

Supporting Grieving Children During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Dealing with grief and loss during this time of pandemic and social distancing is difficult for everyone. For children, it can be especially confusing. Here are some ways to help children deal with grief during this time.

Be honest. Provide accurate and honest information to children about the person who is ill or dying. If they are not informed by a trusted source, children may use their imagination to fill in information they lack.

Explain the death using simple concrete terms. Whether this loss is due to Covid-19 or other circumstances, it is important that children get accurate information as to what happened. You can say “Grandpa had the coronavirus, which made his lungs very sick. The doctors tried to help him, but his body became too sick and stopped working. Grandpa died, which means we won’t get to see him or talk to him again.”

Reassure the children. Many children may think they did something that caused the death or worry that others in their family may get sick and die, too. Validate children’s concerns and make sure they understand the death was no one’s fault and share with them what you are doing to keep others safe and healthy.

Give children the opportunity to say goodbye. If visitation is restricted due to the pandemic, saying goodbye in person may not be possible. Video chat, phone calls, and writing letters or cards can be ways to allow children to say goodbye in this time.

- **Funerals** are important events for some families that can help those that are grieving begin to process the death. Even though funeral services may be delayed, you can still hold a small service within your house. You can read a poem, sing a song, and talk about the person who died. Ask children if they would like to participate and allow for their input. You can invite extended family members or friends to join by video chat. Other ideas include lighting a candle at a certain time or eating your loved one’s favorite meal to remember them.

Expect many different emotions over time. Children’s grief rarely looks like adult grief. Children may show sadness one minute and indifference the next. Children may grieve in small bursts or may not appear to be grieving at all. Some common reactions for grieving children include; feeling “numb”, loneliness, anger, sadness, embarrassment. Children may also have a difficult time remembering things and experience changes in sleep patterns. Physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomachaches, can also be common with grief.

Help identify feelings. Children may not always be able to name what they are feeling. You can help by saying “it sounds like you may be feeling angry right now” and offer a suggestion to help, such as taking deep breaths, listening to music, or offering a hug.

Provide opportunities for play and normalcy. Children learn, grow, grieve, and heal through play. Creative and physical play can be especially helpful in allowing children of all ages to express emotions in appropriate ways. Remember, it is normal and healthy to take breaks from grief. Let children know it’s ok to laugh, play, and be happy, even in times of grief.