



# Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative+ Overview



## What it is

**The Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative+ (GSSI+)** is part of New York Life's nationwide effort to better equip educators and youth-service providers to care for grieving youth. Through the program, trained New York Life ambassadors connect with schools and non-profit organizations in their local communities to raise awareness of the impact and prevalence of grief among school-age children and to direct them to critical resources designed by the Coalition to Support Grieving Students. GSSI+ recognizes organizations that commit to better support



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grieving young people by awarding them the "Grief-Sensitive" designation, which

is accompanied by a grant to help them build a more robust culture of grief support and resiliency .

## Why it exists

**Most adults who work with young people will encounter grief firsthand.** An estimated one in 12 children will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18\* and the majority experience some kind of close, personal loss before graduating from high school. Grief's impact on children can be far-reaching, with potential to lead to serious behavioral issues and poor school performance when children are unsupported.

A survey conducted by the New York Life Foundation in conjunction with the American Federation of Teachers revealed that only seven percent of teachers had received training to support bereaved students, while a full 92 percent of educators felt that childhood grief was a serious problem deserving more attention from schools. In recent years, the tragedy of school shootings across the U.S. has only created additional urgency and concern around addressing issues of grief and death at school.

## New York Life's commitment

As the largest corporate champion of childhood bereavement support over the past decade, the New York Life Foundation has committed to improving the ability of schools and out-of-school time programs to reach their grieving students. In 2013, the Foundation partnered with the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement to convene the Coalition to Support Grieving Students, a collaboration among leading K-12 professional organizations to develop and deliver the best possible grief support resources to educators through its dedicated site, [grievingstudents.org](http://grievingstudents.org). GSSI and GSSI+ are extensions of the Coalition's work, directing schools and youth-serving organizations to grief resources to empower even more educators and leaders to support their students.

## How it works

**As part of the program, New York Life trains interested and qualified agents and employees on how to support grieving young people.** These GSSI+ ambassadors then connect with schools and other youth-serving organizations to offer a presentation on the issue of childhood grief and direct them to existing grief resources (including [grievingstudents.org](http://grievingstudents.org)) that can help them provide a more supportive environment.

Participating organizations are encouraged to make a commitment to strive to become more grief-sensitive; those that take this step receive New York Life's "Grief-Sensitive" designation, as well as a \$500 grant to help enhance the grief support and resources available in their organization or community.

## For more information

Please contact [nylffoundation@newyorlife.com](mailto:nylffoundation@newyorlife.com).

\*Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM) developed by Judi's House/JAG Institute [www.judishouse.org/CBEM](http://www.judishouse.org/CBEM), 2020



# Coalition to Support Grieving Students

## Empowering school communities



### Who we are

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students is a groundbreaking cross-sector collaboration that seeks to improve the level of support and care available to grieving children. Convened in 2013, the Coalition was founded by the New York Life Foundation, a pioneering advocate for childhood bereavement support, the National Center for School Crisis & Bereavement, and 10 leading professional organizations representing K-12 educators and school personnel. Today, the Coalition's robust membership comprises a wide range of groups whose missions align with delivering grief support to children at school—including nonprofit organizations dedicated to education, children's health, after-school programs, and bereavement support. Their comprehensive materials are appropriate for any professional who interact with school aged children.



### Why we exist

We seek to empower school communities and youth-serving organizations to deliver better support to grieving young people. Unfortunately, those who work with children encounter grief on a regular basis: In the United States, approximately **1 in 12** children will lose a parent or sibling by the time they reach 18 years of age\*, and the vast majority of children will experience a significant loss by the time they complete high school. Young people are also affected by tragic and violent events that they learn about in the news and encounter in their communities.

The Coalition affirms that schools and out-of-school time providers have a critical role to play in supporting children's grief journeys. Grief can have a serious impact on learning for school-age children, manifesting itself in decreased academic performance, social withdrawal, new behavioral challenges, and more. By serving as a source of support and stability in difficult times, professionals have an enormous opportunity to improve outcomes for the kids they work with.

\*Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM) developed by Judi's House/JAG Institute [www.judishouse.org/CBEM](http://www.judishouse.org/CBEM), 2020



### Our work

The Coalition's flagship project is the development and maintenance of [grievingstudents.org](http://grievingstudents.org), a first-of-its-kind resource designed to equip educators and other youth-serving professionals with the information, insights, and practical advice that they need to better understand and help the millions of grieving children in America's classrooms. This user-friendly site features videos and downloadable grief-support modules for school personnel, with materials tailored for different audiences, including classroom educators, principals and administrators, student-support personnel, and family and community members.

This resource was developed in response to an expressed need from educators: In a survey on grief at school (conducted by the New York Life Foundation in partnership with the American Federation of Teachers), 92 percent of educators agreed childhood grief is a serious problem that deserves more attention from schools, yet only 7 percent reported having had any amount of bereavement training.

To further its mission to reach school communities across the country, the Coalition has partnered with New York Life on the Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative (GSSI) and Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative+ (GSSI+) which seeks to educate local schools and out-of-school time programs about childhood bereavement, introduce them to resources, and encourage proactive thinking about how to support grieving youth through the "Grief-Sensitive" designation.



### For more information

Please contact us at [info@grievingstudents.org](mailto:info@grievingstudents.org).  
The Coalition to Support Grieving Students  
[www.grievingstudents.org](http://www.grievingstudents.org)

### LEAD FOUNDING MEMBERS



NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
School Crisis & Bereavement



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