

When Students Are Dying

Providing Support in Educational Environments

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What do you do when....

- Student's family member dies?
- Your student with multiple disabilities dies and classmates asking questions?
- Student has a terminal illness?
- You are grieving?

Experiencing a Death

THE BASICS

- American death-denying society
- Affects child, family, teacher
- Grief is an individual process
- Need understand your own personal feelings about death before you can help others.

Children Grieve Too!

Unique Considerations with Children

- Concept of death is based on **developmental age**

Child may not see death as:

- Final
- Irreversible
- Person non functioning
- Inevitable
- Universal
- Causality

Children Grieve Too!

Unique Considerations with Children

- Grief Symptoms in Children
 - Physical (stomach ache)
 - Regression
 - Behavioral signs
 - No reaction to intense grief
 - Grief over pet, not person
 - Variable, remember developmental level

Supporting a Child Whose Family Member Died

- 1. Make yourself available to the student
 - Validate feelings, address fears
- 2. Teachers' emphasis should be on listening & observing student over time.
- 3. Answer student's questions truthfully at their own level- mostly reflective listening
 - Use terms died, dead, and death
 - Do not impose your own feelings, beliefs, or timetable.

Supporting a Child Whose Family Member Died

- 4. Help child find “safe place” in school where can retreat if difficult time.
 - Permission to cry or show sadness
- 5. Provide support, allow student:
 - Tell their story over and over
 - Access to tools to draw, write to express grief
 - Access to create physical ways share memories (memory books)

Supporting a Child Whose Family Member Died

- 6. Maintain structure & routine
- 7. Individualize certain lesson plans, give extra time
- 8. Let child call family when needed
- 9. Provide positive reinforcement for large and small accomplishments.

Death & Grief and Students with Disabilities

- Needs have often been ignored regarding grieving process
- Remember developmental level
- Students with severe disabilities may show they are experiencing the loss through actions

Death & Grief and Students with Disabilities

- Repeated concrete explanations and supported involvement in important events
- Some same strategies
- Remembrance- Memory box

Supporting Students When a Classmate Dies

- Preparing Classmates
 - Developmental age of classmates
 - Current understanding at this time
 - All children will be affected (regardless if close friends or acquaintances)
 - Different reactions to news
 - Children questions
 - Support systems available (crisis team)
 - Special needs of siblings of child

Supporting Students When a Classmate Dies

- 1. Facts surrounding death should be conveyed in open & honest manner, with permission of what to convey from family members. (Students family should be notified of student death)
- 2. Share your reactions with class.
- 3. Do not force a regular day

Supporting Students When a Classmate Dies

- 4. Allow students to talk, write, or draw about their feelings can be helpful. (Make cards for the family...)
 - Cards to family
 - Funeral or memorial service
 - Art projects
 - Bibliotherapy
 - Creative writing
 - Journals
 - Memorial (memory box...)

Helping a Student with Terminal Illness

Perception of Terminal Illness

Stage 1: I am ill

- See self as sick child

Stage 2: I have an illness that can kill people

- Learns about meds and recovery

Stage 3: I have an illness that can kill children

- Sense of well being begins fade

Stage 4: I am never going to get better

- Realizes permanent condition

Stage 5: I am going to die

Helping a Student with Terminal Illness

- Reactions to Dying

- Vary greatly
- Kubler-Ross (stages- any order, can repeat, different family members at different stages)
 - Denial
 - Anger
 - Bargaining
 - Depression
 - Acceptance

Helping a Student with Terminal Illness

- 1. Student should be told by parents that s/he has terminal illness & what it means.
- 2. Teacher should encourage meaningful communication regarding student's concerns.
 - Be available
 - Talk with student
 - Be an active listener

Helping a Student with Terminal Illness

- 3. Student needs to know s/he is valued
 - Wishes and desires shouldn't be ignored
 - Expectations should be there
- 4. Students needs to maintain self-esteem
- 5. Important person is not forgotten (try avoid acting on anticipatory grief).

Helping Teachers

Support for Teachers

- **189 teachers asked about terminal illness**
 - 115 experience 1-3 students w/terminal illness
 - 22 teachers >12 students with terminal illness
 - 44% teachers no source for questions/support
- **189 teacher asked about student death**
 - 133 out of 189 experience death of student
 - 83% no source for support

Grief Interventions to Support Teachers/Adults

- Provide presence
- Active listening, silence, reassurance
- Identify support systems
- Cultural practices
- Attend funeral/ send cards/ be available
- Support of grieving as normal
- Grief work is never completely finished
- What to say

What **NOT** to Say

- “I know how you feel.”
- “God needed [your loved one] in heaven.”
- “This was God’s plan.”
- “You shouldn’t feel that way.”
- “You’ll get over it.” “It’s been months, aren’t you over it?”
- Don’t avoid them because you don’t know what to say.

Possible Things TO Say

- "I'm so sorry."
- "What is this like for you?"
- "Tell me about [your loved one]."
- "What I remember most (or appreciated most) about [your loved one] is..."
- Be available to listen (now and in future)

Supporting Yourself

- Seek and accept support
 - Support in school system
 - Support outside school system
 - Support group
 - Religious/spiritual support
 - Friends/family

Supporting Yourself

- Allow for Grief Work
 - Lean into your grief- acknowledge normal to grieve, express your feelings
 - Read articles on grief
 - Keep a journal
 - Holidays, anniversaries need special planning

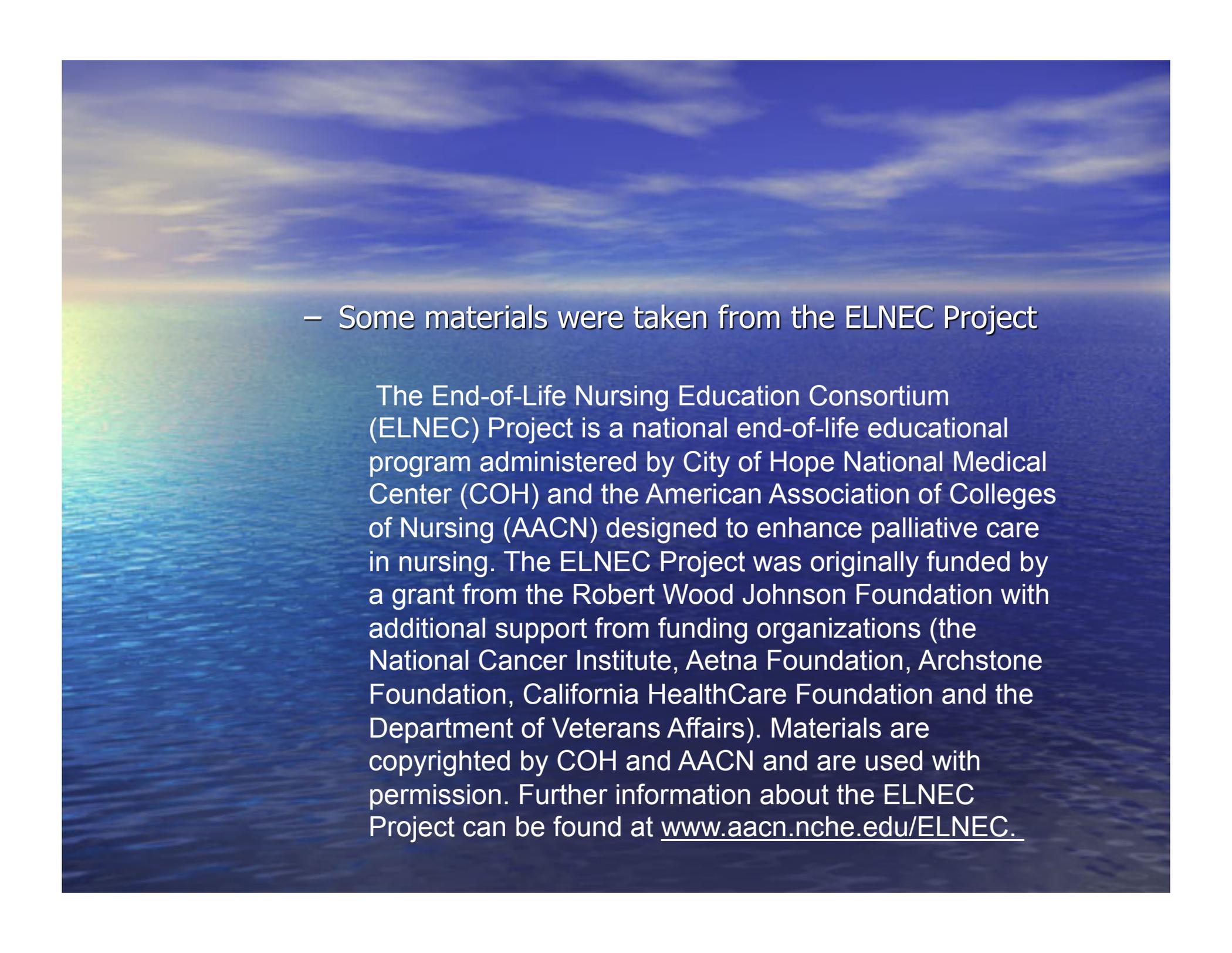
Supporting Yourself

- Be Kind to Yourself

- If need time alone, take it
- Look small ways to paper yourself
- Give yourself rewards along the way to look forward to
- Look new interest, old interest
- Carry special letter, poem, quote when it gets tough
- Be patient with yourself

Supporting Yourself

- Encourage self-care
 - Eat regular, nourishing meals,
 - Rest,
 - Exercise,
 - Meditation
 - Others
- Check your self-care

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- Some materials were taken from the ELNEC Project

The End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC) Project is a national end-of-life educational program administered by City of Hope National Medical Center (COH) and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) designed to enhance palliative care in nursing. The ELNEC Project was originally funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation with additional support from funding organizations (the National Cancer Institute, Aetna Foundation, Archstone Foundation, California HealthCare Foundation and the Department of Veterans Affairs). Materials are copyrighted by COH and AACN and are used with permission. Further information about the ELNEC Project can be found at www.aacn.nche.edu/ELNEC.