

Six ways to help children cope with lockdown loss

Everyone is affected by coronavirus, and we have all have experienced some kind of loss, even if we've been fortunate enough not to lose someone close to us.

Loss of a rite of passage (no tests, end of school production, final class photos - the list goes on). Possibly, no proper goodbye to primary school life. No normal birthday celebrations. Loss of physical contact with friends. Loss of the normal, social connection that all of us need. Social media means that young people can be better connected than ever before, and many relationships have even flourished during lockdown. That said, young people acknowledge that this cannot replace face-to-face contact.

So how can you, as a parent or carer, help your child deal with the losses they are having to endure throughout this lockdown?

1. Take care of yourself

Is your mind so scrambled by constant news reports that it's hard to manage your mood? If (understandably) it is, take steps to manage your state of mind. Daily exercise, relaxation techniques, talking things over - these can all help. With such uncertainty in the world, your children need more than ever to feel they can come to you for reassurance. This is terribly hard if you feel in a state of panic, so try to manage your own anxiety levels.

2. Make time for your children

If you are home working, accept that you can't do your job as you would normally. Your employer should also accept this. Simply carrying on working while your children 'home school' is not going to work for anyone. With the restrictions of lockdown, many children and young people will massively benefit from having more time with their families. Some parents may have more time to read with them. Some young people in foster care may value clearer boundaries. Of course, where there is already a high level of conflict in a family, tensions may also increase.

3. Avoid competing with others

Do not be drawn into competition with other families who have suddenly learnt Japanese, are baking their own bread, and holding 'theme nights'. These families do exist, but don't feel inadequate if you aren't doing these things. If you are able to keep communicating with each other, end up mostly being friends, and your children get **some** reading and Maths done, then think yourselves successful parents.

4. Acknowledge the losses

Your children need to hear that 'one day this will be over and we will continue with our lives'. It will give them a sense of safety. Their losses are significant. If the key stages in life (like school transitions) do not take place as expected, it's hard. Don't pretend they don't matter - they do. Acknowledge the losses. Avoid saying 'at least you can message your friends' or 'at least you can go next year' - the 'at least' doesn't show empathy. Let your children feel sorry for themselves, or feel angry. Agree that this is all extremely unfair on them, don't get them to look on the bright side.

5. Keep to a daily routine

Does it matter if your children are doing less school work? If their bedrooms are messier than usual? It's annoying, but give yourself permission to let things go a bit. On the flip side, routines are extremely helpful for everyone. A day without structure is a day, which is more likely to drift into conflict, and as a parent/carer you need to keep your children physically and mentally healthy. This is more important than ever as the risks to both are high right now.

6. Face the challenges together

It is helpful for children to feel they are sharing this experience with you. Find ways to create a sense of 'we're all going through something uniquely challenging together'. This situation will end, and you can give your children this certainty. Our shared difficulty is that none of us know when it will end. Children hate uncertainty and it engenders terrible anxiety. They demand reassurance, which you can and need to keep giving in an honest way. Added to this, there will be some children for whom the return to 'normal' is unwanted. Face these fears together.

We are all experiencing a collective grief. We may seek closure on this grief, but not get it for some time. Instead, think about how you as a family can find meaning from this experience - it may be as simple as having more time for each other. There is a good chance this experience will help you to grow, not leave you broken.

The reality is we are forced together. Develop ways to keep communicating with each other, and that includes all the bad stuff - not just the achievements. It's the survival of the whole team that will lead to the feeling that you're winning. Try to focus on your family's survival, whatever its size. On this stormy sea, if you can weather the storm together, the chances of you coming out stronger as a family are very high.

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