

Grieving the Loss of WLC 2020

As your child begins to process the news about camp this summer, it may be helpful to consider the following concepts and strategies for working through grief.

Allow them to feel their emotions.

It's natural for our kids to feel sad, angry, or frustrated about losing camp this summer. While our first instinct may be to soothe or placate, remember that these emotions have a place and it is important to experience them, rather than immediately trying to contain them, which may force them underground. Give them time to sit with their grief; they will come around.

Expect wide-ranging emotions and behaviors.

Grief does not follow a predictable course, nor does it feel or look the same in everyone. It can come and go in waves. And just because kids look OK does not mean they feel OK inside. Check in periodically without obsessing. Remember that it's healthy for a grieving person to laugh, have fun, and participate in activities.

You don't need to solve this problem *right now*.

We may feel the instinct to brush aside this loss, to lessen the impact by suggesting "we'll still find fun things to do," or that "it's not as bad as it seems." *Of course* it's not the end of the world, but it may feel like it for your son. Be careful not to be dismissive of his feelings or the impact this may be having on him.

It's not all about COVID-19.

Although the pandemic has dominated the news and our lives, plenty of kids are coping with stressors far greater than other people's getting coronavirus. Don't assume that a young person's social-emotional distress has anything to do with COVID-19. If a child is upset, try: "I can see you're upset. What's bothering you?"

It's hard to talk about silver linings.

For some young people (and adults, of course), there have been positive aspects to spending more time at home, more time with family, and more time alone. Try asking an open-ended and two-pronged question, such as, "What have been the best and worst things about the past few months?" to allow for positives.

Probe and process the memories.

The young people you care for miss different things about camp, so it will feel supportive to ask, "What will/do you miss the most about camp?" Resist the urge to suggest the important memories. And remember that not all kids prefer to express their grief verbally; many want to draw, journal, or talk with peers instead of you.

The decision for this year is made; help focus them on the future.

There are two important points here: (1) Most children understand that some things are final, done with, over forever. On the other hand, they know that something that is cancelled could—in theory—be reinstated. Expect kids to argue, reason, and want to discuss how camp could be un-cancelled. That's a normal, healthy way to come to terms with the finality of a decision. And (2) remember that as much as we are all grieving cancellations, camp is ultimately a "nice-to-have," not a "need-to-have." At some point, gently share some perspective about how cancellation is an unselfish way to keep other people healthy. Offer hopeful messages about summer 2021.

Maintain your routines.

Remember that wellness is founded on eating healthy, getting plenty of sleep, and finding ways to exercise, not to mention the many ways in which we follow our faiths and spiritual practices. As our kids move from their "school-year" schedules to summer, this may be a good time to consider establishing certain daily camp-like routines, whether that mean dedicated times for skill-development and play, a "rest hour" after lunch, or family events in the evenings.

Finally, it's important you convey your own feelings as a parent in ways that are sincere. Kids want honesty from you. As always, we are here to help with questions or concerns.