

LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH

National 2022



Childhood bereavement is a critical issue and an increasingly important national priority. The death of a parent, sibling, or other important person in a child's life is one of the most frequently reported disruptive childhood experiences.^{1,2} Understanding the number of children impacted by death is essential to help every bereaved child find hope and healing.

Why is Cause of Death Important?

This report highlights the common causes of death that precipitate grief in childhood to inform best practices and approaches to care. Cause of death is important to examine for the following reasons:

- Children grieving a traumatic or stigmatized death, such as suicide, homicide, or drug overdose, may have more complex reactions.³
- Children grieving a death due to a less common cause, such as blood cancers or Parkinson's disease, may feel more isolated and misunderstood.⁴
- Cause of death varies significantly by age of the deceased. For example, deaths in infancy account for a large portion of sibling bereavement while medical crises and chronic illnesses are less common.
- Childhood bereavement is best understood when contextualized within systems of care that impact the lives of children, families, and communities. [Examining leading causes of death can identify opportunities for collaboration and advocacy.](#)

CBEM

The Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM)⁵ approximates rates of U.S. children and youth who will experience the death of a parent or sibling by the time they reach adulthood. The 2022 CBEM Key Topic Report explores the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) WONDER data for leading causes of death from 2016 to 2020.⁶ The respective leading causes for parent and sibling deaths account for 70% of deaths from all causes when considering children up to age 18.

NEW INDICATOR

Percentage of bereaved children

Number of children who will be bereaved due to a specific cause

Total number of children who will be bereaved



Annual CBEM reports include the percentage of ALL children in the U.S. who will experience the death of a parent or sibling by age 18 and by age 25. This report uses a different indicator: the percentage of bereaved children. In contrast to exploring a proportion of ALL children in the U.S., this indicator considers a proportion of all BEREAVED children in the U.S. and displays the percentage of bereaved children who will experience bereavement due to specific death causes.

U.S. Childhood Bereavement by Cause of Death of a Parent by Age 18

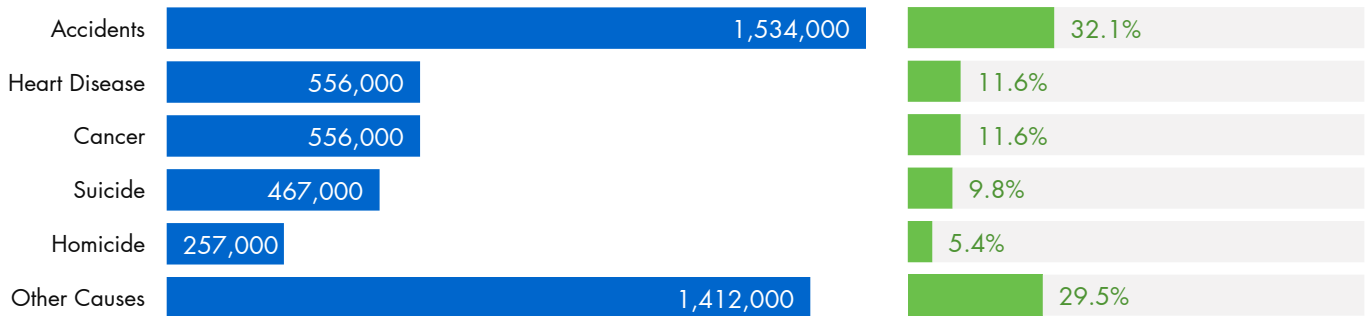
CBEM analyses demonstrate the **number** and **percentage** of children under 18 who will be bereaved due to the death of a parent by different causes of death. Results are displayed for the top five leading causes of death and all other causes combined for adults aged 27-46*. **In total 4,782,000 children in the U.S. will be bereaved due to the death of a parent before 18 years of age.**



Number of bereaved children



Percentage of all bereaved children



New Indicator

Number of children who will be bereaved due to a specific cause

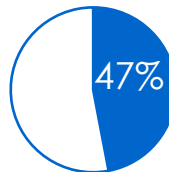
Total number of children who will be bereaved from all causes

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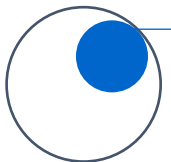
Percentage of all bereaved children

3^x

Grief following an accident is roughly three times more common than any other cause. The significance of accidental overdose deaths among parents is explored in detail in the [CBEM Pandemic Impact Report](#).



Nearly half will grieve a non-illness related death loss (e.g., accidents, homicide, suicide).



All causes of

The 100+ death causes that fall outside the top five noted above account for more than a quarter of bereavement. This includes deaths due to COVID-19. The significance of COVID-19 deaths is explored in detail in the [CBEM Pandemic Impact Report](#).

2^x

Grieving a death by suicide is roughly two times more common than homicide. Homicides by gunshot among parents are explored in detail in the [CBEM Pandemic Impact Report](#).

*Adults most likely to have children 0-18 years old.

U.S. Childhood Bereavement by Cause of Death of a Sibling by Age 18

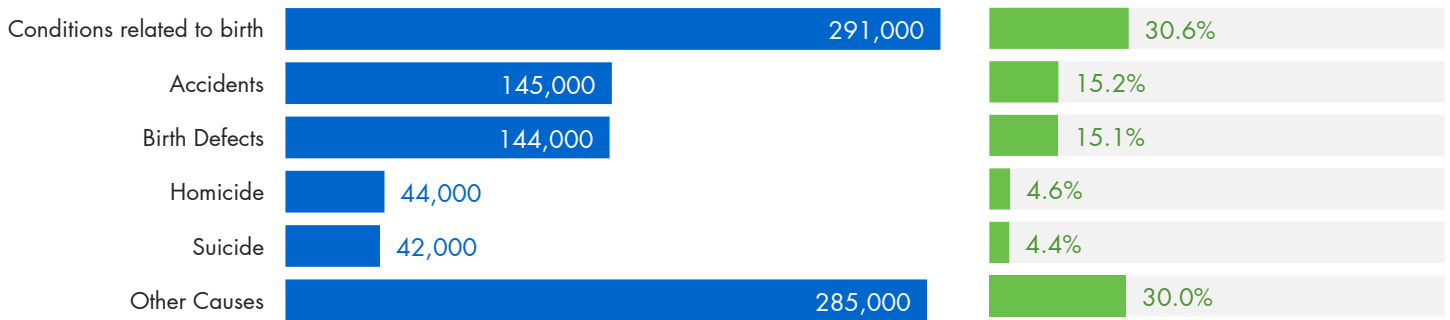
CBEM analyses demonstrate the **number** and **percentage** of children under 18 who will be bereaved due to the death of a sibling by different causes of death. Results are displayed for the top five leading causes of death and all other causes combined for youth aged 0-17. **In total, 951,000 children will be bereaved due to the death of a sibling before 18 years of age.**



Number of bereaved children



Percentage of all bereaved children

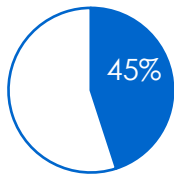


New Indicator

Number of children who will be bereaved due to a specific cause

Total number of children who will be bereaved from all causes

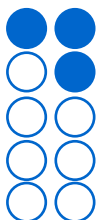
Percentage of all bereaved children



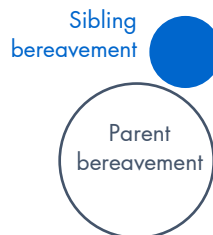
Nearly half will grieve a death related to birth defects, such as genetic conditions, or conditions related to birth, like preterm birth. In these situations, the deceased sibling is typically under two years of age.

85k

More than 85,000 children will grieve a homicide or suicide death loss. Combined, these causes account for nearly 1 in 10 bereaved children.



About 3 in 10 bereaved children will grieve deaths by other causes – a category comprised of more than 100 causes of death.



Sibling bereavement before age 18 is much less prevalent than experiencing the death of a parent – about one-fifth the size – leading to isolation and loneliness.



What Now?

Every grief experience is unique.

Ask and listen to families' stories to help connect them to the most appropriate grief resources. The type of service and level of care required may vary even when children's experiences look similar.

Partnership leads to progress.

We can be champions for the bereaved populations represented in the mission of organizations fighting to prevent mortality from these leading causes. By aligning with like-minded organizations, our voices are strengthened. Share this report with local chapters of national organizations focused on related issues such as:

- [American Cancer Society](#)
- [American Heart Association](#)
- [National Council for Suicide Prevention](#)
- [March of Dimes](#)
- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

Learn more at judishouse.org/CBEM

Sources

¹ Nickerson et al. (2013). Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 5(2), 119-127.

² Pynoos et al. (2014). Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 6(Suppl 1), S9-S17.

³ Keyes et al. (2014). American Journal of Psychiatry, 171, 864-871.

⁴ Gerhardt et al. (2012). Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 37(2), 209-219.

⁵ Burns et al. (2020). American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 90(4), 391-405.

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, CDC WONDER