



DECEMBER: GRIEF AND LOSS

– What Staff Need to Know –

The Basics

Many students have lost family members or loved ones, and the holidays tend to bring up feelings of grief and loss. Times that are expected to be related to love, family and togetherness, make many students feel lonely and remind them of the gaps in their lives. Additionally, many students experiencing poverty or homelessness are reminded of their family's financial status during a month that is focused on gift giving and receiving.

Stages of Grief

Shock/denial:

Trouble accepting the fact of death, diagnosis or new reality, numbness
Inability to do usual activities

Anger:

Anger at yourself, others, professionals (particularly doctors), God, life
Feeling helpless and powerless, abandoned

Bargaining:

Making “deals” with God or friends hoping to change the situation
Thinking about “what could have been” or “should have done differently”

Depression:

Feeling overwhelmed with loss and change, sadness, regret, fear, anxiety, lonely, isolated, self-pity, empty, lost

Isolating self from others.

Feeling no one else understands you or your loss

Acceptance:

Adjusting to the new reality, starting to move on
Sense of hope, healing, and integration

Classroom Tips:

- Create a classroom board to remember family members that are no longer with us
- Recognize and celebrate all religions and customs of the students in your classroom
- Avoid asking questions such as “did you get a lot of gifts!?”, instead ask: “How did you spend your winter break?”
- Normalize that the holidays aren't the same for everyone and engage students in a classroom conversation

Additional Resources

- Video: [5 stages of grief explained](#)
- Article: [Self Care Tips for Grief Support During the Holidays](#)
- Video: [Chair Yoga](#)