



Coronavirus

Helping Children cope with grief

Everyone is talking about coronavirus and its impact. Adults are being encouraged to work from home, schools are closed, children's parties have been cancelled and people are unable to see friends and relatives at this time.

All children will have questions about the effects of the virus but for children who have had someone important die or have a member of their family who is ill, this anxiety is likely to be heightened.

After someone important dies, children will be very worried about the health of their surviving family. It is natural for a child whose parent has died, for example, to be worried that something bad will happen to the other parent.

Fears may include: someone else dying, someone becoming ill and unable to look after the child, the changes to normal living that would happen if someone else gets sick or dies.

Children with relatives who are already ill, for example, a grandparent with lung disease or a parent with cancer, will be particularly concerned that this virus may increase the risk to their relative.

Reassure your child

It is natural that children and young people who have experienced the death of someone important may worry that something will happen to someone else in their family.

Acknowledge their worries

Your child may understandably be concerned or worried by what they see, read or hear in the news and online regarding coronavirus, and this anxiety can be heightened for children and young people who have had someone important die.

It's good to talk to them honestly but calmly about what is happening, and to not ignore or shield them from what is going on in the world. Remember that you don't need to have all of the facts and answers. There are lots of resources out there for you to read together, and a gentle conversation can reassure your child that they can talk to you so they don't feel like they're on their own.

There may well be feelings of anger and guilt e.g. angry that their friend or relative did not receive the care they should have, angry with the government if they think there should have been more protection and stronger controls, or even angry with the person who died for not protecting themselves.

Children might blame themselves or others for infecting the person who died or for not being able to protect them. They may feel very guilty if they were not able to be with the person who dies or say goodbye to them. Worries, anger and guilt can be manifested physically, emotionally and in the child's behaviour.

Isolation can make it harder for bereaved families to process grief and to get practical or emotional support.

Typical reactions seen in children

These are some of the normal reactions you may see in children who suffer a loss;

Sleep difficulties or nightmares; Having flashbacks (regarding emergency services arriving); Becoming more clingy and worrying about being apart from parents and carers (particularly young children); Changes in appetite; Becoming more emotional; Loss of interest in normal activities; Difficulties concentrating; Physical symptoms such as tummy aches or headaches; Irritability; Decline in schoolwork; Irrational beliefs (such as believing they have somehow caused the death to happen); or re-enacting the event through play or thinking a lot about what happened.

Talk to children about coronavirus

Don't be afraid to have conversations with your child about coronavirus – not talking about something can sometimes make children worry more. Other children will be talking about it at school and they may have heard it on the news or social media.

Older children may have already read or seen a lot of information online and could be feeling overwhelmed. You could help them limit the amount of times they check the news and encourage them to get information from reputable websites.

When there is a constant stream of new and distressing information, people can find themselves distracted from dealing with their grief.

Children can have fear and develop anxiety about the whole pandemic situation as a result. They can be worried about their own health but are unable to express their feelings of anxiety and helplessness.



Factual information, delivered in an age-appropriate way can help calm children's anxieties.

There are several articles and videos on BBC Newsround aimed at children:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51204456>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51342366>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51734855>

Share memories

Talk of coronavirus and death can be very distressing for anyone dealing with a bereavement. It's important to continue talking about the loved one who has died – maybe share memories that make you laugh. Perhaps make a memory box together.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/how-to-use-a-memory-box-with-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>

Many bereaved people may be in isolation and unable to attend funerals. Funeral services are likely to be delayed and shortened, this can be very distressing. If the child is not able to attend the funeral, a memorial can be held at home with family members taking part via video conferencing for example, to enable the child to say goodbye.

Look after yourself

Remember to look after yourself too. It's good to stay informed but bear in mind that watching upsetting footage or reading dramatic social media coverage may harm your own mental health. Consider where you're getting your information from. Try to stick to reputable sources for updated guidance on the virus, such as the NHS, rather than relying on social media or the press for your information. If you are feeling worried or anxious about coronavirus, talk to someone you trust who can listen and support you.

Useful resources

Bereavement websites;

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

<https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/>

Managing anxiety;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=so8QN9an3t8>

<https://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xd7Cr265zgc>

<https://www.calm.com>

<https://www.smilingmind.com>

Books;

To read together;

The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back. Margot Sunderland and Nicky Armstrong. (Therapeutic story).

Someone Has Died Suddenly. Mary Williams. (www.suddendeath.org)

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine. (Activity book) Diana Crossley

For Younger Children

Goodbye Mousie. Robie H.Harris

When Uncle Bob Died. Althea

Dear Grandma Bunny. Dick Bruna

Are You Sad, Little Bear? A Book about Learning

To Say Goodbye. Rachel Rivett

Older children;

Flamingo Dream. Donna Jo Napoli

Fred. Posy Simmonds

Granpa. John Burningham



Contact your school's Educational Psychologist for advice and support;

edpsychology@octavopartnership.org

