



Supporting Your Children During These Challenging Times

Over these past months your children have been adapting and adjusting to many changes all at once. At this point, you have been made aware that summer camps are or will likely be cancelled due to Covid-19. It is important to recognize that each child will cope with this news in their own way (as will you, as parents).

In addition to grieving the loss of school structure, social structures, sports, time with friends/extended family, recitals, etc. they are now grieving the loss of their planned and anticipated summer - be gentle and mindful. You will not fix this.

Here are a few tips to help you navigate difficult discussions with your children.

Acknowledgement

The feelings of grief and sadness your children are experiencing are real. Let your children express their feelings. It is reasonable to be sad/angry/disappointed and it will take time for them to process and understand the impact of these new circumstances.

Create a space where you can engage in a meaningful conversation that is not rushed. Let your kids know that you are here with them, and this time is for them.

Ask them how they are feeling while being aware of their body language/expression

For kids under 12 years old - Go slow and steady. Ensure that they understand what you are telling them and watch for emotional responses (words aren't always easy). If they are calmly tearing up, ask "this is hard news to hear, is it making you sad?" If they are starting to tense up/yell/jump around, ask "this is really sucky, are you feeling angry?"

For kids over 12 years old - They may or may not want to engage in conversation right away. There is typically a bigger social impact at this age, and they may want space to process the information and also space to speak with their friends. Keep the conversation open for them to return to.

For all kids - We need to **validate** their feelings.

How to validate feelings:

- Leave judgement out
- Do not try to fix the problem
- Do not add in your own feelings (ex. I feel sad too, everyone is going through this)
- Accept their feelings (ex. "yes this sucks, it's ok to feel angry, sad, disappointed etc.")
- Put aside your discomfort, and let your child feel like they are being heard
- Try to avoid adding in "but you'll still see your friends on zoom", "we'll have fun doing other things" "I missed a summer at camp once"

Processing and releasing their feelings

After we validate feelings, it's often helpful to assist in processing these feelings and/or releasing them (depending on if you have an expressive, quiet, physical, or creative child). Some ideas:

- Writing about their thoughts/feelings.
- Putting a marker/pencil/paint to paper and drawing how they're feeling
- Putting sticky notes/masking tape on bottom of their shoe with what they're mad about and stomping around
- A pillow fight
- Going for a run/bike/ride/walk

Once we've been able to process/release feelings, it's much easier to discuss and focus on the "so, what now?" And explore some reasonable and rationale thoughts:

- I know they are just trying to keep us all safe
- This is not personal, we are all in this together
- Let's make a list of some things we CAN do this summer
- Is there something we can create/organize with camp friends?
- Should we have sundaes on Sundays all summer?

Some thoughts for parents



Supporting Your Children During These Challenging Times

There is no doubt that this news is also disappointing for you. That is also valid. Please ensure that you are able to find time to express and process your feelings in a meaningful way.

There may be changes in your child's behaviour as they process this news, be curious about it and promote healthy discussions about feelings in your household

Each camper will have a different relationship with camp. Which may also be different than the one you had, and/or their siblings have/had....all feelings are welcome

Some General Covid-19 Coping Tips

While we all want to ensure our children are well during these challenging times, we, as parents need to model healthy coping strategies. My top 5 tips for managing stress and anxiety during these uncertain times are as follows:

1. Make a list of things that are IN and OUT of your control (focus on the things IN your control).
2. Reduce watching/reading the news to just one update per day (under 20 mins).
3. Get outside (safely) - find open roads or fields and get outside at least 2 times per day.
4. Movement - we need to move our bodies! This can be as much as going for a walk/run/bike, doing an online exercise/yoga class, running up and down your stairs, etc. But we NEED to move every single day!
5. Practice Gratitude - There are always things in our life that we can appreciate and be grateful for. Focusing on these things will continue to provide us with comfort and joy during these anxious times.

More to consider

I want to remind you that these are uncharted times. This is hard. There is so much uncertainty and fear among us. There is no guide book or 'How To' manual.

This is also a time to slow down. To nest at home. To connect with family and friends. To challenge ourselves and our families to explore new hobbies, interests, and passions.

You are not alone, we are all in this together.
Please take time to check in with yourself and your loved ones daily. How are you feeling today? What do I/you need today?

Important reminders for parents of young and school aged kids: There is a **BIG** transition and big feelings happening right now. There are **BIG** social changes and **BIG** fears about the future of **THEIR** world. In addition, there is ***grief***. The loss of their school year, activities/sports, routine, events, etc. and now CAMP. Be gentle with our kiddos. We ***DO NOT*** need to solve or fix these feelings....we need to validate these feelings and sit alongside them.

Please reach out if *you or your child* would benefit from a virtual session to check in and stay grounded during these challenging times. I can be reached at lsuchter@gmail.com or (647) 339-3026.

Sending positive vibes to you and your families. Stay well and safe!

Lesley Suchter MSW, RSW
Registered Social Worker