



The Pettengill House, Inc.

Children & Family Services
Non Profit Social Service Agency

This resource list was compiled by the Pettengill House. A community-based wrap around social service agency. If you need assistance with connecting to resources, children and family services, school link service connection, mental health and substance addiction supports please contact our agency

Mental Health Resources

National Suicide Prevention 24-hour Hotline:

1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Samaritans:

1-877-870-4673 (HOPE)

www.samaritanshope.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):

1-800-950-6264

In a crisis, text NAMI to 741741

www.nami.org

Lahey Health Emergency Behavioral Services

(978) 744-1585 (24/7 hotline for local supports)

www.nebhealth.org

MassMen

www.massmen.org

Massachusetts Substance Use Help Line

1-800-327-5050 / <https://helplinema.org/>

Grief/Trauma Support

Care Dimensions

1-888-283-1722/ <https://www.caredimensions.org/grief-support/childrens/>

Riverside Trauma Center

1-781-433-0672/ <http://riversidetraumacenter.org/>

Pettengill Family Resource Center
21 Water St Suite 4A @ Carriage Mills
Amesbury MA 01913
978-834-6379
<http://www.pettengillhouse.org/home.aspx>

Normal/Expected Reactions to Death

Physical Sensations:

- Hollowness in stomach
- Tightness in the chest
- Tightness in the throat
- Oversensitivity to noise
- A sense of depersonalization (“I don’t feel real”, “I don’t feel like myself”)
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness in the muscles
- Lack of energy
- Dry mouth

Feelings:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt (worries about not being nice enough, etc.)
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Helplessness
- Shock
- Yearning for the person
- Emancipation (if the person who died was particularly mean/domineering, etc.)
- Relief (i.e., after a long illness — often accompanied by some guilt)
- Numbness

Thoughts:

- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Preoccupation
- Sense of the person’s presence
- Hallucinations (both visual and auditory — usually transient experiences, usually just within the first few weeks)

Behaviors:

- Sleep problems
- Appetite changes
- Absentmindedness
- Social withdrawal
- Dreams of the person we lost
- Avoiding reminders (avoiding places or things)
- Searching, calling out (either verbally or in thoughts)
- Sighing
- Restless overactivity
- Crying
- Visiting places or carrying objects that remind us of the person we lost
- Treasuring objects that belonged to the person

The above lists include many of the reactions to the loss of the loved one or friend. These are considered normal reactions. If these experiences persist for a long time (many months) or cause significant concern, seek support from a counselor.

Riverside Trauma Center

Reactions to Highly Stressful or Potentially Traumatic Events

After a loss or other highly stressful or potentially traumatic event people usually experience a wide range of reactions. These reactions generally fall into six domains (outlined below). For many people, reactions in the immediate aftermath of an event change and shift rapidly. All of these reactions are normal and to be expected.

It may be helpful to have a sense of where you fall on each continuum of types of reaction, keeping in mind that this can change and shift (in either direction) at any time. For most people, over time, reactions tend to move towards the right end of the continuums.

At the same time, there are things that people can do to take care of themselves in each domain which can help to ease some of the reactions that might be causing them continued distress (see other side for some suggestions).

Reaction Continuums

Emotional	Shock; Sorrow; Anger; Guilt; Fear; Numbness	←————→	Feeling some control of your emotions; Experiencing some positive emotions
Cognitive/ Thinking	Confusion; Intrusive thoughts; Short-term memory problems; Difficulty concentrating, Mind racing	←————→	Thinking and remembering as clearly as usual
Behavioral	Irritability; Difficulty sleeping; Lack of pleasure in regular activities; Quick to snap at people	←————→	Acting "like yourself"
Physical	Fatigue; Exhaustion; Stomachaches; Easily startled; Body aches; Headaches	←————→	No noticeable physical symptoms
Relational	Withdrawal; Fighting; Fear of being alone; Feeling obligated to interact with people	←————→	Interacting with others in safe and healthy ways; Accepting support when needed
Spiritual/ Meaning-Making	"Nothing matters." "Why would God do this?" "Why do I bother to do this kind of work?"	←————→	Finding meaning and hope in your life

Riverside Trauma Center

Strategies for Coping

While people experience a range of reactions to a greater or lesser degree after a highly stressful or potentially traumatic experience, generally most people are resilient and are okay after a while. It takes time to recover, however, most people find ways of integrating their experiences into their lives as they move forward. This is an incredibly personal process, but there are some things that many survivors of potentially traumatic events have found helpful.

Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow yourself to experience what you feel (cry, shake, breathe deeply, etc.) • Label what you are experiencing • Find a partner to vent to • Practice moderation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be assertive when needed • Engage in activities that enhance positive emotions • Use and enjoy positive humor • Add your own: _____
Cognitive/ Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write things down • Make small, daily decisions • Review previous successful problem-solving • Remember you have choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on being flexible • Use problem-solving skills • Engage in downward comparisons • Add your own: _____
Behavioral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do activities that were previously enjoyable • Set goals, have a plan • Get involved with others in working for a justice that restores • Ask others how they think you are doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore or develop safe routines • Plan ahead and prepare for possible high-risk situations • Avoid avoidance • Add your own: _____
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink water and minimize caffeine • Engage in physical activity (dance, run, yoga, etc) • Practice relaxation exercises • Listen to and take care of your body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get good, uninterrupted sleep • Avoid high-risk, dangerous sensation-seeking behaviors • Add your own: _____
Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make plans with people who feel supportive (consider, at least temporarily, limiting time with those who do not) • Give back and help others • Talk to others who have survived similar experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance time spent with others with time for yourself • Lean on others, accept help • Use community resources such as websites, telephone hotlines, etc. • Add your own: _____
Spiritual/ Meaning- Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing, paint, write poetry, journal, etc. • Read stories of other survivors who overcame hard times • Use faith to rekindle a sense of hope in yourself and others • Ask the hard questions boldly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek inspiration, guidance, and comfort from prayer, meditation, etc. • Talk to your clergy or other religious leaders • Forgive others and forgive yourself • Add your own: _____

Adapted from Meichenbaum (2012), and Yoder (2002)

For the majority of people, their reactions change over time (even if they come around to the same reactions again and again). However, some people feel that they are just stuck. If nothing is changing, it may be helpful to reach out to someone such as a counselor or clergy member for additional support.

Riverside Trauma Center

A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

www.riversidetraumacenter.org 



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS

Helping Children Cope With Loss, Death, and Grief Tips for Teachers and Parents

Schools and communities around the country will be impacted by the loss of life associated with the war in Iraq. The effects may be significant for some people because of their emotional closeness to the war and/or their concern over terrorism. How school personnel handle the resulting distress can help shape the immediate and longer-term grieving process for students, staff, and families. Children, in particular, will need the love and support of their teachers and parents to cope with their loss and reach constructive grief resolution.

Expressions of Grief

Talking to children about death must be geared to their developmental level, respectful of their cultural norms, and sensitive to their capacity to understand the situation. Children will be aware of the reactions of significant adults as they interpret and react to information about death and tragedy. In fact, for primary grade children adult reactions will play an especially important role in shaping their perceptions of the situation. The range of reactions that children display in response to the death of significant others may include:

- **Emotional shock** and at times an apparent lack of feelings, which serve to help the child detach from the pain of the moment;
- **Regressive (immature) behaviors**, such as needing to be rocked or held, difficulty separating from parents or significant others, needing to sleep in parent's bed or an apparent difficulty completing tasks well within the child's ability level;
- **Explosive emotions and acting out behavior** that reflect the child's internal feelings of anger, terror, frustration and helplessness. Acting out may reflect insecurity and a way to seek control over a situation for which they have little or no control;
- **Asking the same questions over and over**, not because they do not understand the facts, but rather because the information is so hard to believe or accept. Repeated questions can help listeners determine if the child is responding to misinformation or the real trauma of the event.

Helping Children Cope

The following tips will help teachers, parents, and other caregivers support children who have experienced the loss of parents, friends, or loved ones. Some of these recommendations come from Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado.

- **Allow children to be the teachers about their grief experiences:** Give children the opportunity to tell their story and be a good listener.
- **Don't assume that every child in a certain age group understands death in the same way or with the same feelings:** All children are different and their view of the world is unique and shaped by different experiences. (Developmental information is provided below.)
- **Grieving is a process, not an event:** Parents and schools need to allow adequate time for each child to grieve in the manner that works for that child. Pressing children to resume "normal" activities without the chance to deal with their emotional pain may prompt additional problems or negative reactions.

- **Don't lie or tell half-truths to children about the tragic event:** Children are often bright and sensitive. They will see through false information and wonder why you do not trust them with the truth. Lies do not help the child through the healing process or help develop effective coping strategies for life's future tragedies or losses.
- **Help all children, regardless of age, to understand loss and death:** Give the child information at the level that he/she can understand. Allow the child to guide adults as to the need for more information or clarification of the information presented. Loss and death are both part of the cycle of life that children need to understand.
- **Encourage children to ask questions about loss and death:** Adults need to be less anxious about not knowing all the answers. Treat questions with respect and a willingness to help the child find his or her own answers.
- **Don't assume that children always grieve in an orderly or predictable way:** We all grieve in different ways and there is no one "correct" way for people to move through the grieving process.
- **Let children know that you really want to understand what they are feeling or what they need:** Sometimes children are upset but they cannot tell you what will be helpful. Giving them the time and encouragement to share their feelings with you may enable them to sort out their feelings.
- **Children will need long-lasting support:** The more losses the child or adolescent suffers, the more difficult it will be to recover. This is especially true if they have lost a parent who was their major source of support. Try to develop multiple supports for children who suffer significant losses.
- **Keep in mind that grief work is hard:** It is hard work for adults and hard for children as well.
- **Understand that grief work is complicated:** Deaths that result from a terrorist act or war can bring forth many issues that are difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend. Grieving may also be complicated by a need for vengeance or justice and by the lack of resolution of the current situation: the conflict may continue and the nation may still feel at risk. The sudden or violent nature of the death or the fact that some individuals may be considered missing rather than dead can further complicate the grieving process.
- **Be aware of your own need to grieve:** Focusing on the children in your care is important, but not at the expense of your emotional needs. Adults who have lost a loved one will be far more able to help children work through their grief if they get help themselves. For some families, it may be important to seek family grief counseling, as well as individual sources of support.

Developmental Phases in Understanding Death

It is important to recognize that all children are unique in their understanding of death and dying. This understanding depends on their developmental level, cognitive skills, personality characteristics, religious or spiritual beliefs, teachings by parents and significant others, input from the media, and previous experiences with death. Nonetheless, there are some general considerations that will be helpful in understanding how children and adolescents experience and deal with death.

- **Infants and Toddlers:** The youngest children may perceive that adults are sad, but have no real understanding of the meaning or significance of death.
- **Preschoolers:** Young children may deny death as a formal event and may see death as reversible. They may interpret death as a separation, not a permanent condition. Preschool and even early elementary children may link certain events and magical thinking with the causes of death. For instance, as a result of the World Trade Center disaster, some children may imagine that going into tall buildings may cause someone's death.

- **Early Elementary School:** Children at this age (approximately 5-9) start to comprehend the finality of death. They begin to understand that certain circumstances may result in death. They can see that, if large planes crash into buildings, people in the planes and buildings will be killed. In case of war images, young children may not be able to differentiate between what they see on television, and what might happen in their own neighborhood. However, they may over-generalize, particularly at ages 5-6—if jet planes don't fly, then people don't die. At this age, death is perceived as something that happens to others, not to oneself or one's family.
- **Middle School:** Children at this level have the cognitive understanding to comprehend death as a final event that results in the cessation of all bodily functions. They may not fully grasp the abstract concepts discussed by adults or on the TV news but are likely to be guided in their thinking by a concrete understanding of justice. They may experience a variety of feelings and emotions, and their expressions may include acting out or self-injurious behaviors as a means of coping with their anger, vengeance and despair.
- **High School:** Most teens will fully grasp the meaning of death in circumstances such as an automobile accident, illness and even the World Trade Center or Pentagon disasters. They may seek out friends and family for comfort or they may withdraw to deal with their grief. Teens (as well as some younger children) with a history of depression, suicidal behavior and chemical dependency are at particular risk for prolonged and serious grief reactions and may need more careful attention from home and school during these difficult times.

Tips for Children and Teens with Grieving Friends and Classmates

Seeing a friend try to cope with a loss may scare or upset children who have had little or no experience with death and grieving. Following are some suggestions teachers and parents can provide to children and youth to deal with this "secondary" loss.

- Particularly with younger children, it will be important to help clarify their understanding of death. See tips above under "helping children cope."
- Seeing their classmates' reactions to loss may bring about some fears of losing their own parents or siblings, particularly for students who have family in the military or other risk related professions. Children need reassurance from caregivers and teachers that their own families are safe. For children who have experienced their own loss (previous death of a parent, grandparent, sibling), observing the grief of a friend can bring back painful memories. These children are at greater risk for developing more serious stress reactions and should be given extra support as needed.
- Children (and many adults) need help in communicating condolence or comfort messages. Provide children with age-appropriate guidance for supporting their peers. Help them decide what to say (e.g., "Steve, I am so sorry about your father. I know you will miss him very much. Let me know if I can help you with your paper route....") and what to expect (see "expressions of grief" above).
- Help children anticipate some changes in friends' behavior. It is important that children understand that their grieving friends may act differently, may withdraw from their friends for a while, might seem angry or very sad, etc., but that this does not mean a lasting change in their relationship.
- Explain to children that their "regular" friendship may be an important source of support for friends and classmates. Even normal social activities such as inviting a friend over to play, going to the park, playing sports, watching a movie, or a trip to the mall may offer a much needed distraction and sense of connection and normalcy.
- Children need to have some options for providing support—it will help them deal with their fears and concerns if they have some concrete actions that they can take to help. Suggest making cards, drawings,

helping with chores or homework, etc. Older teens might offer to help the family with some shopping, cleaning, errands, etc., or with babysitting for younger children.

- Encourage children who are worried about a friend to talk to a caring adult. This can help alleviate their own concern or potential sense of responsibility for making their friend feel better. Children may also share important information about a friend who is at risk of more serious grief reactions.
- Parents and teachers need to be alert to children in their care who may be reacting to a friend's loss of a loved one. These children will need some extra support to help them deal with the sense of frustration and helplessness that many people are feeling at this time.

Resources for Grieving and Traumatized Children

At times of severe stress, such as the trauma of war or terrorist attacks, both children and adults need extra support. Children who are physically and emotionally closest to this tragedy may very well experience the most dramatic feelings of fear, anxiety and loss. They may have personally lost a loved one or know of friends and schoolmates who have been devastated by these treacherous acts. Adults need to carefully observe these children for signs of traumatic stress, depression or even suicidal thinking, and seek professional help when necessary.

Resources to help you identify symptoms of severe stress and grief reactions are available at the National Association of School Psychologists's website— www.nasponline.org. See also:

For Caregivers

- Deaton, R.L. & Berkan, W.A. (1995). *Planning and managing death issues in the schools: A handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Mister Rogers Website: www.misterrogers.org (see booklet on Grieving for children 4-10 years)
- Webb, N.B. (1993). *Helping bereaved children: A handbook for practitioners*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Wolfelt, A. (1983). *Helping children cope with grief*. Bristol, PA: Accelerated Development.
- Wolfelt, A. (1997). *Healing the bereaved child: Grief gardening, growth through grief and other touchstones for caregivers*. Ft. Collins, CO: Companion.
- Worden, J.W. (1996). *Children and grief: When a parent dies*. New York: Guilford Press
- Helping Children Cope With Death, The Dougy Center for Grieving Children, www.dougy.org.

For Children

- Gootman, M.E. (1994). *When a friend dies: A book for teens about grieving and healing*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Greenlee, S. (1992). *When someone dies*. Atlanta: Peachtree Publishing. (Ages 9-12).
- Wolfelt, A. (2001). *Healing your grieving heart for kids*. Ft. Collins, CO: Companion. (See also similar titles for teens and adults)

Adapted from material first posted on the NASP website after September 11, 2001.

NASP has made these materials available free of charge to the public in order to promote the ability of children and youth to cope with traumatic or unsettling times. The materials may be adapted, reproduced, reprinted, or linked to websites without specific permission. However, the integrity of the content must be maintained and NASP must be given proper credit.

© 2003, National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814, 301-657-0270, www.nasponline.org



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS

Death and Grief: Supporting Children and Youth

Death and loss within a school community can affect anyone, particularly children and adolescents. Whether the death of a classmate, family member, or staff member, students may need support in coping with their grief. Reactions will vary depending on the circumstances of the death and how well-known the deceased is both to individual students and to the school community at-large. Students who have lost a family member or someone close to them will need particular attention. It is important for adults to understand the reactions they may observe and to be able to identify children or adolescents who require support. Parents, teachers, and other caregivers should also understand how their own grief reactions and responses to a loss may impact the experience of a child.

GRIEF REACTIONS

There is no right or wrong way to react to a loss. No two individuals will react in exactly the same way. Grief reactions among children and adolescents are influenced by their developmental level, personal characteristics, mental health, family and cultural influences, and previous exposure to crisis, death, and loss. However, some general trends exist that can help adults understand typical and atypical reactions of bereaved children. Sadness, confusion, and anxiety are among the most common grief responses and are likely to occur for children of all ages.

The Grief Process

Although grief does not follow a specified pattern, there are common stages that children and adolescents may experience with varying sequencing and intensity. The general stages of the grief process are:

- Denial (unwillingness to discuss the loss)
- Anger or guilt (blaming others for the loss)
- Sorrow or depression (loss of energy, appetite, or interest in activities)
- Bargaining (attempts to regain control by making promises or changes in one's life)
- Acceptance or admission (acceptance that loss is final, real, significant, and painful)

Grief Reactions of Concern

The above behaviors are expected and natural reactions to a loss. However, the following behaviors may warrant further attention:

Preschool Level:

- Decreased verbalization
- Increased anxiety (e.g., clinginess, fear of separation)
- Regressive behaviors (e.g., bedwetting, thumb sucking)

Elementary school level:

- Difficulty concentrating or inattention
- Somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, stomach problems)
- Sleep disturbances (e.g., nightmares, fear of the dark)
- Repeated telling and acting out of the event
- Withdrawal
- Increased irritability, disruptive behavior, or aggressive behavior
- Increased anxiety (e.g., clinging, whining)
- Depression, guilt, or anger

Middle and high school level:

- Flashbacks
- Emotional numbing or depression
- Nightmares
- Avoidance or withdrawal
- Peer relationship problems
- Substance abuse or other high-risk behavior

Signs That Additional Help Is Needed

Adults should be particularly alert to any of the following as indicators that trained mental health professional (school psychologist or counselor) should be consulted for intervention and possible referral:

- Severe loss of interest in daily activities (e.g., extracurricular activities and friends)
- Disruption in ability to eat or sleep
- School refusal
- Fear of being alone
- Repeated wish to join the deceased
- Severe drop in school achievement
- Suicidal references or behavior

Risk Factors for Increased Reactions

Some students (and adults) may be a greater risk for grief reactions that require professional intervention. This includes individuals who:

- Were very close to the person(s) who died
- Were present when the person died
- Have suffered a recent loss
- Have experienced a traumatic event
- Are isolated or lack a personal support network
- Suffer from depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or other mental illness

Keep in mind that groups, particularly adolescents, can experience collective or even vicarious grief. Students may feel grief, anxiety or stress because they see classmates who were directly affected by a loss, even if they didn't personally know the deceased. Additional risk factors include the deceased being popular or well-known, extensive media coverage, a sudden or traumatic death, homicides or suicides.

SUPPORTING GRIEVING CHILDREN AND YOUTH

How adults in a family or school community grieve following a loss will influence how children and youth grieve. When adults are able to talk about the loss, express their feelings, and provide support for children and youth in the aftermath of a loss, they are better able to develop healthy coping strategies. Adults are encouraged to:

- Talk about the loss. This gives children permission to talk about it, too.
- Ask questions to determine how children understand the loss, and gauge their physical and emotional reactions.
- Listen patiently. Remember that each person is unique and will grieve in his or her own way.
- Be prepared to discuss the loss repeatedly. Children should be encouraged to talk about, act out, or express through writing or art the details of the loss as well as their feelings about it, about the deceased person, and about other changes that have occurred in their lives as a result of the loss.
- Give children important facts about the event at an appropriate developmental level. This may include helping children accurately understand what death is. For younger children, this explanation might include helping them to understand that the person's body has stopped working and will never again work.
- Help children understand the death and intervene to correct false perceptions about the cause of the event, ensuring that they do not blame themselves or others for the situation.
- Provide a model of healthy mourning by being open about your own feelings of sadness and grief.
- Create structure and routine for children so they experience predictability and stability.

- Take care of yourself so you can assist the children and adolescents in your care. Prolonged, intense grieving or unhealthy grief reactions (such as substance abuse) will inhibit your ability to provide adequate support.
- Acknowledge that it will take time to mourn and that bereavement is a process that occurs over months and years. Be aware that normal grief reactions often last longer than six months, depending on the type of loss and proximity to the child.
- Take advantage of school and community resources such as counseling, especially if children and youth do not seem to be coping well with grief and loss.

TIPS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH GRIEVING FRIENDS AND CLASSMATES

Seeing a friend try to cope with a loss may scare or upset children who have had little or no experience with death and grieving. Some suggestions teachers and parents can provide to children and youth to deal with this "secondary" loss:

- Particularly with younger children, it will be important to help clarify their understanding of death. See tips above under "helping children cope."
- Seeing their classmates' reactions to loss may bring about some fears of losing their own parents or siblings. Children need reassurance from caretakers and teachers that their own families are safe. For children who have experienced their own loss (previous death of a parent, grandparent, sibling), observing the grief of a friend can bring back painful memories. These children are at greater risk for developing more serious stress reactions and should be given extra support as needed.
- Children (and many adults) need help in communicating condolence or comfort messages. Provide children with age-appropriate guidance for supporting their peers. Help them decide what to say (e.g., "Steve, I am so sorry about your father. I know you will miss him very much. Let me know if I can help you with your paper route....") and what to expect (see "expressions of grief" above).
- Help children anticipate some changes in friends' behavior. It is important that children understand that their grieving friends may act differently, may withdraw from their friends for a while, might seem angry or very sad, etc., but that this does not mean a lasting change in their relationship.
- Explain to children that their "regular" friendship may be an important source of support for friends and classmates. Even normal social activities such as inviting a friend over to play, going to the park, playing sports, watching a movie, or a trip to the mall may offer a much needed distraction and sense of connection and normalcy.
- Children need to have some options for providing support—it will help them deal with their fears and concerns if they have some concrete actions that they can take to help. Suggest making cards, drawings, helping with chores or homework, etc. Older teens might offer to help the family with some shopping, cleaning, errands, etc., or with babysitting for younger children.
- Encourage children who are worried about a friend to talk to a caring adult. This can help alleviate their own concern or potential sense of responsibility for making their friend feel better. Children may also share important information about a friend who is at risk of more serious grief reactions.
- Parents and teachers need to be alert to children in their care who may be reacting to a friend's loss of a loved one. These children will need some extra support to help them deal with the sense of frustration and helplessness that many people are feeling at this time.

Adapted from "Death and Grief in the Family: Tips for Parents" in *Helping Children at Home and School III*, NASP, 2010 and from materials posted on the NASP website after September 11, 2001.

© 2010, National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814, www.nasponline.org

Grief/Trauma Handout for Teachers

Dealing with a traumatic event during the school year is very difficult for every member of a school's community, but it can be especially traumatic for the students. Below please find some information that may be helpful to you in assisting our students during this difficult time.

Potential Student Reactions after a Traumatic Event

- Show a decline in school performance
- Have difficulty mastering new material
- Become more irritable
- Become withdrawn
- Become anxious or depressed
- Become more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, promiscuity, reckless driving, and suicide
- Become focused on the loss

Whenever possible, students should be offered additional supports to assist them in maintaining their academic progress before academic failure occurs, which would represent an additional stressor.

What Teachers Can Do

- Listen to what students want to share with you. It may be difficult but just listening can be a powerful healing force. Be patient as this will take time.
- Protect students from becoming re-traumatized. Sometimes other students may ridicule highly emotional students who cry.
- Connect with students who have had past trauma by asking how they are doing; checking in with them on a regular basis; letting them know that you are available to listen; or giving them feedback about their attendance or classroom work.
- Model adult behavior that shows them how responsible adults react to trauma and respond to crisis. Adults may have difficulty, but they continue to act with consideration and maintain calm routines at school.
- Counselors can teach students about normal signs and symptoms of trauma so that students can assess and understand their own behavior and learn new ways of coping.
- Be honest at all times, share your feelings.
- Use the student's name when talking about them.
- Expect violent reactions.
- Use your normal voice.
- It's OK to say "I don't know"
- Reassure students that anger, guilt, sadness, fear, shock, etc., are normal feelings.

Potentially UNHELPFUL Approaches and Corresponding Statements

- Emphasizing positive perspective or trying to cheer people up: "I'm sure you will feel better soon".
- Encouraging them to be strong or hide their feelings: "You don't want to upset the other students or have them see you cry".
- Telling them you know how they are feeling or ought to feel: "I know exactly what you are going through" or "you must be angry" instead, demonstrate your own feelings and express sympathy
- Competing for sympathy: "I had the same situation when I was in school"
- Do not give a theological lecture or discuss religious issues
- Do not hide your feelings
- Resist the urge to "fix", minimize, or give advice.

Appropriate Statements

- "I am so sorry for your difficulty. Is there something I can do that will be helpful?"
- "I can only imagine what you are going through."
- "I understand that it may be difficult to concentrate or learn as well when you are upset; I would like you to let me know if you find yourself having difficulty with your school work so that we can work together to make it easier for you during this difficult time."
- "I am here whenever you want to talk or just need to be with someone."

When to Refer a Student for Counseling

- When upset, crying, or hysterical
- When anger or self-blame becomes a threat to others or self
- When anxiety becomes panic
- When fatigue or slowness becomes physical shock
- When dulled response becomes no response, rigidity, or fetal position

SUGGESTIONS FOR MANAGING STRESS and GRIEF REACTIONS

- Let others help you. Talk about your thoughts and feelings as often as you feel the need. Identify friends, family, coworkers, counselors/therapists or spiritual directors who are helpful listeners. Talking about the event and your reactions is part of the healing process.
- You may find yourself becoming irritable or impatient at times. Others may act as if nothing has happened. Recognize that your feelings (sadness, sorrow, confusion, denial, anger, etc.) are all normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- Understand that current losses or traumatic events often resurrect prior (old) losses. Multiple losses can weaken previous coping strategies, even ones that seemed to work well for you in the past. This does not imply weakness or instability on your part, it is just how cumulative stress affects one's mind and body.
- Make a special effort to take care of yourself:
 - Be sure to get enough sleep. An increase in fatigue is common at these times, but so is denial of the need to rest. Sleep may be disturbed with nightmares, but these usually lessen as time goes by.
 - Eat a balanced diet. You might even consider reducing caffeinated beverages.
 - Consider relaxation techniques, meditation, or listening to your favorite music.
 - Get some physical exercise -- go to the gym (especially during the first 24-72 hours), take a walk, walk the dog, do yoga, etc.
- There is a temptation when the stress level is high to try to numb the feelings by drinking or using drugs. Attempting to cope by using alcohol or drugs (prescription or recreational) complicates the problem, rather than providing relief or a solution.
- Avoid making major life decisions regarding your job, buying a house or car, moving, etc., during this emotionally unsettling time.
- Try to stay connected with your friends and family. Try to maintain a steady level of productive activity at work and play (but it is ok to pace yourself, too).
- You may discover that you have to write things down for a while, or remind yourself more often, about appointments, meetings, etc.
- Know and respect your personal limitations. Don't make unreasonable demands on yourself. Allow yourself to say "No" without feeling guilty.
- Try to avoid feeling that you have to "get through this quickly" and "get back to your normal routine". Give yourself permission to slow down. However, don't be surprised if you do get back into a normal work and family routine fairly quickly.

Above all, try to be patient and understanding of yourself and others.



MIIA Employee Assistance Program (EAP) A Confidential Counseling and Referral Service

You receive 3 confidential in person or phone counseling sessions.



- Manage Anxiety/Depression
- Adjust to Demands of Work
- Resolve Relationship Conflict
- Talk About a Loved One's Drinking
- Address Parenting and Family Issues
- Assess Your Level of Stress
- Become a Better Communicator



You receive legal assistance.

One free 30 minute office or telephone consultation per legal matter (does not include job-related legal issues).

- Divorce
- Child Custody
- Car Accidents
- Real Estate / Landlord / Tenant Issues



You receive financial counseling.

One free 30 minute telephone consultation per financial issue.

- Financial Planning
- Credit Card Debt
- Tax Advice
- College Planning
- Retirement Consultation



Use the Smartphone App to request EAP services

Go to Google Play or App Store, search for "MIIA EAP" and download the app.

Log in with your passcode: **miiaeap**

You can use the app to search for information or resources, and to contact the EAP for services.



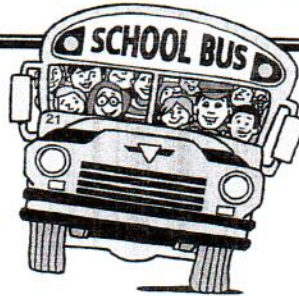
Available to employees, their dependents, and household members 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

800-451-1834

THE PETTENGILL HOUSE, INC. SCHOOL LINK SERVICE (SLS) PROGRAM

Contract with Amesbury School District

SLS Mission: "All children come to school everyday ready to learn"



- National Research based program implemented by The Pettengill House, Inc. since its inception in 1994
- Pettengill / Amesbury School District Exemplary Program status, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

School Link Service Goals:

- ✓ Provide access to Pettengill House identified programs
- ✓ Assist the well-being of students and their families
- ✓ Educate and empower parents / guardians to increase comfort and understanding regarding their child(ren's) education
- ✓ Improve student's academic, social and recreational needs
- ✓ Improve coordination, collaboration, resource sharing and expertise among local and state agencies, organizations and schools
- ✓ Advocate, educate and provide comprehensive case management, prevention education and crisis intervention on behalf of children and their families
- ✓ Provide basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and safety
- ✓ Provide student / parent / guardian supports; linking home, school and community on behalf of your child
- ✓ Attend student based meetings (special and regular education meetings, progress and re-entry)

