

“In This Together”

Helping Children Deal With Loss During The Pandemic

That Funny Feeling

You know that empty feeling you have nowadays? It’s as if you’re missing a part of your life. Even if you’re not sick, and you have not lost anyone, you may still feel like you have lost something, or someone. That feeling is grief.

If you feel it, you can be sure your children feel it too. Think about it for a minute:

- They have lost their normal way of living: They can’t go to school or church and see and play with their friends. They can’t go to the store or the restaurant with the family, like they used to.
- They have lost their feeling of safety. They hear of people sick and dying, and it makes them scared for their own lives, but also for yours as their parents.
- They may feel something called, “Anticipatory Grief.” It’s the feelings of uncertainty for the future.
- They may feel, as you do, that the world will never be the same.



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How Children Grieve

Children grieve the current loss due to the pandemic in much the same way they grieve the death of a pet, or a loved one. Although grief is different for each child, several factors can affect the grief process of a child:

- The child's age and stage of development.
- The child's personality.
- The child's previous experiences with loss, such as death.
- The way the child acts and communicates within the family.
- How stable the family life is after the loss.
- Whether the child is given the chance to share and express feelings.
- How the parents cope with stress.
- Whether the child has ongoing relationships with other adults.

Since the grief children experience is similar to that when they have lost a pet, or a loved one, we will give you some ideas that can apply to one or both of those losses.

Helping a Grieving Child - DON'T

- Force a child to publicly mourn if they don't want to.
- Tell a child to stop crying because others might get upset.
- Try to shield a child from the loss. Children pick up on much more than adults realize. Including them in the grieving process will help them adapt and heal.
- Stifle your tears. By crying in front of your child, you send the message that it's okay for them to express feelings too.
- Turn your child into your personal confidante.



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Helping Children Grieve

Helping a Grieving Child - DO

- Meet regularly as a family to find out how everyone is coping.
- Help your child find ways to symbolize and memorialize the loss.
- Keep your child's daily routine as normal as possible.
- Pay attention to the way your child plays; this can be how they communicate grief.
- Encourage your child to ask questions, and try to answer them honestly and directly. If you do not know the answer to a question, help find the answer.

Help Your Child Cope With Their Loss

- Make sure your child understands that he or she is not to blame.
- Provide lots of affection and reassure your child often that he or she will continue to be loved and cared for.
- Encourage your child to talk about his or her emotions. Suggest other ways to express feelings, such as writing in a journal or drawing a picture.
- Without overwhelming your child, share your grief with him or her. Expressing your emotions can encourage your son or daughter to share his or her own emotions.



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Help Your Child

- Help your child understand that normal grief involves a range of emotions, including anger, guilt, and frustration. Explain that his or her emotions and reactions may be very different from those of adults.
- Reassure your child that it is normal for the pain of grief to come and go over time. Explain that they cannot always predict when they will feel sad.
- If your child is older, encourage him or her to talk with an adult outside the family, such as a teacher or a pastor.
- Keep routines as consistent as possible, and continue setting limits on behavior. Care, consistency, and continuity help.

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Table Talkers: Happy Face Sad Face

Supplies Needed:

2 paper plates per person

Markers

Optional: Googly Eyes

Optional: Pom Poms

Optional: Yarn

Glue

Craft Stick or Straw

Draw a happy face on one paper plate and a sad face on the other paper plate. Another option is to draw a happy face on one side of the paper plate and a sad face on the other side of the paper plate.

Decorate with pom poms and yarn for hair and googly eyes for the eyes. Draw the smile or frown with a sharpie or marker. Another option is to keep it plain with just the face emotions.



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