

Saying Goodbye from a Distance

When a loved one is very sick in the hospital and you are unable to visit, it can be hard for both you and your child. If your loved one's health begins to decline and you are facing the possibility of them dying, you may feel confused or concerned about sharing this information with your child. Sharing open and honest information can help your child process and grieve.

Preparing for a conversation

Encourage your child to ask questions.

Do they understand why they can't visit?

- “You know that _____ has been in the hospital with _____. The doctors and nurses have been taking care of them. We haven't been able to visit because we need to keep our bodies safe from COVID-19 (Coronavirus). What do you know about COVID-19?”
- Let your child's questions help to guide your conversation. Use open-ended questions that ask for a longer answer than just “yes” or “no” such as:
 - “What questions do you have?” or “What are you worrying about?”

Acknowledge your child's feelings.

Let them know it's okay to express themselves. If your child is having a hard time sharing, be open about your own emotions to encourage and normalize their feelings.

- “I'm feeling very sad to be away from _____. Sometimes I cry or need a hug. What kinds of things does your body feel?”
- Your child may share with you it's unfair they are unable to visit their loved one. Validate your child's feelings and then remind them why staying home is the right choice.



Use concrete words to help your child understand what “death” and “dying” mean.

Using words like “passed” or “going away” can be confusing to young children.

• Example for an illness:

“The doctors and nurses did everything they could to help _____. Sometimes a body is too sick to get better or work anymore. Sometimes the sickness can't be fixed.”

• Example for an injury:

“The doctors and nurses did everything they could to help _____. Sometimes a body is too hurt to get better or work anymore.”

Ways to connect from a distance



Help your child write a letter to your loved one.

Some good starters are:

- 5 things I love about you
- I remember when we...
- Thank you for...
- I wish...

The letter can be mailed or emailed to your loved one. It can also be given to staff to share with your loved one.



Connect virtually.

Use FaceTime, Skype, Zoom or other free video connections to visit with your loved one. Staff can help you to connect virtually if your loved one needs assistance.



Mail a hug.

Have your child trace and cut out their handprints. Decorate with pictures or encouraging words. Cut a length of string or yarn. Tape the string to the bottom of the palm of each handprint. Now your loved one can wrap these strings around themselves.



Create your own daily ritual.

Think of something you and your child can do every day to stay grounded and connected to your loved one. This could be lighting a special candle, listening to one of their favorite songs, spending a few minutes each day to share a favorite memory or talk about your loved one or sharing your feelings.

Memorial activities

Because of current restrictions on groups, you may not be able to have a traditional funeral.

Instead, plan a virtual gathering. Your child can help choose favorite songs to play, a poem or prayer to read or help create a slide show of photos.

Create a memorial spot in your home with pictures or your loved one's favorite things.

Encourage your child to use this as a place to connect with their loved one. For younger children, leave a toy phone where they can "call" their loved one to talk.

Have children create a sign or collage with photos and post it somewhere for others to see and remember your loved one.

Prepare your loved ones favorite meal and eat it together.

You can set a place at the table for your loved one or light a special candle so that their presence is felt.

Create an online memorial with the help of your child where people can post memories or photos of your loved one.

Some free options are:

- Forever Missed (<https://www.forevermissed.com/>)
- Gathering U (<https://www.gatheringus.com/>)

