



## Working with Public Officials

Obtaining an official Resolution, Citation or Proclamation from a government body or official can bring a good bit of recognition to the work you're doing for Children's Grief Awareness Day, and to other work you do on behalf of grieving children and families at any time of year.

If you gain this type of support, make the most of it by inviting your partners and the community at large to attend the presentation of the document from the official who has granted it (or one of his or her staff members). Invite local media as well and have the official presentation become a press conference.

Either way, invite a family member to speak in addition to the government official. Hearing from someone who has been helped by a local program—especially a child or teen, if they are able—can reach the hearts of the audience like nothing else can.

### ***“Resolutions”—“Citations”—“Proclamations”***

**Resolutions** and **citations** are used by legislative bodies to express their official positions.

**Proclamations** are provided by government executives (and sometimes by legislative bodies) for ceremonial purposes.

Any one of these three official expressions of support can come from different officials. In order to show their support for grieving children and/or for Children's Grief Awareness Day, it doesn't matter which option they end up using. They all show the official's support just as well as any of the others.

### **Contents**

Learn about these topics on the following pages:

Who Will You Contact?

Building a Relationship

Asking for Recognition

Information Regarding Children's Grief Awareness Day and the needs of grieving children

# Who Will You Contact?

**Decide which officials to approach.** Before you can do anything else, you have to know who you will be working with. Elected officials are busy people with a lot of requests from constituents. Thankfully, most have talented staff members who do much of the work around constituent requests. At the same time, it is important to identify the official(s) most likely to support your cause. In thinking through who to ask, it may be helpful to ask these questions:

- Does anybody at our organization (staff, volunteer or board member) have a connection to an elected official?
- Is there an elected official with a history of supporting causes like ours?
- Who is the local official serving the area in which the program resides?
- Who is most likely to be sympathetic to our cause?

**What if you don't know who the local representatives are?** To learn who your elected officials are at the state, county and local levels, you can gather quite a bit online. Use search terms (with your zip code or geographic name filling in the blanks) such as “state legislator \_\_\_\_\_”, or “city council \_\_\_\_\_”, etc.

You can also connect with the leadership of the various bodies you want to work with, including the president of the state senate, the speaker of the house, or the head of city council. You can also reach out to executives (mayors, governors or county executives).

**Make contact with office staff.** Once you have identified the elected official you'd like to approach, find his/her office contact information and contact the official's office staff.

- When you call, briefly explain why you are calling and ask for advice on how to work with the official to get a local proclamation. (If somebody from your organization has a pre-existing contact with the official or his/her staff, it may be beneficial to ask for an introduction to be made on your behalf, or to have that person on the call with you for introductions.)
- Be prepared to make a case for the need for support for grieving children because some people are unaware of the need for such efforts.
- If the response is positive (or neutral) follow up with a thank you email and some information supporting your cause.
- Also be prepared that although not common, you may not get a supportive response. Remember that these are busy officials with many different requests and philosophies. Don't get discouraged. Try another official. In general, public officials tend to be supportive of the efforts of their constituents.
- Most officials who agree to write an official statement of support will need further information. Since they're not experts in this area, they'll need information about Children's Grief Awareness Day, about your program, and about the needs of grieving children. See the “*Information Regarding Children's Grief Awareness Day and the needs of grieving children*” section of this document for more specifics; also see the sample Resolutions, Citations and Proclamations included at the end.

# Building a Relationship

- **Relationships.** There is a much greater probability of gaining an official expression of support regarding Children's Grief Awareness Day from any level of government if you have some kind of relationship with the government official.
- **Learning about grieving children.** Through this ongoing relationship, the official (and their staff) can get to know you better, and they will also be afforded the opportunity to understand the issue of grieving children in a much deeper way—something that can help in many other ways throughout the year.
- **Initial meeting.** Reach out and ask for an initial meeting with the person you want to build a relationship with in order to explain your program and how it benefits the community. Use the opportunity to bring up the idea of supporting your efforts on Children's Grief Awareness Day.
- **Events.** Keep in touch by inviting him or her to any events you are holding, at any time throughout the year. Invite them to participate (rather than simply attending). Even if they themselves can't make it, they may wish to send a representative, who would also be a good person to get to know.
- **Advance notice.** Give as much advance notice as possible for any meeting or event—schedules get booked quickly, and various bodies are not always in session.
- **Continue the relationship.** These relationships should be cultivated over years, although there's no problem if Children's Grief Awareness Day is used as the occasion to initiate contact. The important thing is to keep the relationship going.

# Asking for Recognition

Ask for a Proclamation, Citation or Resolution from your local or state officials recognizing the importance of and need for the day of recognition:

- **Your program.** Explain your own program, and how it impacts your (and their) local or regional community.
- **Awareness Day.** Explain Children's Grief Awareness Day, the fact that it is a nationwide initiative, and the number of other states or localities where the Day has been officially recognized.
- **Your community.** Put a local spin on Children's Grief Awareness Day by tying it back in to your program and to the elected official's constituency, using statistics about the need in your community.
- **Stay in contact with the individuals moving the proclamation forward.** These are busy offices and it is possible for something to be put on the back burner if larger, more pressing issues must be dealt with. Keep building the relationship with the official's staff; they may be able to support you beyond this one request. If things fail to move forward, find the balance of gentle reminders without becoming too intrusive to keep the document from falling between the cracks.
- **Thank all who helped, no matter the outcome.** After the document is delivered; remember to thank all who took part in getting it passed. This is an excellent opportunity to create a sustained relationship with your local officials. And if it didn't work this time around, thank everyone you worked with for their time and effort, and keep the communication open for next time.

**Planning an Event.** Plan a local event marking Children’s Grief Awareness Day and invite your local government officials to attend. Some examples of the type of activities that can build awareness about the needs of grieving children can be found in the Children’s Grief Awareness Day website.

- **Contact local media.** You may get interest from your local media about the event you’re holding, especially if an elected official will be in attendance. Media coverage is a win/win situation—
  - **Elected official.** It’s good for the official to be seen doing something supportive of the local community and of children in need. They deserve the credit, and beyond that, it never hurts to get good publicity; they may also become examples to other officials in other areas.
  - **Your program.** It’s good for your program to gather more attention, and it’s good for awareness to be raised on behalf of grieving children, in your neighborhood and across the nation.
- **Let us know.** If you do have a local event or get local official support, please let us know so that we can include your efforts in our communications and give credit to your organization, to the community, and to the elected official.

## **INFORMATION REGARDING CHILDREN’S GRIEF AWARENESS DAY AND THE NEEDS OF GRIEVING CHILDREN**

You may be asked by the elected official you’re working with for information which they will need in order to base their Resolution/Citation/Proclamation on. Or you might ask them yourself if they would like this information, once they’ve made it clear that they intend to go forward with the process.

They generally appreciate getting something like this, as they’re not experts in the subject they wish to support. Obviously, though, what you provide to the elected official are only suggestions. The finished product is theirs to write. In general, they would need some background information on:

- The needs of grieving children
- How your organization helps to meet these needs
- What Children’s Grief Awareness Day is

The following bullet points touch on the first and third of these areas; you should add further points to specify how you are involved in the issue in your community or region. Choose the ones that seem most applicable to your (and your official’s) situation, or perhaps allow them to choose what they want to from among the bullet points.

### **The Needs of Grieving Children**

- One in five children in the United States will experience the death of someone close to them by age 18.
- One in 20 children in the United States will experience the death of a parent by age 18.
- 1.9 million youngsters under age 18 have lost one or both parents.
- Approximately 73,000 children die every year in the US; 83 percent of those have surviving siblings.

- 7 in 10 teachers currently have at least one student in their class or classes who has lost a parent, guardian, sibling or close friend in the last year.
- The majority of classroom teachers report that they “always” or “usually” witness a negative impact on academic performance when a student loses a parent or guardian.
- The great majority of grieving children feel alone, not understood, and fearful, on top of their feelings of grief, leading in many cases to an inability to manage or even face their grief.
- Many adults and other children erroneously believe that grieving children are resilient enough that they “just get over” their grief, so much so that children have often been called “forgotten mourners.”
- Many don’t realize that it takes most children much longer to deal with their grief than is commonly expected, and that the amount of inner turmoil, invisible to most, is much more intense than we have any idea of.

### **Supporting Grieving Children**

- For many grieving children the most helpful reaction they can receive is an acknowledgement of their feelings, a listening ear, and the support of caring individuals, like family, friends or others also grieving a loss.
- Many trained professionals working at dedicated children's grief centers throughout *[your state, county, or community]* offer bereavement support to children and their families.
- Such support services provide emotional support for children struggling with grief, allowing them to find guidance and understanding during an extremely difficult time.

### **Children’s Grief Awareness Day**

- Children’s Grief Awareness Day was begun in 2008 in order to help others understand the impact of death on children and their need for support, and to provide ways for caring adults and young people to show their support and solidarity for grieving children.
- Children’s Grief Awareness Day is observed every year on the Thursday before Thanksgiving, immediately preceding the winter holidays which can be a particularly difficult time for grieving children.
- Children’s Grief Awareness Day is a day focused on bringing to mind the children all around us who have experienced the death of a loved one—children who typically feel very alone in the journey of grief they travel.
- Children’s Grief Awareness Day is an opportunity to let grieving children know that they’re not forgotten in the midst of their grief.
- Simple ways to participate are to engage in activities that raise the awareness of the needs of grieving children and to encourage as many people as possible to wear blue on that day as a symbol of support for these children.
- This year, on *[date]*, children and adults from all walks of life from across *[your state]* will join together with thousands of others nationally and internationally to show their support for grieving children by participating in Children’s Grief Awareness Day.
- The efforts of many thousands of people raise awareness and educate others about children and their grieving process, contributing to improving the quality of life for our youth, our most precious resource.