



The State of Grief Report: The Changing Nature of Grief

DECEMBER 2022



NEW YORK LIFE
FOUNDATION



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A Letter from the New York Life Foundation

More than two years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans are still grappling with bereavement and how to have conversations about grief, yet many people are ready to move forward and put these losses behind them. In our annual State of Grief survey, the New York Life Foundation found that 74% of respondents want to focus on lighter topics, yet they continue to understand it's important to access bereavement resources and continue to help those around them.

Raising awareness of the prevalence of grief and helping children and families process grief has been a core part of the Foundation's mission since 2008 and, in many ways, our survey results show there has been progress in advancing the bereavement field with three-quarters of respondents saying they understand the importance of talking about death, compared with 63% in 2021. But continuing to focus on conversations is critical, particularly since **one in 13 children** in the U.S. will lose a parent or sibling by age 18, making the work we're doing incredibly important.

The Foundation's work has broadened over the years from our initial focus on childhood bereavement to focusing on the entire family, school communities, and employers by introducing resources to help people deal more holistically with grief. This year's survey findings demonstrate that while we've made gains in supporting grieving families, there is still more work to be done to help those experiencing a death and those who wish to support them.

By leveraging our partnerships with experts and organizations that support bereaved youth and families, we will continue to make progress toward creating more grief-sensitive workplaces, schools, and homes. In the school community, our Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative (GSSI) has helped over 4,000 schools strive to become grief sensitive with the help of free, expert-driven online resources and grief support tools. We're now working to expand the initiative to after-school programs outside of the classroom to continue to close the gaps.

Another area of focus for us is the workplace. While most people surveyed felt their co-workers were a good support system, only 60% said they would know if a colleague was experiencing a personal loss. When asked about company policies and services and whether they knew where to turn to and what's available, that figure dropped dramatically, indicating that developing resources for companies to examine their policies and for managers and co-workers to help employees will be critical to advancing the bereavement field.

New York Life is piloting ready resources and support for its own workforce with plans to provide these tools to other companies. It's important for companies to support their grieving employees by providing ready resources and assisting with wellness, which is also good for long-term productivity.

As the nation continues to work through grief and loss, we are committed to helping children and families process their emotions and heal. We know that people need support in all aspects of their lives, and we are committed to providing grants and resources to help.

We hope this report can spark and evolve conversations about grief and grief support and help people discover resources to help them or someone close to them who is grieving. With the continued illumination about this common yet awkward topic, we hope to raise awareness, enhance resources, and increase access to support. Those who are grieving

still need support, and together we can help the bereavement conversation evolve, leveraging the increased comfort talking about grief gained during the pandemic.



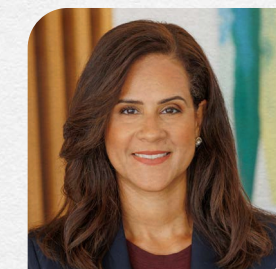
Heather Nesle

President
New York Life Foundation



Maria Collins

Vice President
New York Life Foundation



Marlyn Torres

Senior Program Officer
New York Life Foundation





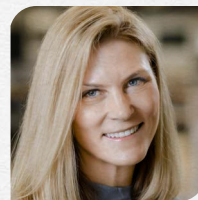
Survey Findings

The way we talk about and deal with grief has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. While more adults feel comfortable providing support when a friend or family member has experienced a death, and know how to find resources to do so, people are tired of the topic. But despite this fatigue, grief persists, and ultimately touches everyone.

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY: People still understand they need these conversations. Now is the time to capitalize on the awareness gained during the pandemic and use that momentum to strengthen bereavement resources and services.



While **74%** say they understand it's important to discuss grief, they're ready to focus on lighter topics

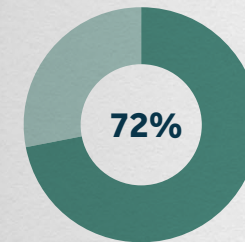
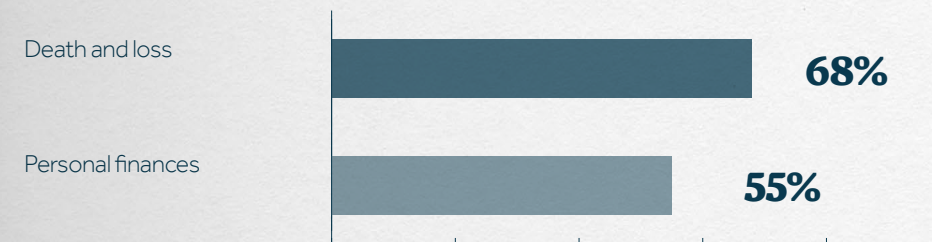


“More than 290,000 children have lost a parent or primary caregiver since the start of the pandemic. **The Hidden Pain** initiative has mobilized the public, assembled the right partners, and curated support for families. Given the survey findings, this work is now more important than ever to make sure children and families know about the grief resources available to them.”

Catherine Jaynes

PhD, Senior Director, External Affairs, COVID Collaborative

More adults feel comfortable talking about death and loss (**68%**) than they do talking about personal finances (**55%**)



72% say they feel either very or somewhat comfortable helping others process loss



“The death of a caregiver or sibling is a life-altering event for a child. At the National Alliance for Children’s Grief, we are committed to making it a reality that they are not alone in their grief. We will achieve this through addressing the systemic barriers to

accessing support and growing the capability and capacity of those working in communities across the country through professional education offerings focused on the child’s grief experience. All bereaved children, regardless of age, race, or ethnicity, must have the support they need, and collectively we can make that a reality.”

Vicki Jay

Chief Executive Officer, National Alliance for Children's Grief



AMERICANS ARE RESILIENT: Grief and supporting those experiencing it doesn't have to be awkward. Now is the time to continue to reduce the stigma around talking about grief. It is important that we shift the focus to resiliency and the positive impacts that bereavement services have had on families.



50% of those surveyed think awareness of grief support services will decline as society returns to normal

78% think more should be done to increase awareness of grief support services



49% say they got used to talking about death and loss during the pandemic, but believe people will become less comfortable with these conversations as society returns to normal



“Overload’ is a representation of how I felt during the pandemic. Everything started to change so quickly, everyone was afraid. Also, during this time, my dad was diagnosed with colon cancer, and we lived in different households. Sometimes, all I wanted to do was hug him before he passed away, but I was afraid if I got too close, I would make him sick because of his low immune system. I felt like I was in overload and was completely overwhelmed by the lack of human interactions and not being able to be around the people I love.

Art for me has been a way to express my emotions in a way that words cannot justify. When the pandemic hit, I was in a depressive state where I lacked motivation. Finally releasing all those pent-up emotions into my art gave me hope for a new beginning in life.”

Taylor Herron

Overload, Painting. Grade 11, Mississippi School of the Arts, Brookhaven, MS. Maurice Calvert and Brittany Horne, Educators; Mississippi Museum of Art, Affiliate. Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, Gold Medal, New York Life Award, 2022

THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE: There are some generational differences when it comes to mental wellness, resiliency, and accessing grief resources. While most of the younger generations say they will need help if they experience the death of a loved one, they are less likely than older generations to know where to turn for grief support, especially Gen Z, who represent a growing number of employees in the workforce. That's why it's critical to continue educating all people on what resources are available and how they can access them.

68% of Gen Z respondents say they would need support in the event of the death of a loved one, yet only **52%** are aware of services available to them



That is compared with **66%** of all adults saying they'd need help and **66%** knowing about available resources

Baby boomers were the least likely to turn to help (**58%**), but **71%** say they know how to access resources



❖ The New York Life Foundation's free bereavement resources can be found [here](#).



Grief at Work – Building a culture of support in the workplace



Employees don't stop grieving when they return to work after a death. It's critical for companies to let workers know what services and benefits are available, as the survey shows there is still a gap in this area. This is especially important for companies with remote or hybrid workers since they may not even know if a colleague experienced a death. Many who experienced the death of a loved one don't feel supported by their employers, which could have lasting effects on productivity and retention. As the workforce welcomes more people from Gen Z, showing them where to access help now will ensure they have the necessary assistance from their companies if it's needed.

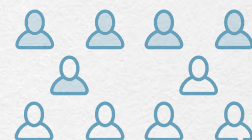


“When a person feels like they've been seen, heard, and understood, it adds to them being an engaged, productive colleague. We know

there are gaps in understanding and accessing resources, so the Foundation is working on an initiative that will help managers and workers support and guide their grieving colleagues.”

Maria Collins

Vice President, New York Life Foundation

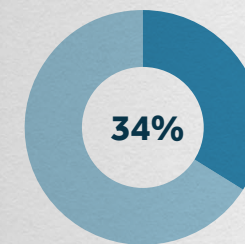


More than 4 in 10 (**44%**) employed adults don't think they would know if a colleague had someone close to them die

62% of full-time office employees and **60%** of hybrid workers say they would know if their colleague had someone close to them die, but only **53%** of fully remote employees say so



Just **28%** of employed adults are familiar with their workplace bereavement policies with **30%** of employed adults saying they don't know if their workplace offers them



Only **34%** of employed adults who had someone close to them die while working for their current employer say they felt supported by their company



- ❖ [What to say/what not to say](#)
- ❖ [SHRM Customized Paid Leave Benchmarking Report](#)



54% of employed adults say their company offered new mental wellness support in the past year



55% agree that their company's bereavement policies show they care about them as a person



8% say their employer made changes to its bereavement policy in the past year



50% say they feel their companies should make enhancements to their bereavement policies considering recent events **(60% of Millennials)**

For many people, just acknowledging their grief is an important way for them to feel supported at work, but many employers lack the expertise to address grief besides having a bereavement leave policy. This moment in time has made death, grief, and bereavement an issue that we can no longer ignore. Resources are needed to equip companies to support their employees through their grief. New York Life enhanced its bereavement leave policy and is encouraging others to do the same. However, just changing a policy is not enough; tools and resources are critical in the adoption of cultural change. Therefore, New York Life is investing in a Workplace Bereavement Initiative that will provide easy to digest,



New York Life not only has the ability, but also the responsibility, to help people in the communities where we live and work. Children of New York Life Agents and employees paint [Hearts of Hope](#) for families of the Uvalde school shooting.

practical information for managers and employees to support one another and companies to support a grief-sensitive workplace. When bereaved individuals feel understood and receive the support they need, they are better prepared to cope with their grief and are more productive, engaged employees.



“These findings confirm that a small number of employed adults are aware of available company bereavement resources. When bereaved employees are better supported by their companies and managers through their experiences, work performance is improved and company loyalty and long-term commitment increases. Managers and co-workers supporting these bereaved team members play a key role in affecting the outcomes.”

Shari O'Loughlin

Chief Executive Officer, The Compassionate Friends USA

New York Life Foundation Vice President Maria Collins leads an employee and agent [Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative](#) training.





Grief in Schools – Helping Children Navigate Grief

The last two-plus years have been hard on everyone, but it's been especially challenging for children, who have been dealing with loss and isolation, which is impacting children's development.



78% of parents believe their children need more help with their social and emotional development



77% of parents feel schools need to provide more long-term support for children who lose a primary caregiver

Offering care will be critical to helping them feel more supported and more comfortable to express and process their emotions. Everyone who interacts with children, whether at home, school, or after school, should have the tools and resources to support them through their grief journey.

The New York Life Foundation is in the process of adapting its successful [Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative](#) for after-school and out-of-school-time providers to further expand the circle of support for grieving children and their families.



During the month of November, which is Children's Grief Awareness Month, New York Life agents and employees participated in New York Life's Read-Along events at schools across the country.

92% of parents whose children participate in a school program (sports, clubs) say they have noticed a direct positive impact

86% of parents think after-school instructors should be informed of a child's loss and that they should receive training in how to support grieving children



“COVID-19 further highlighted social, health, and economic disparities, including increased mortality, within our Black and Brown communities. To protect their loved ones, children often mute their grief. Now, more than ever, after-school programs that are prioritizing behavioral health and investing long-term in skilled and caring staff — and culturally reflective programming — are an essential solution to children’s healing.”

Deborah K. Machold MA, MSW, LCSW

Citywide Director Behavioral Health Services, Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco



“The pandemic highlighted the important role after-school and summer programs play in supporting children both academically and socially. These programs help foster children’s social and emotional development and provide youth with safe and caring spaces that positively nurture their well-being. In addition to school staff, the survey demonstrates the public’s desire for the after-school community to be able to support grieving children. The expansion of our Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative beyond the classroom space will provide these organizations with bereavement support resources and staff training specifically tailored for after-school and summer programs.”

Marlyn Torres

Senior Program Officer, New York Life Foundation



Working with our traditional after-school partners, like [After-School All-Stars](#), New York Life will be expanding its [Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative](#) program in 2023.

Holistic, consistent, and long-term grief assistance is needed for children experiencing everyday grief as well as those impacted by tragedies or community events. Schools and after-school programs need to be prepared to deal with these emotions before a tragedy occurs. Every person who works with children needs to understand how children react to grief and how to help them process their feelings.



“After-school programs can help children cope with the grief that comes with losing a caregiver. They give students ways to express their feelings, explore their creativity, and bond with caring adults and peers who can help them through difficult times. Training after-school providers to support grieving children should be a priority.”

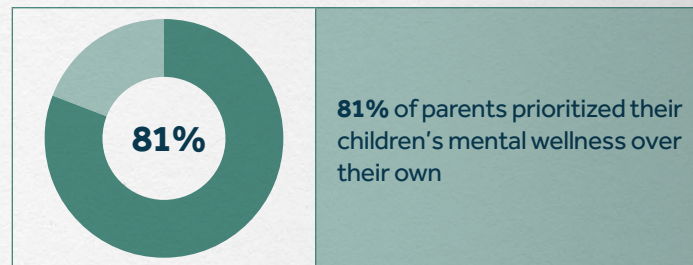
Jodi Grant

Executive Director, Afterschool Alliance



Grief in the Home – Supporting the Entire Family

Parents are also suffering after the last two years, yet most continue to put their children first, sacrificing their own mental health and wellness. The stress of supporting their families can weigh on parents, ultimately causing more strain in the long term. This may have a negative impact on their parenting abilities.



84% feel greater pressure to make sure their children are safe

68% are fearful they may not always be there for their children

Neglecting self-care likely causes problems in other areas, such as work or social relationships. Since most people rely on family and friends for support during the grieving process, taking time to cultivate personal relationships and prioritize mental health is critical.



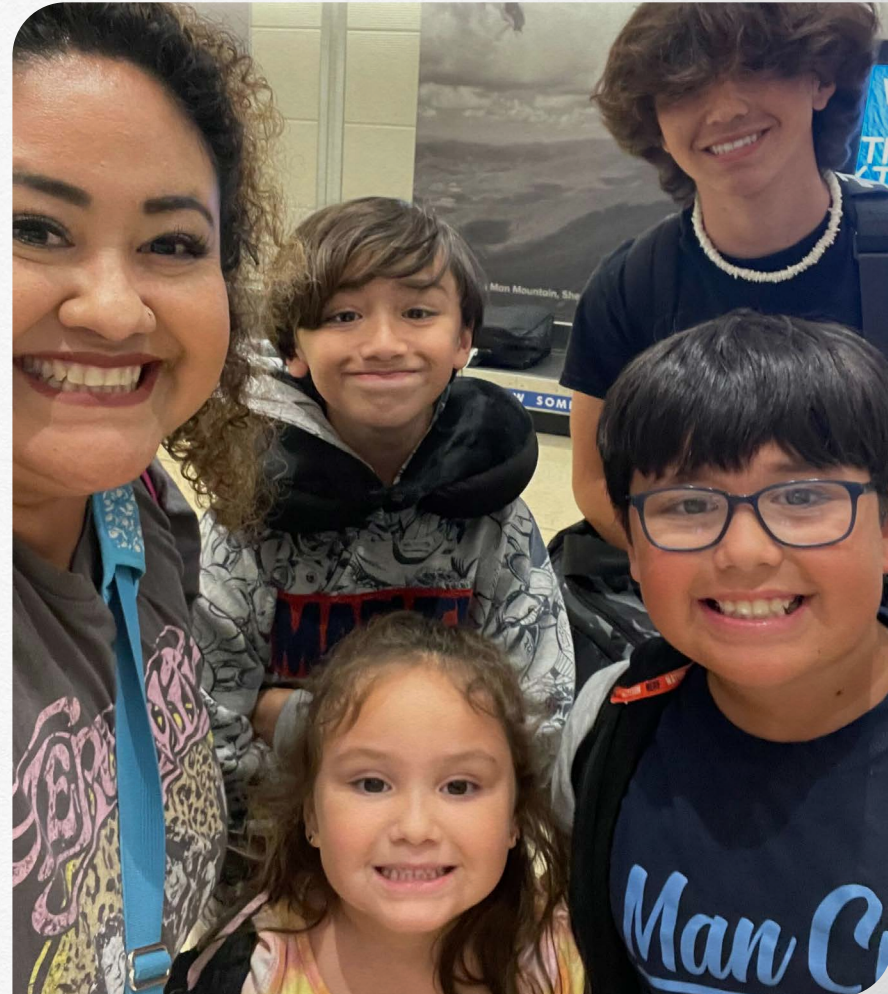
The New York Life Foundation created *Kai's Journey*, a film and book series, that is dedicated to children and families who have experienced the death of a loved one. The series strives to provide guidance and support as they embark on this lifelong journey of learning to better understand, process, and communicate their grief.

Parents need resources to understand and process their own grief, so they're open to talking about death with their children. Youth who feel like they can discuss their feelings are better able to handle losses and challenges, and they need parents to feel comfortable having these conversations. Creating resilient children requires a community of support, which means parents need to know what services and resources are available to them.

Providing programs for parents and equipping them with bereavement tools to have courageous conversations with their children provides a sense of empowerment and creates a supportive, nurturing environment for families. Surviving parents and caregivers are the most powerful resource for helping bereaved children to cope following the death of a parent and strengthens the resilience of bereaved children. By taking a holistic approach to helping families grieve at work, at school, after school and at home, together we can create a nurturing environment to process the death of a loved one and grieve – which benefits everyone.



- ❖ [Resilient Parenting for Bereaved Families](#)
- ❖ [Kai's Journey](#)
- ❖ [NACG Grief Talk Schools Caregiver Guide](#)
- ❖ [TAPS Parent program](#)



“Just seeing their faces after every Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors event fills my heart. It’s been helpful for them to know that they’re with peers who are going through a similar situation. The first event we went to, my nine-year-old said, ‘Mom, they get us, they understand what we’re going through.’ He had this excitement in his eyes and on his face. TAPS is like a big family; it’s a safe space for them.”

Marisol Deck

Surviving spouse of U.S. Air Force MSGT Christopher Robert Deck, Jr., and mother of Christopher (15), Aiden (10), Mateo (9), and Luna (5)

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), a New York Life Foundation partner, provides events for the entire family. Participating as a team helps the family to support one another in their individual grief journeys. Marisol and her children have participated in numerous events with TAPS since MSGT Deck died on July 11, 2021. They’ve been to the California Family Camp, two Regional Military Survivor Seminars and Good Grief Camps, and the 2022 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp.



“Children take their cues from those who care for them at home. While peer support groups, bereavement camps, and other services can have a profound impact on a child’s grief journey, home is also critical to healing. As our survey shows, parents too often sacrifice their own mental wellbeing to concentrate solely on their children. Yet, often the most important step for parents to help their children is practicing self-care and seeking resources for their own grief.”

Heather Nesle

President, New York Life Foundation





Partner Views: The Future of the Bereavement Field

The New York Life Foundation is proud to partner with an extensive network of national bereavement experts and organizations working to support grieving children and their families. Given their experience and on-the-ground perspective, we asked them to share their views on how they would like to see the bereavement field evolve in the future.

Michaeleen (Micki) Burns

PhD, Licensed Psychologist,
Chief Clinical Officer, Judi's House



Our mission at Judi's House is to help children and families grieving a death find connection and healing. With the rising rates of childhood bereavement, parents, caregivers, teachers, and

children need to understand how to talk about and process their grief. Data from our [Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model](#) reinforces the need for access to grief-focused education and programming that helps communities respond compassionately and confidently. Grief does not stop, and neither can this important work. Now more than ever, the need for funding and continually developing resources remains.

Andy McNiel

Chief Executive Officer,
The Satori Group, which provides training, education, and non profit management to those serving in the end-of-life and bereavement support field.



The New York Life Foundation has supported key research, best practices, expansion of care, and innovation in grief support care that have helped shape the bereavement field in

positive ways. With all the ebbs and flows of the past several years with COVID-19 and social unrest, the two things that remain the top priorities for bereavement care are quality of care and access to needed support. We must work to ensure that everyone who needs bereavement support can access quality, grief-informed care.

Catherine Jaynes

PHD, Senior Director, External Affairs,
COVID Collaborative



Identifying children and families who need support is critical. We look forward to working with New York Life and others to develop systemic ways in

which we can identify young people who lost loved ones to COVID and connect them to local support. Even though people want to move past the pandemic, the loss of a parent or caregiver is not something we can just forget. It is part of who we are as Americans to care for those impacted by tragedy — and these children and families are no different.



Conclusion – The Power of Community

While our survey shows that most people want to move forward after the abundance of loss and grief experienced over the last two-plus years, the death of a loved one is something that affects people for the rest of their lives. Everyone experiences death at some point, so normalizing talking about feelings and helping others process their grief is an important way we can, as a society, support each other.

The New York Life Foundation recognizes that while we've made progress in raising awareness about the need for grief-sensitive spaces, we still have work to do to combat the negative stigma around talking openly about a death.

CREATING MORE GRIEF-SENSITIVE PLACES

AT WORK

Most people feel they're prepared to help a colleague who has experienced the death of a loved one, yet they might not even know that someone close to their co-workers has died. Companies rely on managers to communicate with their teams, but often they don't provide supervisors with the tools and resources to know how to support their employees when they're dealing with a death.

Developed with our partners in the bereavement space, the New York Life Foundation's pilot program offers training and tools for managers and co-workers on how they can address the needs of grieving employees and advise team members on ways to help. We're excited to offer this to companies across the country in the years ahead to foster more grief-sensitive workplaces.

AT HOME

Creating a community of support needs to extend beyond the immediate family, including the supporting cast in one's life. It's important that adults are comfortable talking about death so they can help the children in their lives feel seen and heard.

Most people turn to friends and family to help them cope with a death, but having expert-developed resources and other tools is an important way we can advance the conversation and improve the support we provide to grieving children, families, and colleagues.

AT SCHOOL

Children are incredibly attuned to their environments and those around them, and often want to help when others are hurting. Research shows that children who feel supported and safe during times of loss show more adaptive behavior – creating resiliency that will help them throughout life.

The Foundation has spent decades providing bereavement support to families and their allies. But, our work isn't done. We need to develop a grief-sensitive culture and continue to educate everyone from parents to teachers to after-school caregivers on how to support grieving children. That's why we are working diligently to expand our Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative to the out-of-school-time space to support families more holistically.

Now is the time to continue acting and to take advantage of the familiarity people developed with talking about death during the pandemic. Even though many are exhausted and overwhelmed with the topic and would like to focus on lighter issues, we can't abandon our friends, family, colleagues, and children who need help dealing with grief.

Creating a supportive community requires all of us to develop the vocabulary, tools, resources, and awareness about grief-sensitive spaces. We will all be impacted by death, and the more we focus on helping each other, the more resilient our communities will be.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Two polls were conducted between August 24-26, 2022 and October 11-13, 2022. Both polls had a sample of 4,422 General Population Adults. The interviews were conducted online, and the data was weighted to approximate a target sample of Adults based on gender, educational attainment, age, race, and region. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus two percentage points.



 SCAN ME

Scan here for more information about the New York Life Foundation

