

Bereaved Students, Schools and Communities Strategies and Solutions for Post-COVID Epidemic of Grief

A Four-Part Webinar Series for School Nurses & School
Mental Health Professionals
Session 1 | May 5, 2021

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Introductions

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Gather Materials!

- Blank paper
- Writing utensils such as markers, crayons, colored pencils, pens, etc.

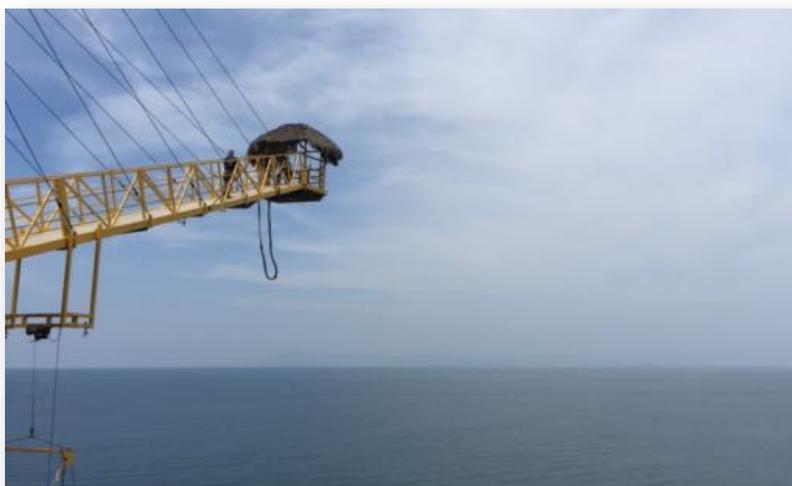
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Checking In

- Let's slow down and take a few deep breaths together...
 - Check in with yourself: How are you arriving this evening?
 - What are your expectations for this training?
 - What do you hope to learn?
 - What questions are you bringing?

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Trust the Process: What to Expect



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Learning Objectives

Webinar 1: Grieving Death, Other Losses and Normalcy

1. Describe how children and adults grieve
2. Discuss how the pandemic has produced a wide range of losses in the lives of students, staff and school personnel
3. Explore aspects of self-awareness and the personal intersection of grief and loss and how it shapes our identities.

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A Year of Grief and Loss



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Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model

CBEM

The Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM)³ approximates rates of U.S. children and youth who will experience the death of a parent or sibling by the time they reach adulthood. Results from the CBEM are updated annually using national, state, and regional vital statistics.⁴ This report uses data from 2014 to 2018 in an enhanced framework to present projected CBEM* results.



Source: Judi's House JAG Institute <https://www.judishouse.org/cbem>

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Naming Our Losses

- Beyond the pandemic, we all bring histories and stories that include experiences with loss, trauma, and adversity.
- Let's brainstorm together:
 - Let's name the various forms of loss that individuals, families, schools, and communities can experience.

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Put On Your Own Oxygen Mask, First...



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Creating a “Loss Line”

- Reflect on the losses you have experienced.
- Tell your story on your paper. Use pictures, words, to express yourself.
- Some create a timeline, others engage in narrative writing or storytelling. There is no right or wrong way to do this.
- We will maintain silence during the activity to allow for quiet reflection.

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Setup for Discussion

- We will have 15 minutes to chat—not a lot of time.

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Breakout Discussion Questions

- Discuss any of the below questions that you feel comfortable with, and keep the rest for your own continued reflection:
 - What (if anything) came up for you that surprised you?
 - What have you learned about yourself through your experiences of loss?
 - What can you learn from your own experiences that might inform how you can show up for others?

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Reporting Out

- What are you taking away from this time of reflection and discussion?

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Controversies and Cautionary Tales

- Grief can not be organized in categories or stages.
 - Phases or staging suggests there is a prescribed, optimum way to work through the process.
 - Stages and phases suggest a linear model where one can move forwards or backwards.
- Grieving is more circular, much like a feedback loop.
 - There are some factors that can facilitate the process and others that can impede it.
- Grief is not one single emotion
 - Loss affects the way we feel, think, interact with other people, even the way our bodies feel



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~~“Closure”~~

“The act of closing or condition of being closed.”

- Frequently used in conjunction with death, loss and grieving.
- In some situations “closure” is represented by visiting the site of death or rituals.
- Consider that the word “Integration” may be more suitable,
 - “to make into a whole by bringing parts together” “to unify.”
- Rituals and visitation are a **beginning**.
 - The reality of the person’s death is recognized, but the real work of integration is just beginning.



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Separation
Your absence has
gone through me
Like thread
through a needle.
Everything I do
is stitched with
its color.
- W.S. Merwin -
- For more visit TheMindJournal.com -

W. S. Merwin, "Separation" from *The Second Four Books of Poems*. Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 1993.

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Defining Grief, Bereavement and Mourning

- **Bereavement** "To lose someone we care about or love through death. It is a state of deprivation, not a reaction or response. The event of death happens in another's life, and, as a consequence of our caring about him or her, bereavement happens to us. This deprivation redefines and limits our life circumstances and possibilities." Attig, P. 343
- **Grief** is the multi-faceted reaction to the death of a person in one's life. It encompasses the *emotional, cognitive, physical, functional, and behavioral reactions* to the death. Therefore, *grief* is one's reaction to loss and bereavement. Gaffney et al., 2016
 - Grief refers to the emotional experience of the psychological, behavioral, social, and physical reactions the bereaved person might experience as a result of this death.

Source: Boerner, K., Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Wortman, C. B., 2015

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Mourning



- The socio-cultural and religious activities established by a family, society, culture or religion to commemorate occurrences of death.
- After someone close to us dies, there is a process of mourning.
- Mourning is work and can be expressed through the written word, music or art.
- Public mourning can take many physical forms, spontaneous shrines, services, formal or informal monuments.
- Mourning can be expressed through signage and social media.

– #Je Suis Charlie
Rosenblatt, P. C., 2013

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Grief. . . is both unique *and* universal.

“Can’t confuse one element of a *complex phenomenon* for the entire thing.”

- Not simply physical labor (food, shelter, & closeness others)
- Nor is it only emotional expression and adjustment.
- Nor is it entirely psycho-dynamic accommodation, including revival of self-esteem and self-confidence and modification of identity.
- Nor is it simply meaning reconstruction, (cognitive adjustment and spiritual accommodation).
- Nor is it merely behavioral modification (adjusting desires, motivations, habits, and life patterns to new reality).
- Nor is it entirely family or community adjustment to loss, reassignment of roles, and shared meaning-making.

Attig, 2004

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THE LOSS OF Normalcy AND COVID 19

We long for what we had. . .

- It is tempting to wonder when things will return to normal but the fact is that it will not be the 'old normal'. We can achieve a new kind of normalcy, even if this new world differs in fundamental ways.
 - Rapid changes to our roles and routines
 - Facing an unpredictable future.
 - Changes to our sense of security and normalcy
 - Impact of community change
 - Influence of silence or media messages

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Grieving losses. . . That are not deaths

- Unable to go back to the way things were, the world has changed, the world you once knew and experienced, is no longer there. (loss of our assumptive world)
 - These losses occur in our lives, our families and our practices
 - Loss of our assumptive world- what we believe our nursing practice to be.
- "Relearning the world or coming to terms with the loss of our assumptive world is primarily about **learning new ways of acting and being in the world**. It is a matter of coming to know how to go on in the world where so much of what we have taken for granted in the emotional, psychological, social, soulful, and spiritual dimensions of our lives is no longer supportable or practicable"

Attig, 2002, p. 64



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The COVID-19 pandemic is different:



Many of us are experiencing an ongoing, pervasive sense of loss:

- The tragic deaths and threatened loss of loved ones or colleagues;
- The loss of physical contact with family members and social networks;
- The loss of jobs, financial security, and livelihoods;
- The loss of pre-crisis ways of life and threatened loss of hopes and dreams for the future; and
- The loss of a sense of normalcy in shattered assumptions about our lives and connections with the world around us.

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Loss of Normalcy: Shattered Assumptions



Life is derailed, on hold, uncertain.

There is a collective experience of shattered assumptions in our worldview.

Our taken-for-granted beliefs and expectations about our lives and our connections to our world.

Invisibility of the virus, its lethal potential, and the possible spread by non-symptomatic persons heighten fears of infection.

“COVID Cognitive Cloud” describes the disorganizing impact of the pandemic. Ambiguities cloud our thinking and decision-making.

Who can we trust, who can keep us safe?

There is even anger at the loss of freedoms with lockdown and restrictions.

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- Healing and resilience are forged gradually over time. Grief is a healing process. We do not get over grief— we go through it.
- Resilience is forged through suffering and setbacks; it involves struggling and integrating painful loss experiences into our life passage.
- More than surviving loss and coping with disruptions, resilience involves:
 - Positive adaptation.
 - Regaining the ability to thrive.
 - The potential for transformation and positive growth forged through the searing experience.

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A Resilience-oriented Approach with Loss



- Contextualizes the distress;
- Attends to the challenges, suffering, and struggles
- Strengthens relational processes that support coping, adaptation, and growth.
- With a multisystemic lens, this approach draws on extended family, social connections, community, sociocultural, and spiritual resources, and strengthens larger systemic/structural supports.

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Historically . . .

Researchers have proposed that children’s understanding of death and their ability to

grieve was determined by their cognitive maturity.

- It is *not only* children’s cognitive maturity that influences their capacity to understand and cope with loss—their emotional development and their understanding of the nature of emotions significantly shape their view of the world and the losses that occur in it. Children need a vocabulary that includes emotions and grief as well as death.
- For many years parents and professionals believed that a child’s inability to fully understand death hindered them from mourning or grieving.



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What are we missing?

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The Development of the child's concepts *and* sub-concepts of death.

1-Irreversibility/permanence: the understanding that death is a permanent state from which there is no return to life;

2-Inevitability/universality: the understanding that all living things must die eventually;

3-Applicability: the understanding that only living things can die;

4-Cessation: the understanding that all bodily processes cease to function upon death;

5-Causation: the understanding that death is ultimately caused by a breakdown of bodily function.

Slaughter, 2005



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- Children are inclined to adopt two parallel conceptions of death—a biological conception or religious conception in which they think of the deceased as someone who has departed this life but lives on elsewhere in some form.
- They are prone to represent that separation, not ONLY in biological terms as the termination of living functions, but also in terms of a departure by the deceased to another place.
- Children's biological and spiritual understanding of death *can* coexist.

Harris and Astuti (2006)

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This is what's missing . . .

There is a major piece to this complex puzzle that has not been explored.

We use the word *grief* with children but do they actually know what grief is?

Can they describe it?

Do they know what it is?

What it feels like?



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DEATH EDUCATION IS NOT GRIEF EDUCATION . . .

Can we be GRIEF LITERATE?



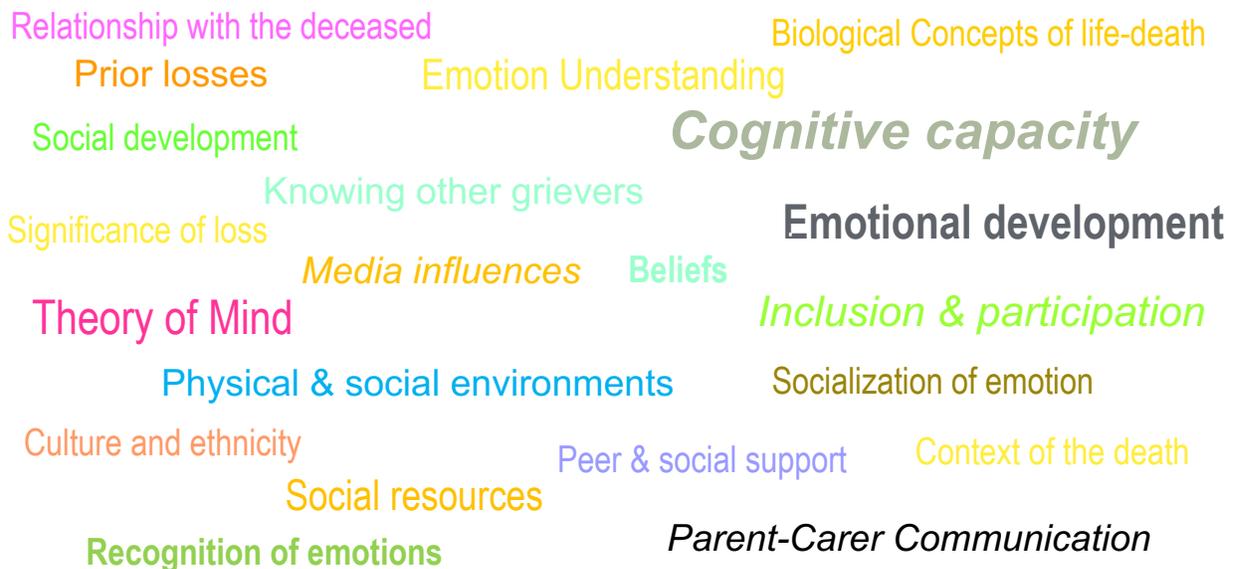
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A Child's Understanding of grief is *NOT* Dependent on ONE Singular Factor

- A complex interaction:
 - The significance of the event in the life of the child (Proximal contact, loss)
 - Individual characteristics
 - Developmental stage
 - Cognitive abilities
 - Age and gender
 - The environment
 - Family loss and injury
 - Displacement of school, community
 - Media and Strangers

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Understanding Grief



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Grieving is each of these things all at once

Attig, 2004, p. 346



How can children understand such a complex concept when adults struggle to process it?

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Understanding the Basic Emotions



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Emotion Understanding (EU)

- Knowing the emotions of others and oneself,—essential for competent social functioning and psychological well-being (de Rosnay, Harris, & Pons, 2008).
- Emotion understanding studies have relied on the following three modes: the visual mode (i.e., facial expression matching), auditory mode (i.e., tone expression matching), and emotion matching in scenes.
- A gradual development—beginning in the first year; infants are sensitive to emotional information shown in facial expressions and vocal tones (Flavell, 2004).
- By approximately 3 years of age, children have the ability to understand situations that stimulate emotions (Brown & Dunn, 1996; Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994).

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Theory of Mind



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Anger



- Commonly accepted as a normal response to childhood loss experiences, however, it is less a normal consequence of loss.
- Noble-Carr found anger was *related to adult's actions or inactions*, complicating the loss experience. Anger rarely existed as a response to loss, without being accompanied, or incited, by feelings of being left out and powerless. The more left out children felt, the angrier they appeared.

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Worried



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Conflicted and Confused



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“ mixed emotions . . . you don’t really know what you feel like.”

Julie, 9yrs old



- Children often described emotions as complex and overwhelming.
- Engaging children about loss is a way to facilitate conversations about emotions.

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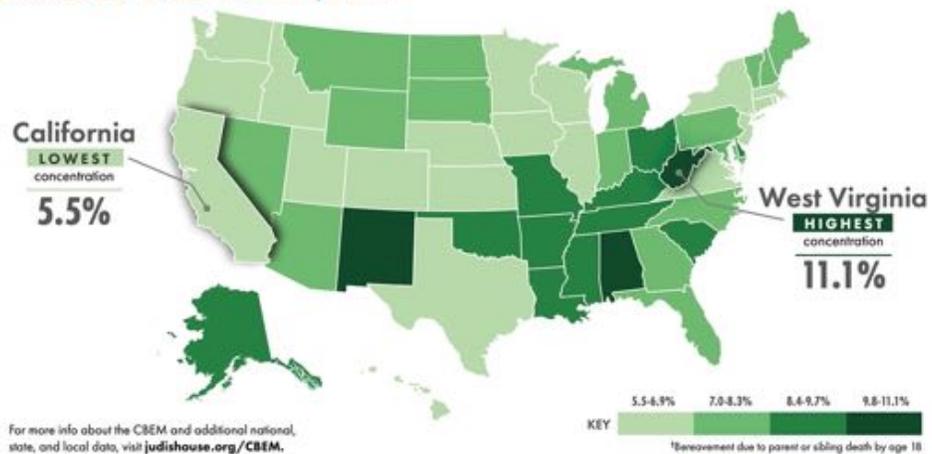
Emotions are only one aspect of Grieving . . . Actions, Behaviors, Physical signs



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Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model

Childhood Bereavement by State†



Source: Judi's House JAG Institute <https://www.judishouse.org/cbem>

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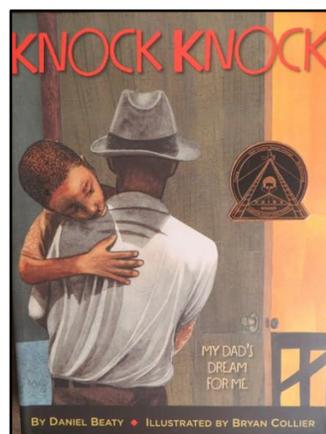
Bereaved Children in the United States

- 2.7 percent of children (under 18) in the United States have a deceased parent
 - Using vital statistics and various assumptions, actuaries from the Social Security Administration (SSA) estimate 3.1 percent of children are bereaved
- 44.9 percent of bereaved children receive Social Security
 - SSA's estimates of the percent of children with a deceased parent who receive Social Security is 49 percent
- 6.4 percent of 18 year olds have lost one or both parents
 - Judi's House JAG Institute, using vital statistics and modeling, finds 5.9 percent of children have lost a parent by age 18
- 10.9 percent of 25 year olds have lost one or both parents
 - Judi's House JAG Institute, using vital statistics and modeling, finds 10.8 percent of children have lost a parent by age 25
- A high level of bereavement among Black children
 - Consistent with large literature on differential mortality by race and vital statistics data

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Bereaved Families

- There are about 2 million paternal and maternal orphans (under 18) in the United States
 - About 2.7 percent of all children in the United States
- Non-Hispanic Black children are more likely to have lost a parent
 - 4.3 percent have lost a parent compared to 2.4 percent of Non-Hispanic White children and 2.3 percent of Hispanic children
- Children who have lost a mother or father are more likely to be in households headed by someone other than a parent (e.g., a grandparent)
 - 88.9 percent of children with both parents alive are in households headed by a parent compared to 69.5 percent for children with a deceased parent



Weaver, D. A. (2019). Parental Mortality and Outcomes among Minor and Adult Children. *Population Review*, 58(2).

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- Many, but not all, paternal or maternal orphans are on the Social Security program
 - 44.9 percent of these children receive Social Security
- Children with a deceased parent are somewhat more likely to be on means-tested programs such as Medicaid, SNAP (food stamps), Supplemental Security Income, and TANF
- A sizeable percentage of children with a deceased parent (27.3 percent) have a parent who was born outside of the United States
 - This is true for children with both parents living as well, but the finding has important implications for bereaved children and Social Security

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Economic, Social, Health, and Education Findings

- Because of Social Security, paternal and maternal orphans have similar rates of poverty and near poverty to other children
 - 22.2 percent of bereaved children are in poverty and 48.1 percent are in families with income less than 200 percent of poverty
 - The figures for non-bereaved are 23.0 and 45.2 percent
- Rates of material hardship are also similar
 - 18.3 percent of bereaved children have low or very low food security compared to 17.2 percent of non-bereaved
 - 16.9 percent of bereaved children were in households that were unable to pay utility bills compared to a figure of 15.6 percent of non-bereaved

NYPL, Iowa, 1936



- Does not mean bereaved children are free from hardship
 - Rates of poverty/near poverty and material hardship are high among children in U.S.
 - Both bereaved and non-bereaved face this problem

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Social, Health, and Education Findings

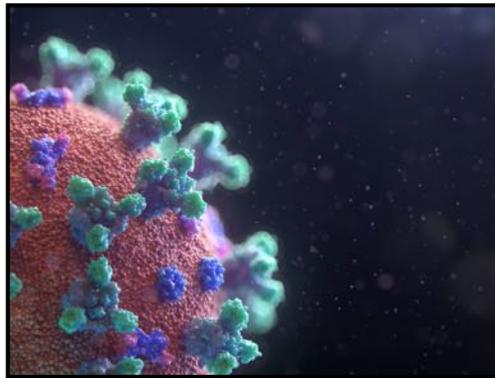
- Children with deceased parents have similar levels of social interactions to non-bereaved children with regard to
 - Being active in Clubs, Sports, or Music
 - Dining with a family member every night
 - Caring about school
 - Attending religious services
- **But, have more health and schooling problems**
 - 19.0 percent have been expelled or repeated a grade compared to 11.8 percent for non-bereaved
 - 12.7 have a disability as compared to 9.1 percent for non-bereaved



Permiana All for Unsplash

- Overall conclusion: bereaved children have economic and social supports, but have problems with regard to health and education outcomes

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“In the United States, we estimate that on average, under diverse epidemiological circumstances, every death from COVID-19 will leave approximately nine bereaved.”

Tracking the reach of COVID-19 kin loss with a bereavement multiplier applied to the United States. Ashton M. Verdery, Emily SmithGreenaway, Rachel Margolis, Jonathan Daw
Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Jul 2020, 117 (30) 17695-17701; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2007476117

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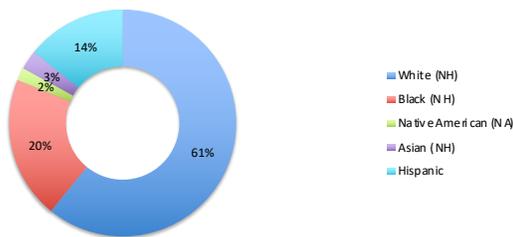
- The number of children experiencing a parent dying of COVID-19 is *staggering*, with an estimated 37 300 to 43 000 already affected.
 - For comparison, the attacks on September 11, 2001, left 3000 children without a parent.
- The burden will grow heavier as the death toll continues to mount.
- Black children are disproportionately affected, comprising only 14% of children in the US but 20% of those losing a parent to COVID-19.
- These estimates do not include bereavement of nonparental primary caregivers.

Kidman, R., Margolis, R., Smith-Greenaway, E., & Verdery, A. M. (2021). Estimates and Projections of COVID-19 and Parental Death in the US. JAMA pediatrics.

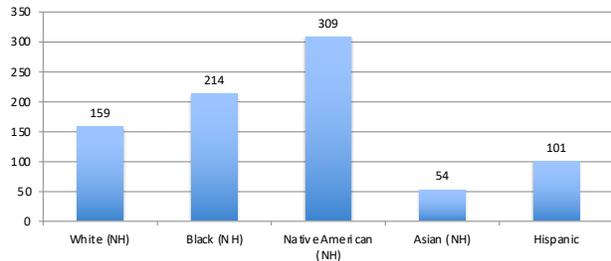
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Race/Ethnicity and Adult Death

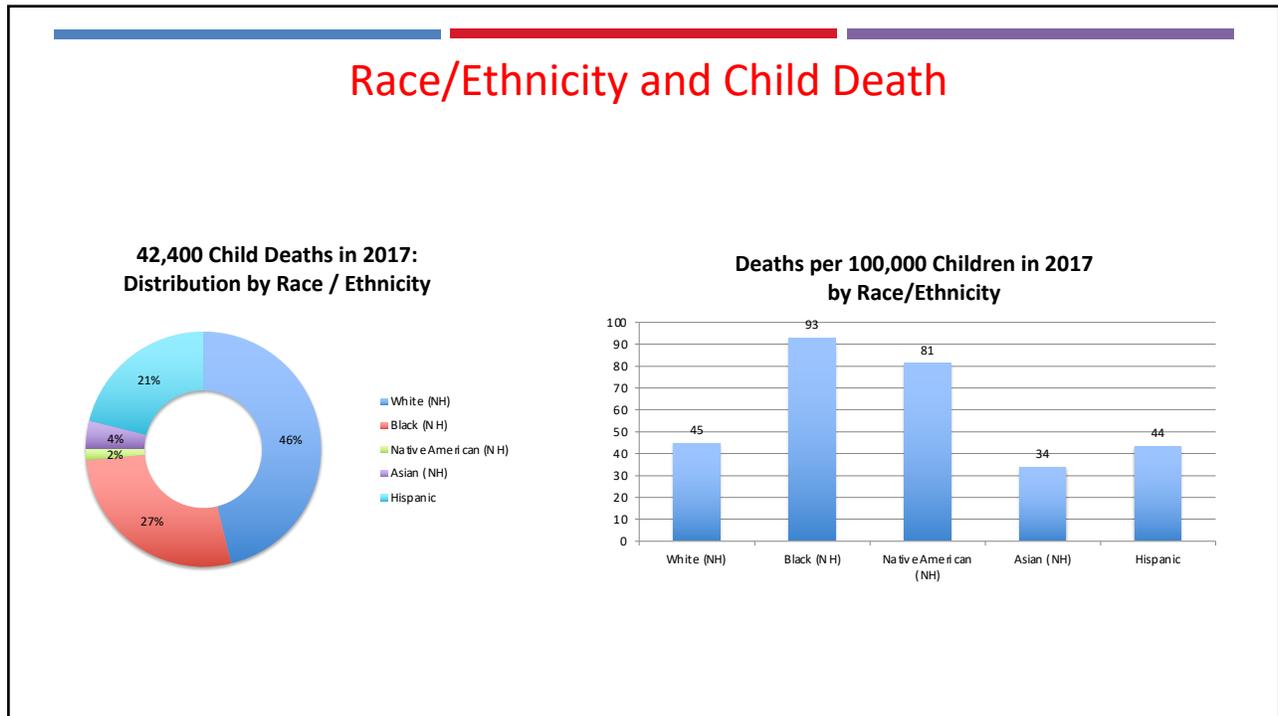
160,600 Deaths, Ages 20-44, in 2017:
Distribution by Race / Ethnicity



Deaths per 100,000 Adults Ages 20-44, by
Race/Ethnicity



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COVID-19

American Indian and Alaska Native people constitute **9%** of the total population in New Mexico. But they account for **44%** of the total confirmed COVID-19 cases (14x the confirmed case rate of white people in NM) and **59%** of total deaths (10x the mortality rate of white people in NM).

COVID Racial Data Tracker
covidtracking.com/race
#RacialDataTracker

Nationwide, Black people are dying at a rate 2.5 times higher than white people.

Source: 2. These calculations are based on data from The Covid Racial Data Tracker and the U.S. Census Bureau. Race categories may overlap with Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. States are not age-adjusted and some rates are underestimated due to lack of reporting of race and ethnicity categories for COVID-19 deaths.

In Arizona, those whom the state has categorized as **American Indian or Alaska Native** constitute...

- 4%** of the total population
- 20%** of the total confirmed COVID-19 cases
- 21%** of the total COVID-19 deaths

COVID Racial Data Tracker
covidtracking.com/race
#RacialDataTracker

In Florida, confirmed COVID-19 cases among Black people are **3.2 times** the rate of white people. Among Latinx people, confirmed cases are **3.4 times** the rate of white Floridians.

COVID Racial Data Tracker
covidtracking.com/race
#RacialDataTracker

COVID-19 RACIAL TRACKER
Covidtracking.com/race

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Questions

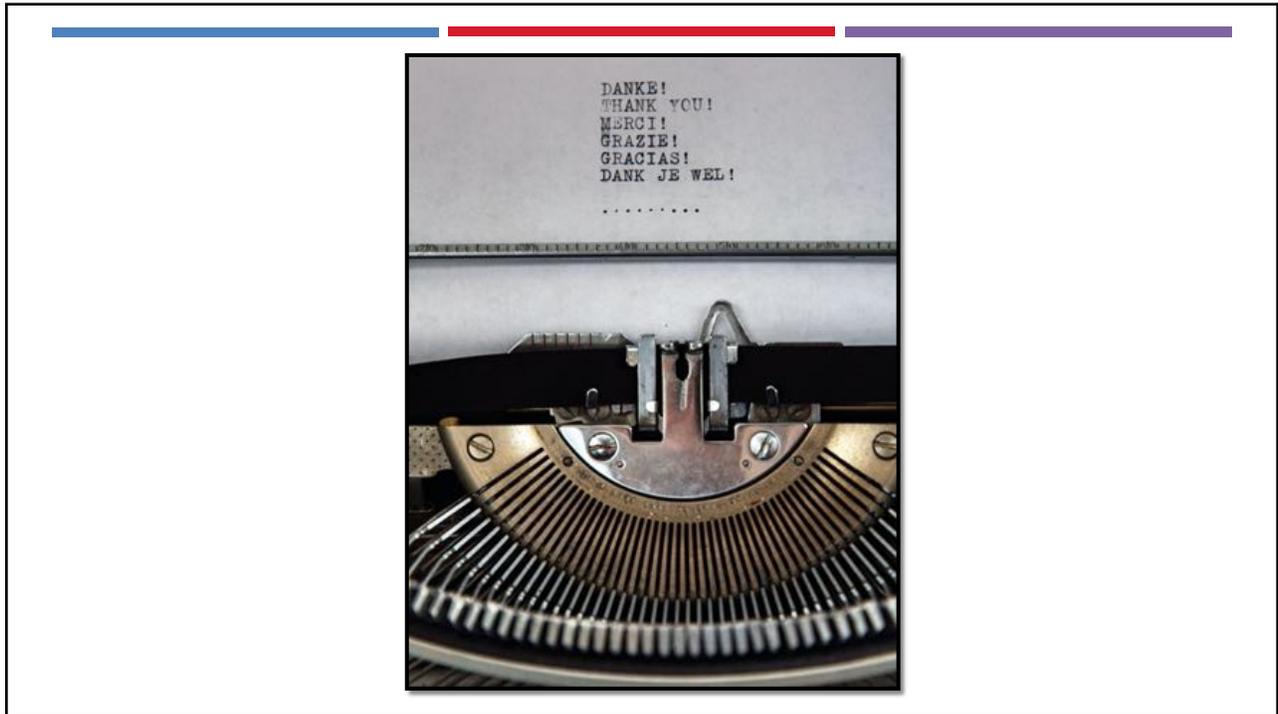


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Checking Out

- Let's slow down and reflect together as we end the session.
- Questions for your reflection:
 - How are you leaving at the end of tonight's session?
 - What are you feeling at the end?
 - What did you learn tonight?

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