

Remembrance & Bereavement on Memorial Day: Supporting Children

Memorial Day honors and remembers those who have served in our military. We bring special attention to those who have died in the line of duty, and the families who remember and miss them.

This is an opportune time for school professionals to think about providing support to children who have lost a parent, sibling or other close family member serving in the military. These children will be thinking of their loved one, even if the death occurred some time ago. So will children with a parent going through a long or repeat deployment, or families watching a loved one recovering from a serious emotional and/or physical combat injury.

In most ways, the process of grief and remembrance will be similar to that of children who have lost loved ones in other ways. The website of the [Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#) provides guidance geared specifically to school professionals on how to offer support.

Ready to Protect

It is understood that service members stand ready to protect our nation, whatever the risk. Combat deaths are often seen as heroic and noble. Children and families believe they are expected to respond to a loved one's combat death with strength, courage and grace.

Often, however, children feel confusion, anger, resentment and other difficult emotions. "Why did my dad have to die serving his country? I want him here with me!" "Why couldn't someone else have died? I want my mom back."

Children may feel guilt or shame about these reactions. They may be unable to express the painful and complex emotions they're having. They may believe they should curtail their emotions. This interferes with their ability to fully experience their grief and, over time, move forward in their lives.

Support Grieving Children

School professionals can take steps to support children who have lost a family member in combat.

1. *Touch base.* As Memorial Day approaches, let children in military families or those who have lost a loved one in combat know you're thinking of them. Ask

how they're doing. (See modules at the Coalition's website on [Talking With Children](#) and [What Not to Say](#).)

2. *Create a supportive culture among peers.* Take steps proactively to help students understand and talk about death. Offer guidance on how to support a peer who has experienced a loss. (See the module on [Peer Support](#).)
3. *Support children in their process of bereavement.* Ask them to share memories of their loved one or talk about the deceased's positive traits and behaviors. Ask about positive traits they share. Have them describe friends and family who have been supportive. (See the module on [Providing Support Over Time](#).)

Providing support for children and families in these ways is one of the most meaningful ways for school professionals to support children and remember those who served our country.

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students was convened by the New York Life Foundation, a pioneering advocate for the cause of childhood bereavement, and the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, which is led by pediatrician and childhood bereavement expert David J. Schonfeld, M.D. The Coalition has worked with Scholastic Inc., a long-standing supporter of teachers and kids, to create grievingstudents.org, a groundbreaking, practitioner-oriented website designed to provide educators with the information, insights, and practical advice they need to better understand and meet the needs of the millions of grieving kids in America's classrooms.