

# HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH GRIEF AND LOSS



All children benefit from parents and caregivers listening to and validating their feelings, especially in stressful times. Your child or teen may struggle with feelings about what they see and hear in TV coverage of COVID-19 and the uncertainty of not knowing when they can return to routines that provide them comfort.

Grieving children may show a range of emotions and reactions. Sometimes they appear sad and talk about who or what they have lost, other times they play, interact with friends, and do their usual activities. Children may show changes in behavior or social interactions (like being more withdrawn), or question their faith. Talking to children and teens about difficult topics can lessen their worries.

Be gentle and kind to your child, yourself, and your family - everyone grieves differently and heals at different rates. Take one day, one moment, at a time.

**If your child is having difficulty engaging in daily activities or finding activities to feel better, seek out a mental health professional – preferably one with expertise in treating traumatized children.**

## Support for grieving children

### Activities

- [At Home Grief Activities](#)
- [Activity Booklet - Responding to Change and Loss](#)

### Children's Grief Support

- [Ele's Place](#)

### Grief Resources

- [Positive Parenting News](#)
- [Child Mind](#)
- [The National Alliance for Grieving Children](#)

## COVID-19 resources for families

- [Communicating With Children About COVID-19](#)
- [Family Well-Being Guide](#)

**STAY WELL**  
[Michigan.gov/StayWell](https://Michigan.gov/StayWell)

## Help children understand feelings they are not be able to identify or express

- Reassure them it is okay to feel sad, angry, or hurt. Help children label their emotions with words.
- Acknowledge and validate emotions. It is unlikely that saying "you don't need to worry" will change their emotion. It may lead them to believe their emotions are not okay or to stop sharing how they are feeling.
- Provide positive encouragement. Children need help learning to deal with stress. As you provide them with extra patience, be patient with yourself, too!

## Talk about upsetting or scary thoughts your child may have

It's okay to not have the right words while offering support. No words can take away the pain or "fix" things. It's better to say something than nothing at all. Your presence is powerful.

- Be available and allow time to share feelings and memories.
- Listen carefully and ask questions in a non-judgmental way.
- Encourage open communication. Wait until they are ready, don't force them to talk.
  - [Common questions, concerns and feelings children have when coping with traumatic separation/loss related to COVID-19.](#)
- Reassure them that their thoughts are understandable after experiencing an upsetting event.
- Help children relax or provide distracting activities when they have upsetting thoughts or memories.

## Show children how to cope with stress

- Establish routines for bedtime, meals, school, and chores. Try to include some calm and quiet time too.
- Help children connect with people who are important to them by phone or video chat.
- Help children find ways to stay involved in hobbies and physical activities.
- Practice calming and coping strategies with. Teach family members a slow breathing technique: Inhale slowly through your nose and exhale very slowly through your mouth. Have young children blow bubbles.
- Teach and practice mindfulness. Mindfulness promotes mental well-being and resilience by calming anxiety and building healthy coping skills.
  - [How mindfulness can help during COVID-19](#)
  - See page 3 for simple mindfulness activities



## Mourning a loved one

Traditional ways of mourning may not be an option as we navigate this pandemic, but there are ways to support grieving children and teens right now.

Write a letter to the person who has died as a way to say goodbye, then keep the letter, burn it (safely) or tear it up.

Work together to plan the memorial for when gathering is permitted again. If it feels right for your family, include children in the planning process.

Consider creative outlets, such as journaling, crafting, dance, or music to process grief.

# Simple Mindfulness Techniques

**Mindfulness is one way to lessen the effects of stress – emotionally and physically. These techniques promote being present, in the moment, and mindful.**



**Sit outside in the sun.** Feel the heat of the rays on you. Appreciate how far the rays have traveled just to reach you.



**Walk around.** Feel as much as you can - notice the grass, pebbles, or soft carpet under your feet.



**Deep breathing.** Take long, slow breaths at the top of the hour, or set a reminder on your phone throughout the day.



**Look at the night sky.** Appreciate how delicate the stars and moon appear. Admire the twinkling lights - maybe notice a satellite or shooting star.



**Sit quietly.** Feel the breath coming and going from your chest, through your nose. Feel how the breath is cool as you inhale and warm as you exhale.



**Write in a journal.** Write down happy moments you can look back on when you're feeling anxious or stressed. Acknowledge the appreciation you feel for the things around you.

## Grounding Technique

**A grounding technique can help decrease anxiety and anger when you are feeling overwhelmed.**

Think 5-4-3-2-1 as you notice:

- 5 things you see
- 4 things you feel
- 3 things you hear
- 2 things you smell
- 1 thing you taste

**Try the free app for meditation, sleep, and movement exercises.**

[Headspace.com/mi](https://www.headspace.com/mi)