

HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES

School Support Personnel's Perspectives on School-Based Grief Support

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Children who experience the death of a loved one are often overlooked after the initial loss and rituals that follow. As students, they face the unique challenge of focusing on their education while under the emotional weight of grief. Schools have the opportunity to step up and support students long-term after a death. The purpose of this study was to collect direct information from Indiana school personnel (e.g., school counselors, social workers, nurses) regarding their perception of the needs of grieving middle school students through an online survey. Participants were asked to provide their opinion regarding childhood grief as well as the appropriate logistics of a school-based grief support curriculum through a variety of question types, including scale measurements and open-ended questions. Prompts that participants were asked to answer include, "Describe your understanding/sense of need for a school-based grief support group at your school," and "What kind of training would allow you to feel

more comfortable and prepared to facilitate a grief support group in your school?" Overall, the results indicated a perceived need for grief support in school settings, but low levels of grief training among school support personnel. This means that any curriculum provided needs to be accompanied by training to help support staff feel prepared for this topic. When support personnel were asked to rate the need for grief support in their school on a scale from 1–10, the average answer was a 6. This indicated a slightly higher than moderate need for grief support. The survey also revealed the importance of craft materials, preference for 30-minute meetings, and a desire for videos in a grief support curriculum. Additional knowledge gained from this study has the potential to instruct grief professionals in the development of resources for bereaved middle school students.

Research advisor Heather Servaty-Seib writes: "Eliza Van has engaged in a scholarly project that pushes back against the societal taboo associated with the topics of death and grief. She has collected data from middle school counselors regarding the facilitators and barriers associated with their ability to provide school-based grief support groups for students."