



Recognizing Grief Awareness Day in Your School

Children's Grief Awareness Day is held each year on the third Thursday in November. In 2021, it will be marked on November 18. The day reminds us that childhood bereavement is all too common. In the United States, [one in 14 children](#) will lose a parent or sibling by the time they reach 18 years of age (CBEM). Almost all children—[about 90%](#)—will experience the death of a close family member or friend.

2021 has been an especially challenging year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many children have lost loved ones from COVID-19. The nation has experienced excess deaths from other causes as well. Families have grieved these losses in isolation, without the usual in-person comforts of friends, neighbors, and faith communities.

Despite these sobering facts, grieving children are vastly overlooked both in society at large and in schools. Schools have a critical role to play in the grief journeys of children who have lost a loved one. Educators' and classmates' responses to a student's grief can either serve as a source of support and stability during a difficult time, or as an additional hurdle to overcome. Moreover, grief can have a serious impact on learning for school-age children. Bereavement can lead to decreased academic performance, social withdrawal, and behavioral problems.

Educators have an enormous opportunity to improve outcomes for students by demonstrating an awareness of grief experiences and offering support. Talking with grieving students about their loss helps them cope.

Increasing all students' awareness of the impact of loss can also help those who are grieving. Peers who don't know what to say or do may isolate or tease a grieving classmate after a death. This can worsen the isolation grieving students already feel. When educators equip all students with the skills to support a peer, they help create an environment that is beneficial for the entire school.

SAMPLE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES FOR GRIEF AWARENESS DAY/MONTH

- » Pledge to become a Grief-Sensitive School (if you haven't already). <https://grievingstudents.org/gssi/>
- » If you are already a Grief-Sensitive School, encourage your district or other schools in your

district and region to become Grief-Sensitive as well. <https://grievingstudents.org/gssi/>.

- » Provide a school staff training during November on ways to support grieving students. You can utilize these [educator training modules](#) or invite your [local children's bereavement program](#) to provide the training.
- » Meet with a local children's bereavement support program to discuss setting up school-based grief support groups, training for school staff, and/or a mechanism for referring grieving students for support services. (You can locate programs/centers at <https://elunanetwork.org/national-bereavement-resource-guide/resources/> and <https://childrengrieve.org/find-support>)
- » Inform/remind school staff about the free materials at the [Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#).
- » Meet with your parent teacher organization during November to make them aware that you are a Grief-Sensitive School. Let them know about the

resources of the Coalition to Support Grieving Students. Note: The National PTA is a member of the Coalition.

- » Order or download free resources for your school community including:

After a Loved One Dies: How Children Grieve and How Parents and Other Adults Can Support Them

This booklet explains how children grieve and the ways parents and other caring adults can help them understand death better.

- [English e-book](#)
- [Spanish e-book](#)

Supporting Your Child Brochure

This brochure provides advice to parents and caregivers on supporting children who are grieving.

- [English e-book](#)
- [Spanish e-book](#)

Supporting Your Students Brochure

Developed by the Coalition to Support Grieving Students, this pamphlet offers advice to educators and school personnel on how to support grieving students and how classmates can help.

- [English e-book](#)

Other materials are available at the [New York Life bereavement support resource site](#).

- » Review your school or district policies and practices related to supporting grieving students. View some of the [guidance documents](#) on the Coalition's website for ideas.
- » Inform your school staff about Grief Awareness Month and invite them to choose one of the following options:
 1. Encourage educators to reach out to at least one grieving child in their classroom. <https://grievingstudents.org/modules/conversation-support/>
 2. Have school mental health staff reach out to a grieving family from the school community. <https://grievingstudents.org/module-section/connecting-with-families/>
 3. Conduct an age-appropriate classroom lesson for children about grief and the needs of peers who are grieving (<https://grievingstudents.org/module-section/peer-support/>). Invite students to develop an appropriate classroom or school-wide project for National Children's Grief Awareness Day.

