

Children and Grief During COVID-19

Grief: a silent symptom of COVID-19

Many children are facing sudden losses or changes in their normal lives during COVID-19, with schools closing, time with friends being canceled, and relatives getting sick and some dying. Children may also be experiencing fear as COVID-19 spreads in their communities. These feelings of loss, change, and fear can be very difficult for children, and can bring about a grieving process.

Just like adults, children experience grief after the loss of a loved one, or the loss of a routine, friendship, relationship, or feeling of safety. Children may be experiencing grief for the first time during COVID-19, and it is important for parents and caregivers to know how to support them during this time.

Recognizing the signs of grief

Grief is commonly experienced in five parts. Children may experience these five parts in a different order than the order below, experience each part more than once, or move through them faster or slower than others.

- **Denial** is when the child is in a state of shock or disbelief because life as they once knew it has changed. They may refuse to believe how much their life has changed. Once the denial and shock starts to fade, the start of the healing process begins, and the feelings that the child was holding back begin to show.
- **Anger** is a common stage for the child to think “why me?” and “life’s not fair!” The child may act out or show frustration more than normal during this stage, including what may feel like taking anger out on loved ones. This is normal.
- **Bargaining** is the stage of false hope. A child might falsely make themselves believe that they can avoid the grief by making a major change in their life. For example, they might believe if they start having better behavior, the person they lost will “come back.”
- **Depression** is the emptiness the child feels when they accept reality and realize the person or way of life is gone or over. In this stage, they might withdraw from life, feel numb, and not want to get out of bed. They might even experience suicidal thoughts. If you think your child is experiencing thoughts of suicide, call the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255**, visit [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) for a live chat, or text the Crisis Text Line by **texting START to 741741**.
- **Acceptance** is the stage where your child’s emotions may return to normal as they understand that they can continue with life and grow into their new situation. The child still may feel sad from time to time when reminded of their loss.



Supporting a grieving child or teen

Grief is a difficult experience, especially for children. There are many strategies for supporting a grieving child.

- **Listen to the child.** It is important for a child to have a safe space to talk and share their feelings. Be patient and understanding.
- **Allow the child to show emotion.** Children may experience anger, sadness, pain, shame, guilt, or other powerful emotions. These are all normal during grief.
- **Encourage coping skills.** Support the child by helping them find healthy ways to cope with their feelings. Try out different activities as a family: deep breathing, praying, journaling, going for walks, arts and crafts, etc.
- **Practice self-care.** Caregivers must take care of themselves in order to support their children to the best of their abilities.
- **Understand grief comes in waves.** During grief, children will have good days and bad days. Understand that this is normal, and practice compassion during the bad days.
- **Create and maintain routines.** Children need routines to feel supported and comforted during their grieving process.
- **Ask for help.** Rely on family and friends for support. Encourage the child to reach out to their friends or a trusted adult for support. If these steps are not enough, consider contacting a mental health professional or traditional healer.
- **Make new memories.** This can remind the child that it is okay to be happy and to move on with their new life. It is also important to talk about the loss in healthy ways.

For more information: www.CDC.gov/coronavirus



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Sources: CDC, Hospice Foundation of America, National Alliance for Grieving Children