

Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild @HWDSB: BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF CARE

Module 1: Physical & Mental Health and Safety

Lesson # 4: Loss and Grief During the COVID-19 Pandemic and During Civic Action

Learning Goal: To support everyone in understanding their range of grief responses and understand loss during the global pandemic.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Bereavement** - a period of mourning after a loss, especially the death of a loved one
- **Grief** - The normal process of reacting to a loss. The loss may be physical (such as a death), social (such as divorce), or occupational (such as a job). Emotional reactions of grief can include anger, guilt, anxiety, sadness, and despair. Physical reactions of grief can include sleeping problems, changes in appetite, physical problems, or illness.
- **Grieving Process** - grieving includes the entire emotional process of coping with a loss, and it can last a long time. The process involves many different emotions, actions, and expressions, all of which help a person come to terms with loss. The 5 stages of grief and loss are: 1. Denial and isolation; 2. Anger; 3. Bargaining; 4. Depression; 5. Acceptance. People who are grieving do not necessarily go through the stages in the same order or experience all of them.

Educator Pre-Reflection:

Before engaging in this lesson, consider/think about...

The COVID-19 Pandemic has affected many aspects of our lives as educators, both personal and professional. For some, it has caused increase stress and worry due to uncertainty of safety, job prospects, shelter, necessities, and loss of familiar routine. For others, the COVID-19 virus has caused death and loss of loved ones or close friends.

What is grief? Grief refers specifically to the reaction we have in response to a death or loss. Grief can affect our body, mind, and emotions ([Kids Health, 2020](#)). Grief can look and feel like not only sadness, but anger, frustration, fear, anxiety, remorse, or apprehension. Grieving can also look differently from one individual to the next.

For some students, feelings of grief have been amplified by the loss of their day-to-day routines, ability to socialize, in-school milestones such as graduation, and for some, increased stress due to working on the frontlines during this pandemic. For many other students, the losses of Black lives such as George Floyd, Ahmad Arbery, and Breona Taylor have brought forward substantial feelings of sadness, fear, and loss of safety. Many teenagers may feel that they are alone in their losses, and have difficulty asking for help or articulating how they feel.

It is important to listen and pay attention to our students in the classroom. We do not need to have the answers or make “everything better”. Simply listening to our students and validating their concerns, fears, and feelings can go a long way.

Please see the list in [Further Resources to support students who may have suffered loss during this time.](#)

Student Pre-Reflection:

Before you begin, think about...

Grief and grief responses can be a reaction to situations other than death (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2020).

- How did the COVID-19 Pandemic affect your semester two?
- What changes in your life happened immediately? How did your routine change?
- What emotions were you experiencing because of those changes?

Provocation / Minds-on:

Your COVID-19 Timeline

The purpose of this provocation activity is to explore lost history since the beginning of the global pandemic. Students can use their iPads or paper to draw their timeline. Depending on your classroom, share that there is no requirement to share specific items of their timeline.

Teacher Prompt: Ask students to draw a jagged or straight line. The beginning of the line is the last day before March Break, Friday March 13th, 2020, and the end of the line is today’s date. Along the line, have students make marks that represent significant changes in their family, personality, friendships, activities at home, losses, and responsibilities that have occurred global pandemic. Once students have brainstormed about the effects of pandemic, in small groups, encourage students to describe how they felt before, during and after the times marked.

Teacher Suggestion: As students are completing the activity, you may want to acknowledge the disappointments. Things like prom, grade 8 graduation, sport tournaments, athletic banquets, concerts, and plays are important milestones for students. Many of these activities have been planned, prepared for and/or dreamed about for a long time. When they are suddenly taken away, it is okay to feel sad, angry, cheated or disappointed.

Adapted from Providence Hospice of Seattle.

Learning Task/Activity:

Teacher Prompt: The next part of the learning activity of this lesson is to ask students to think about what other “losses” or “changes” they might have missed. Then read aloud the additional categories of change by Canadian and Mental Health Association below. You may also choose to share some of the descriptions for each category. Encourage students to add new situations that resonate with them to their timeline, after reading through these additional layers of change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought dramatic changes to our lives, including many losses.

- **Racial inequities:** The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified public attention to the unequal vulnerability of Indigenous and Black people and amplified other racialized inequalities inherent in society. The losses of Ahmad Arbery, George Floyd, and Breona Taylor have propelled Black students' and allies' involvement in racial justice initiatives during this time, amid the pain of their loss. Or instances of anti-Asian racism during this time, that included MP Derek Sloan who accused Chief Public Health Officer of Canada Theresa Tam of having divided motives.
- **Academic stability:** For parents and students, the added stress of decreased access to student success, resource room, and other supports surrounding students' IEPs, have caused concerns about impact on their education.
- **Economic security:** The pandemic has resulted in large unemployment numbers, a fear of further job loss and an economic recession. (Connections can be made to the impact small businesses, government subsidies, construction delays or construction prioritization).
- **Health and Accessing Healthcare:** Fears of contracting COVID-19 have led to increased health risks for the most vulnerable. Of note is secondary harm for people who need care but are avoiding hospitals, or for those who can't access their doctor easily due to increased demand due to the pandemic. (Connections can be made to healthcare roles, technology required for telehealth, and engineering requirements for ventilation).
- **Food security:** Food is both a necessity and a source of comfort. The financial crisis, closure of social services and increasing pressure on our safety net has resulted in a growing number of Canadians living in hunger. (Connections can be made to public health initiatives, healthy eating, and budgeting).
- **Friends:** Despite the virtual connections available, for many the inability to connect with friends and family in the same physical space has led to isolation and loneliness. (Connections can be made to communication and emotional validation).
- **Graduation:** The traditional markers for milestones have been cancelled or shifted online, leaving many with unresolved feelings.
- **Death and Funerals:** Many restrictions were imposed on families when seeking to celebrate the lives of their loved ones who have died during the pandemic. Changes to funeral visitation restrictions have changed over the weeks as well.
- **Future dreams or dream jobs:** With the turmoil of the pandemic, many have put future plans and hopes on hold. This loss of hope can be particularly painful.

Teacher Suggestion: After reading through the additional circumstances, validate that collectively we have experienced a lot of unexpected change during the global pandemic. As a society, we continue to navigate these changes and feelings associated with loss. You may want to share or reintroduce ways to access We Help.

Ideas for Follow up / Discussion:

- **Celebrate the good.** If this activity has encouraged active reflection on the global pandemic and school closure journey, you may wish to take time to include “good circumstances” that have happened during the pandemic. Explain to students that we can also find meaning in the good it may have brought into our lives: closer ties, time for reflection, realization of what is important to us and what our priorities are.
- **Self-care.** Discussions around what self-care looks like encourages all of us to recharge and be kind to ourselves. Suggesting taking a walk, exercising and meditating are all ways we can be kind to ourselves.
- You may wish to provide students with an opportunity to share their timelines. This can be followed by a discussion about their observations, changes, and the loss that is associated with change.

Adapted from Canadian Mental Health Association, 2020.

Educator Post-Reflection:

The main idea I want to remember or take away from this lesson is ...
I am feeling...

Student Post-Reflection:

The main idea I want to remember or take away from this lesson is ...
I am feeling...

Further Resources:

- [Kids Health: Someone Has Died](#)
- [Canadian Mental Health Association: Loss and Grief During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [The Conversation: How Racism Works and Shifts during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Providence Hospice of Seattle: Grief Activities](#)
- [SickKids Helping Grieving Children](#)

Curriculum Connections

The lessons included in **Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild@HWDSB** align with the [Ontario Curriculum](#) across several subject areas, as articulated within the [Considerations for Program Planning](#) (i.e., front matter) applicable to all curriculum documents, Grades 1 to 12. Educators must consider this information to guide the implementation of curriculum and in creating the environment in which it is taught. These considerations include areas such as Student Well-being and Mental Health; Healthy Relationships; Human Rights, Equity and Inclusive Education. Outlined below is the specific language that has been used to align Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild@HWDSB with the Ontario Curriculum across several secondary subject areas.

<https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/curriculum#secondary>

The Arts (2010)

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND THE ARTS

Healthy relationships are based on respect, caring, empathy, trust, and dignity, and thrive in an environment in which diversity is honoured and accepted. To experience themselves as valued and connected members of an inclusive social environment, students need to be involved in healthy relationships with their peers, teachers, and other members of the school community (p.36).

Canadian and World Studies - (2018/2015)

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND CANADIAN AND WORLD STUDIES

Every student is entitled to learn in a safe, caring environment, free from violence and harassment. Research has shown that students learn and achieve better in such environments. A safe and supportive social environment in a school is founded on healthy relationships – the relationships between students, between students and adults, and between adults. Healthy relationships are based on respect, caring, empathy, trust, and dignity, and thrive in an environment in which diversity is honoured and accepted. Healthy relationships do not tolerate abusive, controlling, violent, bullying/harassing, or other inappropriate behaviours. To experience themselves as valued and connected members of an inclusive social environment, students need to be involved in healthy relationships with their peers, teachers, and other members of the school community (p.47/p. 53).

Classical Studies and International Languages (2016)

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND CLASSICAL STUDIES AND INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES

Every student is entitled to learn in a safe, caring environment, free from violence and harassment. Research has shown that students learn and achieve better in such environments. A safe and supportive social environment in a school is founded on healthy relationships – the relationships between students, between students and adults, and between adults. Healthy relationships are based on respect, caring, empathy, trust, and dignity, and thrive in an environment in which diversity is honoured and accepted (p.46).

Cooperative Education (2018)

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

Every student is entitled to learn in a safe, caring environment, free from violence and harassment. Research has shown that students learn and achieve better in such environments. A safe and supportive social environment in a school is founded on healthy relationships - the relationships between students, between students and adults, and between adults. Healthy relationships are based on respect, caring, empathy, trust, and dignity, and thrive in an environment in which diversity is honoured and accepted (p. 60-61)

French as a Second Language (2014)

SUPPORTING STUDENTS' WELL-BEING AND ABILITY TO LEARN

Educators play an important role in promoting children and youth's well-being by creating, fostering, and sustaining a learning environment that is healthy, caring, safe, inclusive, and accepting. (p.3)

Health and Physical Education (2015)

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Mental health concepts are included within all content areas of the Healthy Living strand. The focus in this strand is on promoting and maintaining mental health, building an understanding of mental illness, and reducing stigma and stereotypes. (p. 42).

Social Sciences and Humanities (2013)

SUPPORTING STUDENTS' WELL-BEING AND ABILITY TO LEARN

Educators play an important role in promoting children and youth's well-being by creating, fostering, and sustaining a learning environment that is healthy, caring, safe, inclusive, and accepting. A learning environment of this kind will support not only students' cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development but also their mental health, their resilience, and their overall state of well-being. All this will help them achieve their full potential in school and in life.

The Role of Mental Health: Mental health touches all components of development. Mental health is much more than the absence of mental illness. Well-being is influenced not only by the absence of problems and risks but by the presence of factors that contribute to healthy growth and development. By nurturing and supporting students' strengths and assets, educators help promote positive mental health in the classroom (p.6).

Technological Education (2009)

Health and Safety in Technological Education

Teachers are responsible for ensuring the safety of students during technology lab, shop, and classroom activities. Health and safety issues must also be addressed when learning involves cooperative education and other workplace experiences (see p. 39). Teachers need to encourage and motivate students to assume responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others, and they must help students develop the knowledge and skills needed for safe participation in all technology-related activities. For these reasons, teachers must model safe practices at all times and communicate safety expectations to students in accordance with school board policies and procedures, Ministry of Education policies, and Ministry of Labour regulations.