

The 2024

# New York Life Foundation State of Grief Report:

Holistically supporting families through grief



NEW YORK LIFE  
FOUNDATION



## Table of contents

[CLICK TO EXPLORE>>](#)

03

Survey methodology

04

Foreword

06

Grief in school communities

11

Grief at home

16

Grief in the workplace

21

Conclusion



## SURVEY

### Methodology

#### School teacher and afterschool professional survey

**methodology:** This poll was conducted by Morning Consult from December 6–18, 2023, among a sample of 299 current teachers (K–12) and 201 afterschool professionals. Afterschool professionals were defined as employed adults who worked with children in an afterschool setting. Teachers have a margin of error of plus or minus 6 percentage points and afterschool professionals 7 percentage points.

**General survey methodology:** This poll was conducted by Morning Consult from December 7–12, 2023, among a sample of 1,017 adults. The interviews were conducted online, and the data was weighted to approximate a target sample of adults based on gender, age, race, educational attainment, and region. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

[Return to the table of contents](#)

## FOREWORD:

# A letter from the New York Life Foundation

**When you look at those in your community—your coworkers, friends, children’s schoolmates—can you pinpoint who is grieving the death of a loved one? Would you know how to talk to them or help them find resources if you did? It’s likely that someone around you is grieving, and you can help provide them with support. The first step is knowing they are in need.**

More than 3.2 million people died in the United States in 2022,\* leaving behind a wake of grief for families, friends, coworkers, and community members. Too often those who have experienced loss are left to process their feelings alone. While challenging at any age, these emotions can be especially difficult for children, who are increasingly experiencing grief in their youth and need age-appropriate resources.

Seventy percent of those surveyed in this year’s State of Grief survey,\* an annual report commissioned by the New York Life Foundation to evaluate the bereavement landscape, agreed they would want help and support through their grief. But everyone has a different idea of what support looks like and where they might find it. For some it’s a trusted friend, family member, or a therapist, while others may turn to schoolteachers, coworkers, or physicians. That is why we need to expand the preparedness of different communities to provide bereavement support so that when they are faced with a grieving person, whether at school, work, or in their personal life, they are equipped to meet that person with care.

Since 2008, the New York Life Foundation has invested more than \$75 million to create a comprehensive approach to bereavement support by conducting research, investing in organizations with shared goals and expertise, and developing tangible resources and tools to support bereaved youth and their families within the systems where they regularly interact. By deepening our understanding of the bereavement field and working directly with communities, families, and experts, we have learned that a key gap in support is being aware people are bereaved. This year’s report explores the concept of



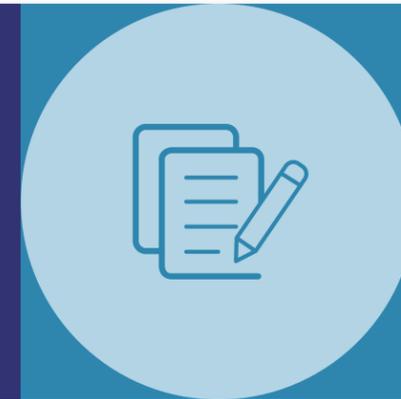
As of 2023,  
**1 in 12**  
American youth will  
experience the death of  
a parent or sibling before  
the age of 18—which is  
up 25% from 2018 when it  
was 1 in 15 youth.\*\*

\* “CDC Provisional Mortality Data, 2022” [Provisional Mortality Data—United States, 2022 | MMWR \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr).

\*\* “Judi’s House/JAG Institute Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model.” <https://judishouse.org/research-tools/cbem/>

## Identify

—when a loss occurs, that information should be recorded in relevant records, including death, government, medical, and school records



## Act

—anyone interacting with bereaved people, but particularly adults working with bereaved children, can provide support and serve as a connection to resources



## Document

—for any bereaved person’s records, that information should stay on file year after year to ensure that the family continues to receive support



using existing personal records to identify and document that someone is recently bereaved, so that those who have seen those records can act accordingly.

Through this process, we can all help meet people where they are, within the systems where they usually receive support, during a time when it can be difficult to ask for help. Throughout this report we highlight survey responses and provide areas for action—we encourage you to reflect on how you can bring these resources to your community to support those who may be grieving today and in the future. **We hope this report helps spark ideas for how you can make a difference in the lives of those who are grieving in your community.**

*Heather Nesle, Maria Collins, Marlyn Torres*



**HEATHER NESLE**  
President  
New York Life Foundation



**MARIA COLLINS**  
Vice President  
New York Life Foundation



**MARLYN TORRES**  
Senior Program Officer  
New York Life Foundation

## GRIEF IN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES: Supporting kids in their trusted spaces

**With the number of youth experiencing the death of a parent or sibling before the age of 18 on the rise, it is critical now more than ever to understand and strengthen how bereaved youth receive support. It is not enough to recognize the number of children impacted by grief. We must understand how we can support these youth as they process their feelings and help to avoid the adverse effects of being unsupported through grief.**

Children bond with adults in various ways, depending on the roles these adults play in their lives. While one child may find solace in a trusted teacher, another may turn to an afterschool staff member whom they are familiar with to seek comfort or advice. When we consider how we are supporting youth through grief, it is critical to consider the perspectives of both in-school and out-of-school-time professionals.

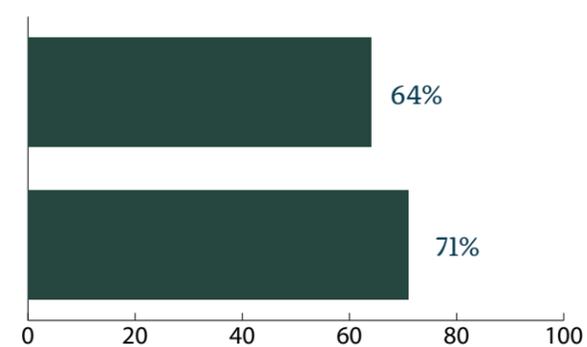


**Bereavement is the number one predictor of poor school outcomes, including poor school grades, school dropout, school truancy, lack of school connectedness, and problems learning."**

*—Dr. Julie Kaplow, Executive Vice President of the Trauma and Grief Center at the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, a Foundation partner*

The powerful, trusting relationships established in afterschool programs with children can be a source of strength for young people and their families when they experience the death of a loved one. But afterschool professionals, like many adults, need the skills and resources to be able to respond both appropriately and effectively. Working with New York Life Foundation's Peer Learning Group (PLG), and accessing their network of experts, has helped the afterschool field to build those skills, and has provided concrete resources to the caring adults who children often turn to in complicated and hard times."

*—Alison Overseth, CEO, Partnership for Afterschool Education (PASE)*



**64%** of teachers and **71%** of afterschool professionals state that they personally have seen the negative impacts of grief on children in their classrooms or afterschool programs.

Teachers and afterschool professionals share similar experiences in working with bereaved youth:

**97%** of teachers and **94%** of afterschool professionals

agree that grief can have an adverse impact on a child's learning.

**97%** of teachers and **93%** of afterschool professionals

say that grief can have an adverse impact on a child's behavior.

**96%** of teachers and **93%** of afterschool professionals

agree that students who experience a significant personal loss generally need more support over the long term.

**94%** of teachers and **93%** of afterschool professionals

agree that students who experience a significant personal loss generally need more support than they can get from schools and youth organizations.

**92%** of teachers and **89%** of afterschool professionals

would like to do more to support grieving students.

Educators and afterschool staff identified five of the most significant challenges when supporting grieving students in their care. In order, they are:

- 1 Not knowing what to say or do and how to provide support
- 2 Not having enough information about the child's loss
- 3 Insufficient training
- 4 Lack of resources or support from administration
- 5 Not knowing that a child is bereaved until significantly after the loss

90% of teachers and 90% of afterschool professionals

agree that identifying students who have faced a significant death such as of a parent or caregiver is crucial information that should be included in school records.

91% of teachers and 94% of afterschool professionals

say that it's very or somewhat important that this information be maintained on record year after year.

With so many teachers and afterschool professionals seeing the effects of bereavement on a student's experience, supporting these youth should be simple, but there are several barriers to adults in a child's life providing support.

Many youths who experience the loss of a loved one, crave a sense of normalcy in the days, weeks, and months that follow. While they may resume life as usual, it can take an extended period for the adverse effects of grief to emerge. Currently, educators lack crucial information about a student's experience with death unless directly informed by a parent or the child themselves. This, combined with transitions between in- and out-of-school-time programs and between grades, means that often adults in a child's life do not know a child is grieving until an incident occurs.

At the New York Life Foundation, we take a multi-step approach to make sure that the adults in a child's life are aware that they have experienced a loss to allow for proactive support. This approach uses existing documentation, such as school and program records, to ensure that year after year and program to program, adults are informed of the support a child needs.

While we continue to work with communities to build out these recordkeeping processes, we are expanding our commitment to creating grief-supportive spaces for children and providing practical tips and tangible tools to adults in a bereaved youth's life. In 2018, New York Life's Grief-Sensitive

Successful academic, attendance, physical and mental health outcomes in afterschool and summer programs are all dependent upon the consistent caring relationships built between staff and youth participants over time. When an already vulnerable student in a program faces the traumatic death of a loved one in their life and is dealing with grief, the staff want to jump into action. However, they need to know some of the evidence-based practices for how best to show support. The critical training, resources, and investments the New York Life Foundation has made in helping both students and staff in afterschool and summer programs deal with grief is needed, invaluable and allows everyone to navigate one of the toughest times in life."

—Aaron Dworkin, CEO, National Summer Learning Association (NSLA)

Schools Initiative®(GSSI) was developed to raise awareness about grief and supportive resources in schools through the deployment of our nationwide workforce. Through this initiative, we have provided more than \$2 million in financial support, helping more than 5,000 schools that have agreed to work toward building more grief-sensitive school communities. To further fulfill our mission to meet youth where they are and provide support to those administering out-of-school-time programs, this initiative is expanding beyond the schools to out-of-school-time settings, such as afterschool and summer programs, through GSSI+ in 2024.

Children build connections with a diverse range of adults in various settings. Therefore, ensuring that everyone who interacts with them, both within and beyond the educational sphere, possesses the necessary information and skills to support them through grief is crucial.

Learn more about how New York Life Foundation is creating grief-supportive school environments and how you can bring these resources to your in-school and out-of-school-time programs.

[CLICK TO EXPLORE THESE RESOURCES>>](#)

## [Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative](#)

Bring grief-supportive resources and tools to your school or out-of-school program through this nationwide program.

## [Kai's Journey book series](#)

This novel series for elementary and middle school-aged children can help them access the language and experiences to share their stories with others.

## [Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#)

This site provides training modules for educators on how they can support bereaved youth.

## [TAG Center Learning Library](#)

This virtual library includes resources to learn more about the impacts of grief on youth.

## GRIEF AT HOME: Identifying and supporting those who are bereaved

**When individuals experience the death of a loved one, their entire world shifts. For adults facing loss, they must balance their own grief, support their children through their grief, continue to navigate daily life, and address changes brought about by their loss. In need of both emotional and practical support, it can be incredibly challenging for bereaved parents to maintain a sense of normalcy for their children as their daily life has undergone numerous adjustments.**

The impact of parental death, especially before the age of 21, can have enduring effects on a child's health, education, social engagement, and financial stability. This experience can result in poor well-being, academic underperformance, diminished earnings throughout their career, and early mortality. Timely access to resources and interventions is imperative—since losing a primary caregiver has far-reaching consequences for children and their families.

Many adults can find it difficult to ask for help. At the same time, family members and friends may find it challenging to find the right ways of supporting those closest to the deceased, leading to the added challenge of feelings of isolation from social groups. Unsure of where to turn for help and overburdened with the number of tasks to address, bereaved parents need to be connected to resources that support their families through grief.

Parents and other caregivers promote the resilience of their bereaved children by providing a listening ear so their children can share their grief and all the stressful changes in their lives. Parents also create a stable family in which children can count on being cared for and in which positive and enjoyable things happen, not only sad things. Parents do all this while dealing with their own grief. It's a daunting task."

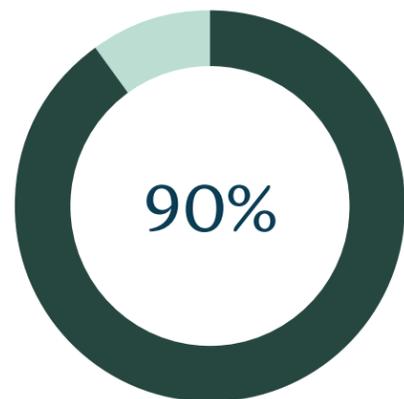
—Dr. Irwin Sandler, *The Resilient Parent for Bereaved Families Program at Arizona State University*



[Return to the table of contents](#)

When a child loses a primary caregiver, they are at immediate risk of homelessness, hunger, and other lifetime negative impacts of their trauma. Our priority in our partnership with the New York Life Foundation is to find kids who have experienced a tragic loss and connect them and their families to available services like federal death benefits, public assistance nutrition, grief camps, support groups, therapeutic services, and mentoring. We know these efforts will reduce the immediate risk of homelessness and hunger, create more resilient families, and provide opportunities for healing and support so bereaved children can find happiness and success despite their life-shaping tragedy."

—Ben McAdams, Senior Advisor for the Children's Collaborative, former U.S. Congressman and Mayor of Salt Lake County



Over **90%** of those surveyed agreed that the primary caregiver of a bereaved child should be provided with critical resources to support their children, including:

- Information on survivor benefits
- Understanding grief in children, including how to talk about grief
- Tools to support children emotionally through grief

Families can spend more than a year resolving the financial implications of death, including closing out accounts, determining housing, paying debts, and other administrative tasks. This prolonged period of financial uncertainty can deepen feelings of insecurity. However, there are financial resources available, but many have no idea they are entitled to state and federal benefits. This lack of knowledge hinders families from accessing much-needed financial assistance during a time of immense vulnerability. In this year's survey:

**41% of respondents** said they did not know that a child under the age of 18 was eligible for benefits when experiencing the death of a primary caregiver.

Dealing with the death of a loved one is not a one-time occurrence. Grief and the complexities of loss ebb and flow throughout one's life. That's why it is critical not only to connect bereaved families with resources immediately following a death, but also to find ways to continue to do so over time. A key piece of this puzzle is identifying bereaved families on personal, government, and medical records and continuing to maintain those records over time.

Overwhelming public support exists for improved identification and support of bereaved children:

**80% of respondents** believe there should be an emphasis on establishing a systematic approach to identifying bereaved children and linking them with support services.

**81% of respondents** think that at least one of a bereaved child's personal documents (e.g., school, medical, government, records) should indicate their loss.

**86% of respondents** stated that including living children on a person's death record is either very or somewhat important.

As we continue to build out the documentation of bereaved families, we must ensure that those receiving that information are also adequately prepared to act. Whether by connecting families to survivor benefits, bereavement centers, or other grief-related resources, there is great opportunity for support within the systems that individuals regularly interact with. This year's survey suggests that a key area for growth in grief sensitivity is within the healthcare industry.



### GRIEF IN HEALTHCARE:

**77%** of respondents would be comfortable discussing loss with healthcare providers.

**83%** strongly or somewhat agreed there should be a greater focus on training healthcare professionals to support grieving families.

**83%** believed healthcare professionals are critical in connecting bereaved children to support and resources with prior knowledge of a death.



The goal of Yale’s Grief-Sensitive Healthcare Program is to help healthcare professionals understand grief as a natural journey, one that is essential to our shared humanity and gives meaning even as loss is painful. The program gives healthcare professionals tools to work with families and individuals experiencing grief while at the same time, recognizing how their own grief and feelings of helplessness in the face of loss also deepens their ability to work empathically with individuals across the lifespan.”

—Linda C. Mayes, MD, Arnold Gesell Professor of Child Psychiatry, Pediatrics, and Psychology and Chair, Yale Child Study Center

As grief can often have physical manifestations, it is imperative that healthcare providers are prepared to recognize this when caring for the whole person in front of them. That is why the New York Life Foundation has partnered with the Yale University Child Study Center to create the Grief-Sensitive Healthcare Project, an initiative dedicated to providing healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to understand and support grieving people.

An overwhelming majority of people want to help bereaved families—they just need some support in learning how. Through the New York Life Foundation’s comprehensive approach of investing in strategies that support direct practice, access to information, and adequate preparedness, we are building a grief-supportive infrastructure at the key touchpoints a family will encounter. The ultimate goal is to ensure that grieving families will be taken care of through their most critical times of need.

You can help create a culture of grief sensitivity in your community by sharing the importance of identification, documentation, and preparedness in your schools, doctors’ offices, and government agencies when supporting bereaved families. Learn more about this work at:

[CLICK TO EXPLORE THESE RESOURCES>>](#)

### Resilient Parenting for Bereaved Families

This training program provides parents and caregivers with the tools to take care of themselves and show up for their families in the face of loss.

### Children’s Collaborative

This partnership, which includes local government, is dedicated to improving the identification and recordkeeping of bereaved families in Utah. As the initiative grows, its model will be replicated in communities across the U.S.

### Grief-Sensitive Healthcare Initiative

This resource hub includes trainings and information for healthcare providers on how to navigate grief personally and in their practice while supporting their grieving patients.

## GRIEF AT WORK:

# Supporting adults where they spend their days

**Many adults who have experienced the death of a loved one find themselves navigating grief while at work. Whether due to limited time off, craving a sense of normalcy, or wanting a distraction, they may have to navigate a variety of emotions while working. The support of colleagues and managers, when appropriately applied, can be a protective factor for grieving employees. However, without proper training and guidance, a workplace's lack of response and support can lead to disgruntled and burnt-out employees.**

Survey respondents reported that their workplace can best support them through grief by:

- 1 Giving them time off to grieve
- 2 Offering them flexible working hours
- 3 Providing their manager with resources about how to best support them
- 4 Offering to decrease their workload and adjust deadlines
- 5 Providing them with resources for newly bereaved individuals



Considering the long-term nature of grief, a sizable portion of a company's workforce may be grieving at any given time. This impact reaches far beyond any one project or team, affecting everything from bandwidth to productivity to morale, making it essential that workplaces are prepared to support their grieving employees.

Providing ample time off is a critical aspect of bereavement support due to the logistical demands following the loss of a loved one. Employees recognize this as well, as improved time-off policies are what they would most like to see from their employers. Despite this, many companies have room to grow in this area.

For those employees who do receive time off specifically for bereavement, their grief does not end simply because they return to work. Employers need to be prepared to support their employees as they adjust to their new reality following the death of a loved one. As with other sensitivities in the workplace, offering training modules can quickly and efficiently prepare a bereaved person's colleagues and manager to support their coworker.

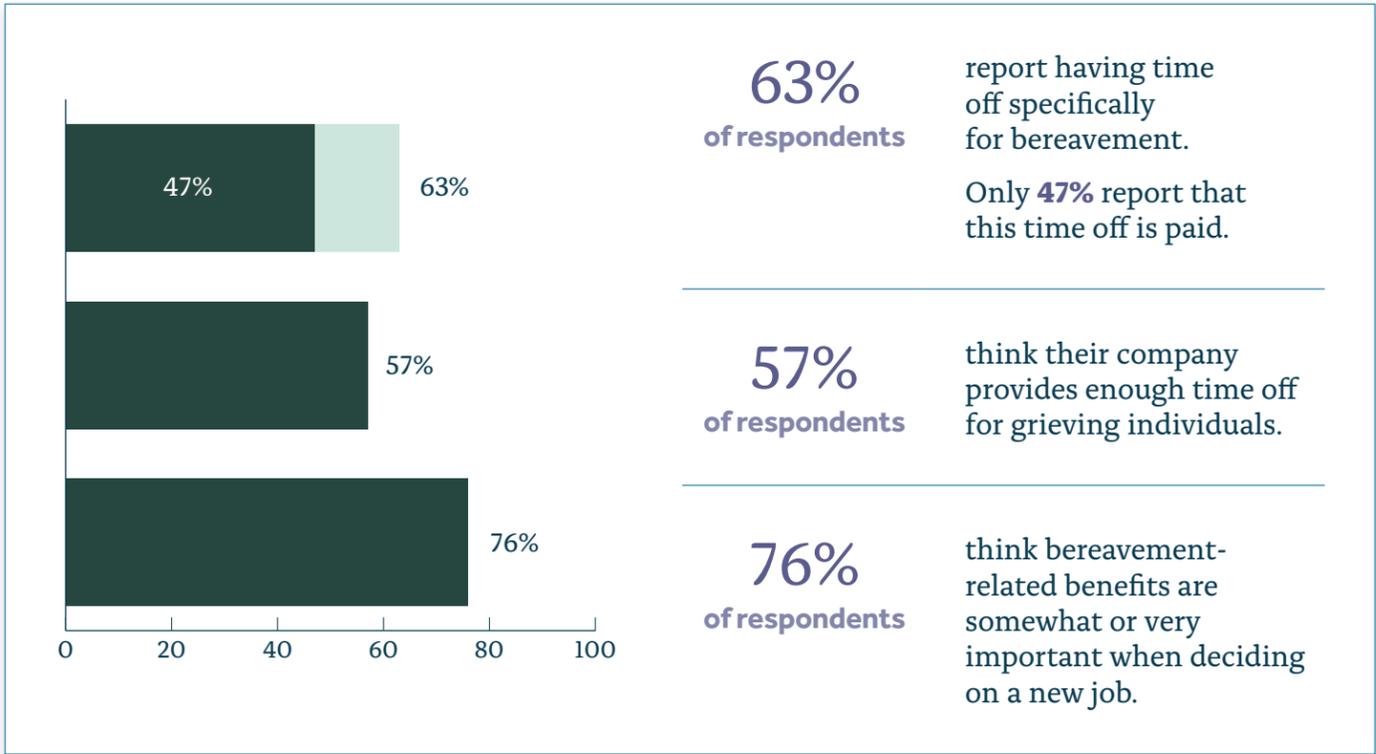
Grief disrupts all aspects of a bereaved person's life. Returning to work after a life-altering loss can be particularly challenging. A supportive workplace bereavement program facilitates a more successful transition back to work and positively impacts the employee, employer, and team. Through our partnership with New York Life, we are making effective bereavement support programs more accessible and educating employers and their teams on the most helpful ways to assist grieving employees."

—Shari O'Loughlin, CEO, The Compassionate Friends, USA



If a company can do the right thing and help an employee regain their productivity, regain their sense of belonging, their sense of balance after a tragedy like the death of a loved one, that speaks to the company's long-term future, that they're investing in their people."

— John Santoro, Bereaved Employee



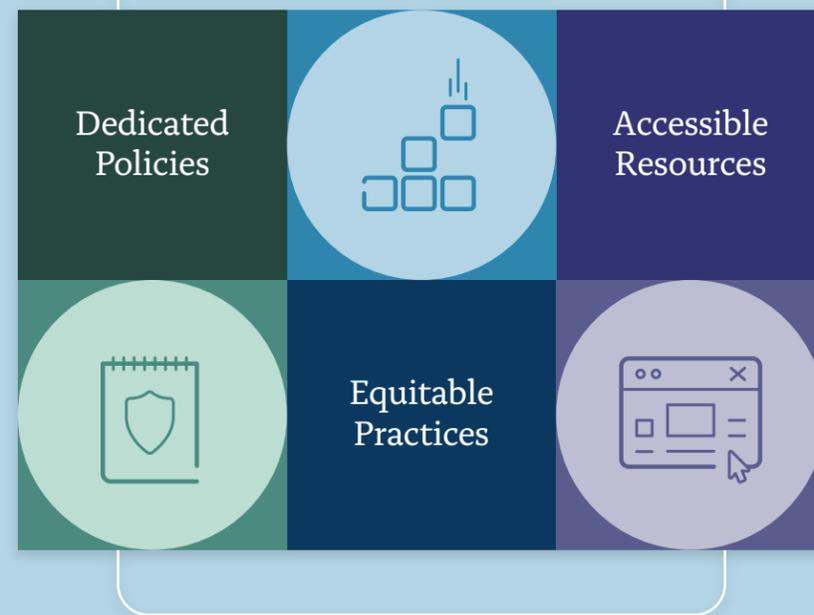
64%	71%	85%
of respondents said their employers don't offer bereavement support training for all employees.	of workers were very or somewhat interested in taking voluntary grief support training to help their colleagues through a loss.	of respondents agreed that they would be proud to work at a workplace that has publicly committed to being grief-supportive.

As a leader in the bereavement space, the New York Life Foundation is well positioned to develop these critically needed and wanted training modules. Through our Grief-Supportive Workplace Initiative, companies can provide manager, colleague, and griever-specific trainings to their workforce. These learning modules are designed to provide tangible tips, including how to acknowledge the loss, what to say, and how to best support employees as they undergo the grieving process. Along with these resources, companies can publicly pledge to build a grief-supportive culture within their workforce and commit to supporting their employees.

Employees clearly want more resources to help each other navigate the bereavement process. Employers who can create grief-supportive environments will be able to attract and retain top talent by demonstrating that employees are able to bring their whole selves to work and have their needs met both personally and professionally. By bringing grief support to the workplace, we are ensuring that people are getting tools for their grief in the spaces where they are already engaged.

## YOU CAN BE A KEY PIECE OF BUILDING A GRIEF-SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AT YOUR WORKPLACE.

Learn more about the benefits of bringing these principles to your employer through New York Life's Grief-Supportive Workplace Initiative. This program provides companies with critically needed and wanted grief resources to support their employees.



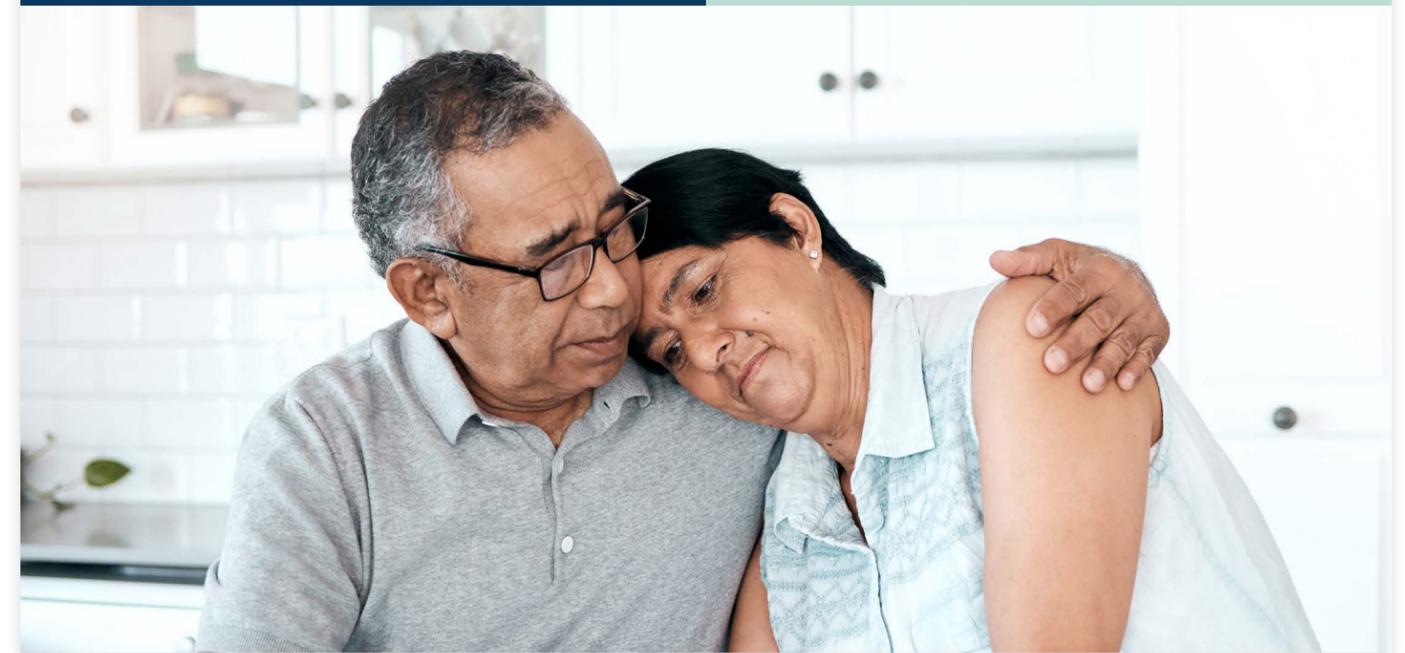
Modeled after our Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative, New York Life is advocating for the needs of grieving adults in all workplaces. This program provides guidance for leadership and tangible tips on what to say and how to best support bereaved colleagues. For those who are grieving, these resources affirm that they are not alone and help carve a path forward through loss.

We encourage companies of all sizes to join our commitment to fostering a grief-supportive workplace.

CLICK TO EXPLORE>>

## New York Life's Grief Sensitive Workplace Initiative

Learn more about the initiative to understand what it means to become a Grief-Supportive Workplace



## CONCLUSION: Creating a culture of empathy at school, home, and work

**To cultivate a more supportive culture when it comes to grief, it is crucial to meet people where they are. This allows us to better understand their experiences with grief, ask what support they could benefit from, and provide relevant resources. We then must create environments where they feel comfortable expressing their feelings and asking for help as they continue to navigate grief over time.**

While grief support will never bring back those that have died, normalizing talking about our experiences and those we've lost can help us heal collectively. No matter if the person grieving is a child in school or a colleague returning to work after a death, we need to foster a culture of empathy and compassion, where people who are brave enough to share their experiences are heard, supported, and cared for.

At the New York Life Foundation, we are continually looking for innovative solutions to the challenges of connecting grieving people with resources that are tailored to meet their needs. We are working across schools, communities, and workplaces to create grief-sensitive environments, but we will only succeed if we work together to identify who needs help, document their experience, and act on their need for support.

We encourage you to join us in supporting those on their grief journey. By finding a way to help those around you in their times of need and leveraging the resources that are most appropriate for your community, **you can have an immeasurable impact on ensuring that no one grieves alone.**

