

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 more intense during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Even though these are extraordinary times, adults can still give children what they need 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 recognize and accept 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 hard for children to understand.

LISTEN

- Although we often want to *fix* the pain of a child, it is most important to *listen* in these situations.
- Let children ask questions. This tells you what is on their minds and what they are worried about.

MAINTAIN CONNECTIONS

- Grief can make you feel alone. So can social distancing. It is important for children to find ways to connect. This could be calling, messaging, or video chatting with friends, family, teachers, or other supports.
- Children may also like to write letters or draw pictures for the person who has died.

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 these feelings.

PROVIDE REALISTIC REASSURANCES

- Avoid making false promises to children, especially in these uncertain times. Children need realistic support to address their worries.
- Remember these points:
 - **Focus on safety**, including all of the steps 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 need to go in public, you are helping to make sure our family and others don't get sick."

GET SUPPORT

- If you notice that your child is having problems sleeping, eating, or taking part in activities like they used to, they may need extra support. Reach out to their pediatrician, a mental health counselor, or our program from more support.

Remember: We are here to help. Contact the Good Grief Program if you need support or guidance on how to have these conversations with a child. Reach out by calling **617.414.4005**.