

## Mini-Articles: Peer Support for Grieving Children

### **“Your mommy died. You can’t make a Mother’s Day card!”**

Would children really say such things to a grieving classmate? Yes, they sometimes do. Is it because they are being cruel? In most cases, no. It may be because they have questions, anxiety and confusion about what has happened to their peer.

Our organization is a member of the Coalition to Support Grieving Students. The Coalition encourages school professionals to talk with students of all ages about death, grief and ways to offer support. Addressing these topics in class helps students better understand how to reach out to a grieving classmate. And that’s what most children truly want to do.

Find resources and learn more at the Coalition’s website:

[www.grievingstudents.org](http://www.grievingstudents.org).

### **Support Grieving Children by Teaching Skills to Their Peers**

*“I thought coming back to school after my father died would be a lot harder than it was. But it was actually a really good experience because the second I came in, all of my friends, which were 31 classmates at the time, they all just rushed and gave me a hug, including my teacher. And I felt like I couldn’t breathe, but it made me really happy to be back.”*

Children, like adults, are often uncertain about how to support a grieving peer. They want to help their friends, but they may hold back or unintentionally isolate a peer who has experienced a death in the family.

School professionals can equip students with skills that help them offer genuine support to a classmate. This can make a profound difference for grieving students.

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## 5 Questions Children Often Have When a Classmate is Grieving

Grief and loss are common among children and teens—almost all students will experience the death of a close friend or family member before they complete their schooling. Children often have questions, anxiety and confusion about what has happened to a grieving classmate. While every child is different, here are some questions they commonly have.

1. Could someone I love also die? My parents? My siblings?
2. What does it actually mean when someone has died?
3. How will this affect our classmate and his or her family?
4. What can I do? I'm worried about members of my own family dying.
5. I have no idea what to say or do to be supportive to our classmate. Can you help me figure it out?

Find guidance about answering these questions at the website of [The Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#). Our organization is a member. Help students better understand how to reach out to a grieving classmate and learn to get support for their own concerns or anxieties.

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students was convened by the New York Life Foundation, a pioneering advocate for the cause of childhood bereavement, and the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, which is led by pediatrician and childhood bereavement expert David J. Schonfeld, M.D. The Coalition has worked with Scholastic Inc., a long-standing supporter of teachers and kids, to create [grievingstudents.org](http://grievingstudents.org), a groundbreaking, practitioner-oriented website designed to provide educators with the information, insights, and practical advice they need to better understand and meet the needs of the millions of grieving kids in America's classrooms.