



BEREAVEMENT

LOSS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

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LOSS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19:

Please note that in this piece we have used the term 'passed away' to refer to the death of a loved one. If your child/ren are used to another term e.g. 'died', 'passed on', 'is gone' please use that phrase. There are no wrong or right terms - only the terms that make the best sense in your and your child/ren's lives.

Many of us will experience loss because of COVID-19. Some of us will experience the passing away of a loved one. Most adults have some tools to express their feelings of loss, but children and teenagers do not always express their feelings in the same way.

Children and teens experiencing a loss will often act in the following ways:

• **Appearing not to react**

Children under 6 years old do not understand that death is permanent. Children cannot handle strong emotions, such as sadness or anger, for long periods, and may jump quickly in and out of grief. When told that someone important has passed away, some children may look blank and ask 'can I play?' They may have heard, but they are not able to process what that means yet. They may react later with sudden crying, outbursts, changes in behaviour or asking questions.

• **Asking questions and exploring what death means**

Children may ask repeatedly: "When's Granny/ Gogo coming back?" even though they've been told clearly what has happened. They may hunt everywhere for a 'lost' person or seem fascinated with death, play-act about death or ask repeatedly about it. All of these are normal ways that children show that they are processing their understanding of what has happened.

• **Feeling anxious or insecure**

When someone passes away, a child's sense of safety is rocked. They may not want to leave you, and may cling to you or follow you everywhere. They may behave as if they are younger, and go back to doing things they did when they were younger such as being very quiet or tearful, having temper flare-ups, sucking their thumb, or wetting the bed.

• **Anger**

Anger and other strong emotions are natural reactions to sad or shocking news, and some children and young people may feel angry at the person who passed away, at family, at themselves or at the world in general. Don't think that your child is being naughty or rude if they have angry outbursts. They are trying to make sense of strange and unfamiliar feelings and their behaviour is a way of them reaching out to us for love, support and guidance.





- **Looking after adults or feeling responsible**

As children realise that death is permanent, they also become aware that it happens to other people including themselves. They may be protective and try to look after their important adults and siblings. They may feel that they were somehow responsible for the death.

- **Denying what has happened or taking risks**

Bereavement can be overwhelming, and can bring huge changes, alongside other challenges that young people face as they grow up. They may want to forget or deny the death or how strongly they feel. They may feel 'what's the point?' with school or social activities. Some young people may be impulsive or take risks, in an attempt to get back some control in a life that for them currently feels very out of control.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT A CHILD SHOWING SIGNS OF BEREAVEMENT?

- **Keep normal routines** which will help your child to feel safe
- If you need to leave your child, **tell them when you will be home**, or who will be looking after them, which should preferably be someone they know and feel safe with.
- Help your child to know that it's **normal to feel angry** and find safe ways to release anger such as: physical exercise and activities or messy painting sessions.
- **Clear, honest and age-appropriate information.** Whilst too much information can scare or overwhelm children, too little or false information is harmful too. Avoid talking about any pain or suffering that their loved one may have experienced before passing, but also don't tell your child that Gogo has 'gone away' or 'sleeping' as this may cause your child to fear separation from a loved one or going to sleep. Be honest and use simple words. It may sound harsh, but it is true, and makes the most sense for children. You can always reassure your child that the person who has passed away, is no longer in pain.
- **Reassurance** that they are not to blame and that different feelings are OK.
- **Time to talk** about what has happened, ask questions and build memories. Encourage your child to share their favourite things about the person who has passed away, and any happy memories they have of that person.





WHAT IF YOU'RE GRIEVING TOO?

You can identify another adult, known and trusted by your child, who can help you support your child through this time. This will give you the time you need to process your own sense of loss, which is very important, too.

It is not selfish to seek help for yourself, even if your child is also struggling – in fact, it is very important to look after your own mental and physical health at this time. Working through your own grief will help you be more present to your child's needs at this time.

