

WHEN A STUDENT LOSES A SIBLING: A Toolkit for Schools



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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many families that have come to the Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) Foundation has said the same thing, “I didn’t know SUDC existed until now,” or “I thought my child was safe once they turned 1 year.” What many families soon learn is that there are hundreds of families affected by SUDC around the world.

The lack of SUDC awareness extends beyond parents and families. In fact, many professionals, including those in medicine and education, have little knowledge of SUDC. This, coupled with the difficulties that many families face in the aftermath of their traumatic loss, particularly concerning siblings, is why the SUDC Foundation developed this toolkit for schools.

Due to their age and developmental stage, surviving siblings (as well as any future children in the family) will have less of an ability to process this loss. Parents and other influential adults, including their teachers, must be empowered to appropriately assist a child in dealing with the aftermath.

It is important to keep in mind that this is a traumatic event. Children need the right support, understanding and interventions when necessary. Fortunately, educators are in a unique position to help.

The toolkit is divided into two main sections: (1) specific information on SUDC and the impact on surviving siblings and (2) general grief information for coping with any loss a student may experience.

We hope the information pertaining to SUDC will help further develop your knowledge and understanding of this traumatic loss. The appendix features information by the “Coalition to Support Grieving Students,” which developed a series of free modules included in the links provided also has videos on their website (grievingstudents.org) to assist schools on this issue. We thank them for developing such an excellent resource and feel privileged to be able to include this in our toolkit.

Along with this toolkit, the staff at the SUDC Foundation is available as an additional resource for you. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or for more information. We hope that you find this toolkit to be a valuable addition to your school!

Best regards,
The SUDC Foundation

WHAT IS SUDC?

Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) is a category of death in children between the ages of 1 and 18 that remains unexplained after a thorough investigation, including an autopsy.

SUDC leaves families with many unanswered questions about their child's death. There are parents who witnessed their child's death, and others who found their children after putting them down for a nap or to bed the night before. Some parents received the news via a phone call from a daycare or other relative. Regardless of the circumstances, each scenario is traumatic, which further compounds the bereavement process of each family.

Research on SUDC is currently underway. The SUDC Foundation is spearheading these efforts to find any potential cause(s), and, ultimately, to find a way to prevent SUDC.

ABOUT THE SUDC FOUNDATION

Our Mission

The SUDC Foundation is the only organization worldwide whose purpose is to promote awareness, advocate for research and support those affected by SUDC. The SUDC Foundation provides all services at no cost to the people it serves.

Our History

In 1999, a small group of parents affected by unexplained toddler death attended a presentation at the SIDS Alliance national convention in Atlanta, GA. The presentation by Dr. Henry Krous was entitled "Post-Infancy SIDS-Is it on the rise?" Following the presentation, Dr. Krous agreed to review the children's records. Over the following two years, more families who had experienced an unexplained childhood death were discovered and the beginning of the San Diego SUDC Research Project began.

Laura Crandall, a neurological physical therapist by training, and Chelsea Hilbert, an ER social worker by training, brainstormed together to create the mission of The Sudden Unexplained Death In Childhood Program. They submitted a proposal to the CJ Foundation for SIDS, a national nonprofit, to support this new program. It was approved in the fall of 2001. The SUDC Program was created to be a centralized resource for Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood providing information, support, advocacy and research.

In 2014, Laura Crandall and Lorri Caffrey, both SUDC parents, along with Orrin Devinsky, M.D. and James Lintott, decided to turn the SUDC Program into a separate nonprofit. They founded the SUDC Foundation to continue the mission of the Program and its goals, as well as meet the many needs of those touched by Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood.

SUDC Family Services:

- Individualized case advocacy to assist families with navigating the death investigation process
- Personalized support from family services staff, including a licensed clinical social worker
- Public and private online support groups and social media pages with moderators, creating a safe and supportive online community
- Peer support programs matching trained family volunteers with newly bereaved families
- Resources for siblings and grandparents
- Pediatric sleep monitor programs for subsequent children

- Accurate and up-to-date educational resources and medical research
- Memorial and event planning websites
- DNA Banking Services
- SUDC research opportunities
- Guidance and support for hosting events and fundraisers to honor your child

STATISTICS

We do not know exactly how often SUDC occurs. Because the World Health Organization (WHO) lacks a specific way to record sudden and unexplained deaths in children that have been thoroughly investigated, it is impossible to know how widespread the problem is. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome has its own code (R95), but it is not used for any deaths where the child is older than 364 days of age. The best thing we can do, at this time, is estimate deaths due to SUDC by examining the statistics of deaths with "undetermined" causes (R99). This information is displayed below.

Each year, we know SUDC:

- Is receiving increasing recognition
- Has more relevant papers appearing in literature
- Has a parent movement that parallels SIDS
- SIDS research has revealed a great deal of information, and we expect the same from the study of SUDC

SIDS AND UNDETERMINED CHILD DEATH CRUDE RATES/100,000**, 2011-2017 IN THE US

Year	Under 1 yr	Age 1-4 yrs	Age 5-9 yrs	Age 10-14 yrs	Age 15-19 yrs
2011	69.7	1.5	.1	.1	.4
2012	69.6	1.4	.2	.1	.6
2013	66.4	1.4	.1	.1	.5
2014	66.8	1.3	.1	.1	.4
2015	69.6	1.4	.2	.2	.5
2016	69.3	1.5	.1	.2	.7
2017	67.3	1.5	.2	.2	.4 (15-18yo)

Statistics above are based on ICD-10 Codes R95-R99 from CDC Wonder Database

SUDC Statistics above are based on ICD-10 Codes R95 - R99 from CDC Wonder Database

**Death rates for infants less than one year of age are calculated per 100,000 live births; death rates for children over the age of one are age adjusted.

Based on the above statistics, 389 children were affected by sudden unexplained death in 2017, occurring in:

- 243 children ages of 1-4 years,
- 33 children ages of 5-9 years,
- 39 children ages of 10-14 years,
- and 74 teens ages of 15-18 years.

FEEDBACK FROM FAMILIES

Parents have communicated a variety of experiences related to the siblings of the child who died, as well as subsequent children (also known as “rainbow babies”). Most commonly, parents experience anxiety or general concern upon the start of a new school year and/or when their child returns to school after the loss. Below is a list of some of the feedback we have received from parents that are particular to schools.

- “Every year for a few years, the first back to school project was to draw a family tree. My daughter always included her sister, who passed away, which made me very happy. Each year I tell her teachers about her sister. We wanted our daughter to be open to talking about her sister, and we wanted her teachers to be able to do the same. They were always very supportive of that.”
- “The school counselors were great. They kept in touch with my child’s therapist, and used the interventions discussed so that he was getting consistent care and responses from everyone involved.”
- “The school had identified other kids in the school who had also experienced a loss. They held a little peer group at school around the holidays, which really helped him feel not so alone.”
- “The teachers were very compassionate.”
- “The school counselor suggested my child bring in an item belonging to his late brother, so that when he got sad while in school, he could pull out the item and use it to self-soothe.”
- “All of the teachers were very encouraging and were open to talking about his brother. They were patient and allowed him to see the school counselor whenever he needed.”
- “Many of the teachers and staff at the school didn’t know how to react to the news.”
- “Every year, I talk with my child’s teachers before school starts to fill them in on what’s happened, and what’s helped at school in the past. This has helped them be open, but also not push too much when he doesn’t want to talk.”
- “The teachers were amazing. They got together and bought us a gift and a card and expressed their sympathy and support.”
- “Every month, my girls would be pulled out of class to do an activity with the school counselor, who was available whenever they needed her.”
- “As soon as the principal heard, he called us immediately and met with us a few days later.”
- “The teachers always kept me in the loop to let me know how my son was doing. Because of this and how supportive they were, my son did really well in school.”
- “My son’s school was amazing. They brought in a grief counselor to work with the students. The class was very supportive.”
- “The teachers allowed my daughter extra time to complete assignments. We were very grateful for that.”
- “Our principal was useless. We had moved and our son was attending a new school. I called the principal multiple times to discuss my son and she never returned my calls or emails.”

Regardless of what age the siblings are, parents commonly report that the support, understanding, and flexibility of the school’s administrators and teachers made a significant difference to both the parent(s) and child(ren). Don’t hesitate to reach out to the parent(s) to discuss their needs and concerns, and that of their child(ren), to help ensure a successful school year.

THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

Most families experience a mixture of excitement and anxiety when the new school year starts. It can be overwhelming for both parents and kids. When a family has experienced the sudden and unexplained loss of their child, the experience is peppered with dread, sadness and anger, amongst other emotions.

For parents and caregivers, this can make the new school year even more challenging. Since many of our families experience the loss of a young child, some siblings may be entering school for the first time. Registering their child, bringing them the first day, parent-teacher conferences and “Back-to-School” nights can bring up feelings of sadness and anger. If the school is the same, entering the building may in and of itself be a challenge.

Grandparents are sometimes very involved with the care and supervision of their grandchildren. Grandparents also experience many of the same thoughts and feelings as parents do. When they had a close relationship with the child, or when either or both grandparents bring them to school, pick them up afterwards, drive them to activities, babysit, etc., the grandparents experience triggers of their own. Often, grandparents find themselves experiencing a “double grief”: grief over the loss of their grandchild, as well as the pain of feeling powerless to help their adult child through their own pain and mourning.

Regardless of which family members are involved with the child and his or her education, a strong partnership among school administrators, teachers, school counselors, outside service providers and the family is a necessity in ensuring a successful school year for the bereaved child.

A NOTE ABOUT ASSIGNMENTS

We never quite know what will trigger someone who has experienced a trauma and/or loss. By learning as much as you can about the child who died, the family, the surviving siblings and any subsequent children will help empower you as a school administrator, teacher, or counselor.

Additionally, it is important to not only think about how to support the child and family upon their return to the classroom, but to also be mindful about the dynamics within the classroom, especially when it comes to assignments.

As mentioned in the “Feedback from Families” section of this toolkit, many young children return to school and are asked to draw a picture of their family or family tree. Any assignments that rely on the child to talk about, draw, or write about their family may result in discomfort or other reactions. Consider the potential impact on the child and be prepared to handle the questions and reactions of the other students.

In the modules developed by the Coalition to Support Grieving Students (additional videos are also available on their website at grievingstudents.org), you will review strategies and recommendations on how to handle the classroom and any discussion around the child’s loss. As a teacher or administrator, you have the benefit of the parents, school counselors, outside support persons/providers, knowledge about SUDC, trauma, and loss to help respond to the child’s needs as well as the other students.

DEVELOPMENTAL AGES/STAGES OF CHILDREN AND GRIEF

When faced with death, many families struggle with how to tell their other children and what to expect from them throughout their grief. Telling other children, such as their friends and other family members can also be a challenge. In general, understanding the age and developmental stage of a child can help you, as the adult, help them navigate their grief in a healthy way.

Most importantly, if a child says that he or she wants to hurt/injure themselves, or take their own life, immediately take the child to your local emergency room where a professional can assess their mental health. If you have a school counselor that is available to do the initial evaluation prior to this, please rely on their recommendation and follow-up plan. If you are unable to do either scenario, call 911 or your local police department immediately for assistance.

The following sections will also provide additional information on how to help.

Ages and Developmental Stages: Ages 2 to 4

Developmental stage/task - Egocentric. Believe world centers around them. Narcissistic. Lack cognitive understanding of death and related concepts. Limited language skills.

Concept of death - Death seen as reversible, as abandonment, not permanent. Common statements: "Did you know my sister died? When will she be home?"

Grief response - Intensive response but brief. Very present oriented. Most aware of changes in patterns of care. Asking questions repeatedly.

Signs of distress – Regression, changes in eating and sleeping patterns, bed wetting, general irritability and confusion.

Traumatic grief reactions - May repetitively engage in play about the death or the person who died. May have problems getting back on schedule or meeting developmental milestones. May have difficulty being comforted.

Possible interventions - Short, honest answers, frequent repetition, lots of reassurance and nurturing. Consistent routine. Play is their outlet for grief.

Ages and Developmental Stages: Ages 4 to 7

Developmental stage/task - Gaining a sense of autonomy. Exploring the world outside of self. Gaining language. Fantasy wishing and thinking. Initiative phase seeing self as the initiator. Concerns of guilt.

Concept of death - Death still seen as reversible. Personification of death. Feeling of responsibility because of wishes and thoughts. Common statements: "It's my fault. I was mad and wished she'd die."

Grief response - More verbalization. Great concern with process. How? Why? Repetitive questioning. May act as though nothing has happened. General distress and confusion.

Signs of distress – Nightmares, sleeping and eating disturbed. Possible violent play. Attempts to take on role of person who died.

Traumatic grief reactions - May repeatedly exhibit play or talk about the death. May have nightmares about the death. May become withdrawn, hide feelings (especially guilt), avoid talking about the person, or about places and/or things related to the death. May avoid reminders of the person (for example, avoid watching TV news or refuse to attend the funeral or visit the cemetery). May become jumpy, extra-alert, or nervous. May have difficulty concentrating on homework or class work or may suffer a decline in grades. May worry excessively about their health, their parents' health, or the health and safety of other people. May act out and become the "class clown" or "bully."

Possible interventions - Symbolic play using drawings and stories. Allow and encourage expression of energy and feelings through physical outlets. Talk about it.



Ages and Developmental Stages: Ages 7 to 11

Developmental stage/task - Concrete thinking. Self-confidence develops. Beginning of socialization. Development of cognitive ability. Beginning of logical thinking.

Concept of death - Death seen as punishment. Fear of bodily harm and mutilation. This is a difficult transition period, still wanting to see death as reversible but beginning to see it as final.

Grief response - Specific questions. Desire for complete detail. Concerned with how others are responding. What is the right way to respond? Starting to have ability to mourn and understand grief.

Signs of distress - School problems, withdrawal from friends, acting out, sleeping and eating disturbed. Overwhelming concern with body. Death thoughts (desire to join one who died). Role confusion.

Traumatic grief reactions - May repeatedly exhibit play or talk about the death. May have nightmares about the death. May become withdrawn, hide feelings (especially guilt), avoid talking about the person, or about places and/or things related to the death. May avoid reminders of the person (for example, avoid watching TV news or refuse to attend the funeral or visit the cemetery). May become jumpy, extra alert, or nervous. May have difficulty concentrating on homework or class work, or may suffer a decline in grades. May worry excessively about their health, their parents' health, or the health and safety of other people. May act out and become the "class clown" or "bully."

Possible interventions - Answer questions. Encourage expression of range of feelings. Explain options and allow for choices. Be available but allow alone time. Symbolic plays. Allow for physical outlets. Listen and allow for talk about the death.



Ages and Developmental Stages: Ages 11 to 18

Developmental stage/task - Formal operational problem solving. Abstract thinking. Integration of one's own personality.

Concept of death - A more "adult" approach. Ability to be abstract. Beginning to conceptualize death. Work at making sense of teachings.

Grief response - Extreme sadness. Denial. Regression. More often willing to talk to people outside of family and peer support. Risk taking. Traditional mourning.

Signs of distress - Depression. Anger often towards parents. Suicidal thoughts. Non-compliance. Rejection of former teaching. Role confusion. Acting out.

Traumatic grief reactions - May have similar traumatic grief reactions to those of school-age children when at home, with friends and at school. May avoid interpersonal and social situations such as dating. May use drugs or alcohol to deal with negative feelings related to the death. May talk of wanting to harm themselves and express thoughts of revenge or worries about the future. May have low self-esteem because they feel that their family is now "different" or because they feel different from their peers.

Possible interventions - Encourage verbalization. Allow for choices. Encourage self-motivation. Listen. Be available. Do not attempt to take grief away.

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

In the prior section outlining the various stages of development, we have highlighted in red the “signs of distress” and “traumatic grief reactions.” We encourage you to review the “possible interventions” in each stage of development and implement either in the classroom or one-on-one, if possible. Here are some helpful tips if you see any of these behaviors in the classroom:

- **Acknowledge the loss the child has experienced.** Let them know that you are sorry for the loss of their brother or sister, and that you are available for them. Consider attending the viewing and/or funeral services if you are able.
- **Show your concern and express your support in an age-appropriate manner.** It’s okay to let them know that you are here for them, or are concerned about them given their loss.
- **Provide the safe space for expression of thoughts and/or feelings.** By creating that space, a child is better able to allow themselves to show you how they are grieving or let you in to their innermost thoughts and feelings.
- **Let them know the limits and boundaries.** Provide accurate and clear instructions and let them know about any deadlines or assignments. Reinforce interpersonal boundaries when playing with other children and pull them aside to check in if you see any behaviors that are concerning.
- **Be flexible.** While it’s important to reinforce boundaries, it’s also important to know when to give your student extra time or space.
- **Let your student know that they can talk to you.** Boundaries are still very important, so inform your student of what you’d have to talk to their parents and/or a counselor about before they open up to you.
- **Communicate openly with the student’s primary caregiver.** Be sure to let them know when you see any concerning behaviors, and what you have tried to do to help. If the student is in counseling, suggest to the parent(s) or legal guardian that it may be helpful to mention this feedback to the counselor. Ask the caregiver if the counselor has any suggestions for you, and offer the ability to speak with the counselor directly.
- **Refer the student to the school counselor.** Suggest to the student that it may be helpful to talk to someone who is in a counselor role and why you think it may help. This can be done whether the student has their own outside therapist or not.

Being a safe, stable, caring and nurturing adult in this student’s life helps build resiliency and strength.

TRAUMA AND LOSS

Sometimes, the loss that a family has experienced is traumatic. If you consider the definition of trauma from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th edition), a trauma can occur if a person directly witnessed the event, or heard about it from someone else. A child lost to SUDC is often traumatic for whoever found the child, or at the point at which they learned about the death from another source.

Some SUDC families have expressed symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and therefore seek treatment with a trauma specialist. Not everyone who experiences a trauma develops symptoms of PTSD, but it is helpful to learn about the symptoms in order to recognize these in the other surviving siblings. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) confirms that a child may have a traumatic reaction after a sudden, unexpected death of someone close to them.

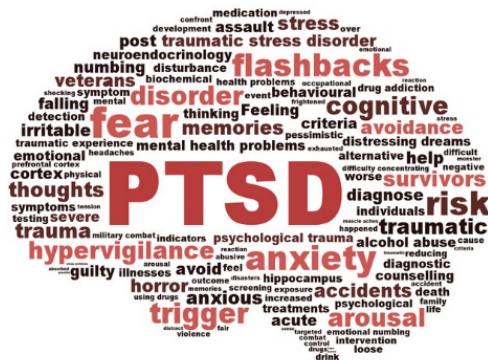
Further, the NCTSN reports that if the child's responses are severe or prolonged and interfere with the child's functioning, the child may have a condition called childhood traumatic grief (CTG). Thinking about the person who died—even happy thoughts—can lead to frightening images or memories of the way that person died. The symptoms of CTG include the following:

- Repeated or intrusive images about the person's death (such as in nightmares).
- Avoidance of thinking or talking about the person who died, the cause of death or avoidance of places or activities associated with the person, or what happened.
- Negative beliefs or negative mood occurring since the death.
- Other changes in behavior, such as trouble sleeping, poor concentration or being jumpy.

IDENTIFYING TRAUMATIC GRIEF IN STUDENTS

Children at different developmental levels, such as preschool, school age and adolescence, may react differently to a loved one's death that has been traumatic for them. However, there are some common signs and symptoms of traumatic grief that children may show at school. These may include the following.

Being overly preoccupied with how the loved one died. This preoccupation may involve repeated descriptions of the death to teachers and peers or repetitive drawings illustrating the death. For example, following the stabbing death of a loved one, a child might draw pictures of a bloody knife over and over again. The child may also repeatedly ask the same questions about aspects of the way the loved one died: “What does it feel like to get stabbed?” The student may also speak excessively about death and dying in general without specifically focusing on the death of his or her loved one. These symptoms suggest that the child has not come to terms with how the person died. This can interfere with the resolution of the child’s grief.



A preoccupation with or distressing thoughts and feelings about how a loved one died can interfere with the grief processes. For example, traumatically bereaved youths may avoid mourning rituals such as funerals or memorial services. They may shun conversations about the deceased that help survivors remember, reminisce, and learn more about the person that died. They may avoid making life changes that reflect an acceptance of the permanence of the death, such as redecorating a bedroom that is no longer shared with a sibling who died.

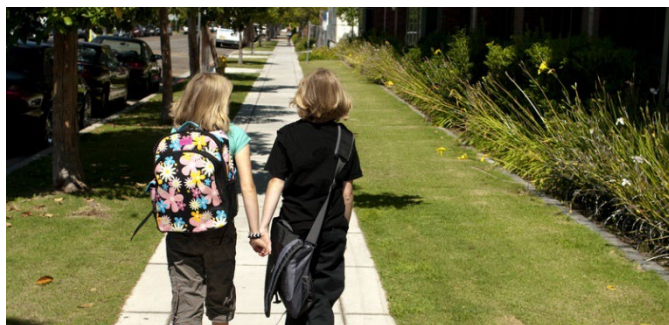
Reliving or re-enacting the traumatic death through play and/or artwork. Following a gun-related homicide, a child might repeatedly run around with a stick while “shooting” other students. The child whose father died in a car accident may use toy cars to re-create the details of the accident. This child may also incorporate themes of the event (violence, murder, fear and so forth) into his or her play. Child’s play incorporating themes of traumatic death tends to be repetitious, to culminate in the same tragic and unacceptable ending, and to generate feelings of irritability, frustration or tiredness instead of enjoyment. The child may also report nightmares or upsetting memories of the death that interfere with daily activities.

Showing signs of emotional and/or behavioral distress when reminded of the loss. Children may experience distress when cues in their environment remind them of the loss. These reminders may be difficult to predict and can range from seemingly insignificant events to more traumatic reminders. For example, a student whose brother died of leukemia begins to cry and complains of his heart pounding during a science class lecture on cancer. This stress reaction may be caused by physical reminders. For example, following the death of her father in a car accident, a child becomes withdrawn and tearful when classmates playing with toy cars crash them together. It may also be triggered by thoughts like after hearing another child talk about his mother, a child begins to think about his recently deceased mother’s death and angrily throws his books off his desk.

Children may also become intolerant of these reminders. For example, a student who lost his father in a car accident begins to persecute the only boy in his classroom whose father drops him off at school. Children may also show signs of increased aggression for various psychological reasons, such as contending with perceptions of danger and increased vulnerability or acting out on revenge fantasies.

Because teachers and other observers may not always see or connect the cues that remind the child of the traumatic death, it may appear that such outbursts are coming out of nowhere. This is especially true if the distressing cues are internal or otherwise subtle, such as thoughts or dreams about the lost loved one or the arrival of the anniversary of a loved one’s death. Unfortunately, traumatically bereaved children may be disciplined at school, and their inappropriate behavior may be confused with acting out rather than recognized as a sign of unresolved grief.

Attempting to avoid physical reminders of the traumatic death, such as activities, places or people related to the death. Students may avoid situations they fear will provoke painful or uncomfortable thoughts or feelings about the death. A student whose best friend died in a fire, for



example, may refuse to walk by his friend’s former locker at school. Children may try to avoid conversations and/or thoughts about the loss, as well. For example, a child might throw a tantrum when another student asks him about his grandmother’s death.

Withdrawing from important aspects of their environment. Children may lose

interest or stop participating in activities they previously enjoyed. For example, following the death of his father, a child who was a very gifted baseball player might quit the team. Or they may show less willingness to interact with other people, including family, important adults (such as teachers), friends and classmates. This withdrawal may be at least partly due to a sense of distrust in others, to avoid reminders of the traumatic death or of the loss in general or to guilt. For example, youths who suffered the traumatic death of a friend may avoid other friends of the deceased or may avoid activities in which the deceased formerly participated. They may also withdraw in an attempt to avoid intrusive questions by peers about the traumatic loss. These behaviors may create additional adversities in the form of loneliness, peer rejection and the loss of developmental opportunities.

Showing signs of emotional constriction. Children may seem unable to experience either negative or positive emotions. This can result in the child appearing “numb” or “flat.” For example, a student that used to laugh and smile frequently at recess now has a blank expression. This seeming lack of emotion can be seen as a form of avoidance that the child uses to protect him- or herself from feelings that seem overwhelming.

Being excessively “jumpy” or being easily startled. A child whose father died in a hunting accident might jump up and scream when a student behind him drops a book. He or she may also be constantly on the alert or on edge. This exaggerated startle response may unfortunately lead to additional social adversities for the child in the form of teasing by insensitive or uninformed peers. For example, fellow students who find amusement by clapping their hands behind his head and watching him jump. These children may show other signs of being over-aroused, including increased activity levels, inability to settle down and difficulty sleeping.

Showing signs of a loss of a sense of purpose and meaning to one’s life. A traumatized child may show disinterest in previously valued goals or activities, or may engage in increased risk-taking (for example, not wearing seatbelts or helmets, or engaging in drug abuse or sexually precocious behavior) because “it doesn’t matter anymore,” “I deserve it,” or for other reasons that may or may not be related to the death.

For more information on this subject, visit the National Child Traumatic Stress Network at www.nctsn.org. To view the aforementioned publication in its entirety, please visit http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/schools_package.pdf.

We also included the possible “traumatic grief reactions” within the Ages and Developmental Stages section of this toolkit so that you can identify these, and how they differ from normal grief.

(Source: National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s “Childhood Traumatic Grief Educational Materials,” 2004.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Dougy Center: The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

The National Center for Grieving Children & Families has provided support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children in grief. The website offers resources for adults and kids, including workbooks and pamphlets on grief. Several resources are available in Spanish. www.dougy.org (866.775.5683 or help@dougy.org)

Fred Rogers Center

This center helps children deal with the death of a loved one. <https://www.fredrogerscenter.org/>

Fernside: A Center for Grieving Children

Fernside provides support and advocacy for grieving children and their parents and families. www.fernside.org

New York Life Foundation: A Child in Grief | Parents and Family Members

This foundation has resources for children who have experienced the loss of a loved one. <https://www.newyorklife.com/foundation/bereavement-support>

Solace House

Their belief is that “no child should grieve alone.” Their site is a resource for other grief support services. www.solacehouse.org

The Compassionate Friends: Sibling Resources

The Compassionate Friends is a national nonprofit, self-help organization that offers friendship, understanding and hope to bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. www.compassionatefriends.org

KidsAid

This website gives kids their own place to deal with their feelings with other children who have suffered major losses. www.kidsaid.com

Comfort Zone Camps

Bereaved children given the opportunity to remember their loved ones in a safe and healing camp environment. <http://www.comfortzonecamp.org>

Seasons Centre for Grieving Children

This organization believes "every child deserves an opportunity to grieve in a supportive and understanding environment." <http://www.grievingchildren.com>

Coalition for Grieving Students

A collaboration between multiple partners, this website assists school systems in responding to and addressing grief and loss in students. www.grievingstudents.org

Rainbows for All Children

Dedicated to be the premier source of support for all youth as they navigate grief and heal from any kind of loss. Trained facilitators, supported with a repository of resources, are available to help youth through their grieving process. www.rainbows.org

For additional resources, please visit our website at www.sudc.org.

BOOKS ON DEATH FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Isabelle's Dream: A Story and Activity Book for a Child's Grief Journey by Betsy Bottino Arenella.

This coloring and activity book was written by a good friend and neighbor of a family who lost their two-year-old child, Sophia, suddenly and to unexplained causes. The book has 24 pages of narrative and illustrations which tell the story of Sophia who returns to her sister in a dream, reminding her that her spirit will always remain through the beauties of nature. The proceeds are being donated to the SUDC Foundation. <http://www.isabellesdream.org>

What Do They Do All Day in Heaven? by Staci Thomas (Ages 8-12)

Parents and children can discuss death of a sibling and heaven.

Where's Jess? by Joy and Marv Johnson (Ages 3 to 8)

Story about how a brother and his family grieve after their baby, Jess, dies.



The Fall of Freddy the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia (Ages 4 to 8)

This is a warm, wonderfully wise and strikingly simple story of how Freddy and his companion leaves change with the seasons, finally falling to the ground with the winter's snow. This is a classic and wonderful for explaining death to a child.

Sad Isn't Bad- A Good Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss by Michaelene Mandy and RW Alley (Ages 4 to 8)

This book is loaded with positive, life affirming advice for coping with loss as a child. This guide tells kids what they need to know: the world is still safe, life is good and hurting hearts do mend.

The Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley (Ages 4 to 8)

All the animals loved badger and when he dies they are overwhelmed by their loss. They begin to remember and through their memories the animals find strength to face the future with hope.

This Book is for All Kids but Especially My Sister Libby. Libby Died. By Jack and Annette Simon (Ages 4 to 8)

Children ask many questions about death and this book explores some of the common ones. It will bring a tear to your eye. The illustrations are colorful and wonderful.

Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities For Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies by Janis Silverman (Ages 5 and up) An art therapy and activity book for children coping with the death of someone they love. Sensitive exercises address all the questions that children may have during this emotional and troubling crisis. Children are encouraged to express in pictures what they are often incapable of expressing in words.

When Someone VERY Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief by Marge Heegaard (Ages 6 to 12)

This book was designed to teach children death education, to recognize and express feelings of grief, encourage open communication and help adults discover unhealthy misconceptions the child may have.

Losing Someone You Love by Elizabeth Richter (Ages 7 and up)

Fifteen young people tell about the death of their brother or sister. They tell about their feelings, sorrows, fear, loneliness and anger, as well as, their difficulties both at home and at school.

Children Facing Grief by Jan Rodmond (Ages 8 to 16)

A collection of letters written by children ages 6 to 15 who tell about their feelings and experiences after the death of a brother or sister. They tell what hurt and what helped very openly and honestly.

Children Are Not Paper Dolls by Erin Linn (Ages 9 to 15)

Six bereaved siblings ages 10 to 13 write and draw pictures about funerals, family, friends, school, feelings, holidays, etc. They tell it like it is.

I Wish I Could Hold Your Hand by Pat Palmer and Dianne O'Quinne Burke (Ages 9 to 12)

This warm and comforting book gently helps grieving children identify their feelings and learn to accept and deal with them. It has wonderful heartwarming illustrations. Simple direct writing helps children discover that it is normal and natural to feel the pain of loss.

To Healing Your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Kids by Alan Wolfelt (Ages 9 to 12)

A clear concise book with sensitivity and insight that offers suggestions for healing activities. It acknowledges that death is a painful part of life. It offers ideas and activities aimed at reducing confusion, anxiety and the huge personal void so that the living can begin their lives again.

Today My Sister Died by Ronee Christy Domske (Ages 10 and up)

A book written from the point of view of a fifth grader, discussing death and a family's reaction to it.

My Brother Joey Died Today by Gloria McLendon (Ages 10 to 14)

The young girl in this story feels anger and guilt after her brother dies suddenly. She feels better after talking with other kids in a support group.

Healing Grieving Hearts for Teens by Alan Wolfelt (Young Adult)

A book written in clear, user-friendly prose. Each page presents a different idea designed to help teens recognize mourning as a natural process connected with loss, reassuring them that they should not be afraid of deep sometimes uncontrollable emotions and showing them how to release grief in healthy, positive ways.

Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins—A Journal for Teenagers Experiencing a Loss by Enid Samuel Traisman (Young Adult) The journal encourages teens to work through grief in creative and healthy ways. It allows them to keep permanent memories of the person who died.

Dancing on the Moon by Janice Roper and Lauren Grimm (Infant to Pre-school)

This book is designed to help families coping with a SIDS loss. Written by a parent whose three-month-old son died of SIDS.

The Tenth Best Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst and Erik Blegvard (Ages 4 to 8)

In simple phrases narrated by a child whose cat, Barney, has died. The author honestly and simply handles the emotions of losing a beloved pet and the questions about the finality of death.

I'll Always Love You by Hans Wilhelm (Ages 4 to 8)

This story is about Elfie, a dachshund, and her special boy who go through life together. One day Elfie doesn't wake up. The family grieves and buries her. Very sweet and tender.

What's Heaven by Maria Shriver (Ages 5-8)

Religious connotation around a grandparent who died and a good explanation of the concept of heaven.

I Miss You: A First Look at Death by Pat Thomas (Ages 4-8)

Explains to children the concept of death. Includes diverse characters and provides some insight into the various ways people express their grief, including culturally.

What on Earth to Do When Someone Dies by Trevor Romain (Ages 9 to 12)

This simple, insightful, straight-from-the-heart book is for any child who has lost a loved one. The author talks directly to kids about what death means and how to cope. Answers kids' questions including why, how, what next, is it my fault, what's a funeral, etc., in basic straightforward terms.

All God's Creatures Go to Heaven by Amy Nolfo-Wheeler. (All ages)

The angel paintings of artist, Nancy Nolfo, beautifully portray the story of Jacob, a child angel on a journey of discovery. It is an inspiring message of joy and hope. This is a story about baby angels who are in heaven and they take care of God's animals. A new little boy goes to heaven and receives a pet to love and care for.

Someone Came Before You by Pat Schwiebert (Pre-school)

This paperback picture book is for very young children through preschool age who were born after their parents lost a child born earlier. It describes the parents' grief and sadness and how they eventually decide they wanted to bring another child into their lives. The book offers ideas for keeping the deceased child's memory alive.

Grieving for the Sibling You Lost by Erica Goldblatt Hyatt (Teens)

This book provides practical tips, tools and coping strategies on how to find hope and meaning after sibling loss.

For an up-to-date listing of books for children, please visit our website at www.sudc.org > Education & Resources > Grief Resources > For Siblings > SUDC's book list recommendations.

APPENDIX

[Coalition for Grieving Students Modules 1A – 6D](#)

[Coping with the Death of a Student or Staff Member, US Dept. of Education](#)

[National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, Guidelines for Responding to the Death of a Student or School Staff](#)