

NEW GRIEF CONSIDERATIONS DURING COVID-19



Written by Lane Hendricks, Director of Programs and Liz Carson, Program & Outreach Manager

When a family experiences the death of a loved one from COVID-19, traditional ways of mourning and receiving support may no longer be accessible. Much of the below information applies to grieving a death from any cause at this time.

FUNERALS



Funerals or memorials are a key part of the mourning process. Being with others who are grieving, being able to express emotions, and having a chance to say goodbye collectively can help start the healing process. What do we do when those are not possible? The ban on groups over ten people has put a stop to traditional funerals and memorials for now. For Jewish families, sitting shiva must now be done without visits from friends and family. How do we say goodbye under these circumstances? For children this can be particularly hard to understand, and they may feel confused.

HOW TO HELP

- Connect with family virtually to share stories about the person. You could structure it as a memorial where everyone has a chance to say something or someone performs a song.
- Write a letter to the deceased. Children and adults were mostly likely not able to say "goodbye" or visit their person before the person died, due to current visitor restrictions in hospitals. Write a letter to tell the person what you would have wanted them to know. You can keep it or even burn it in a large metal bowl or outdoor fireplace.
- Work together to plan the memorial for when gathering is permitted again. Include children in the planning process.



MEDIA



Many of us are using social media to stay socially connected and supported during this time of social distancing. The information about COVID-19 changes on a near-daily basis. While it is important to stay informed and connected, constantly reading and hearing about the illness that caused your loved one's death could be traumatizing.

HOW TO HELP

- Limit media exposure (both news and social media) for children AND adults. Make a goal to only check the news once a day if you feel the need to stay informed.
- Allow children to share their fears and concerns.
- Have honest conversations about what your family is doing to stay safe.



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STIGMA



With a disease like COVID-19, increased fear and anxiety can lead to stigma or assumptions, which may be directed at groups of people, such as people of Asian descent, people working in healthcare, or people with a family member impacted by the virus. Because the virus is highly contagious, children may tease or ostracize people in those groups. Those on social media may see jokes and memes about the virus, which could be painful. Stigmatized groups may experience a negative effect on social connectedness, as well as mental and emotional health.

HOW TO HELP

- Only share information about COVID-19 that has been verified by a reputable source, such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) or World Health Organization (WHO).
- Refer to the virus with correct terms (COVID-19 or novel coronavirus) to avoid associating it with specific groups of people.
- If you see someone spreading false information or making negative statements, speak up in the moment.
- Acknowledge the importance of social support for those impacted by COVID-19.



SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

With many cities following government orders to shelter in place, friends of grieving families may feel helpless or unsure of how to support them at this time.

HOW TO HELP

- Reach out to let them know you are thinking of them. They may feel overwhelmed, so it is helpful to preface a text or email acknowledging that they do not need to respond.
- Send an e-gift card for food delivery from restaurants or groceries.
- Send cards and letters.
- Send IOUs for childcare help or days out together when contact is allowed again.
- Order things that may make life easier right now and have them sent directly to the grieving person's house. For children, this might include games or books, while adults may appreciate books or pampering items.

