
Foreword

Donna Burns's new book, *When Kids Are Grieving: Addressing Grief and Loss in School*, is most welcome. There are a number of reasons to hail this new addition to the literature. Most importantly, children are often disenfranchised grievers—their grief is unrecognized and unacknowledged by those around them. There are many reasons for this. Their grief may not be recognized since it often appears in indirect ways—sleep disturbances, physical complaints, acting out behaviors, and regressive behaviors. Children and adolescents may be inarticulate in identifying the loss that underlies their reactions. Overwhelmed and frightened by their parents' grief, they may seek to spare their families, grieving alone. Their parents, also likely mourning the loss, may be unable to see beyond their own grief. They may have neither the energy nor the skills to succor their children.

Schools can and must play a critical role. We often forget the significant role that schools play in the life of students. Beyond the critical academic role, schools are a social and developmental arena offering critical contact and interaction with peers and adults outside the family. Schools offer opportunities for children and adolescents to explore and to develop their talents and to test their skills.

Schools also offer “an early warning system”—a place where objective observers can begin to notice changes in behaviors or grades that might indicate difficulties heretofore unrecognized. Most importantly, they offer the possibility of informal and formal support to a child struggling with grief and loss.

When Kids Are Grieving: Addressing Grief and Loss in School is designed to help. As Dr. Burns likes to say, it is a “hybrid” book: part text, part resource, and part workbook. It is, most importantly, an accessible and valued resource—designed first and foremost for the school professional. This is not to say that clinicians will not find the book useful. However, the fact that it is designed for the school

professional means it is both focused and practical—offering teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors critical information as they approach students who are grieving.

The book has great sensitivity. That sensitivity begins by acknowledging that children grieve many losses—not just death, but losses such as divorce, separation, or the other many losses children and adolescents experience on the way to adulthood. There is sensitivity to the developmental process, recognizing that different methods and approaches must be used with children and adolescents and acknowledging that even these approaches must be constantly modified as the child continues to develop. It is sensitive to the ways that children and adolescents grieve, acknowledging both similarities and differences in the ways that adults might experience grief. It is sensitive to the constraints that school personnel may face, acknowledging the limits to the support they can offer and urging effective partnerships with other community organizations.

Robert Kastenbaum once wrote an article titled “The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies” (1972). His point in that piece is that adults often like to think of childhood as a kingdom where nobody dies. Adults attempt then to protect children from death. In fact, adults are only protecting themselves from exposure to the child’s evident pain and loss. Try as they may, schools cannot try to close the castle moat—pretending that loss, death, and grief have no role beside reading, writing, and arithmetic. With this resource, they no longer have to—they now have the tools for a sustained siege.

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