

Trauma, Loss, and Grief in Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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- ❑ The COVID-19 pandemic is a significant threat to the health of people everywhere

- ❑ children may be at greater risk for mental health effects of this pandemic; because of their limited capacity :
 - to understand their surroundings
 - cope with stressors
 - control their environments

Potential stressors

- Illness or death of caregivers, relatives, acquaintances, or community members
- Fear of contracting the virus, or of a loved one contracting the virus
- Exposure to disturbing media content or distressing adult conversations
- Separation from caregivers (essential workers, first responders) who do not want to expose family members to the virus
- Confusion and fear about the virus, including society's measures to contain it
- Economic impact, such as family job insecurity or loss, food insecurity, or disrupted access to healthcare or other support services
- Increased family stress and conflict, abuse, domestic violence, or neglect

children often have difficulty talking about experiences of loss, grief, and trauma stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. This can make it difficult to know who may be affected the most.

The following guidelines are intended to support care providers in identifying and responding to trauma, loss, and grief in children.

Understanding Trauma During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Childhood trauma:

- a negative reaction (traumatic stress) following
- an overwhelming, upsetting, frightening experience (traumatic event) which
- challenges the child's ability to cope

COVID-19 Pandemic has the the characteristics above,? Is:

does it necessarily lead to trauma?

Traumatic Events

- ❑ Is the COVID-19 pandemic a Traumatic events?

Traumatic events: situations that are out of our control, beyond our usual experience, and cause us to feel as though our lives or the lives of others may be in danger

- ❑ How children exposed to T.E?

seeing and hearing frightening news on television, family members or other people they know who are sick or may have died

and....

- ❑ Children's responses to T.E ?

Depend on :child's age, developmental level, degree of social support, coping skills, levels of exposure, caregivers reaction ,....

Identifying Traumatic Stress

❑ Unwanted Thoughts or Images:

replay certain thoughts or images in their minds
have an increase in nightmares (which may or may not be clearly related to the traumatic events).

draw, write, talk or play about the event(s) repeatedly

❑ Negative Feelings:

struggle with a range of negative feelings including sadness, hopelessness, irritability and anger, or numbness

display behaviors they had previously outgrown, such as becoming clingier, bedwetting, separation anxiety, sleep difficulties, etc

Identifying Traumatic Stress

❑ Avoidance of Reminders:

avoid, or become agitated or distressed if unable to avoid, people, places, and things that remind them of what happened, or what is happening.

❑ Problems with Attention:

have a hard time concentrating on schoolwork or other activities

seem more forgetful or seem like they are daydreaming.

❑ Arousal Symptoms:

startle more easily or feel like there is danger or threat present.

have an increase in stomachaches, headaches, other bodily aches and complaints, or have a change in appetite.

have difficulty falling or staying asleep.

Asking About Trauma

- Many care providers are reluctant to ask families or children about their exposure or reaction to traumatic events
- Other care providers forget or neglect to ask about trauma
- other care providers may avoid asking about trauma because they are not sure what they would do if they uncover these concerns
- ❖ the best way to determine a child's exposure and reaction to traumatic events is the most obvious:

ask!

When to Refer for Additional Help

- If symptoms do not decrease in 2-4 weeks after the event
- If the family is unable to meet the needs of the child, including if caregivers are struggling because of the traumatic event(s) and want or need support.
- If symptoms are severe or significantly interfere with daily routines, the ability to socialize, or do schoolwork.
- If the child has been previously exposed to trauma, previously diagnosed with a mental health disorder, or struggles with anxiety or other mood problems. These children are more vulnerable for developing ongoing traumatic stress problems

Helping Children Cope

- ✓ Depending on their age and developmental level, children are likely to have some information, but this information may be incomplete or inaccurate.
- ✓ Ask children what they have heard and whether they have questions. Provide concrete explanations and use child-friendly language
- ✓ Limit media exposure as it can be
- ✓ Be mindful about talking about the event with others when children are present
- ✓ Create opportunities to check in with children.

Helping Children Cope

- ✓ Provide concrete reassurance about what you are doing in the present and immediate future to keep them safe.
- ✓ Be prepared that children may ask the same question or bring up the same concern repeatedly. Try to give a brief, but honest response
- ✓ Teenagers may want to have more information and may need to talk more. Alternatively, they may act as though nothing is bothering them and may say they do not want to talk. Give them space, but also keep a close eye on how they are coping, and create opportunities for discussion
- ✓ If children have difficulty calming themselves, give them simple strategies such as deep breathing, thinking about a happy memory, using a stress ball, etc.

Helping Children Cope

- ✓ Young children are tuned into their parents' reactions. It is important to model healthy expression of emotion
- ✓ If parents feel overwhelmed by their own reactions, they should seek consultation or help from others or from mental health providers.
- ✓ You can help your child by labeling their feeling and providing validation. For example, "It makes perfect sense that you are feeling worried. Lots of people are getting sick, but we are doing everything we can to stay safe and healthy."
- ✓ Young children may blame themselves, even if the events are out of their control, or have other inaccurate thoughts about what happened. Help your child come up with more helpful thoughts and coping statements (e.g., "I did the best I could").
- ✓ In order to best support your children, you must take care of yourself, too.. Find ways to get support from family and friends and if you are involved in a spiritual group or community organization, stay connected during this difficult time.

Helping Children and Families with Loss and Grief During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- ❑ There is no one right or normal way that children are meant to experience their grief, and there is no one right way for parents to offer support.

- ❑ *Below are a variety of suggestions to provide families dealing with loss and grief during the COVID-19 Pandemic:*

Sharing Sad News with Children

- ✓ children should be provided the essential facts about the death and the circumstances and have an opportunity to ask questions—as often as necessary
- ✓ Graphic details should be omitted. The goal is to provide an age-appropriate understanding of what happened so that children can begin to come to terms with the finality and consequences of the death
- ✓ Young children may need some explanation about what death means. There are no right words, but it's important to convey that it's a permanent state and that people can't come back from it
- ✓ it's important to use the words “death” or “died”, rather than other language

Helping Children Express their Feelings About Loss

- ✓ The experience of sadness and longing at the death of a loved one, while painful, is essential to go through.
- ✓ provide a chance to talk about the person who died and their feelings about the death, and to validate and normalize their experience.
- ✓ Attention to all emotions, like anger, including at the person who died or at their relatives
- ✓ Parents should check-in intermittently so that children understand that they can talk at any time about anything that is upsetting them about the death

Helping Children Cope with Loss and Grief

- ❑ Following a death, and especially in the context of this crisis, children may worry about what may happen to them or their surviving loved ones and others in the community.
- ❑ The vast majority of children—and adults—will be able to come to terms with the death and resume a life that has the potential for joy and satisfaction.
- ✓ Parents should provide reassurance whenever possible
- ✓ Parents should keep family routines, as intact as possible,
- ✓ Positive experiences, fun and enjoyment, are very important in supporting the child's adjustment to a death in the family
- ✓ Caregiver well-being is the most important factor in supporting children through the death of a loved, and parents themselves should be encouraged to seek any support they need for themselves.
- ✓ Find alternative ways to come together to say farewell and to commemorate the person who died

Getting Additional Help

- ❑ In the vast majority of cases, grieving children, and adults, will be able to cope with the support of their loved ones and will not need professional support
 - the child's outlook on life or has seemed to impact his or her ability to participate in or enjoy other aspects.
 - If a child's grief seems not to have eased after a period of 6 months
 - shorter periods of disruptions in sleep, eating habits, or attention to personal hygiene
- and
- suicidal thinking or self-harming would indicate a emergency need for consultation with a professional.

“Many Thanks”

for your attention