

# Death of a Family Member During a Global Pandemic: Supporting Children and Finding Ways to Mourn Together and Celebrate a Life



Talking about dying and death with children is never easy. As the world grieves together the inconceivable numbers of deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic is never far from our minds or the minds of children. In the months to come, many will be impacted by the death of a family member due to COVID-19 or other causes.

With quarantines, travel restrictions and physical distancing measures in place, saying good-bye and participating in important rituals that allow us to gather, remember and mourn are becoming increasingly difficult at a time when we are at our most vulnerable and most need connection to family and friends. Although the measures that have been put in place to keep us all safe during this pandemic have impacted our ability to gather together for visitations and funeral services, there are other ways we can connect and participate in rituals that allow us to mourn and honour the deceased person in a meaningful way. For children, including them in planning and participating in these rituals is an important part of their grieving and they will often have their own ideas and suggestions to share.

**Below are some ideas for planning rituals of remembrance at home whilst maintaining safe social distancing:**

**Although it may be necessary to delay a formal funeral gathering with extended family and friends, have a 'funeral' gathering at home with any immediate family members in your shared home.**

- Assemble in the yard or around a table in your home. Include pictures of the person who died, flowers, candles, mementos, or other meaningful linking objects to create a special ambiance. Invite children to add their favourite photos or special "reminders" of the deceased
- Encourage and allow for the expression of all emotions. The tears and sadness, and all emotional reactions from adults will be a model of grief for children, especially if this is the first death of a family member that they have experienced
- Invite family members to share stories, special memories and quotes
- Include rites and rituals from your own faith backgrounds, prayers, blessings, etc
- If family members were unable to say good-bye before the death, write letters to the deceased person and invite sharing
- Let children join in the planning and choose special music, special poems (or write their own stories and poems)
- Invite children to sing songs and play their own instruments as part of a homemade ceremony
- Allow small children to include their stuffed animals etc, as guests
- Prepare special refreshments for a 'reception' to follow. Use special china, silverware and napkins



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## Utilize technology to connect and allow participation

- Where strict limits are set on the number of funeral participants, technology allows the option of livestreaming the funeral service
- Record the service to share with other family members
- Invite family and friends to gather via meeting platforms such as Zoom or Google Hangout. In the absence of physical gatherings, technology can help to fill this important need to mourn together and offer support to one another. Raise a glass to the deceased, recount stories and memories, or share in a dinner with family and friends virtually
- Use social media to post photographs and tributes to the deceased person and encourage others to share their thoughts as well

## Continue to encourage the sharing of feelings and talk about the person who died

*One of the things we hear most from the children who come to Lighthouse is how important it is to them to continue to share stories, memories and talk about the deceased person.*

- Keep photographs of the deceased person where they can be seen
- Carve out time to talk about feelings and encourage expression of feelings through journaling, art or play
- Continue to tell stories, share memories and talk about the person who died. We may not be able to change this time in which we are living, but we can continue to come together to acknowledge the death of an important person, support and connect with one another and mourn together while we need to remain apart

*The Lighthouse team with special thanks to Christina Walton, Dermody Funeral Home and Deirdre Madden, Glen Oaks, Arbor Memorial.*

