

## **Building Block 1: Acknowledging the Grief and Loss Present in Your Classrooms (It's Not Just Loss by Death)**

The aim of this series is to provide teachers with basic building blocks to enhance their capacity to work with the grief and loss present in their classrooms. As we will discover, grief always arrives, whether through normative, predictable transitions and events of children living their daily lives, or through nonnormative, unpredictable, unforeseen events such as serious illness, death and trauma.

### **Building Block Highlights**

- *Being Human and Grieving go Hand in Hand:*

Loss is a natural (though often uncomfortable) aspect of our humanness. It is rooted in our capacity to attach to each other, to things, and to states of being. Attachment and mattering go hand-in-hand. Ruptures in our attachments impact us greatly. Those ruptures can be felt as loss that we grieve. This holds for adults and children alike.

- *There are Many Forms of Loss and that Loss is Present in Your Classrooms:*

Changes in the many different aspects of our lives – including changes in relationships, changes in work or activities, changes in surroundings, and changes in our physical and mental health – may be experienced as loss. Adverse Childhood Experiences in all its forms are also harbingers of loss.

Looking at the specific case of loss by death, 69% of teachers report having at least one student in their class who has lost a parent, guardian, sibling, or close friend in the past year. Looking through the lens of Adverse Childhood Experiences, in an average classroom of 30 students age eight, 19 will have experienced at least 1 adverse childhood experience and 3 will have experienced 3 or more.

- *Grief is a Healthy Response to Loss:*

By supporting a grieving child we are supporting that child's mental health and development. Developmentally, children need our support to process their grief. We are not meant to grieve alone. The classroom can be a compassionate community that fosters emotional intelligence and resilience, safety, and belonging. In so doing is also fosters a child's capacity to find meaning and making sense of what is unfolding in their world.

### Select References from Building Block 1

- American Foundation for Teachers (2012) Grief in the Classroom Bereavement Survey <https://www.aft.org/childrens-health/mental-health/supporting-grieving-student>
- CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences Study <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>
- Marryat L, Frank J. The Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences in the General Population of Scottish Children in the first 8 years of life [presentation]. 2017. Available from: <http://www.scphrp.ac.uk/the-prevalence-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-in-the-general-population-of-scottish-children-in-the-first-8-years-of-life/>
- Smith M. Capability and Adversity: reframing the “causes of the causes” for mental health. *Nature* 2018; 4:13. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0066-z>
- Woerden, Hugo. (2018). Annual Report of the Director of Public Health, 2018. Adverse Childhood Experiences, Resilience and Trauma Informed Care: A Public Health Approach to Understanding and Responding to Adversity.

### Other Building Blocks in This Series

- Building Block 2: What Grief Might Look Like in Your Classroom (Expect a variety of responses)
- Building Block 3: The Power in Being Vulnerable and Talking About Some Tough Stuff (Emotional Intelligence & Resilience)
- Building Block 4: Guideposts for Being *Grief-informed* with Activities You Already Have Going on in Your Classroom (Inclusion)
- Building Block 5: School-Level Strategies for Being *Grief-informed* (Support Beyond Your Classroom)

These and other resources related to Grief and Loss in the Classroom can be found on the Camp Kerry website. Resources include grief-informed and grief-focused classroom activities (including facilitation guides) targeted for children in Kindergarten – Grade 6.

*The Camp Kerry Society is invested in changing lives for the better by providing an abundance of year-round services to bereaved families. With our help, children are able to enjoy their childhood's, widows regain hope and happiness, and families move forward in their processes of grief by creating positive memories together. Not only do we assist families, but we also provide educational services to organizations, institutions and more. We can help those that help others to achieve their full potential and discover new ideas.*

<https://campkerrysociety.org/> or contact [info@campkerry.org](mailto:info@campkerry.org)