

I think it's important to note that today is International Children's Grief Day. Here in the United States it's observed the third Thursday of the month, before Thanksgiving, so that we may remember that the holidays are especially hard and that support truly matters for grieving children. With that, Good Morning. My name is Nicole Light and I am here in support of House Bill 363. Thank you representative Miller for the invitation. In April my life partner, best friend and children's father was killed in a workplace explosion here in Columbus. The explosion was violent, killed 1, hurt and traumatized many more and forever changed the landscape. The emotional explosion in our home was just as violent. We too are forever changed. With all due respect to the love and support from neighbors, strangers, staff at the school, Ohio needs a comprehensive, bullet proof Crisis process with the prerequisite of humanity and dignity. The death of a parent is a crisis. We must be brave enough, and forward thinking enough to truly make mental health the utmost priority. Two words connect me to this bill, mental health.

This issue has many entry points, my experience and my passion especially, are for bereaved and grieving children. Because our schools have care, custody and control of our children, in my opinion this brings great opportunity, responsibility and I would be remiss to say, challenge. However, we are in the most critical state our great State of Ohio may ever have been in. We need all hands on deck, overdoses, suicides, bullying, mass casualty events, social media, political division. Our children are suffering, need direction and we must act.

My next thought is funding but that's where we must be forward thinking.

Things I learned:

-This is a life long walk with Grief and bereavement.

1:that I was forced to reconcile our entire life on a dime.

2:that a percentage of my friends and close family cannot deal.

3: how inconvenient the conversation on Grief can feel and is

4:the clarity that death can bring .

5: that my school system's system felt shaky. I thought very soon on that the State did not have a standardized process

6: The number of unrequited or delayed emails and texts I would have

7: The leaps in logic that the traumatized mind has.

8:You cannot beat grief. Much like a hole in the roof of a home, without repair, that water will eventually make its way down inside your home.

9: How comforting it felt to hear the words "good job" every week for the first month.

10: The importance to simply eat and sleep was some of the best advice I received right out of the gate

11. How hard it is to secure mental health help, especially when one is in Crisis

Things we need

1: A trained liaison to be assigned to the family to be the family coordinator through the Crisis period. Children need to be part of the conversation as much as the adults. This person would Recognize and articulate the transition to the Chronic period where outside counseling could be the goal. *(as much as they can)*

2: Family is triaged: What are the immediate needs from clothes for the

funeral to food insecurity.

3: Who is telling the school nurse, the bus drivers, the pediatrician?

4: who is supporting the support? Children's best friends, etc.

5: homework

6: A printout with contact info, counselors that take your special ins,

7: ongoing Sensitivity training for all staff, students too.

8: All children get equal treatment in Crisis, no child is left behind.

Things I consider

1: is there federal money available to Ohio

2: the mental stress put on our mental health teams

3: these children can become the fray that become other traumas.

4: how do we incentivize this field?

5: mental health, at the school level, can create its own challenges.

6 "only" parents are busy. Can They get extra PTO hours at work, etc. for doctors appointments etc. *Our kid had knee surgery, no help w/ appts anywhere*

7: how do we really create "grit" and a growth mindset from a young age?

Coping skills?

8: that children don't need to know where they are going but that they remain moving

9: what about during the summer and extended holidays for these children?

10: How and when do we disclose that this child has lost a parent or significant family member child's school file for future teachers/staff? Do we put significant dates of the deceased person's birthday and death date in immediate view so that they can be extra aware around those times that that child might need something special or could be acting out. Grief masquerades as other things.

11: How solid is The Student Wellness and Success Fund, rolled out by the Dept of Ed?

We must keep this in place.

12: Does the literature and books selections for class reading, discuss grief and loss?

13: Can children that have healing time under their belt be contacts for newly grieved children?

14: I wonder how different our journey might be if this was a suicide. In some death situations, the person might be perceived as a victim (accidents, sickness) whereas, a suicide, that person could be vilified for leaving their family behind. The latter would create its own set of challenges.

How might Success look?

1: bereaved kids are helping other bereaved kids. They are creating villages inside of their own schools with grief groups.

2: Wellness spaces reserved for zoom meetings with mental health workers that are outside of school, a place to deescalate, etc.

Wellness is spoken of daily

3: Our guidance Counselors are less burdened with schedule changes and Admin work. Funding allows for hiring Admins or incentivizing retirees, etc to free them up so that counselors can do more Guiding and Counseling.

3: Limited bureaucracy

4: We are celebrating these children for being the Warriors that they are

5: Mental Health is not judged by grades, good or bad, but by mental health markers set forth

6: Get Funding on the ballot by creating passion. This topic and need is no secret.

7: Hope, Peace and Honor are part of everyone's daily Grief vocabulary

8: Children are seeking Purpose

9: they are Finding new things to fill the void.

10: Grief liaisons in the community

11. Grieved and bereaved parents, grandparents
find each other

Resources

* I strongly believe there are less groups than people think

1: Cornerstone of Hope. They come in to school and set up Grief Groups, on grant. They have access to Grief camps. grant \$

2: Ohio Health Hospice will come into schools and set up Grief group, in grant \$

3: Grief cast: podcast for adults

4: Milam Byalick: podcasts for adults

5: character lab.org it gives parents weekly tips for building "grit", in children

In closing, later today, this weekend, I ask you to consider what you expect of your school if your spouse or one of your children dies? What could you imagine your children might need.

What are your assumptions now?

**My suggestion for the comment box on mass casualty festival events such as Travis Scott/Astroworld: My idea is that there is a statewide, visual color coded alarm system in place.

Remind people where exits are, water is available, First Aid and review the Color scheme.

e.g blue is a "cool" color therefore it is used for threats that are not for weapons, fires, etc but things like crowd surge, people passing out due to heat, etc. once the mass threat is detected, this alarm would require that people slowly and coolly open up space between them and others. Lights and music are turned up and off. Calm voices and actions would

direct the crowd.

Different colors mean different levels of problems. There would be a preconcert rundown of the color scheme, if it is a weekend event, it would be done several times.

All venues in OH, for crowds over 100, must comply. All bands and acts must be aware and are responsible for helping to manage the crowds.