staff and families at times of crisis and loss. The Center is headed by Dr. David Schonfeld, a world-renowned expert in childhood bereavement who has provided critical leadership and oversight of the Coalition to Support Grieving Students, including the development of its educational web-based materials. Dr. Schonfeld and his colleagues at the Center play an integral role in the ongoing activities of the Coalition, leading webinars and conference presentations for the Coalition's member organizations and providing expertise to the group.

Established in 2005, the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement was originally supported by the September 11th Children's Fund and the National Philanthropic Trust, and is now funded by the New York Life Foundation.

How is the New York Life Foundation involved in this initiative?

The New York Life Foundation has long been focused on serving children in need, and in 2008, the Foundation expanded that focus to include an initiative to help children and their caregivers deal with a close personal death. Since that time, the New York Life Foundation has worked tirelessly on behalf of grieving children, dedicating over \$20 million to supporting this cause to date.

In 2013, the New York Life Foundation founded the Coalition to Support Grieving Student as one of its flagship initiatives to support grieving children. With the recognition that it is imperative to reach grieving children at school, the Foundation convened professional leaders across the K-12 educational spectrum to participate in the groundbreaking efforts of the Coalition. The Foundation underwrites all activities of the Coalition to Support Grieving Students and plays an active leadership role in the direction of the initiative.

Who is the intended audience of grievingstudents.org?

The primary audience includes classroom educators, principals, administrators, student support personnel, and other school professionals. The secondary audience includes parents, students, community members and anyone interested in resources to support grieving students.