

Supporting Grieving Children During a Global Pandemic

It is normal for adults to feel overwhelmed, nervous, or worried when they have to share news of a death with a child. These feelings may be heightened during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Even though these are extraordinary times, adults can still provide what children need in order to cope.

If you are having a difficult conversation with your child, remember these tips.

Check in with your feelings

- It is important to first acknowledge your own thoughts and feelings related to this loss.
- Take time to refuel. That may mean having a healthy meal, taking a walk, or talking with a friend.

Use simple, honest language

- Use concrete words: "Your Uncle died at the hospital. He died because he could no longer breathe, and his body stopped working."
- Avoid vague terms like "passed on" or "went to a better place." These can be difficult for children to understand.

Listen

- Although we often want to fix the pain of a child, with these difficult conversations it is most important to listen.
- Allow children to ask questions. This tells you what is on their minds and what they are concerned about.

Maintain connections

- Grief is isolating. So is social distancing. It is important for children to find ways to connect. This could be calling, messaging, or videochatting with friends, family, teacher, or other supports.
- Children may also like to write letters or draw pictures for the deceased.

Support feelings

- Grief is a mixture of many emotions like sadness, anger, relief, anxiety, and abandonment. Children need to hear from adults that their feelings are okay.
- The COVID-19 pandemic may heighten a child's fears, worries, or other feelings related to their loss. Help them voice those feelings.

Provide realistic reassurances

- Avoid making false promises to children, especially in these uncertain times. Children need realistic support to address their worries for themselves and others.
- Remember these points:
 - *Focus on safety*, including all of the measures your family is taking to keep yourselves safe.
 - *Be realistic*: "No one else in our family is sick right now. We work hard to stay healthy. If anyone gets sick, we will talk with you about it and make sure you are taken care of."
 - *Remind children of what they can do*: "By washing your hands often and wearing your mask when we go in public, you are helping to make sure our family and others don't get sick."

Provide realistic reassurances

- If you notice that your child is having difficulty sleeping, eating, or engaging in activities like they used to, they may need additional support. Reach out to their pediatrician, a mental health counselor, or our program for more support.

