

GRIEF IN OUR SCHOOLS: HOW CAN WE SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS?

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WHAT IS GRIEF?

GRIEF IS EVERYWHERE! LOSS COMES IN MANY FORMS...

- Incarceration
- Breakups/divorces
- Loss of friendship
- Loss of a home/moving
- Loss of cultural ties
- Loss of a job
- Loss of a dream
- Diagnosis of illness/disability
- Finishing a really good book
- Death



GRIEF AND TRAUMA

- Not all grief is traumatic, but there is grief in all trauma.
- Grief and trauma histories have lots of layers. These layers are messy and get wrapped up in each other.
- It is not our job to organize the mess for our students, but to simply support them through it



SOME STATISTICS FROM THE CHILDHOOD BEREAVEMENT ESTIMATION MODEL...

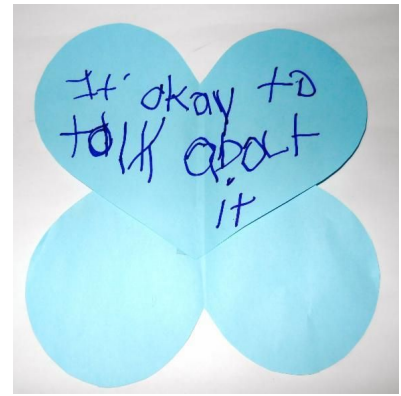
- An estimated 1 in 15 children (over 4.8 million children) will experience the death of a sibling or parent by age 18
- By age 25, over 12.7 million people have experienced the death of a sibling or parent



DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS IN GRIEF

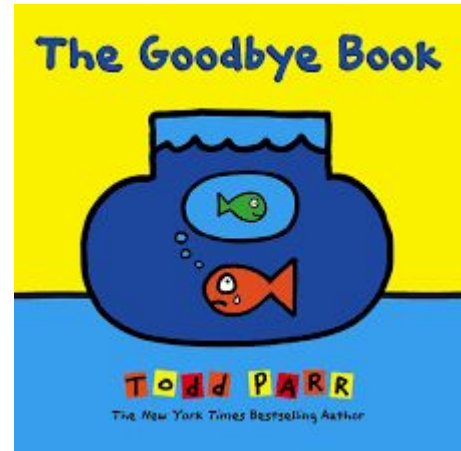
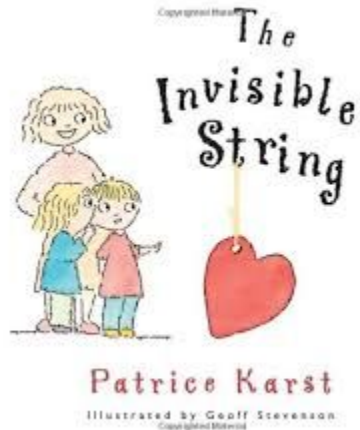
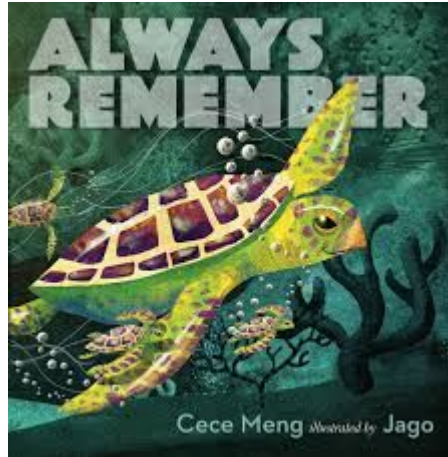
KIDS GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY THAN ADULTS!

- It's okay that they want to play!
- It's okay if they don't cry!
- It is not our job to make students feel grief in a certain way
- It is our job to help their caregivers understand that grief looks different in children
- Can look like: outbursts, shutting down, crying, escaping, changes in behavior, anger, aggression, lack of concentration/focus



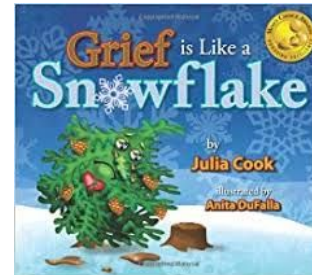
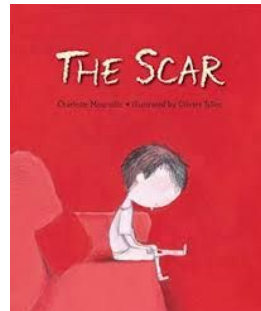
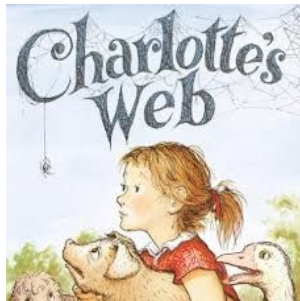
PRESCHOOL

- Avoid euphemisms
- Provide opportunities to express feelings through play and art
- Provide concrete answers to questions and be prepared to answer the same question repeatedly



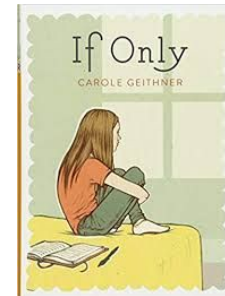
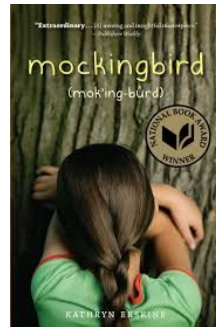
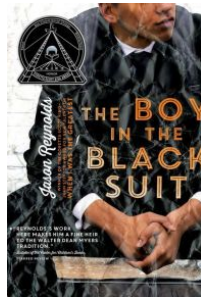
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

- Be patient when students have questions. Refer them to adults who have the answers if you do not.
- Younger students may engage in magical thinking and might think they could have prevented the death
- Provide students with a variety of ways to express their feelings- arts, toys, etc. because they might not have the words to talk about what they are feeling



MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

- Don't force students to share their feelings, especially in front of their peers. One-on-one opportunities are beneficial until students become more comfortable sharing
- Older students begin to express grief in a style similar to adults
- Older students may express their grief by using physical touch (hugging, touching the arm, etc.)



CULTURAL
CONSIDERATIONS

CULTURE AFFECTS GRIEF/TRAUMA

- Culture influences how people react to/cope with traumatic events
- Culture impacts the lens through which people view their experience and how they might judge their responses
- Cultural connections may have a healthy impact on the healing process (i.e. who is considered family, church as a support system, etc.)

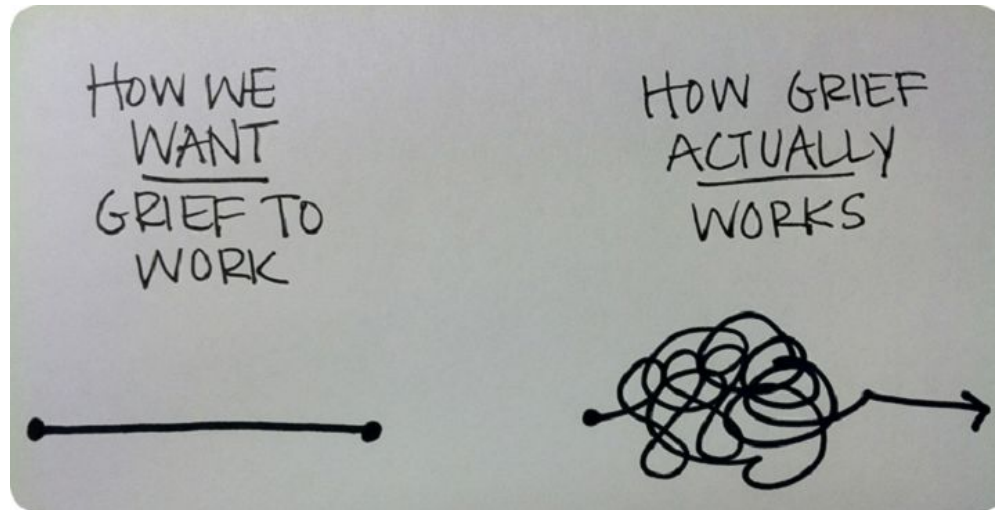
CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Students who are Asian American may be more prone to depression due to a more stoic overall demeanor
- Jewish families may sit shiva for 7 days following the death of a loved one
- Haitian American and African American students may be more emotional, as showing great emotion is valued in these cultures
- Native American students may put more emphasis on a reunion with nature after death
- Church/religion may become especially important for Black/African American students following a death

GRIEF SKILLS 101

GRIEF DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SCARY!

- Although you've likely heard of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's 5 stages of grief, it's time to move beyond that



GRIEF LANGUAGE DOS AND DON'TS

Dos

- It's okay to say died, dead, death
- Say their loved one's name
- Accept the student's reality as their reality
- Ask what your student needs
- Be okay with not knowing what to say/having all the answers. It's okay to sit in silence and just be present with a student.
- Died by suicide
- Be mindful about saying "parents" or "moms and dads"

Don'ts

- Use euphemisms
- Avoid the topic
- Try to force your student to talk about something they aren't ready for/force them to accept a different reality
- "They're in a better place now"
- "At least..."
- "I know how you feel"
- "Committed suicide"

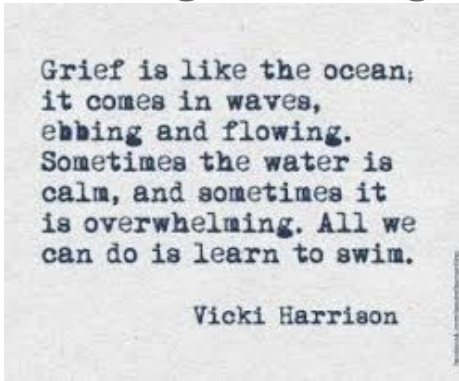
GRIEF FACILITATION BASICS



- We don't have to lower our expectations, but we can be flexible
- Keep checking in with students, let them know you're still there for them
- Be mindful of student/staff needs if a death occurs over the summer
- Be mindful of the impact social media has on student grief

GRIEF FACILITATION IN ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS

- Sessions can be activity-based, art-based, play-based, or experience-based
- It's okay to connect around some of your own experience, but should never be about you. Be intentional with the information you share
- Let the student lead the conversation. They don't need platitudes about how things will get better. Be there to listen and reflect



Grief is like the ocean;
it comes in waves,
ebbing and flowing.
Sometimes the water is
calm, and sometimes it
is overwhelming. All we
can do is learn to swim.

Vicki Harrison

GRIEF FACILITATION IN A GROUP SETTING

- “I pass” rule
- Set group rules
- You are not the expert
- Help facilitate connection between students
- Grief doesn’t always have to be the main topic- coping skills, feelings, etc.
- It’s okay to use games to build rapport/connection between members



GRIEF FACILITATION IN A CLASSROOM SETTING

- In a classroom lesson, include the bereaved student in the lesson if they are comfortable
- Consult with the bereaved student/family prior to a lesson
- Invite other students to share their feelings, offer support



WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT DESKS, LOCKERS, AND MEMORIALS?

- Immediately clearing out a desk or locker can create distress for other students
- Consider allowing the class to decide what they would like to do with the desk (keep it in a special place, put notes on it, etc.) and take cues from them about when it is time to remove any memorials. Teachers moving desks could be a good time to transition away from a memorial.
- Be mindful that students may become uncomfortable with using a desk/locker that belonged to a deceased student



WHAT HAPPENS IF A STAFF MEMBER DIES?

- All students should receive the same information
- Share information with families when possible
- Give students time to process their feelings, ask questions, talk about their concerns
- Be as honest as possible
- Be present with students
- Check in with staff/honor their needs as well



A SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING A STUDENT/STAFF DEATH ACCORDING TO ASCA

1. Attend the morning staff meeting
2. Identify and make contact with staff members acquainted with the person who died and find out if they need additional support
3. Provide in-class assistance when requested by teachers- speaking to classes that the student was in a teacher's classes if they have died to offer additional support and make them aware of the resources available to them
4. Identify high-risk students who might need additional support- close friends of the person who died, relatives, neighbors, etc.
5. Meet with identified high-risk students and determine which interventions may be suggested to the students- individual counseling, small group counseling, referral to clinical mental health agency

ASCA ROLES CONTINUED

6. Identify high-risk students who may be absent
7. Monitor students who ask to go home for the day- check in with them the next day and provide additional resources for guardians
8. Attend the afternoon staff meeting
9. Meet with Crisis Management Team to update members on the day and high-risk students
10. Discuss the role Crisis Management Team/Student Services staff will have at the funeral
11. Meet with the Crisis Management Team two weeks after funeral/memorial service to discuss the response activities and make recommendations for future crises

GRIEF RESOURCES

- [Dougy Center](#)
- [New York Life](#)
- [National Alliance for Grieving Children](#)
- [What's Your Grief](#)
- [Actively Moving Forward](#)
- [Grief Programs in Wisconsin](#)
 - [Agnesian Healthcare Bereavement/Grief Relief- Fond du Lac](#)
 - [Children and Teen Grief Support Network- Boys and Girls Club Oshkosh](#)
 - [Center for Grieving Children- Boys and Girls Club Fox Valley](#)
 - [Mourning Cloak- Ozaukee County](#)
 - [Unity Hospice and Palliative Care- De Pere](#)
 - [Camp HOPE- Stevens Point](#)
 - [Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin](#)
 - [Kids, Teens 'n' Grief- Beloit Regional Hospital](#)
 - [My Good Mourning Place- Milwaukee](#)
 - [Agrace Grief Support Center- Madison/Fitchburg](#)
 - [UW Carbone Cancer Center Grief Resources- Madison](#)
 - [Kyle's Korner- Wauwatosa](#)
 - [Camp Lloyd- Green Bay](#)
 - [Winchmann-Fargo Funeral Homes- Fox Valley](#)