

Grandfamilies Tip Sheet Series

For grandparents & other relatives raising children



Grief and Loss

Grief and loss can have far-reaching effects, but kincare families have unique strengths and abilities to navigate challenging situations.

Here's what can make a difference!

Key Findings

- Nationally, 214,000 youth lost parents and primary caregivers as a result of COVID.¹
- Globally, 5.2 million children experienced the same type of losses.²
- In Wave 2 of the national GrOW study, 26% of caregivers said that loss, grief and trauma have impacted their caregiving the most.
- Caregivers identified that 43% of their children had behavioral health challenges, school and learning issues which can be directly connected to loss and trauma. Counseling services were requested but not always readily available.
- Kincare families may be more vulnerable and at heightened risk for mental health issues due to earlier losses and disruptions in attachments. However, they have considerable strengths, resiliencies and protective factors that are sustaining during difficult times. We can help support families in many resourceful ways as well.

1. 1 in Every 200 NYC Children Have Lost a Parent or Caregiver to COVID. That's Almost Twice the National Rate. - THE CITY, 4-20-22)
2. Five million children have lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19 | Science News, 2-24-22)

“My grandkids already lost their parents and now we have to worry about COVID. It's been a really scary time, as we try to take care of their needs but have little time for ours. We're working hard to get through this together.”
— Kinship Caregiver

Recommended Citation

Langosch, D., Cooper, L., Devine, A., Fedus, D., Littlewood, K., & Rosenthal, M. (2022, November). *Grief and Loss. Grandfamilies Outcome Workgroup (GrOW): Grandfamilies tip sheet series for grandparents and other relatives raising children.* <http://grandfamilieswork.org>

Resources

- NCTSN | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: nctsn.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Text or call **988** (988lifeline.org)
- National Alliance for Children's Grief: childrengrieve.org
- Coalition to Support Grieving Students: grievingstudents.org
- What's Your Grief? Grief Support for the Rest of Us: whatsyourgrief.com
- Open to Hope | Find Hope After Loss: opentohope.com
- The Grief Toolbox: thegriefftoolbox.com
- The Compassionate Friends | Supporting Families After a Child Dies: compassionatefriends.org

Key Concepts and Practical Recommendations

COVID losses and separations can be both practical and emotional

- Health and life
- Consistency, predictability, and stability
- Work, school, income, food, housing
- Structure, routines, and control
- Hope
- Normalcy
- Companionship and closeness
- Support, community, safety, and connection
- Confidence in systems to be responsive and effective

What families need to know and do

Children and adults grieve differently, guided by culture, race, religion, and family traditions. Children and teens may not express grief in words.

Instead, they may express reactions to loss through their:

- Behaviors
- Play
- Changes in mood
- Social interactions
- School performance
- Sleeping/eating patterns

Children can benefit from **caregivers who listen, address grief reactions and then validate the children's diverse feelings**. It helps to normalize these responses but also **know the warning signs** of when to seek professional help. These can include:

- Acting-out and running away
- Unnecessary risk taking
- Alcohol and drug misuse
- Significant and persistent withdrawal
- Loss of interest in usual activities

Providers can be instrumental in educating caregivers about these risk factors and how to respond.

For families who have post-traumatic stress, there are very helpful short-term evidence-based treatments that are becoming increasingly available. Families also have the potential to develop **post traumatic growth strategies**.

How providers can help

- Build awareness of what children's grief looks like and how it's expressed
- Be aware of warning signs that a child may be at risk and who to contact for help
- Consider a kinship family's access to their support systems, both informal and formal, within their cultural context
- Highlight how caregivers have coped adaptively in the past when faced with adverse or overwhelming situations, and use these skills again
- Identify where specific grief services can be found
- Help create linkages to resources and find ways to navigate the often-complex mental health system
- Address the value of structure, consistency, and routines to mitigate the unpredictability of this time
- Destigmatize getting help and identify where to find it
- Maintain a focus on cultural norms and utilize culturally responsive providers
- Take time for self-care regularly
 - We're all going through this together as a potentially shared traumatic reality, so it's essential that caregivers and providers alike take time for self-care
 - It's incredibly sustaining and restorative



The Grandfamilies Outcome Workgroup (GrOW) is a national collective comprised of multi-disciplinary stakeholders that work across systems of care in partnership with kinship families.

GrOW intentionally integrates the lived experiences of kinship caregivers in its evaluation methods, tools, and resources to support best practice in the field of kinship care. GrOW: Research to Inform Practice.

To learn more about GrOW, visit grandfamilieswork.org

Tip Sheets are made possible by funding from:

The Brookdale Foundation Group

