



2025 New York Life Foundation

State of Grief Report:

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE CULTURE
OF CARE AND GRIEF SUPPORT



NEW YORK LIFE
FOUNDATION

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Survey Methodology

This poll was conducted online September 16-21, 2025, with a sample of 2,201 adults. The data was weighted to approximate a target sample based on age, gender, race, educational attainment, region, gender by age and race by educational attainment. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus two percentage points.

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A Letter From the New York Life Foundation

Every day, people in our communities face the reality of grief — often quietly, and often without the support they need to move through it. Despite how universal grief is, too many families, children and workers still encounter systems that are unprepared to recognize their loss or guide them to meaningful help. With more than 3 million deaths in the U.S. last year, the urgency to strengthen grief support is unmistakable.*

This is why the New York Life Foundation remains committed not only to understanding the landscape of grief, but to transforming it. The State of Grief Report reflects what we continue to learn and the actions we are taking to drive lasting, systemic change.

For more than a decade, our work has centered on identifying the gaps that shape how grief is understood, acknowledged and addressed nationwide. What began as programmatic investment has evolved into a broader effort to influence culture, policy and practice. We've championed awareness, equipped caring adults with practical tools, and expanded access to support in the places people turn to every day: schools, workplaces, community organizations and healthcare settings.

The national conversation is shifting. More educators, employers and local leaders are recognizing that people who are grieving deserve understanding, structure and care — not silence. Our role now is to accelerate this momentum by building scalable frameworks that create clear, consistent pathways to support no matter where someone encounters grief.

Through the Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative, we are helping educators and youth-supporting organizations cultivate grief-informed learning environments. Through the Grief-Supportive Workplace Initiative, we are supporting employers in strengthening policies and practices that acknowledge the profound impact of loss on an employee's life and work. And through partnerships across the country, we are working to embed grief support within the systems that families rely on most.

Evidence continues to guide this work. The Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model, paired with our national survey and other leading research, helps us pinpoint where support is most needed. Families are telling us clearly that they want grief to be recognized: The vast majority of parents believe a child's experience of losing a parent, caregiver or sibling should be reflected in school records so adults can respond with appropriate care.



1 in 11 children in the U.S. will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18.

Judi's House/JAG Institute Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (<https://cbem.judishouse.org/>)

This year's findings also underscore the importance of supporting the youngest grievers, children under age 5, whose developmental needs require sensitive, age-appropriate guidance that many parents feel unequipped to provide. And in the workplace, most adults view the death of a loved one as on par with other major life milestones, reinforcing the importance of compassionate managers and responsive, flexible policies.

This year represents a defining moment for the New York Life Foundation: We will reach \$100 million invested in bereavement support. This milestone is more than financial commitment — it reflects over a decade of leadership, partnership and innovation dedicated to strengthening the bereavement field.

Our investments have powered scalable programs, evidence-based tools, groundbreaking research and local partnerships that meet grieving families where they already seek support. They've also helped equip educators, employers, healthcare providers and community leaders with the confidence and capacity to respond with care.

And our work continues. Beyond funding, we bring a long-term vision and collaborative approach to embedding grief support within the systems people rely on — making it accessible, equitable and built to last.

We hope this year's State of Grief Report deepens understanding, sparks meaningful dialogue and empowers educators, employers, parents, managers, policymakers and community members to support those who are grieving now and those who will face grief in the years ahead.

Together, we can build a society where no one has to navigate grief alone, and where care, understanding and connection are part of the fabric of every community.



Heather Nesle
President
New York Life Foundation



Maria Collins
Vice President
New York Life Foundation

*U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Health Statistics, Deaths and Mortality (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>)

Youngest Grievers: Helping Those Most Forgotten

Young children are often the most overlooked grievers, despite being deeply affected by loss early in life. While nearly all parents agree children younger than age 5 need specialized, age-appropriate support, many lack the tools to guide these early conversations. This section highlights why early, trusted interventions are essential to ensuring our youngest grievers are seen and supported.

SURVEY FINDINGS:

95%

of parents agree that the youngest grievers need special support.

89%

of parents want more resources to help them discuss grief with young children.

86%

of parents believe those younger than age 5 are often the most forgotten grievers.

52%

of parents believe children should be introduced to the concept of grief before age 6.

48%

of parents with children younger than age 5 either have or know of a child who experienced the death of a loved one.

Young children who experience the death of a parent or caregiver are often the forgotten grievers, and parents need clear, accessible resources to deliver the special support these young children require.

Often in early childhood, between ages 3 and 6, children begin to ask questions about death, which can be sparked by the loss of a grandparent or pet. This year's survey found that **88%** of parents with children younger than 5 have had to talk or consider talking with their child about death, and many are searching for resources for how to handle these critical conversations.

"While children often come to understand what death means between the ages of 5 and 7, the effects of loss can be felt much earlier. Babies and toddlers may not have words for grief, but they respond to the absence of a loved one through changes in behavior, sleep, emotions and attachment. Using simple, honest language and acknowledging loss, rather than avoiding it, helps children feel safe and supported."

David Schonfeld, MD, Director, National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, Children's Hospital Los Angeles

The New York Life Foundation is working to help fill in these gaps and build resource systems around grief support. Parents want tools that fit into their daily lives to broach the subject of grief with young children, such as:

- Safe spaces in care settings (**52%**),
- Age-appropriate books and videos (**50%**)
- Adult guides to facilitate conversations (**45%**)

Reaching families through trusted community spaces, such as libraries, museums and familiar educational programs like Sesame Street, is essential. The New York Life Foundation is developing and supporting initiatives embedded in the places where families naturally turn for guidance and care.

One example is *Healing with Play*, a partnership with the Association of Children's Museums to create safe, supportive environments to process and express difficult feelings and thoughts through play. Museums host bereavement-related events and activities, share resources and provide appropriate language, particularly focused on those younger than age 5.





When children can see themselves reflected in books and videos — like our “*Kai’s Journey*” book series — it helps them recognize and name their own emotions. From resources designed for the youngest griever, such as “*Something Small*” with Sesame Workshop to the “*Lost in the Middle*” graphic novel for middle schoolers, these stories give children language, connection and opportunities to start conversations about their experience of grief.

Building a sustainable system for supporting our youngest griever will ensure that families

and others around a grieving child will have consistent access to information to guide conversations across their grief journey. Grief is not linear and does not end. By encouraging open conversations about emotions in safe, supportive environments from an early age, we help destigmatize grief and normalize these discussions. Over time, this approach strengthens emotional well-being and contributes to healthier communities.

“Children’s museums are trusted partners for families and communities, offering safe, welcoming spaces where young children can begin to understand grief through play and shared experiences. The Association of Children’s Museums is grateful for our partnership with the New York Life Foundation, which helps children’s museums work alongside caregivers to gently raise awareness of loss in ways that honor children’s emotions and developmental needs.”

Arthur G. Affleck, III, President & CEO, Association of Children’s Museums

TAPPING INTO THE MAGIC OF SESAME STREET

For many people, Sesame Street taught us how to make friends, share and be a good citizen. Now, the New York Life Foundation is partnering with Sesame Workshop to teach families how to talk about grief. It’s all part of creating a sustainable culture of grief and reaching children through typical daily activities.

Parents say their children younger than age 5 spend time watching TV programs (58%), engaging in creative or imaginative play (52%), and reading children’s books (45%). Tapping into the universal love for Elmo, families can learn how to navigate their grief journeys via bilingual (English and Spanish) multimedia tools that promote empathy and help those in a child’s community navigate the grieving process.

It can be hard to process and talk about feelings of loss and know how to honor a loved one. Elmo is here to help.

“Experiencing loss and navigating grief is life-changing for young children. Our resources not only provide ways for caring adults in children’s lives to help them cope with loss in an age-appropriate manner, but also offer comfort, hope, and ways to look ahead and start to heal as a family.”

Jeanette Betancourt, Ed.D., Senior Vice President, U.S. Social Impact, Sesame Workshop



Grief in Schools: Driving Culture Change

Schools play a critical role in supporting grieving children, yet many lack the systems, training and policies needed to respond effectively when loss occurs. Parents overwhelmingly want grief to be recognized in schools through education, safe spaces and better identification of bereaved students, so children are not left to grieve alone. This section explores how coordinated, grief-sensitive approaches can help schools build cultures of care that support students' emotional well-being and long-term success.

SURVEY FINDINGS:

83%

of parents would support the inclusion of grief education in the school curriculum, with **42%** believing it should begin as early as elementary school.

77%

of parents said that a death in the family should be documented on a child's permanent school record.

42%

of parents with school-aged children are unaware if there is grief support at their child's school.

41%

of parents with school-aged children have a child who experienced a significant death.

While schools have made meaningful progress in supporting grieving children, important work remains to build a true culture of grief sensitivity. Our survey shows that school communities want to do more and parents strongly agree.

- Nearly **nine in 10** parents believe all education personnel should play a role in supporting grieving children, including:
 - Educators (**87%**)
 - School administrators (**87%**)
 - Afterschool caregivers (**84%**)
- **Eighty-three percent** of parents would support including grief education in the curriculum, with **42%** believing it should begin as early as elementary school.

Momentum is building. In 2024, New Jersey became the first state to require grief education for all students in grades 8–12, marking an important step toward normalizing grief in schools nationwide. The New York Life Foundation views this legislation as a promising signal for what's possible nationwide. To that end, we are working to

SAFE SPACES MATTER

The accommodation parents viewed as most important for grieving students was the ability to leave the classroom and go to a designated safe space, cited by **46%** of parents. Inspired by our graphic novel "[Lost in the Middle](#)", we're supporting efforts with the National PTA to create "The Middle Ground," or safe spaces for students navigating grief and loss. This work is part of the Foundation's Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative and helps build a culture of care for the bereaved.

raise awareness of the need for grief education and to support other states exploring ways to strengthen grief support for students.

These developments reinforce the importance of our Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative (GSSI), which supports students, teachers, administrators, families and the broader school community. By providing practical resources, training, tools and other supports, GSSI helps make grief a natural part of the conversation and reduces stigma that can affect young people's emotional well-being and mental health. Identifying who needs support is just as critical as providing resources.

"New Jersey's grief education legislation reflects what bereavement organizations across the state have long known: proactive, meaningful education paired with early identification and connection to resources makes a significant difference for grieving students. Grounded in proven data and a systematic framework, this work demonstrates how policy, education, direct support services and awareness can work together to strengthen school-based grief support nationwide."

Lindsay Schambach and **Evelynn Moon**, Members of the NJ Grief Collaborative, representing Imagine and Good Grief, The Alcove and Common Ground Grief Support Centers of NJ



In our survey, most adults (77%) want schools to maintain bereavement records beyond the initial period of loss. Yet schools and other caring adults often have no reliable way to know when a child has experienced the death of a parent or caregiver.

Our partnership with the Children’s Collaborative launched a pilot program in Utah in May 2023 to help address this gap by creating new pathways to identify children who have lost a parent or caregiver. This program included matching birth and death records, adding voluntary disclosure questions to school forms, and advocating for alerts to relevant agencies through death certificates. This systemic approach ensures that once children are identified, they can be quickly connected to tangible resources and the ongoing support their families need. The Coalition to Support Grieving Students strengthens this work by uniting organizations across the school ecosystem — from teachers and counselors to healthcare professionals and administrators — to provide clear guidance and accessible tools for navigating grief and loss.

“Without systematic ways to identify bereaved students, grief can easily go unseen. Through the Children’s Collaborative, we work to bring together data, policy and practice so schools and states can recognize loss early and respond in meaningful ways. Our approach helps ensure children and families are connected to appropriate supports while also providing educators and school staff with the tools, training and resources they need. This kind of coordinated framework creates consistency, shared standards and a culture of care for bereaved students across communities.”

Catherine Jaynes, Ph.D., Co-Founder and CEO, Children’s Collaborative

As a lead founder of the Children’s Collaborative, the Foundation helps ensure these resources reach the adults working closest to bereaved students, and through the Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative, equips school communities with practical tools to create environments that are aware of students’ needs and prepared to provide grief-informed support.

Parents, educators and school leaders consistently share that they want to support grieving students but often lack the information, training and tools to do so effectively. Schools can play a pivotal role by prioritizing emotional health education, expanding access to trained professionals and fostering environments where bereaved children feel seen, understood and supported.

The death of a parent or caregiver can affect every aspect of a child’s life — from emotional development to mental health and academic achievement — yet grief often goes unnoticed. Without systems to identify bereaved children, adults may not have the information they need to provide timely, appropriate support.

The New York Life Foundation is working to close this gap. Across the country, we are helping build systems that identify bereaved children earlier, connect them with the resources they need and equip the adults in their lives to support them with confidence and care.

CREATING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Fewer than half of the children eligible for Social Security survivor benefits actually receive them, a sign of a system that asks too much of families already coping with profound loss. Awareness plays a role, but the bigger issue is structural: The process is hard to find, hard to navigate and too easy to abandon when caregivers are overwhelmed.

The Social Security Advisory Board’s latest report outlines seven recommendations to strengthen access to these benefits. Two stand out as particularly important. One is the creation of a fully online application, which would replace a complicated, mostly in-person process with something far more accessible for grieving families. The other is a call for the Social Security Administration to use existing data, in partnership with states, to identify children who may be eligible for survivor benefits and make sure families are informed early — not left to figure it out on their own.

These recommendations build on work already in motion. In Utah, the New York Life Foundation partnered with the Children’s Collaborative and state agencies to pilot a data-driven approach to identifying bereaved children and proactively connecting families to survivor benefits and support services. Early results show over 3,000 children who may otherwise have gone unidentified were flagged through existing records, demonstrating that systems can be designed to reach families without requiring them to navigate complex processes on their own.

The New York Life Foundation has long advocated for these kinds of improvements, pushing for systems that recognize how difficult it can be to navigate paperwork and government requirements in the aftermath of a death. Modernizing survivor benefits isn’t just an administrative fix; it’s a matter of compassion. Advancing these recommendations would help ensure that every eligible child receives the support they’re entitled to — not by chance, but by design.

Grief Support in Real Life

Partnering with the Children's Collaborative

The New York Life Foundation has established a relationship with the Children's Collaborative for Healing and Support to aid children grieving the loss of a parent or caregiver. Our grant funding supports initiatives like the pilot program launched in Salt Lake City, Utah, which aims to identify and connect bereaved children with necessary resources.

Beyond funding, the Foundation has played a central role in shaping the Children's Collaborative's approach — including the addition of bereavement checkboxes on school intake forms and state death certificates and outreach through school systems. By integrating advocacy, research and direct intervention strategies, the Foundation is ensuring that its impact extends beyond financial contributions, fostering meaningful change.

Learn more about the [Children's Collaborative for Healing and Support](#).



Children's Collaborative
FOR HEALING AND SUPPORT

Collaborating with Judi's House

For over a decade, the Foundation has partnered with Judi's House, a national leader in childhood bereavement support. Together, we developed the Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM), the national standard for estimating how many children will experience the death of a parent or sibling. This has transformed the field by quantifying the prevalence of childhood grief on the national, state and local level, and informing policies and identifying gaps in access and services.

Learn more about [Judi's House](#).



Supporting communities through NACG

We also partner with the National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG), offering financial and strategic support for programs such as the Grief Reach and Local Education Events grants. These initiatives bolster the capacity of local organizations and schools to serve grieving youth and meet the needs they encounter every day.

Learn more about the [National Alliance for Children's Grief](#).



Guiding the Coalition to Support Grieving Students

The New York Life Foundation is a key supporter and founding member of the Coalition to Support Grieving Students, a national initiative that provides resources and training to help educators support grieving students in schools. Through financial contributions and strategic guidance, the Foundation helped develop comprehensive resources and professional development opportunities tailored to educators. The Coalition's free videos, guides and training tools equip educators with practical, compassionate approaches to help address the needs of grieving students in a school setting.

Learn more about the [Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#).



Expanding the Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative

A key component of the Foundation's work is fostering grief-sensitive school environments. Through the GSSI, our nationwide workforce helps schools create environments where children feel supported in their grief. More than 7,000 schools have already committed to becoming grief-sensitive, and our expansion into out-of-school time programs ensures that supportive adults across multiple settings are prepared, trained and connected to resources.

Learn more about the [Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative](#).

Grief in the Workplace: Building Systems and Policies With Heart

Most employees will experience grief during their working lives, yet workplace policies and supports often fall short of what employees say they need. Survey data shows a clear gap between the importance employees place on grief-supportive benefits and the resources many companies currently provide, leaving grief unaddressed at work. This section explores how bridging that gap through thoughtful policies, training and culture change can better support employees and strengthen workplaces overall.

SURVEY FINDINGS:

93%

of employed adults say they would be proud to work for a company that was committed to bereavement support.

77%

of employed adults say a company's bereavement policy is an important consideration when looking for a new job.

91%

of employed adults say a loved one's death is as significant as other major life events, such as getting married or becoming a parent.

66%

of employed adults experienced the death of a loved one while working.

Most of us have or will experience grief at work, yet it's treated differently than other life events. **Two in three** employees experienced the death of a loved one while employed, and **91%** say a loved one's death is as significant as other major life events, such as getting married or becoming a parent.

While conversations and support systems exist for working parents, there is far less discussion or accommodation when an employee experiences the loss of a family member — an event that can have a profound impact on one's life. Recognizing the significant gap in compassionate, consistent grief support at work, we set out to ensure that bereaved employees and the companies that support them have the resources they need during life's hardest moments.

While many workplaces offer benefits for major life transitions, few have structured approaches for employees grieving the death of a loved one. To address this need, we created the Grief-Supportive Workplace Initiative (GSWI), which provides tailored training and

resources for employees, managers, colleagues and leaders so organizations can respond with care, clarity and understanding. When it comes to supporting workers, **77%** of employees want their managers to receive educational resources if they were to experience the death of a loved one. Most employees believe it's critical for companies to provide resources such as:

- Ways to support yourself
- Strategies for managers when a team member dies
- Considerations for communicating with families
- Tips for supporting colleagues and teams

Understanding and supporting grief fosters loyal employees who feel cared for throughout their lives, increasing their investment in the company and its mission.





BENEFITS MATTER

It's clear from our survey that employees value working for grief-supportive companies, with **93%** saying they would be proud to work for a company that is committed to bereavement support. This support is also a desired part of a holistic set of benefits, with **77%** saying it's an important consideration when job hunting.

"This partnership with New York Life Foundation's Grief-Supportive Workplace Initiative reflects the compassion that is at our core. We're building more than a set of guidelines. We're cultivating an environment where our team knows their well-being matters, particularly when they're navigating the unexpected."

Sabrina Hall, Vice President and Director, Human Resources, E4E Relief (Member of the Grief-Supportive Workplace Network)

People want these conversations and resources. They're looking for help supporting each other, whether it's a colleague or direct report. That's one of the hallmarks of the Foundation's work — creating resources to support the bereaved at work. We're helping companies fill the void in their offerings, creating work cultures that support employees.

MODERN WIDOWS CLUB

After the death of a partner, many surviving spouses and partners must reenter or navigate the workforce while assuming full responsibility for their families amid profound grief. After experiencing this firsthand, Carolyn Moor founded the Modern Widows Club in her living room in 2011.

"When a spouse or partner dies, employees face an impossible choice: grieve authentically or protect their job security. Our data shows that when employers create space for access to informed resources and honest conversations about grief, they build workplaces where humanity isn't a liability, it's a strength. The ROI isn't just retention — it's a culture where everyone feels safe to navigate life's hardest moments without choosing between their well-being and their paycheck."

Carolyn Moor, Founder and Executive Director, Modern Widows Club



Building Grief-Supportive Workplaces

Grief affects everyone at some point in their lives and can have an impact wherever we are — including at work. The Grief-Supportive Workplace Initiative helps companies create environments where bereaved employees feel supported, valued and understood through free training modules, comprehensive resources and practical guidance.

93%

would be proud to work somewhere publicly committed to being grief-supportive.

77%

believe bereavement benefits are important when deciding on a new job.

74%

would be interested in voluntary grief-support training at work.

What makes a workplace grief-supportive?



DEDICATED POLICIES

Flexible, paid bereavement leave that recognizes grief is nonlinear and deeply personal



ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES

Training modules, tools and other bereavement resources for employees and managers



EQUITABLE PRACTICES

Consistent application across all employees, regardless of position or tenure



CULTURE OF EMPATHY

Acknowledge the emotional impact of loss and promote understanding throughout the organization

JOIN THE GRIEF-SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE NETWORK

Companies that pledge to become Grief-Supportive Workplaces gain access to:

- Comprehensive resource library and communication templates
- Free modular training programs for all levels of staff
- Expert-led webinars on grief and workplace well-being
- Ongoing consultation and best practices guidance
- Public recognition as a Grief-Supportive Workplace

Together, we can build workplaces where employees feel valued and understood during life's most challenging moments.

LEARN MORE >

Take the Pledge: GSWI@newyorklife.com

WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT VS. WHAT COMPANIES PROVIDE

	WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT	WHAT COMPANIES PROVIDE
Flexible work arrangements	90%	60%
Paid bereavement leave	89%	58%
Flexible working hours	89%	63%
Emergency assistance funds	79%	34%
Educational materials or training for employees on how to best support colleagues through grief	73%	31%
Educational materials or training for managers to help bereaved employees	73%	32%
Educational materials or training for bereaved employees	71%	31%
Connections with local bereavement centers or support groups	70%	33%

Closing the gap between what employees need and what companies provide can help attract top talent and strengthen employee loyalty.

How You Can Help

Our work affirms that grief support must extend across the entire lifespan. From equipping our youngest grievors with the language to understand difficult emotions, to ensuring adults feel prepared and supported after the death of a loved one, we are working to shift long-standing norms. By changing the conversation around grief, we can replace stigma with understanding and recognize grief as a natural, universal human experience.

The New York Life Foundation is committed to shaping a future where empathy, steadiness and compassion are carried into every family, school and workplace. Together, we can build a culture that meets grief, not with silence — but with care.



TAKE ACTION: TURNING INSIGHT INTO IMPACT

Meaningful change begins when organizations and communities respond to grief with intention, understanding and care. The following are practical ways to translate insight into action.



FOR EMPLOYERS: **BUILD A GRIEF-SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE**

The **Grief-Supportive Workplace Initiative (GSWI)** is a no-cost framework designed to help employers of all sizes strengthen how they support employees experiencing grief.

By joining the GSWI Network, organizations commit to:

- Strengthening workplace policies and practices
- Communicating benefits and available resources more clearly
- Fostering cultures that recognize grief and respond with compassion

Learn more and take the pledge: griefsupportiveworkplace.com



FOR SCHOOLS AND YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS: **JOIN A PROVEN NETWORK**

The **Grief-Sensitive Schools Initiative (GSSI)** equips school communities to better understand and respond to grief experienced by students, staff and families.

By joining the GSSI Network and hosting a GSSI presentation, schools and youth-serving organizations gain access to:

- Practical tools and guidance for educators and staff
- Shared language and increased confidence in responding to loss
- Support systems that strengthen the entire school community

Explore resources and join the network: griefsensitiveschools.org



FOR COMMUNITIES: **EXPAND AWARENESS AND ACCESS**

Communities play a vital role in shaping how grief is understood and supported.

By working together, communities can:

- Increase awareness of grief and its wide-reaching impact
- Expand access to trusted, evidence-informed resources
- Strengthen support for bereaved children, families and individuals

Access free tools and guidance: NYLgriefresources.org

For more information about the New York Life Foundation, visit newyorklife.com/foundation.



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