
Making Memorial Day Meaningful: Supporting Military-Connected Students

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Created by [Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#)



Memorial Day was established after the Civil War to honor those who had died while in military service. It is observed each year on the last Monday of May. While non-military families often see Memorial Day as the first celebration of summer, those connected to the military are likely to see it differently.

Military-connected students almost certainly attend your schools. There are nearly 2 million children of active service members—that is, with parents in active duty military, National Guard or Reserves. They live in communities across the nation. Over 80% attend public schools.

Things to Know

Here are some helpful things to consider if you are planning learning activities or other student events related to Memorial Day.

- Memorial Day is a solemn day for most military families. Many spend it visiting cemeteries to place flowers or flags on graves. They may attend special programs remembering those who have died in service.
- Children who have lost a loved one through a line-of-duty death often revisit powerful feelings of grief at this time of year.
- Memorial Day is not the same as Veteran’s Day. While Veteran’s Day honors all who have served in our military, Memorial Day focuses particularly on those who have died in the line of duty. This distinction is quite important to military-connected children and their families.
- The [TAPS Good Grief Camp](#) is a weekend experience offered over Memorial Day weekend to child survivors of service members who died in the line of duty.

Things to Do

To support military-connected children, especially those who are grieving a line-of-duty death, consider these steps.

- Offer students opportunities to think about and discuss the serious and solemn qualities of Memorial Day.
- If active service members or veterans are invited to speak to students at this time of year, ask them to acknowledge and address the deeper meanings of Memorial Day.
- Support students’ efforts to attend events such as the Good Grief Camp.
- If you know military-connected students, especially if they are grieving, reach out as Memorial Day approaches. Ask them how they’re doing. Ask whether Memorial Day brings up any thoughts or feelings they’d like to talk about. Let them know you’re thinking of them.

Children who experience the loss of a parent or other family member through a military line-of-duty death are likely to face a number of unique issues. School professionals working with students in such circumstances will be able to provide more effective support when they understand the distinct aspects of this experience.

[The Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#) offers a range of free resources that can help educators learn more about supporting grieving students. They have just released a special module, Supporting Children and Family Survivors of Military Line-of-Duty Deaths. This will be helpful to any educator working with military-connected children. The Moyer Foundation is a supporting member of the Coalition.

The Coalition provides extensive information about children and grief at their website with materials specifically geared towards the roles and responsibilities of school professionals. You can use the videos and written materials on the Coalition’s website as your primary resource for learning more about providing support to grieving children.

The materials in this module are designed as a supplement to the broader information at the Coalition’s website.

They are not intended to be a stand-alone resource. They were developed collaboratively with the national non-profit organizations Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) and Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), along with representatives of the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA).

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students was convened by the New York Life Foundation, a pioneering advocate for the cause of childhood bereavement, and the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, which is led by pediatrician and childhood bereavement expert David J. Schonfeld, M.D. The Coalition has worked with Scholastic Inc., a long-standing supporter of teachers and kids, to create grievingstudents.org, a groundbreaking, practitioner-oriented website designed to provide educators with the information, insights, and practical advice they need to better understand and meet the needs of the millions of grieving kids in America's classrooms.

Camp Erin: The Moyer Foundation's Camp Erin is the largest national bereavement program for youth grieving the death of a significant person in their lives. Along with our partners, we are honored and proud to welcome military children and families to the 48 Camp Erin locations around the United States and Canada. Find the Camp Erin in your area on our [Camp Erin Page](#).

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