

Supporting Children Who Have Experienced Bereavement

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1) The impact of the pandemic on children

- While infections are still present in the community, children are greatly restricted in their activities and suffer from the constant bombardment of information from the media and people around them.
- Many children are anxious and scared about the possibility of them or people close to them becoming infected by COVID-19. Especially for children living with family members who are elderly, are ill or have disabilities, or if they have experienced bereavement in the past this can easily heighten anxiety.

2) Support for children when someone close to them is hospitalized

- Ask children what they know about the new Coronavirus infection. Children may be getting wrong or distorted information from the media and from people around them. When delivering "correct" information to children, give them explanations appropriate to their age and do not place excessive burdens on them. If you don't know how to answer some of their questions, it is ok to simply tell them you don't know the answer.
- When the person's condition is uncertain, do not make firm statements like "He/she will definitely recover".
Rather, tell children they are supported and protected no matter what happens.
Set aside some times when all family members can relax together and also provide opportunities for children to do things by themselves.

- When death is near for a family member or a relative, keep communicating especially with children.

3) Support for children when their loved one has died

- It is important to tell children about the person's death in a truthful manner and at the earliest possible time using language appropriate to their age. At that time, give children the chance to ask questions. It may be difficult for them to understand about death after just one explanation. Make sure how they have understood what you've said. You may have to carefully repeat the explanation several times.
- When you talk about the death of a family member or relative, it is preferable to check with children how much they understand about the symptoms and the course of the illness, then develop the conversation from there.
- It is difficult for adults to see children agitated and grieving, but children can handle bereavement when trusted grown-ups tell them the truth rather than leave them without any explanation.
- During this difficult time following bereavement, children need a lot of love and need a feeling of security. It is important for children to know people care about them even when those people are very sad.
- Children of school age or older often blame themselves for the death of a loved one. Therefore, adults need to repeatedly tell children not to blame themselves.
- In ordinary times, when a child loses his/her family member or a relative, the rituals of the funeral wake and funeral ceremonies present a good opportunity to learn about commemorating the person with others and to understand the importance of offering sympathy to one another. Also, farewell ceremonies like these serve to reduce feelings of isolation. Additionally, connection with relatives of their own age is very beneficial to children.
- While infections are still present in the community, children don't have opportunities to experience the funeral wake and ceremonies. Their feelings of isolation and pain can be amplified by not being with people who share their grief and can offer mutual support. That is why it is important for family members to support children's thoughts.

- In times like these, family members need to find new ways to support one another. In achieving this, children may well be more creative and skillful and come up with better ideas than adults.

For example, small children can share memories with their brothers and sisters by drawing and creating handicrafts that relate to the deceased person, making a memory box to put memorable items in, putting photographs in a scrapbook, or sending pictures taken by smartphone to cousins and other relatives. It is very meaningful to share their handicrafts with others.

- There are things that children can do with adults. For example, writing a letter together to the deceased person, cooking dishes that the person liked, singing a song for the person, and possibly taking a walk to a place the person liked. These activities give children the chance to naturally express their feelings.
- To encourage these creative activities, tell children that they can talk about their feelings and help them actually do that. Emphasize to them that it's ok to cry when one is sad, that people support each other when they are lonely, that one does not always have to be confident, and that there are a lot of people who need them.

[Reference]

- Cruse Bereavement Care <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>
- Australian center for grief and bereavement
<https://www.grief.org.au/Default.aspx?hkey=e57b003b-1eac-495b-b267-74456fc2d08d>
- The Irish Hospice Foundation <https://hospicefoundation.ie/>
- LEEDS Bereavement Forum <http://lbforum.org.uk/>

[Note]

- The information we have provided here should serve merely as a guide. When offering actual support, please respect the situation at the time and thoughts and feelings of children well.

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