

# Trauma, Grief and Loss Services for Adolescent Students in California Fact Sheet

## How Does Trauma, Grief and Loss (TGL) Affect Adolescents?

- **Traumatic events and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** Traumatic events can involve an actual death, other loss, serious injury, or threat to the child's well-being. These events could include natural or man-made disasters, such as interpersonal violence, car accidents, war, or pandemics. A child may directly experience or witness a traumatic event.<sup>i</sup> Among adults in California, 61% reported ACEs, potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). ACEs were associated with \$10.5 billion in excess personal healthcare spending,<sup>ii</sup> and 18.5% of California youth ages 12-17 have reported two or more ACEs.<sup>iii</sup>
- **Loss of a parent:** Loss is defined broadly. Children can lose parents through separation, deportation, death, and divorce. 4% of children experience a parent's death, and 1 in 20 lose a parent by 18 years.<sup>iv</sup> This often leads to other losses, such as moving/switching schools or living with a different caregiver.
- **Loss of peers and violent deaths:** The three leading causes of death among teenagers are accidents, suicide, and homicide. In 2017, there were 10,886 deaths for ages 15–19 years.<sup>v</sup> From 2009-2018, 114 people were killed and 242 were injured in K-12 school shootings.<sup>vi</sup> From 2007-2017, the suicide rate increased 76% for ages 15–19.<sup>vii</sup>
- **COVID-19 pandemic:** The pandemic has created conditions for a rise in child abuse and domestic violence.<sup>viii</sup> Due to systemic health disparities and structural racism, communities of color are more greatly impacted: Black, indigenous, and Pacific Islanders are dying at a higher rate, Asian Americans are experiencing racial discrimination, and undocumented immigrants are shut out of relief.<sup>ix</sup> People are reporting loss in: relationships (death and separation from families and peers), community, faith in systems (hospitals, government), trust in others, survival needs (home, job, healthcare, food), anticipated loss (loved one who is sick or working on the front lines), collective loss, and sympathetic loss (loved ones who are also experiencing loss).

## Why Provide Trauma, Grief, and Loss Services in High Schools?

- **Problems with unaddressed trauma among older adolescents:** Those who experience adversity in childhood, and do not have access to healing systems, are at an increased risk for major health complications such as heart disease, and diabetes, and an increase in health-risk behaviors.<sup>x</sup> Only a third of children diagnosed with mental illness receive treatment, but 70% of youth who do receive treatment do so in a school setting.<sup>xi</sup>
- **Older adolescence a key time for mental health services:** Many unhealthy coping strategies like risk-taking behaviors often start during adolescence.<sup>xii</sup> Older adolescence is an important period for promoting positive mental health and reducing negative consequences of mental health issues, and supporting the transition to independence and adulthood.<sup>xiii</sup> Adolescents are generally allowed to consent to their own mental health care.<sup>xiv</sup>
- **Schools key to accessing mental health services:** Students have trouble accessing mental health services due to time, transport issues, cost, lack of mental health awareness, fear of stigmatization, and language and cultural issues. Adolescents spend the majority of their lives at school, and are more likely to visit a school-based health clinic for mental health services than a community health center or HMO.<sup>xv</sup>
- **Lack of designated TGL services and training in California schools:** In a 2012 survey, the American Federation of Teachers found that 69% of teachers surveyed reported having at least one student in their class who had lost a parent, guardian, sibling or close friend in the past year. Yet only 7% reported having any bereavement training, and only 3% said that their school district offered bereavement training.<sup>xvi</sup> Trauma-informed mental health services can help adolescents recover from TGL, but most California schools do not have designated TGL services. While California school counselors often have cross-cultural counseling and career counseling training, they are not systematically trained, or designated to provide TGL resources for students.
- **Evidence shows TGL services help:** The San Francisco Wellness Initiative's TGL services in San Francisco Unified School District high schools reported that after participating in the 12-week support groups with a curriculum based on trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Seeking Safety therapy, students about the clinical range for PTSD was reduced from 92% to 44%.<sup>xvii</sup>

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## Specialized School-Based TGL Services Should be Provided for Adolescents

- **Providing TGL funding and training:** Local educational agencies (LEAs) should be encouraged and provided funding and training to designate mental health professionals to provide TGL services for students grade 9 to 12.
- **Targeting the needs of vulnerable populations:** LEAs with a higher percentage of lower income students, migrant children, homeless youth, foster youth, and limited English proficient youth who may face greater barriers to accessing mental health services. They should be prioritized for providing TGL services for students.
- **Flexible model:** To accommodate for school districts of various geographic and demographic needs, LEAs should be encouraged and provided funding and training to work with providers either within or external to the school district to provide TGL services. Services can be provided in individual or group counseling; include trauma-related intervention, prevention, and treatment; and include wellness and mindfulness services.
- **Providing support and assessing impact with data:** LEAs should be supported to survey, collect information, research, and analyze TGL needs and TGL's impact on learning and educational outcomes.

## Case Examples \*All names changed to protect identities

- **Jhoni,\*** a 14-year old boy from El Salvador, witnessed violent murders and was threatened by gang members with death. Fleeing the country, he was separated at the U.S.-Mexico border from his father, who was then deported. He then reunified with his mother in Los Angeles, but she passed away from cancer eight months later. Jhoni had to change schools and went to live with his aunt. His aunt fears accessing services due to misinformation regarding recent federal public charge regulations for immigrants. Jhoni feels that school is a safer place to talk to a Spanish-speaking counselor about his worries and feelings of abandonment.
- **Jane,\*** a 16-year old girl, lost her best friend Anita when Anita died by suicide. Jane's parents divorced recently, and her mother does not feel that she has the time or money to take Jane to a therapist on her own. Jane is partaking in group therapy sessions at school with other youth affected by Anita's death, helping her to normalize her thoughts and emotions associated with traumatic grief, and providing as well as receiving social support from both the TGL counselor and her peers.

<sup>i</sup> National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "Childhood Traumatic Grief Educational Materials," (2004), [https://rems.ed.gov/docs/SAMHSA\\_ChildhoodTraumaticGriefForParents.pdf](https://rems.ed.gov/docs/SAMHSA_ChildhoodTraumaticGriefForParents.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> Ted R. Miller, et. al., "Adult health burden and costs in California during 2013 associated with prior adverse childhood experiences." 15 *PLoS ONE* e0228019 (2020).

<sup>iii</sup> Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health, "2017-2018 National Survey of Children's Health," (retrieved Apr. 28, 2020), <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/allstates?q=7205>.

<sup>iv</sup> Jette Marcussen, et. al. "Parental death in young adults with divorced compared to non-divorced parents: The effect on prolonged grief and mental health," *J. of Death Studies* (2019). This does not account for loss of a "parental figure" like a grandparent.

<sup>v</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "National Vital Statistics Report: Deaths: Final Data for 2017," Volume 68, No. 9 (Jun. 24, 2019), [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68\\_09-508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_09-508.pdf).

<sup>vi</sup> Christina Walker, "10 years. 180 shootings. 356 victims," CNN, (Jul. 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2019/07/us/ten-years-of-school-shootings-trnd>.

<sup>vii</sup> Sally C. Curtin & Melonie Heron, "Death Rates Due to Suicide and Homicide Among Persons Aged 10–24: United States, 2000–2017," National Center for Health Statistics, Data Brief No. 352. (Oct. 2019), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db352-h.pdf>.

<sup>viii</sup> Ashley Abramson, "How COVID-19 may increase domestic violence and child abuse," American Psychological Association, (Apr. 8, 2020), <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/domestic-violence-child-abuse>; Laura Santhanam, "Why child welfare experts fear a spike of abuse during COVID-19," PBS News Hours, (Apr. 6, 2020), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/why-child-welfare-experts-fear-a-spike-of-abuse-during-covid-19>.

<sup>ix</sup> Samantha Artiga et. al., "Growing data underscores that communities of color are being hit harder by COVID-19," KFF (Apr. 12, 2020), <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-policy-watch/growing-data-underscores-communities-color-harder-hit-covid-19/>; Carla Herrera Russo, "L.A. Officials say Asian teen was assaulted, bullied over coronavirus fears," HuffPost, (Feb. 14, 2020), [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/la-teen-student-assaulted-bullied-coronavirus\\_n\\_5e4749f4c5b64ba2974fa29](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/la-teen-student-assaulted-bullied-coronavirus_n_5e4749f4c5b64ba2974fa29); Miriam Jordan, "'We're Petrified': Immigrants fear seeking medical care for coronavirus," New York Times, (Apr. 10, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/us/coronavirus-immigrants.html>.

<sup>x</sup> Michelle C. Black, "Intimate partner violence and adverse health consequences: implications for clinicians," 5 *Am. J. Lifestyle Med.* 428 (2011); Matthew J. Breiding, et al., "Chronic disease and health risk behaviors associated with intimate partner violence: 18 U.S. states/territories," 18 *Ann. Epidemiol.* 538 (2008); National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," (2017), [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/creating\\_supporting\\_sustaining\\_trauma\\_informed\\_schools\\_a\\_systems\\_framework.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/creating_supporting_sustaining_trauma_informed_schools_a_systems_framework.pdf).

<sup>xi</sup> Laura Hurwitz & Karen Weston, "Using Coordinated School Health to Promote Mental Health for All Students," National Assembly on School-Based Health Care, (Jul. 2010).

<sup>xii</sup> World Health Organization, "Adolescent Mental Health," (Oct. 23, 2019), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), "Serious Mental Health Challenges Among Older Adolescents and Young Adults," (Sep. 8, 2014), <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/serious-mental-health-challenges-among-older-adolescents-and-young-adults>.

<sup>xiv</sup> E.g., see Cal.Family Code 6924 and Cal. Health & Saf. Code 124260.

<sup>xv</sup> Samira Soleimanpour, et. al. "The Role of School Health Centers in Health Care Access and Client Outcomes," 100 *Am. J. of Public Health* 1597 (2010).

<sup>xvi</sup> American Federation of Teachers (AFT) & New York Life Foundation, "Grief in the Classroom," (Dec. 2012), [https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/release\\_bereavement121012.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/release_bereavement121012.pdf).

<sup>xvii</sup> San Francisco Wellness Initiative, "Data Snapshot: Our Impact on Trauma, Grief, and Loss (TGL)," (May 2012), <https://sfwellness.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/SFWI-Our-Impact-on-Trauma-Grief-Loss-May-2012.pdf>; San Francisco Wellness Initiative, "Data Snapshot: Our Impact on Trauma, Grief, and Loss (TGL)," (Aug. 2013), [https://sfwellness.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TGL\\_web.pdf](https://sfwellness.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TGL_web.pdf).