



Supporting a *grieving student*

When a student loses someone they love, school can feel like the hardest place to be. It can also be one of the safest. You don't need perfect words. Steady, caring adults make a real difference.

What grief can *look like* at school

Younger kids

- Asking the same questions again and again
- Acting younger than their age
- Tummy aches or headaches
- Playing out the loss

Middle grades

- Trouble focusing or finishing work
- Big feelings that come out as anger
- Worry that others they love will be hurt
- Wanting to seem "fine"

Teens

- Pulling away or staying very busy
- Changes in grades, sleep or friends
- Feeling different from everyone else
- Taking on adult worries at home

Try *saying*

- ♥ "I'm so sorry about your [mom, brother, grandpa]."
- ♥ "I'm here if you want to talk. It's okay if you don't."
- ♥ "Tell me about them. What were they like?"
- ♥ "If class gets to be too much, here's what you can do."

Gently *skip*

- × "I know how you feel."
Try: "I can't imagine. I'm here."
- × "They're in a better place."
Try: "I'm so sorry this happened."
- × "You need to be strong for your family."
Try: "All your feelings are okay here."
- × Avoiding their loss so they won't be sad.
Try: saying their person's name.

Before they *come back*

- 1 **Talk with the family.** Ask what the student wants shared with the class and what words the family uses.
- 2 **Prepare the class.** Share only what the family is okay with. Give classmates simple ways to be kind.
- 3 **Make a quiet plan.** Agree on a signal or pass to step out and a safe place and person to go to.
- 4 **Check in privately.** A short "glad you're here" on day one means more than a big moment.



FOR TEACHERS, COACHES & SCHOOL STAFF

In the *weeks ahead*

Grief doesn't end when the cards stop coming. Students often need the most support weeks and months later, when everyone else has moved on.

In the *classroom*

- Give extra time and smaller chunks of work
- Excuse or adjust big tests for a while
- Keep routines steady. Predictable feels safe.
- Watch lessons that may hit hard, like family trees or Mother's Day
- Let them sit by a friend

Remember the *hard dates*

- Birthdays and angel days
- Holidays and family events at school
- Sports nights, concerts and graduation
- The start of a new school year
- A short note on these days says "I remember too."

When to bring in *more help*

- Grief looks different for every child. Reach out to your school counselor, the family or a licensed professional if changes last many weeks or keep getting harder.
- Watch closely if a student talks about wanting to disappear, not wanting to be here or joining the person they lost. Stay with them and get help right away.
- Take care of yourself too. Supporting grief is heavy work.

988 If a student may be thinking about suicide, do not leave them alone. Follow your school's safety plan and call or text 988 (U.S., 24/7). Text HOME to 741741. If someone is in danger right now, call 911.

Harper's Hope Foundation · Coming in 2027

I'm forming Harper's Hope Foundation in honor of my daughter Harper to bring free grief groups and support to families and schools in Idaho. To bring a grief talk to your school, visit nikihumpherys.com/speaking.

Sources: The Dougy Center (dougy.org); Coalition to Support Grieving Students (grievingstudents.org); National Association of School Psychologists (nasponline.org); David Kessler (grief.com); 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988lifeline.org); Crisis Text Line (crisistextline.org). Shared for education, with no endorsement implied.

Niki Humpherys is a certified grief educator and coach, certified through David Kessler's Grief Educator Certification program. She is not a licensed therapist, counselor or medical provider. This guide is for education and support, not therapy, medical care or crisis services. Always follow your school's policies.

Healing is possible, at your own pace.

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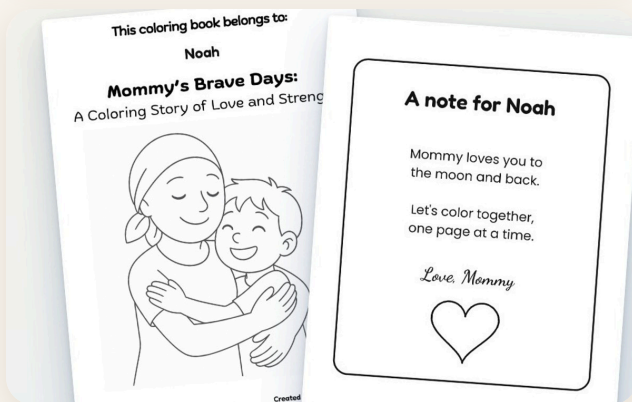
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Gentle grief workbooks

Written the way I wish someone had spoken to me: gently, honestly and without a timeline. For moms, dads, siblings, little ones and the holidays.

[See the workbooks →](#)



Personalized coloring books for kids

Their name on the cover and a note from you inside. A gentle story to color together, made just for your child.

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Sympathy gifts

A cardinal memorial mug and a soft sherpa blanket that says "still with you, in every cuddle." For when you don't have the words.

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