



## WHY THIS MATTERS

From deaths of loved ones to loss of rituals and routines, children and youth have experienced many types of loss during the pandemic. Attending to a young person's grief helps them heal and become healthier and resilient moving forward.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

As of December 2021, an estimated 167,000 U.S. children had lost either a parent or a caretaking grandparent to COVID-19, with rates highest among children of color.<sup>1</sup> Many more have seen a parent, grandparent, or other loved one become seriously ill or become debilitated by acute or "long COVID."

In a small national survey, two-thirds of high school teachers or staff expected student bereavement to have an impact on learning this school year.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, almost half of the teachers or staff surveyed (44%) said their school was "extremely prepared" to help students deal with grief due to loss of a loved one, and 84% were at least "somewhat prepared."

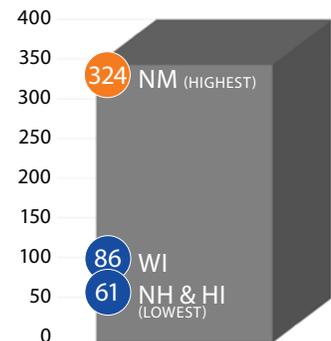
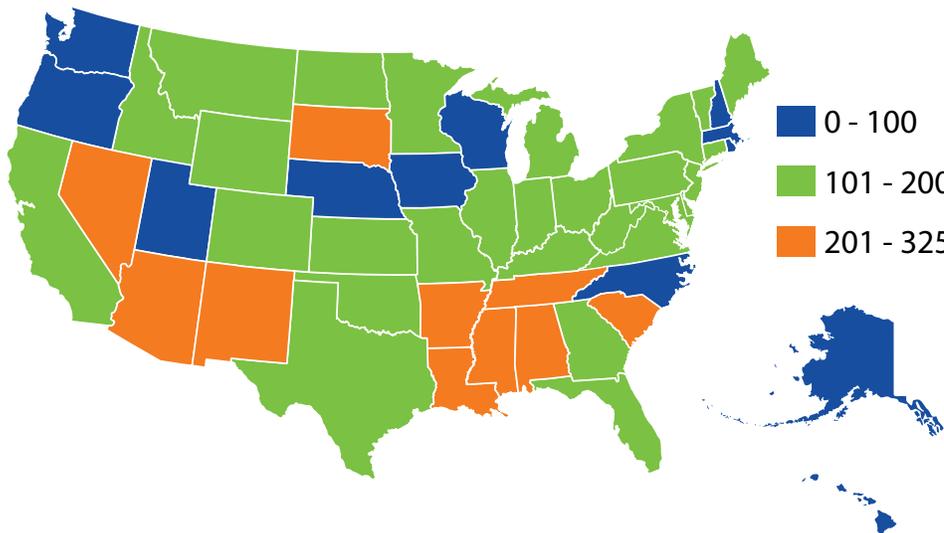
## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WISCONSIN?<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately, based on the most recent state estimates (through June 2021), Wisconsin has one of the lowest rates of COVID-19 orphanhood in the nation.

Nevertheless, as of June 2021, an estimated 1,098 Wisconsin young people had lost a parent or caretaking grandparent to COVID-19.

No racial or ethnic group has been free of such losses. Most of the children who have lost a caregiver in Wisconsin are White (60%), because most of Wisconsin's children are White. But Wisconsin's children of color have lost caregivers at disproportionately high rates.

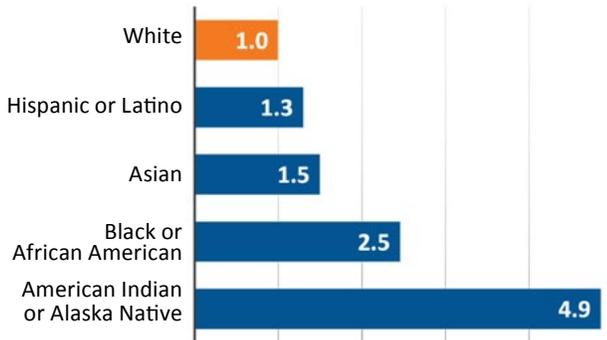
### LOSS OF PRIMARY CAREGIVER PER 100,000 CHILDREN<sup>3</sup>



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**COMPARED TO WHITE CHILDREN OTHER WISCONSIN CHILDREN ARE 1.3 - 4.9 TIMES AS LIKELY TO HAVE LOST A CAREGIVER TO COVID-19**



**OTHER FORMS OF GRIEF OR LOSS**

Most Wisconsin children have not had to cope with the monumental loss of a parent or caregiving grandparent. Nearly all children, however, have had other reasons to experience some form of grief or loss during the pandemic. This can include loss of routine, rituals, social connections, and a sense of physical or economic safety.

Research from other pandemics and disasters shows that even children who do not experience a close death may become overwhelmed if the situation leads them to have unaddressed feelings of powerlessness, social stigma, and disconnection. That’s why it’s important for adults to recognize signs of this type of distress in children and young people, even if those signs look very different for children than for adults, or if adults don’t think children are very aware of losses around them.<sup>4</sup>

From the outside, experiences of grief and/or trauma don’t always look like sadness. They can also look like inattentiveness, acting out, physical symptoms such as stomach aches, or refusal to go to places or engage in activities that trigger the grief.<sup>5</sup>

**REFERENCES:**

<sup>1</sup> Treglia et al. (2021) “Hidden Pain: Children Who Lost a Parent or Caregiver to COVID-19 and What the Nation Can Do About It.” The COVID Collaborative. Also Hillis, S. et al. (2021) “COVID-19-Associated Orphanhood and Caregiver Death in the United States.” *Pediatrics*.

<sup>2</sup> Morgan Stanley Alliance for Children’s Mental Health. (2021) “A Return to School: Educators Assess Mental Health Concerns for U.S. Teens”. <https://www.morganstanley.com/assets/pdfs/reemergence-program-educator-survey-factsheet.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Hillis et al 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Meherali et al. (2021) “Mental Health of Children and Adolescents During COVID-19 and Past Pandemics: A Rapid Systematic Review” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18: 3432.

<sup>5</sup> National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (n.d.) “Helping School-Age Children Cope with Grief.” <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/helping-school-age-children-traumatic-grief-tips-caregivers>

<sup>6</sup> Albuquerque, S. and Santos, AR. (2021) “In the Same Storm, But Not on the Same Boat: Children’s Grief During COVID-19”. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12: 638833.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Surgeon General. (2021) “Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory.” <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Treglia et al. (See endnote 1).

**RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>6, 7</sup>**

**➤ PARENTS/CAREGIVERS:**

- Talk about the loss. Listen to your child and let them talk about their feelings. Validate their experiences. Help them feel calm.
- Use routines to help establish a sense of normalcy.
- Seek professional help if needed.

**➤ SCHOOLS:**

- Educate staff about child and adolescent grief.
- Provide supports to bereaved students.
- Promote universal social emotional learning and trauma-sensitive strategies.
- Support teachers’ well-being so that they have the ability to support students.

**➤ POLICYMAKERS**

- Expand mental health resources through support for telehealth, student services professionals in schools, and school-based social emotional learning and mental health programming.
- Support funding for children who lost a caregiver to COVID-19, such as the proposed COVID-Bereaved Children’s Fund.<sup>8</sup>

**➤ COMMUNITIES**

- Provide spaces and rituals for bereaved families to gather, and for others to support them.
- Create opportunities for youth to interact with other supportive adults in the community who can get to know them and provide a listening ear or opportunities for fun.

