

Supporting Grief and Loss at School in BC School Districts



**LEARNING
THROUGH LOSS**
hope | healing | community

Background & Rationale

Approximately 1 in 25 children and youth have experienced the loss of a parent or sibling before their 18th birthday – that's potentially one child or youth in every school classroom across the country.

Of the more than 38,000 young people aged 12–19 in 58 of BC's 60 school districts who completed the '2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey, 71% reported that someone close to them had died.

More than a third reported that someone in their family, or a close friend had died by suicide.

Early, major loss can derail a life narrative and shatter a youth's sense of safety and assumptions about the future. The pandemic further intensified this traumatic reality. Children and youth experiencing grief and loss are even more isolated during this time and feel that nobody understands their feelings. Although the experience of grief and loss is unique to every individual, it is difficult to predict how someone will respond. We know certain reactions are common to youth as well as adults.

Like adults, bereaved youth can experience a number of emotions, including sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, fear, denial, disbelief and confusion. With the right support from people who care and the understanding of familiar and trusted adults, most children and youth will not require professional help. Schools and teachers are also well positioned to provide such support, and to ensure supplemental resources are easily accessible if needed.

Learning Through Loss (LTL) is a trusted community resource and partner for school districts and communities. We have a long, proven track record of helping youth through grief. We provide guidance, tools and resources to school staff to assist them to help their students get through the different periods of grief, loss and transition. By teaching staff about children and youth's understanding of death and bereavement, and how this can be introduced into the curriculum, we enable important conversations and opportunities to explore the feelings associated with loss in safe and healthy ways.



The "8 of Grief" is the hallmark of our teaching. Developed by founder Dr. Sandra Elder, PhD., it depicts how we may cycle through different emotions as in a figure 8.

At LTL, we believe all youth are entitled to experience and benefit from good mental health. Youth can improve their chances of moving forward in more helpful ways by receiving timely support during the grief, loss, and bereavement period.

Kathryn Dafos
Executive Director

¹ 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey, McCreary Centre Society

About Us

Learning Through Loss (LTL) is a trusted, community organization recognized by the Government of British Columbia as an approved supplier of grief and loss services for youth and youth service providers.

Our Mission

Learning Through Loss (LTL) designs and delivers grief and loss education and support programs to youth and provides professional development and training to other youth-serving organizations to increase capacity and well-being through grief, loss and bereavement.

Our Vision

We envision a community where all youth, and those that support them, have access to education, support, and resources relating to grief, loss and healthy strategies for well-being.

Our People

Our staff are all highly trained and experienced registered clinical counsellors who work with youth from all cultures, backgrounds and spectrums (i.e., Indigenous youth, LGBTQ2S+, BIPOC etc.) facilitating educational workshops and providing targeted support to children and youth in need.



Services & Programs Available

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR YOUTH

Good Grief Workshops

Good Grief Workshops are interactive workshops that support school districts in providing grief education to children and youth by opening up the conversation on what grief is, what it feels like and how it can impact so much. In this workshop, our facilitator speaks to the commonality of grief and loss and the process of grief that often follows.

Community Education Workshops

Community Education Workshops are designed to address the specific needs of participants after an untimely death, sudden tragedy, or shared community loss. These workshops increase the capacity of our communities to respond effectively to those experiencing grief and loss through our evidence based, research informed knowledge and practices.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR YOUTH

Learning Through Loss Group Program

The **Learning Through Loss Group Program** is an eight-week, sixteen hour peer support group that provides a safe place for youth who have been impacted by significant loss or change to find the support and resources to help navigate and manage their grief. The group allows youth to connect with their peers, gain invaluable life skills support, and find strength and hope in their capacity to survive, adapt and move through their loss.

Short-Term Grief Counselling

Short-Term Grief Counselling support is provided by registered clinical counsellors and available to eligible youth and young adults between the ages of 13-24 by referral. Older youth can self-refer. Counselling provides one on one support to youth experiencing grief and loss who can benefit from individual counselling. Sessions are conducted according to the preference of the youth (virtual or in person).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF

Supporting Youth Workshops

Supporting Youth Through Loss Workshops are half-day workshops developed for youth-serving professionals who would like to learn more about how to recognize and support youth through grief and loss. These workshops focus on increasing knowledge and awareness; provide an experiential understanding of our approach to supporting youth; and provide the tools to assist in supporting youth who are responding to grief and loss.

Supporting Youth Through Grief Training Program

Supporting Youth Through Grief Training Program focuses on the importance of establishing group safety and cohesion as the foundation for the group process. We review time tested strategies as well as some of the potential barriers that may arise and how to navigate them. This training program is for school district personnel and community members who wish to learn more about grief in youth and is a precursor to participating in the group program.

As a registered Canadian charity, the cost of our programs and services is based on the actual cost of providing them. If budget or financial hardship is an issue, there may be other options available. Please contact us directly to discuss.

NB: Services are available in person, or virtually using our secure Zoom Healthcare platform.

Feedback From Youth

What is the most useful thing you learned?

There are more people like me out there.

That it is okay to be sad, along with reaching out for help.

How to deal with grief and help others through it.

How to deal with my emotions.

What might you say to another youth that is also dealing with grief and loss?

It's ok to feel sad, angry, stressed, etc. and to not bottle things up until they become too much.

I'm here for you and your emotions are normal.

It will get better. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but eventually.

Don't give up, and you are welcome to share if you feel comfortable.

It takes time to heal.

What did you like best about the program?

Being able to hear the stories of fellow grieving people and share my own. It was comforting to know of other youth who have had to deal with similar grief.

The welcoming atmosphere and the general demeanor of the counsellors.

How motivational and inspiring the counsellors were.

The feeling of being safe.

Testimonials

"Our partnership with Learning Through Loss Society has provided a much-needed knowledgeable resource and educational support for many of our students including those most in need. As well, the developmental work that the LTL society has done with our Grade 8 students and with educators within our district has enriched our learning community bringing a deeper level of understanding regarding how to optimally support those among us through loss. The LTL society brings a specialized body of knowledge and experience to our community which increases and deepens the support that we can offer our students and families in our school and district."

Doug Mollard, PhD, Counsellor, Royal Oak Middle School, SD63

"This program has been an essential service that we have referred many of our students and families to over the years. Whether students have experienced death, divorce, moving, the first referral our counsellors make is to the Living and Learning Through Loss Program. The fact that there is no fee associated with the services opens up the access for all of our students, especially our most vulnerable."

Tina Pierik, Student Advocate, Critical Incident Response Team Coordinator, SD63

"LTL counsellors are skillful and knowledgeable. They are also compassionate and empathetic enabling them to effortlessly bring a complex and challenging topic to students that can often be difficult to process. The Good Grief Workshop has been and will be an integral part of the Career-Life Education course at Spectrum. I highly recommend this presentation."

Chris Lubinich (he/him), Careers Teacher, Spectrum Community School, SD61



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