



---

## *Children's Grief Awareness Month and Philadelphia's Latino Community*

Authors:

Teresa Méndez-Quigley, MSW, Associate Director at Uplift Center for Grieving Children.

Adriana Rivera, MSL, Director of Operations at Uplift Center for Grieving Children.

*November 17, 2022*

November is National Children's Grief Awareness month. According to the Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model by Judi's House/JAG Institute, one in fourteen children in the metropolitan Philadelphia area would experience the death of a parent or a sibling by age 18. In the city of Philadelphia, that number was one in eleven. The model did not account for other deaths, such as a grandparent that might have been the most constant presence in that child's life, or the coach or teacher who encouraged children to do their best. That estimation model was completed in 2018, before Covid and before the escalating numbers of deaths due to guns and overdoses in the city.

Many children in the Latino community are struggling with grief and loss due to a death. Some children have witnessed or learned of harm in their communities, as happened earlier this year with the school shootings in Uvalde, Texas. Philadelphia is not without its own staggering statistics of gun violence where children live, walk to school and play in parks.

Adults can contribute to building community care where children are protected, nourished, and supported. Adults living and working in the Latino community - school staff, community professionals, church leaders, neighbors and caregivers - are part of that community care by being a presence in children's lives.

There are ways to be a resource for grieving children by referring them to counseling or connecting them with grief support. While grief is normal and natural after a death of someone close to us, children grieve differently than adults. They need the support of caring and consistent adults to deal with their feelings in healthy ways, and to know that they are not alone.

Grieving children and teens may lose some developmental milestone gains, not be able to pay attention, have sleeping difficulties, may be irritable or want to be alone. Oftentimes, people who are grieving simply need someone who will listen. Children and teens want to know that they matter to adults and that their feelings are normal.

In 1995, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children recognized a need for our community to receive grief services acknowledging and supporting children, and their loved ones, after a death. Uplift Center for Grieving Children (formerly Center for Grieving Children) began as a program of St. Christopher's and in 1999 became a separate nonprofit organization.

Uplift provides free grief support groups in Spanish to children and their caregivers on Thursday evenings for one hour via Zoom. The groups are run by bilingual/bicultural Masters-level clinicians who can provide guidance on parenting grieving children. Uplift also offers free grief groups in the evenings for children in grades K to 12th and their caregivers via Zoom and in-person at our offices in East Falls. Youth are also able to access grief groups at partnering schools during the day which are arranged by school staff.

Uplift offers the Philly HopeLine, a warmline where youth or caregivers can receive free emotional support, referrals to services, or sign up for grief support groups. This helpline operates Mondays through Thursdays 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Fridays, 1 to 4 p.m. We have Spanish-speaking clinicians on Mondays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and on Friday 1 to 4 p.m. and we use a translation service for over 100 languages. Families or referral sources can call the Philly HopeLine at 1-833-PHL-HOPE or 1-833-745-4673. All Uplift services are available to all without regard to immigration status.

As we embark on a season of holidays, let's all commit to helping grieving children whose ideas of festive celebrations may be sullied by the loss of someone they knew. By showing care to these children, we are building a stronger, more vibrant community where Latino children can thrive. Together we can deal, and we can heal.

###

Uplift Center for Grieving Children is a Philadelphia nonprofit organization that offers peer support groups for children and teens in grades K-12th who have experienced the death of someone significant in their lives. Specialty services for Spanish-speaking and LGBTQIA+ children, teens, and caregivers are facilitated by clinicians from their communities. Annually, Uplift directly supports more than 2,500 children in Philadelphia, and supports over 1,000 caregivers, community members, and professionals in how to best support the needs of grieving children. Learn more by visiting [www.upliftphilly.org](http://www.upliftphilly.org).