



(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/lossdiscussion.pdf>)

The School's Role in Addressing Psychological Reactions to Loss

I. Loss and Grief Reactions are Normal Responses to an Abnormal Situation; Forms of Loss Differ Significantly;

So Do Psychological Reactions to Loss

“Of course I’m feeling it.”

II. Because Disasters such as Hurricane Katrina Bring Losses to Many, Many Students Have Experienced Loss,

So Schools Must Respond with More than Clinical Strategies

“Saving Starfish and Building Bridges”

III. Initial School Responses Focus on

- > Supporting resiliency by facilitating a normative and supportive environment school-wide and in the classroom
- > Promoting broad-based “natural” support in a systemic way
- > Reducing existing stressors on everyone who is affected
- > Responding appropriately to individuals as needed

IV. Over Time: Schools Need to Maintain

- > Awareness of Need
- > Follow-up
- > Follow-Through

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Support comes in part from the Office of Adolescent Health, Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act), Health Resources and Services Administration (Project #U45 MC 00175).

Some Basic Questions and Answers About the School's Role in Addressing Psychological Reactions to Loss

Q. Why should schools play a role in addressing psychological reactions to loss?

A. As the Carnegie Task Force on Education has stressed:

*School systems are not responsible, for meeting every need of their students.
But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.*

Q. What makes the current disaster a high priority mental health concern?

A. Unprecedented dislocation and devastation

Q. What is the range of events that create a sense of loss?

A. Frequent and common events → severe and infrequent events

Q. What is the range of responses to loss?

A. Normal developmental responses → troublesome psychological reactions → mental health disorders

Q. What are some of the immediate roles for a school to play?

A. Welcoming relocated students and providing a range of supports; not adding stressors; providing special assistance when individuals can't cope

Q. What can I do to help schools, districts, organizations, communities in responding to students who need assistance in dealing with loss?

A. Share what you are learning about this matter and direct them to resources.

Use the resources available from the Center for Mental Health in Schools and use the Center website as a gateway to a world of resources - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

Go to the Quick Find online clearinghouse and access topics such as:

- Crisis Prevention and Response
- Depression
- Environments that support learning
- Grief and bereavement
- Homeless Children and Youth
- Peer relationships and peer counseling
- Post-traumatic stress
- Resilience/protective factors
- Support for Transitions

For each of these topics you will see links to Center materials, to other online resources, and to others centers that focus on the topic.