



NATIONAL CENTER
FOR SCHOOL CRISIS
AND BEREAVEMENT

Helping students and staff cope with crisis and loss during a pandemic



David J Schonfeld, MD, FAAP
Director, National Center For School Crisis And Bereavement
Children's Hospital Los Angeles

schonfel@usc.edu

SchoolCrisisCenter.org | GrievingStudents.org

1-877-536-NCSCB (1-877-536-2722)

Outline

- LAUSD five resilience factors
- Helping children cope with the pandemic
- Supporting grieving students during the pandemic
- Professional self-care

LAUSD Five Resilience Factors

Sense of Safety:

- Establish a sense of safety
- Create or re-establish routines
- Encourage self-expression
- Maintain a sensitive and caring environment
- Provide and seek comfort, stability and predictability

Ability to Calm:

- Be aware of your reaction
- Model calmness and coping

LAUSD Five Resilience Factors continued

Self-Efficacy and Community-Efficacy

Connectedness

- Cultivate and maintain healthy connection
- Listen and be present
- Minimize exposure to media outlets
- Provide facts and Stay informed and updated

Hope

- Empower children to express themselves and to play a role in their own safety
- Maintain calm and express optimism for the future

Effects of the World Trade Center Attack on NYC Public School Students

- 6 months after 9-11-01
- Applied Research and Consulting, LLC, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, and NY State Psychiatric Institute
- Over 8,000 students grades 4-12
- Self-reports of current mental health problems and impairment in functioning
- “Probable psychiatric disorder” if reported symptoms consistent with diagnostic criteria AND impairment in functioning

Prevalence of probable psychiatric disorders

- One of four met criteria for one or more of probable psychiatric disorders
- Approximately one out of ten had: PTSD (11%), major depressive disorder (8%), separation anxiety disorder (12%), and panic attacks (9%)
- 15% had agoraphobia

Adjustment problems nearly universal

- 87% reported PTSD symptom 6 months later
 - 76% often thinking about attack
 - 45% trying to avoid thinking, hearing, or talking about it
 - 25% harder to keep mind on things
 - 24% problems sleeping
 - 17% nightmares
 - 18% stopped going to places or doing things that reminded them
 - 11% at least 6 symptoms → probable PTSD
- 2/3 had not sought any mental health services

If only the signs were this easy to read.



Talking with and supporting children

- Don't pretend everything is OK – children pick up when parents/adults are not genuine and honest
- Children may pick up on concerns primarily of adults
- Provide appropriate reassurance, but don't give false reassurance
- Find out individual child's fears, concerns, skepticism
- Don't tell children that they shouldn't be worried; help them learn to deal with their uncertainty and fear
- Include positive information; present a hopeful perspective

Strategies for dealing with distress

- Reading or hobbies that promote healthy distraction
- Journaling, blogging, art, music to promote expressions of feelings
- Exercise, yoga
- Appropriate use of respectful humor
- Relaxation techniques, mindfulness, self-hypnosis and guided imagery
- Cognitive behavioral therapy

Help children identify steps they can take personally to protect their own health and to help others

Some children may need more assistance

- The pandemic and discussion about the impact on families may remind children of other difficulties – events in the past, ongoing challenges, or concerns about future losses or crises
- Children who were anxious or depressed before the pandemic will likely need more support
- Children may need to focus first on their own needs before they are able to think of needs of others; try not to make them feel guilty for thinking about how this crisis impacts them personally

Watch your media consumption

- Make sure it is a healthy diet; don't consume too much
- Keep informed through focused/periodic attention to trusted sources of information
- If you aren't getting reassured or learning practical actions to take, then disconnect from media
- Limit amount of media exposure – this is a good time to unplug and connect instead with children and family

Grief during a pandemic

- After a death, children often concerned about the health of themselves or others close to them
 - Important to help children deal with fears/concerns about the pandemic
- Social distancing measures including school closure increase social isolation and makes it difficult to provide support
- Secondary losses become even more of an issue
- Family members may be overwhelmed by the pandemic as well as their own grief

Grief during a pandemic (continued)

- Children may experience more than one personal loss; deaths may impact the entire school community
- Some grief may not be related to death
- Grieving students often experience at least temporary academic difficulties; so do children during a crisis
- Supporting grieving students can be difficult in the best of times; this is not the best of times
- This is an unprecedented time, but there are practical steps school professionals can still take to support grieving students

What you are doing is of value

- Just because we don't know everything, doesn't mean we know nothing of value
- You know strategies that have helped in the past to decrease distress – try them now
- Reach out to colleagues/resources in school district and community when more is critically needed
- Celebrate positive contributions you make
- Set reasonable expectations
- The curriculum has changed – teaching children how to cope → helping them learn life skills that will make them more resilient

Compassion fatigue

- Exposure to trauma and suffering of others can lead to compassion fatigue
 - Empathy: understanding and taking perspective of another
 - Compassion: requires empathy but includes wanting to help and/or desiring to relieve suffering – “to bear or suffer together”
- Warnings about compassion fatigue imply that compassion is necessarily tiring
- Compassionate approaches can be gratifying and bring meaning to the work

Supporting those in need can be gratifying

- Realistic objectives of purpose of interactions
- Have skills and resources to provide meaningful assistance
- Are aware of and have sufficient support to deal with personal impact of work
- Especially difficult during a pandemic when you have other challenges

Challenges to self-care

- Making time when there is so much to do and everyone needs your help
- Feeling shame or guilt for attending to your own needs
- Assuming others are having less trouble adjusting
- Lack of modeling of professional self-care

Challenges for leadership after a crisis

- No matter what you do, or how well you do it, you won't be able to make everything ok
- Those impacted by a crisis often react to feeling out of control by trying to exert more control
- People will have very different views about what should be done and feel strongly about those views
 - Safety
 - Timeline for returning to academic focus
 - Commemoration and memorialization
 - Use of funds
- Reactions can challenge working relationships
- You can't stop and focus just on recovery

COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESOURCES

[READ MORE](#)

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOOL CRISIS AND BEREAVEMENT

Dedicated to helping schools support their students
through crisis and loss

[I Need Help Now](#)

[Help Me Prepare](#)

www.grievingstudents.org



COALITION to SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

Video and Downloadable Grief Support
Modules for School Personnel

Conversation & Support

Talking With Children >

What Not to Say >

Providing Support Over Time >

Peer Support >

VIEW MODULES



Conversation &
Support

Developmental &
Cultural Considerations

Practical
Considerations

Reactions & Triggers

Professional
Preparation & Self-Care

Crisis & Special
Circumstances

For further information about NCSCB
visit us, call us, like us, share us



NATIONAL CENTER
FOR SCHOOL CRISIS
AND BEREAVEMENT



1-888-53-NCSCB (1-888-536-2722)



www.SchoolCrisisCenter.org | info@schoolcrisiscenter.org



@schoolcrisisorg



National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

www.grievingstudents.org

Order Free Materials (download)



After a loved one dies—

How children grieve and how parents
and other adults can support them.



NATIONAL CENTER
FOR SCHOOL CRISIS
AND BEREAVEMENT

Coalition to Support Grieving Students

- American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- American School Counselors Association (ASCA)
- 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 (NEA)
- School Social Workers Association of America (SSWAA)
- School Superintendents Association (AASA)



NATIONAL CENTER
FOR SCHOOL CRISIS
AND BEREAVEMENT

Supporting Organizational Members

