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The Irish Hospice Foundation

Helping children grieve during COVID-19 restrictions

Proudly developed with The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network

The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network
proudly supported by TUSLA The Irish Hospice Foundation

> We know this is a scary time for everyone, especially children and young people.
> Children need adults to help them understand what's going on, to help them talk about what frightens them and to help reassure them.

Grieving in exceptional times

During these weeks of isolation, sadly some families will experience the death of a loved one; it may be due to COVID-19 or it may be completely unrelated. It's natural to want to protect and shield children when someone dies; however, we need to talk to children to help them feel safer. The best thing to do is give children honest, age-appropriate information about death. It is painful to see a child upset, but children cope better with sad news when they are told the truth. Helping children understand death and grief will vary depending on the child's age and developmental stage.
See our simple guide here: https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/families/childrens-grief/

Funerals

In normal times, we would encourage parents to allow children take part in opportunities to say goodbye to loved ones in any way they feel comfortable. Children and young people are usually very involved in our funeral traditions. It helps them understand the finality of death and it shows them how to give and receive compassion. Funerals also help children feel less isolated as they are part of something they share with other adults and children in their families. Often for children, funerals connect them with extended family members, particularly cousins and relations who are of a similar age. During these exceptional times, however, it may not be possible to take part in our normal end-of-life and funeral practices. Infection controls may mean family members do not have an opportunity to spend time with someone who is dying, to say goodbye or attend funerals.

Create a sense of connection

We can try and create the sense of connection that would have happened at funerals in different ways. While children may have to be in their own homes, they can connect digitally with cousins and friends to share memories and create ideas together.

Adults can plan sessions for everyone to read the poems or play the song that they would have if funeral gatherings were not restricted.
Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we must keep physically distant from each other, yet this is especially hard when we are grieving.

Reaching out and giving a hug to those around us is our normal ways of showing support but now we must restrict these comforts to only those within our safe isolation zone.

Children are normally isolated within the tight family context and should be comforted in the normal way. In fact, being together in isolation may allow more time to support each other with your emotions and feelings around the loss.

Remember there are no restrictions on household hugs so, you might encourage each family member to offer support and hugs to the children within the confines of your own household.

There are no restrictions on household hugs

Finding new ways to connect in our grief

We will have to adapt and develop new ways around supporting each other grieve until the crisis passes. Children and young people can be encouraged to use their creativity and technical skills to generate ideas to help.

Younger children might use arts and crafts to create stories and pictures of their loved one and develop memory boxes and scrapbooks to share with siblings, cousins etc.

For older children, they might create a group chat or Facetime/Zoom among cousins and friends to share memories, pictures and videos to create a virtual ceremony to mark the life of their loved one.

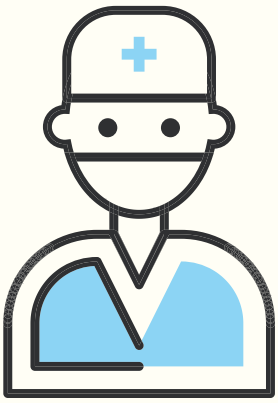
Children express their feeling in many different creative ways and while social media will be an important part of this, they can also use the traditional things like making a phone call, writing a poem or song, going for a walk to the loved ones favourite place or baking/cooking their favourite recipe.

Staying emotionally connected is very important – help children reach out and talk to the people in their isolation zone and those who have to be physically apart. Encourage children to talk about their emotions; let them know they can come to you and that it is okay to be sad/confused/angry/lonely, that grief is messy but, together you will help each other.

The world is a very scary place now. COVID-19 is on all our minds but for families who are bereaved their grief is the biggest thing on their minds. Children get their support through grief mainly from family, this means that adults supporting children need to look after their own grief as well.

Mind yourself so you can mind them

The COVID-19 crisis impacts all of us



The COVID-19 crisis impacts all of us. We are all going to be challenged but one of the best things we can do is follow the official guidance and play our part to stop the spread.

Sometimes we will be angry, sad and confused by all that is going on. Children will have these feeling as well; they may worry they have not been as good at following the measures to stop the spread. These anxieties will be worse if someone close to them dies, as adults our job is to reassure them that no one is to blame.

Feel free to contact
The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network
https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/contact/

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Other useful contacts

Barnardos Bereavement Helpline Service - **(01) 473 2110** is available from 10am-12pm Monday to Thursday

The Children's Grief Centre are available online at www.childrensgriefcentre.ie

Some resources for activities with grieving children;
https://www.dougy.org/docs/Movement_Activites_Sheet.pdf
https://shop.winstonswish.org/collections/books/products/muddles-puddles-and-sunshine

This leaflet is brought to you by The Irish Hospice Foundation and in partnership with the Irish Childhood Bereavement Network.
If you would like to support us you can do so online at www.hospicefoundation.ie

As part of our Care & Inform Series, we have also developed Grieving in Exceptional Times which you can read here:
https://hospicefoundation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Grieving-in-exceptional-times-.pdf