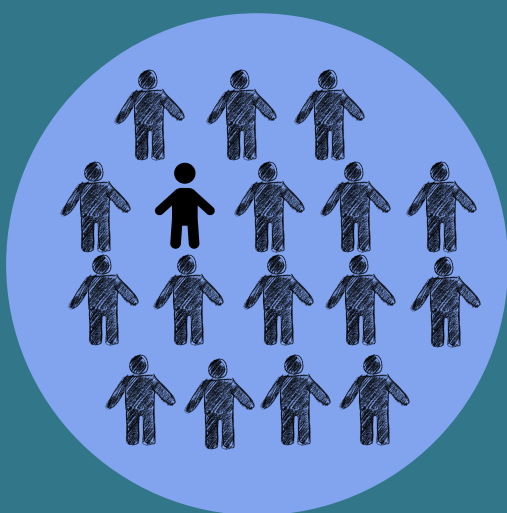


# GETTING THROUGH GRIEF

## A Guide for the Classroom



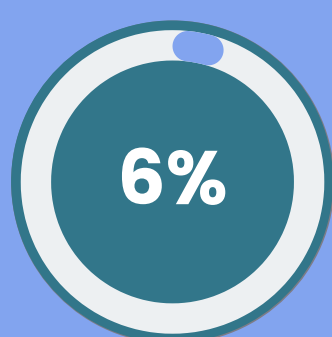
**1 in 17** children, about 249K children, in the United States will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18.



**This doubles to 662K NY youth by age 25.**

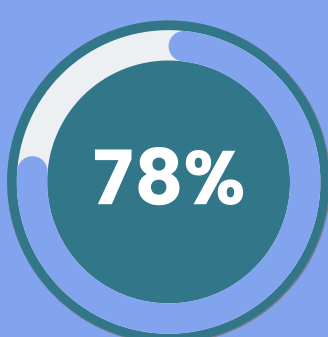
According to the Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM), created by the JAG Institute in partnership with the New York Life Foundation.

There may be more children in your classroom dealing with grief than you might think. Grief often goes unnoticed if not directly talked about.



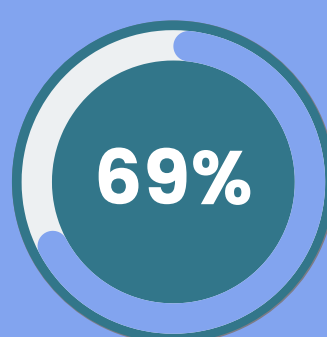
**OF CHILDREN IN NY**

will become bereaved by age 18



**OF 11-16 YEAR OLDS**

have lost at least one of their friends



**OF CHILDREN WHO LOST A PARENT**

think about their parent frequently

This is particularly relevant now during the pandemic. Evidence suggests that over 4,200 kids in NYC have lost a parent due to COVID-19.

Grief can also look like more than the loss of a parent or friend. Due to COVID-19, students are dealing with other forms of complicated loss, including loss of routine, social interactions, financial/economic stability in the household.



#### Sourced from:

- Burns et al. (2020). American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Advanced online publication.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, CDC WONDER Online Databases.

# In the Face of Grief: Conversations with Students

**It can feel very  
awkward to  
approach a  
student who has  
experienced loss,**



but silence  
actually communicates a  
lot to young people.  
Reaching out to grieving  
students lets them know  
that you recognize their  
situation and want to be  
supportive.

**It Is the Loss They  
Are Upset With,  
Not Your Question.**

As uncomfortable as it  
might feel, as caregivers  
we must try to start the  
conversation. Silence can  
underscore feelings for  
the bereaved of being  
alone, abandoned, or that  
nobody cares.

**Reluctance, fear,  
shame, and  
confusion**



are all possible reactions  
students might have to  
your outreach. Make it  
clear that you are  
available if and when they  
want to speak, and ask if  
you can reach out to their  
surviving caregiver(s).

SOURCED FROM

PARTNERS IN HEALING: BACK TO SCHOOL: CONVERSATIONS IN THE FACE OF GRIEF

# Creating Space to Talk

Our goal is not to say the “right” thing to make a student “feel better” – you don’t necessarily have the power to do that. The goal is to create space for the student to speak. You can create space by:



## Expressing concern

Let students know you’ve heard about their loss and are available to listen and offer support in private.

## Inving the conversation in private with direct, open-ended questions

For example, you can simply ask, “How are you and your family doing?”



## Offering practical advice

For example, discuss ways to respond to questions from peers or adults about the loss, or offer ways to ask for help if the student is having academic difficulty. Try to avoid offering “feel better” techniques, as they might appear to trivialize the situation or be very personal.

## Listening and observing

Share observations about students’ behavior or responses in a nonjudgmental manner, such as, “I noticed you haven’t been sitting in your usual seat and I just wanted to touch base.” Listen more and talk less.



## Limiting personal sharing

You can draw on personal experiences to help better understand students, but do not share details with them. Keep the focus on the student.

## Offering reassurance

Without minimizing their concerns, let students know that over time they will be more able to cope with their distress, and that they are not alone- you will be there to help them along the way.



## Maintaining contact

At first, children may not accept your invitation to talk or offers of support. Their questions and willingness to talk will evolve over time. Remain accessible, curious, and connected.

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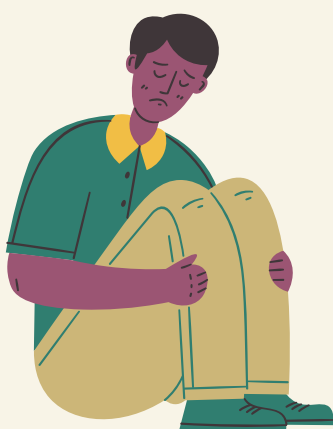
# HELPFUL TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

## INSTEAD OF SAYING THIS

which can seem  
minimizing or  
presumptuous,



“I know just what you’re going through.”



“You must be so... (angry/ sad/ etc.).”



“This is hard. But it’s important to remember the good things in life, too.”

OR

“You’ll always have your memories...”

OR

“At least he’s no longer in pain.”

(Any statement that begins with the words “at least” should probably be reconsidered.)



“You still have (other caregiver)...”

## TRY SAYING THIS

so that the student  
maintains a sense of  
control over their story.



“Can you tell me more about what this has been like for you?”



“Most people have strong feelings when something like this happens to them. What has this been like for you?”

OR

“I noticed you did/said \_\_\_\_\_. I was wondering how you might be feeling.”



“What kinds of memories do you have about (the person who died)?”

OR

“What sorts of things have you been thinking about since your (grandma/father/friend) died?”



“How has it been at home with your (other caregiver)?”

# TEN TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR STUDENTS GRIEVE DURING COVID-19

Don't forget that your students are very smart and also experience emotion similarly to adults. Treat them and their feelings with respect and dignity.

## 1 IMMEDIATELY ACKNOWLEDGE THE LOSS.

Reach out to say, “I am so sorry for your loss.” Don’t be nervous. It doesn’t matter if your student has directly vocalized their loss with you, just reach out if you hear about the loss from administration or their family members.



## 2 DON'T MINIMIZE.

Do not minimize the loss or try to “take away” your student's pain.



## 3 AVOID PRESUMPTIVE STATEMENTS.

Avoid statements like: “He/she is in a better place” or “I know how you feel.”

## 4 KNOW THAT GRIEF IS NOT LINEAR.

Your students may cycle between the different stages of grieving.



## 5 FOCUS ON YOUR STUDENT.

Don’t compare your experiences with grief to your student's experiences. Allow them to navigate their own grief.

## 6 DON'T JUDGE HOW YOUR STUDENT IS REACTING.

Everyone grieves differently. There is nothing wrong with how they are feeling or coping.



## 7 DON'T RUSH THE PROCESS.

Everyone grieves at a different pace. There is no timeline to “move on” or “get over it”.



## 8 ALLOW FOR CRYING AND SILENCES.

Expressing emotions is healthy. Resist the urge to fill silence with words.

## 9 LEND A HELPING HAND.

Instead of saying, “Let me know how I can help,” tell them what you will do. For example: providing homework passes, extending assignment deadlines, referring to a school counselor



## 10 PEOPLE WHO ARE GRIEVING OFTEN FORGET TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES.

See if you can reach out to a caregiver of the student and connect them with resources that can help with basic needs.