

# PATHWAYS CENTER *for* GRIEF & LOSS

## **HELPING CHILDREN COPE DURING THE PANDEMIC CRISIS**

Grief is the internal response we experience when you lose someone or something that you care about. As the Coronavirus quickly took over, it has affected everyone throughout the world. Life is different than it was before March, 2020 and the losses are numerous. The more changes that have occurred, the greater the impact it will have on your child.

The best way you as an adult can help a child is to encourage the child to express their feelings and questions. A child needs reassurance that someone will be there to support them. Children need to feel included in what is happening in the situation. If parents are working and gone for a length of time, this can increase a child or teen's anxiety and distress. Whenever possible, develop some new routines for the child. The predictability is something that can be counted on during this time when other routines have been disrupted.

If possible, include in your child's daily routine a place or time to talk about the day and ask questions. Provide simple answers, give a short description and listen for questions behind the questions. Consider the age of your child and where he or she is developmentally. Remember that pandemic questions will be reprocessed from time to time. New questions can arise along the way.

While children and teens are affected by this pandemic, the adults around them are also under stress. Coping with everything that has changed is physically and emotionally exhausting. Take care of yourself by eating well and getting enough rest. It's impossible for you alone to provide everything your child may need during this time. Accept support and input from friends or family. There is no magic formula. In the many different ways you include your child, you are helping him or her through this difficult time. It is the best preparation you can give for future life experiences.

## **COMMON FEELINGS IN CHILDHOOD GRIEF**

Anger is a common response - anger at the situation or at the changes that have resulted from the pandemic. Know that underneath anger is helplessness. Rather than reacting to the anger that is expressed, acknowledge the feeling and be supportive and nurturing.

Fear is more likely to develop if the significant adults have not been completely straightforward or honest in talking openly about Coronavirus. Children will sense the intensity of the emotions even if they're not told the facts, and their imaginations will reinforce and expand upon the fears they develop. At times like this they realize they are dependent and unable to protect themselves so they feel much more fearful and insecure. This is certainly reinforced by the media coverage so limit the amount of exposure to the media.

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## **SIMILARITIES / DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADULT GRIEF PROCESSES**

### **SIMILARITIES:**

- The need to have their grief acknowledged by others.
- The need for support throughout the grieving process.
- The need for reassurance that nothing is their fault.
- The need for assurance their feelings, whatever they are, are normal.
- The need to express their grief.

### **DIFFERENCES:**

- Child's grief - intermittent, sometimes appears absent.  
Adult's grief - continuous and integrated into who they are.
- Child's understanding of death, change and permanence is limited by age and cognitive development.  
Adult's understanding is more mature.
- Child's ability to remember the past - limited before puberty, may need help remembering.  
Adult's ability to remember the past - fully developed and memories are more complete.
- Child - grows up with the feelings associated with the pandemic and may grieve longer.  
Adult - has already grown up when the pandemic occurs so the grief process may be shorter.
- Child - has need for a consistent surrogate parent to meet basic needs.  
Adult - basic needs can be self met.
- Children may act out their feelings in an inappropriate way.  
Adults usually have some history in handling loss, although this doesn't guarantee that they always will act appropriately.