



# DECEMBER: GRIEF AND LOSS

## – What Staff Need to Know –

### The Basics

For students who have lost family members or loved ones, 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. Additionally, students experiencing poverty or homelessness are reminded of their family's financial status during a month that is focused on gift-giving and receiving.

### How to support grieving students: the 6 R's

1. **Reassure:** Continue to provide messages of safety, belonging, and love in school. Accept and normalize all feelings in response to grief: reassure your student that there is no right way to feel.
2. **Routine:** When things feel out of our control, we crave consistency. Lean on all your classroom routines to offer predictability and consistency, allowing room for choices or breaks as needed.
3. **Release:** Offer creative outlets throughout the day: music, coloring pages, journaling, outdoor breaks, and movement via dance, yoga, or sports are all wonderful outlets to help a grieving child through a school day.
4. **Remember:** Invite and welcome mementos of loved ones into the classroom: a student might want to wear clothing or jewelry that is meaningful to their loved one, bring in pictures, or find other ways to feel connected.
5. **Reflect and Connect:** Listen without judgment or try to change their feelings. If a student wants to talk about their loved one; listen, ask open-ended questions, and offer validation of their feelings. Offer opportunities to connect with other supportive adults in the school.
6. **Reach out:** Connect with your school's wellness team for more guidance or to connect your student with mental health support. If a student's grief symptoms ever include suicidal ideation, do not leave them alone, and immediately reach out to your school wellness team or call the national suicidal lifeline 988.

### Classroom Tips:

#### Additional Resources

- [Holiday grief toolkit](#)
  - [Self Care Tips for Grief Support During the Holidays](#)
  - [Youth grief responses by age](#)
- Accept different expressions of emotions. It can be tempting to offer a positive perspective when a child expresses sadness (“But think of all the good times you had with your dad!”), but this can feel like their feelings are being minimized or disregarded. You can say
  - Having time away from the consistency and routine of school can be difficult for many students during the holidays. When students return to school after holiday break, instead of asking “how was your break?” or “how were your holidays?” try, “I am so happy to see you! Is there anything you want me to know about your break?”