



HELPING CHILDREN WITH TRAUMATIC SEPARATION OR TRAUMATIC GRIEF RELATED TO COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in thousands of children being separated from loved ones who require isolation and/or hospitalization due to a loved one testing positive for COVID-19 or because of potential exposure for essential workers. For some children, the separation may result in distress or in a traumatic reaction. If a loved one dies from the virus, a child may experience traumatic grief due the sudden nature of the death and being unable to say goodbye or observe cultural or religious mourning rituals. This tip sheet is for caregivers or other adults supporting children with traumatic separation or traumatic grief related to COVID-19. Especially in stressful times, in addition to the suggestions here, all children benefit from caregivers listening to and validating their different feelings.

I want you to know that:	You can help when you:
<p>1. I may have a lot of feelings but am not able to identify them or why I have them.</p>	<p>Acknowledge it is ok to feel sad, angry, hurt, lonely, etc.</p> <p>Understand when I get upset out of the blue about things that do not seem related.</p> <p>Help me label my feelings with words and talk about what is happening.</p>
<p>2. I am afraid when my loved one who is sick must be isolated from me at home or away from home.</p>	<p>Explain that isolating my loved one protects me from getting sick and helps the sick person to recover.</p> <p>Tell me the isolated person cares about me very much and does not want me to get sick.</p> <p>Remind me how you or other helpers take care of our sick loved one and me.</p> <p>Help me to find ways to stay in contact with my sick loved one (call, text, make a card).</p>
<p>3. I am afraid that my loved one, who is a health worker or emergency responder, will get sick or die.</p>	<p>Explain that health professionals and emergency responders get special training on how to stay safe at work to care for people.</p> <p>Tell me ways I can stay in touch with my loved one if I can't see them all the time or if they have to stay close to work for a period of time.</p> <p>Explain the important work they are doing to care for people.</p>
<p>4. I am sad that I can't see my sick loved one in the hospital and I worry that they are alone.</p>	<p>Assure me that my loved one wants me to stay safe, so they do not want me near sick people in the hospital.</p> <p>Explain how people in the hospital make sure my loved one is not alone.</p> <p>Help me communicate with my loved one, through calls, cards, pictures, songs, prayers, texts, and virtual communication when possible.</p>
<p>5. I am scared that my sick loved one is in the hospital and might die.</p>	<p>Give me accurate information about how my loved one is doing in words I can understand for my age.</p> <p>Help me understand that most people get better and come home.</p> <p>Tell the truth if my loved one won't recover and help me find a way to say goodbye.</p>
<p>6. I am scared, sad and mad that I can't say goodbye in person if my loved one is going to die in the hospital, and we can't go.</p>	<p>Explain that health care workers are with my loved one, so they are not alone.</p> <p>Find out if you can send a message for me or I can say goodbye remotely.</p>



<p>7. I am angry and sad that I did not get to say goodbye to my loved one and cannot have a funeral or gathering with family and friends.</p>	<p>Assure me my loved one knew how special they were to me.</p> <p>Talk about ways we can share our feelings and memories virtually with family and friends until we can meet in person.</p> <p>Explore how we can have a funeral or memorial with people I live with now or later when it is safer.</p> <p>Help me find an object or picture that connects me to my loved one and reminds me of positive times</p> <p>Guide me in engaging in spiritual practices that we use.</p>
<p>8. Watching or hearing the news makes me afraid someone else will get sick or die.</p>	<p>Limit my media viewing and talk to me about what I am watching or seeing on the Internet.</p> <p>Go to trusted sources for accurate information, give the facts, and correct misinformation and rumors.</p> <p>Practice activities like handwashing with me and talk to me about how this helps us to stay healthy. Point out what else we are doing as a family to stay safe.</p> <p>Limit your own media viewing to a time and place where I can't see it.</p>
<p>9. It is hard to stay at home where things remind me of my loved one who is still sick or who died.</p>	<p>Understand that things at home remind me of the person who is sick and make me worry.</p> <p>Recognize it is upsetting to see things that remind me of a person who died and is not coming back.</p> <p>Find ways for me to do things that help me feel better, like doing activities, exercising, face timing with friends, playing games, doing yoga, art, or reading.</p>
<p>10. I am afraid I will get sick too.</p>	<p>Tell me how you will care for me if I get sick.</p> <p>Remind me that most sick people recover, especially children.</p> <p>Comfort me to calm my worries.</p>
<p>11. I have upsetting thoughts or remember scary scenes from when my loved one was taken to the hospital, or I remember other upsetting events or losses I experienced in the past.</p>	<p>Be available for me to share my thoughts or memories with you.</p> <p>Let me know these types of thoughts and memories are normal after experiencing an upsetting event.</p> <p>Provide me comfort and remind me I am currently safe.</p> <p>Help me do relaxing or distracting activities when I have upsetting thoughts or memories.</p>
<p>12. Social distancing makes it hard to get a break from upsetting thoughts or worries, and to do the things that normally help me cope with stress.</p>	<p>Set up consistent routines for my usual bedtime, meals, school, and chores.</p> <p>Help me connect with friends, family, and support figures by phone or video chat.</p> <p>Help me find new ways to stay involved in hobbies and physical activities I used to do.</p>

If any of these problems get in the way of your child engaging in daily activities, going to remote or in-person school when able, connecting with friends, or doing other activities to feel better, seek out a mental health professional with expertise in treating traumatized children. You can also access additional resources for Childhood Traumatic Grief and Traumatic Separation at <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/traumatic-grief>

Suggested Citation: Cohen, J., Goodman, R., Kliethermes, M. D., & Epstein, C. (2020). *Helping Children with Traumatic Separation or Traumatic Grief Related to COVID-19*. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.