



# Partners in *grief*

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## OUR MISSION

*Hospice of the Western Reserve provides palliative and end-of-life care, caregiver support, and bereavement services throughout Northern Ohio.*

*In celebration of the individual worth of each life, we strive to relieve suffering, enhance comfort, promote quality of life, foster choice in end-of-life care, and support effective grieving.*

*Western Reserve Grief Services is a community-based grief support program that provide services throughout Northern Ohio. We offer support to anyone who has experienced a loss due to death.*

## *The opioid epidemic and grief*

- Lindsey Neag, MSSA, LSW, LSSW

*Hello, and welcome back to what I hope will be a wonderful school year!*

I would first like to introduce myself. My name is Lindsey Neag and I am the new School Liaison. I received my MSSA from Case Western Reserve University. I am both a Licensed Social Worker and Licensed School Social Worker. My background includes training in school social work, pediatric palliative care and child and adolescent bereavement.

As we begin this new year, I wanted to take a moment to discuss the silent victims of the opioid crisis – children and adolescents whose loved ones died as a result of a drug overdose. *According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018), the most recent research indicates that Ohio has the second highest rate of drug overdoses at 46.3 people per 100,000.* It comes as no surprise that Ohio's students are especially vulnerable to experiencing the death of a loved to drug overdose.

Like other types of grief, students who experience the death of a loved one to drug overdose have a range of mixed feelings from anger, sadness, guilt and regret to feelings of love and happiness. What makes an overdose death different, however, is that children and teens are more likely to experience higher degrees of stigma, guilt, shame and blame. You may find students asking questions like "Why?" or dwelling on what they could have done to prevent this overdose. Often, these students will experience complicated grief and require extra support from trusted adults on their grief journey.

*As one of these trusted adults, here are a few things to consider when working with your student:*

- ▶ **Use** language that is clear and appropriate to the student's age and level of understanding.
- ▶ **Talk** about the deceased in a respectful way. The overdose does not define the person.
- ▶ **Emphasize** that no one is at fault or to blame for the death.
- ▶ **Guide** students to learn how to share their narrative appropriately.
- ▶ **Use the 7 C's** when working with the student: I didn't **cause** it. I couldn't **cure** it. I couldn't **control** it. I can **care** for myself, by **communicating** my feelings, making healthy **choices** and by **celebrating** myself.

While this only briefly touches on how to work with students who have experienced the death of a loved one due to overdose, I hope that it will at least provide a starting point. Please see the reverse side for simple definitions to use when talking to a student. If you are interested in more information, feel free to contact Western Reserve Grief Services at any time for more resources.

*I sincerely look forward to working with you as the school year begins and developing a collaborative partnership to best serve our community's students!*

**Addiction: THE URGE TO DO SOMETHING THAT IS HARD TO STOP.** The person's brain wants more and more of something than what may be safe.



**Prescription medication: MEDICATION PRESCRIBED FOR A MEDICAL TREATMENT OF A HEALTH DISORDER BY A MEDICAL DOCTOR.** Most prescriptions are not addictive and keep a person healthy. Some medications, like opioids, benzodiazepine, and stimulants, can be addictive.

**Illicit drugs: NON-MEDICAL USE OF A VARIETY OF DRUGS.** These are illegal and can be bought or obtained by drug dealers or others who use illicit drugs.

**Drug misuse: A PERSON'S USE OF MEDICATION NOT RECOMMENDED BY A DOCTOR** or taking more of a medication than prescribed by a medical doctor.

**Overdose: WHEN SOMEONE TAKES TOO MUCH MEDICATION, DRUGS OR ALCOHOL AND THE BODY STOPS WORKING.** This can cause a person to die or have lifelong health problems.

**Drug rehab: A PLACE THAT HELPS TREAT PEOPLE WHO ARE ADDICTED TO DRUGS AND ALCOHOL.** Drug counselors and professionals provide therapy to help the person stop using drugs and alcohol.

**Death: OCCURS WHEN ALL PARTS OF A PERSON'S BODY STOP WORKING.** The body no longer breathes, thinks, sees, hears, feels or eats.



## School Resources

*Western Reserve Grief Services gratefully acknowledges the Ridgecliff Foundation for its support of our school program.*

**AS A COMMUNITY PARTNER,** Western Reserve Grief Services offers schools, faculty and staff members resources to navigate the painful experience of grief and loss.

### Grief Support in Schools

Support is available for students after the death of a student, staff or community member. This may include administrative consultation, staff support and facilitation of a 6-8 week support groups (S.T.A.R.S.) for students in grades 1-12. S.T.A.R.S. groups can be tailored to specific school needs.

### Classroom Presentations

Interactive classroom presentations, often integrated into a health class curriculum, can be provided to all grade levels with age-appropriate information focusing on natural life spans of all living things, end of life, anticipating a death, common grief reactions, coping, traumatic death and supporting a grieving friend.

### Crisis Response

Immediate on-site crisis response is available when a school-related death occurs. All staff are trained and prepared to respond. This service is available to the general school community and provides grief counselors to support school administration, staff, parents and students. This includes strategic planning, large and small group interventions, education and follow-up support.

### Staff Training

Professional development opportunities can be tailored to a school's specific needs. Topics include an overview of grief and loss, anticipatory grief, children and teen grief, traumatic grief, supporting students through loss, grief activities for the classroom and school crisis response.

*To set up a S.T.A.R.S. group, classroom presentation, staff training or to access crisis response, please contact **Lindsey Neag, School Liaison** at [lnearg@hospicewr.org](mailto:lnearg@hospicewr.org) or **216.486.6287**.*



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