



## Support Grieving Students During the Pandemic



Across the nation, Thanksgiving and the December holidays are a special time for families, schools, and communities. But holidays can serve as a grief trigger for students experiencing adverse childhood experiences. They might have lost a loved one to the pandemic, be suffering as a result of the economic downturn, or be experiencing heightened emotional responses due to anxious feelings about COVID-19.

Each child grieves in a unique way; most also share a number of common characteristics. Elements of the COVID-19 pandemic further intensify these characteristics. For example:

- **Grieving children often experience academic challenges.** It is difficult to concentrate during acute grief. Among educators and students learning how to work remotely, academic challenges are common during the pandemic.
- **Grieving children are frightened about their own health and that of people close to them.** They often worry that they or their loved ones might die. In a pandemic, such events might actually happen.
- **Grieving children feel isolated.** Friends and educators sometimes withdraw, not knowing what to say or do. In the COVID-19 world, physical distancing and school closures exacerbate isolation.
- **Grieving families feel overwhelmed.** They might find it difficult to manage simple daily tasks such as shopping, cooking, or cleaning, and during COVID-19, they might also feel overwhelmed by the challenges of the pandemic.
- **Grieving children experience secondary losses.** Many things can change for a child after a death. The family might need to move in with relatives or find less-expensive housing. The child might have to attend a new school. The pandemic increases the likelihood that families will have to make these same kinds of changes.
- **Cumulative loss is especially challenging.** Children do not “get used to” multiple losses. In fact, they become more sensitized to death. In neighborhoods that have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, some students might have lost family members, friends, and teachers. Their entire community is grieving.

When you make the effort to reach out to a grieving student, you make a difference. Your students will remember this period in their life, the losses they suffered, and the sincere assistance you offered them. Access additional resources from the Coalition to Support Grieving Students, of which NAESP is a founding member.

[www.grievingstudents.org](http://www.grievingstudents.org)

# 64%

of parents and caregivers of grieving children said that their children’s mental health is their top concern as schools reopened in August, according to a survey from Experience Camps, a nonprofit dedicated to building awareness about childhood grief. Parents’ other concerns included the fear that they (35 percent) or someone they love (44 percent) will contract COVID-19, and the fear of financial losses (29 percent).

NAESP members left to right: Jeri Heard, Montana; Melissa Reams, Virginia; Ed Cosentino, Maryland; and Amy Adams, Utah



Maryland principal Ed Cosentino taking recess with the boys

## Principals Impact School in Dominican Republic

Every year since 2011, approximately four NAESP members have joined other educators and Lifetouch employees for an eight-day Lifetouch Memory Mission, volunteering assistance on humanitarian projects throughout the world. In January 2020, 50 volunteers returned to Rio Grande, Dominican Republic, to add to a school that was built from 2016 to 2018.

The team worked side by side with local construction workers to build the walls of a two-story building that will house the school library, a computer lab, and a community infirmary. "We hauled and mixed cement, laid blocks, and painted murals," says 2020 participant Amy Adams, principal of Fox Hollow Elementary in West Jordan, Utah. "It was hard work, yet so rewarding. I encourage everyone to apply!"

"Children are children, near or far," says fellow volunteer Ed Cosentino, principal of Clemens Crossing Elementary School in Columbia, Maryland. "All children must have an opportunity to have an education. This includes children in a remote agricultural village along a river in the Dominican Republic. My heart is still full from this experience."

Due to COVID-19, Lifetouch will postpone its 2021 mission, set for Guatemala, until 2022, says Lifetouch President Greg Hintz, but the company remains committed to the project. "Lifetouch has a long legacy of giving back, and the Memory Missions exemplify that spirit of community, giving, and shared experiences through photography and a commitment to education," he says.

To learn more and to apply for the 2022 Memory Mission, visit [www.lifetouchmemorymission.com](http://www.lifetouchmemorymission.com).

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**—Amy Adams, principal, Fox Hollow Elementary, West Jordan, Utah**

Photos courtesy of Lifetouch.