

COVID 19: Burials without funerals and grief without hugs: How the virus is changing how we say goodbye

Resources for Supporting Grief

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School Staff Supporting Students with Grief during COVID-19 Pandemic

If you're a school staff person, you will likely encounter a student who is living with the anxiety of a family member's life-limiting illness. You will have the opportunity to be a support person for your student, providing empathy as they face the serious illness, and perhaps death, of a family member.

- **1. LISTEN**

One of the most helpful and healing things to do for your student is to listen to their story without judging, interpreting, evaluating or offering advice. Listening, even briefly, to anything they're willing to share sends the message that you are a safe and supportive person.

- **2. ACKNOWLEDGE**

Say something to the student that acknowledges you know about their family member's illness. Be authentic. Although "I'm sorry" is a common response, children and teens tell us they don't like to hear "I'm sorry." Better to say "I'm thinking of you" or "You've been on my mind."

- **3. UNDERSTAND**

You can't take away the feelings of pain, fear, loneliness, or being different that students experience when a family member has been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Your role is not to get rid of the feelings, but to create a safe environment where they can be shared.

- **4. PROVIDE CONSISTENCY**

The structure, routine and consistency of the school environment can provide a child or teen dealing with a family member's illness with a sense of stability. At the same time, allow for some flexibility for students who may be having a bad day.

- **5. HELP**

Help the student make a plan for completing schoolwork. Stress and anxiety can manifest in students as well as difficulties with concentration, memory, low energy and fatigue. Communicate often with the child to discuss specific, flexible goals for schoolwork completion.

- **6. SAFETY**

Provide a safe place for students to go when feeling overwhelmed, stressed or anxious. Have the student designate a counselor, teacher or other support staff person who is willing to be available, to listen to and talk with the student.

- **7. PROVIDE RESOURCES**

Get the student help if needed. Most students have a mix of some easy days and other days that are challenging and difficult to get through. A child or teen who is profoundly affected may experience drastic changes which can include: prolonged depression or anxiety, risk-taking behaviors or suicidal thoughts. If you observe changes such as these, it is important to consult a qualified mental health professional for additional support.

****Extra Resource:** <https://grievingstudents.org/module-section/talking-with-children/>

Caregivers Supporting a Child with Grief during COVID-19 Pandemic

- **1.Listen to Your Child**

It is important for your child to have a safe space to talk and share their feelings. Act as a sounding board and validate your child's feelings. This can help them to create their unique story. This story can even be used as a way for your child to support a friend in the future.

- **2.Allow Emotional Expression**

Allow your child to have a safe space to express their emotions. Your child may experience a wide range of emotions: anger, sadness, pain, shame, guilt, or other powerful emotions. Often, children are not able to verbalize what they are feeling. Avoid minimizing these emotions, telling them how they should feel, or trying to put a positive spin on things.

- **3.Encourage Coping Skills**

You can support your child by helping them find healthy ways to cope with the overwhelming emotion. Try out different activities as a family: deep breathing, yoga, taking breaks, going for walks, gratitude jars, artistic expression, etc. Help your child identify the different activities that work well for them and develop a plan for when these feelings arise.

- **4.Practice Self-Care**

Just like the oxygen mask theory, you must take care of yourself first before you can support your child. Implement healthy coping skills, develop a self-care plan, surround yourself with a support system and express your emotions--this way you can serve as a role model for your child.

- **5.Understand Grief Comes in Waves**

Both you and your child will have easier and harder days, and it is important to give yourself and your child grace to grieve. Be open about it if you are having a difficult day and encourage them to do the same, as this can help prevent misunderstanding.

- **6.Establish/Maintain Routines**

Children need routine and normalcy to feel in control, supported and comforted. Keep limits consistent and clear to provide a safe and secure environment for everyone.

- **7.Ask for Help**

It can be difficult to ask for help. Stay connected with your support system and encourage your child to identify friends and adults that they can go to when they need support. Look for resources in your area that can help your child to build their social support with others who understand what they're going through.

Conversation About Death and Grief

Be sure young children (especially preschool-age children and those in early elementary grades) understand four major concepts:

1. Death is irreversible –

If children do not understand that death is permanent, they may not be able to start to grieve the loss. They may be angry that the person has chosen not to return.

2. All life functions end completely at the time of death –

Children who do not understand this concept may worry that someone who has died is cold, hungry or in pain.

3. Everything that is alive eventually dies –

If children do not understand this, they may wonder what they did, or what the person who died did, that caused this particular person to die. This leads to guilt and shame.

4. There are physical reasons that someone dies –

When children understand the true reasons for a death, they are less likely to make up explanations that cause them to feel guilty or ashamed.

****Attached to packet is an article of Addressing Grief****

Someone Died, COVID-19 and Social Distancing – Now What?

Written by, Corrie Sirota MSW, PSW.

So someone dies and most of us know what to do – whether it's a funeral, a memorial, a gathering of sorts, a cremation, a wake, a shiva or a celebration of life – we do something that honours the deceased. Not now. Due to the potential spread of the coronavirus – given the current directives around social distancing the community has no choice but to put an abrupt stop to these types of rituals – the *very rituals* that provide comfort and guidance when someone we love dies.

Grieving together has been an integral part of the grieving process regardless of race, religion or beliefs. It's what helps the mourners navigate through some of the toughest moments of the grief process. The very idea of social isolation during this period is completely contradictory to what is so valuable. Social connection is what drives people's ability to cope. COVID-19 has taken away that option...or has it? Perhaps we just need to get creative about how we grieve in a world of COVID-19. We need to look at *what we can do* rather than what has been taken away from us.

So Now What? Here are some basic suggestions that I hope will help you or someone who wants to support you in mourning the death of a loved one during social isolation:

Maintain Mourning Rituals: Even though they may not look the same as they normally would, however, reciting prayers on your own, lighting candles, and/or creating new rituals will help with acknowledging and processing the death of a loved one.

- Record the Service - Ask the funeral home to tape or record the service so that it may be shared digitally with those who cannot attend. In the day of technology many funeral homes already practice this – given our current circumstances, we need to request this now more than ever.
- Create and/or utilize 'On line Guestbooks' - This is an important tool that family members & friends far and wide can participate in as a way of sharing their thoughts and feelings.
- Connect via Social Media- you can send a voice message, Skype, or FaceTime with the bereaved – it's the next best (and safest way) to be present without putting anyone at risk.
- Delay the Memorial Service- While health laws in most areas prohibit delaying burials, families can plan a memorial at any time in the future.
- Make a donation to the deceased favorite charity – anyone can call and/or make a donation on line. This not only sends a message to the bereaved family that you are thinking of them, it also contributes to a worthy cause.

Remember social distancing doesn't mean social isolation. So while we need to maintain a safe physical distance, when a death occurs, we can still create ways to be together emotionally. After all, the best thing to hold onto in life (and death) is each other!

****Extra Resource: The New York Life Foundation**

<https://www.newyorklife.com/assets/docs/pdfs/claims/Bereavement-bklet-English.pdf>

Grief Responses of Students

<p>Everyone grieves differently so students' reactions to a death will be impacted by a variety of factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age and developmental level of the student • The relationship, if any, with the person who died • Previous experiences with death and other types of loss • Support systems available to them • Modeling of grief responses from those around them • The nature of the death: anticipated vs. expected, violent, sudden, long term illness 	<p>Physical Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stomachaches, headaches, heartaches • Frequent accidents or injuries • Increased requests to visit the nurse • Nightmares, dreams or sleep difficulties • Loss of appetite or increased eating • Low energy, weakness • Nausea, or upset stomach • Increased illnesses, low resistance to colds and flu
<p>Academic Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty focusing or concentrating • Declining grades/performance • Increased performance, high achievement, emphasis on perfection • Incomplete work, or poor quality of work • Increased absences or reluctance to go to school • Forgetfulness, memory loss • Language errors and word finding problems • Inattentiveness/Daydreaming • Difficulty watching movies or reading books related to death 	<p>Social Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from friends • Withdrawal from activities or sports • Increased importance/energy for friends, activities, sports • Changes in relationships with teachers and peers • Changes in family roles (e.g. taking on the role of a deceased parent) • Wanting to be physically close to safe adults
<p>Behavioral Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noisy outbursts, disruptive, high-energy behaviors • Trouble keeps hands/feet to self, frequent fighting • Unable/unwilling to follow directions • Increase in risk-taking or unsafe behaviors (unsafe high energy play, drug/alcohol use, stealing) • Isolation or withdrawal • Regressive behaviors (unable to perform task previously accomplished) • Increased need for attention • A need to checking in on surviving family and friends 	<p>Emotional Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insecurity, fear for safety of self and others, fear of separating • Concern about being treated differently from others • Increase in compassion, connection, and valuing relationships • Fear, guilt, anger, rage, regret, sadness, confusion, relief, happiness • "I don't care" attitude • Change in values, questioning what is important • Depression, hopelessness, intense sadness • Frequently tearful, irritable • Appears unaffected by the death • Preoccupation with death, wanting details

Bereavement Downloadable Books

Ready to Remember: Jeremy's Journey of Hope and Healing

http://nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/ctg_book_09_09_11a.pdf

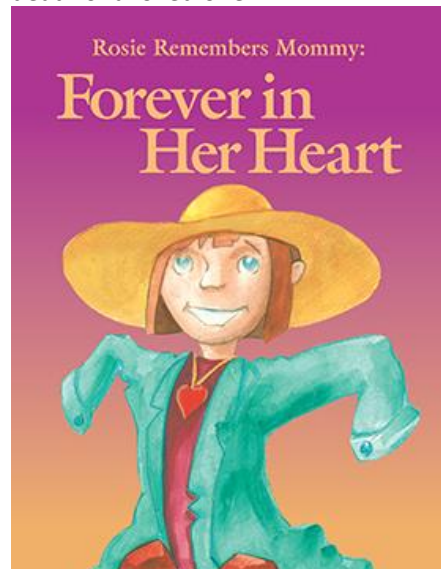
The story of a 10-year-old boy's experience following the tragic death of his father. Jeremy is having a traumatic reaction and struggling at school and at home. This children's book was developed for the school-age reader, with an additional caregiver guide. The illustrated book describes Jeremy's journey as he and his family get help and are able to enjoy happy memories together.



Rosie Remembers Mommy

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/ctg_Book_2015.pdf

Follows Rosie, a young girl who is struggling after the death of her mother, as she expresses wishes to see her mom, feels reluctant about school, finds no pleasure in activities she formerly found enjoyable, wonders whether she could somehow have caused her mother's death, and even refuses her favorite meal that Daddy has made. This children's book illustrates how a parent can provide solace and support to a child after the death of a loved one.



Additional Resources

PHONE:

- **Disaster Hotline:**
SAMHSA Disaster Distress Hotline – call 1-800-985-5900 or text TALKWITHUS to66746

WEBSITES:

- **Online grief group support:**
Website- <https://www.griefshare.org/groups/search>
- **Grief Support- Resources for Classroom Educators:**
Website- <https://grievingstudents.org/audiences/classroom-educators/>
- **Grief Support- Resources for Family and Community Members:**
Website- <https://grievingstudents.org/audiences/family-community-members/>

WEBSITES AND PDF ATTACHMENTS:

- **Funerals in time of pandemic:**
PDF attachment titled- Children Funerals and a Pandemic
Website- <https://good-grief.org/covid-19/>
- **When Your World is Already Upside Down: Supporting Grieving Children and Teens During the COVID-19 Global Health Crisis:**
PDF attachment titled- Grief During COVID-19)
Website- https://www.dougy.org/docs/Grief_during_COVID-19.pdf
- **My friend is grieving:**
PDF attachment titled- Your Friend is Grieving
Website- <https://www.tdcschooltoolkit.org/teens>

PDF ATTACHMENTS:

- **The Coalition to Support Grieving Students**
PDF attachment titled- Coalition to Support Grieving Children-All Modules
- **The Dougy Center, Grief Responses of Students**
PDF attachment titled- The Dougy Center, Grief Responses of Students
- **Supporting Your Students After the Death of a Family Member or Friend**
PDF attachment titled- Supporting Your Students
- **National Alliance for Grieving Children Activity booklet for Children and Teens**
PDF attachment titled- NAGC Activity Booklet Responding to Change and Loss

- **National Association for Psychologists (NASP) School Safety and Crisis Addressing Grief: Tips for Teachers and Administrators**

PDF attachment titled- Addressing grief tips for Teachers and Administrators Final

- **Sesame Street Resources:**

- Sesame Street- When Families Grieve (Grief Caring Cards- Appropriate for elementary aged-children)

PDF attachment titled- Grief Caring Cards

- Sesame Street- A Special Guide for Families and Caregivers

PDF attachment titled- Grief Caregiver Guide

- Sesame Street- When Families Grieve Journal

PDF attachment titled- Grief Feelings Journal

- Sesame Street- Grief Storybook

PDF attachment titled- Grief Storybook

- **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network- Helping Teens with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers**

PDF attachment titled- Helping Teens with Traumatic Grief Caregivers