

December 2020

Pondering Parenting

Every month SMFCSD's Counselor Wellness Team will share with you stories and guidance based in the 3R's: Routines, Relationships and Regulation, to help your family navigate the everyday puzzles that arise in supporting your learner(s).

Navigating Grief and Loss During the Holidays

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The Challenge:

Around the world families are preparing for the holiday season. For many the holidays are a time to gather; a time to share, connect and find comfort in the company of those we love. The holidays provide an opportunity to spend time with the people in our lives who we cherish, and at the same time, can highlight those who are not with us. Feelings of grief and loss are often amplified during this time of year due to these reasons. With all of the complexities that this time of year brings, we are faced with even more layers this year due to the pandemic. We are having to make difficult decisions about how and if we will be able to gather and celebrate in the same ways. We are left asking ourselves: "How can we provide care and comfort to ourselves and our children during this holiday season?"

Grief is a natural response to loss and is unique to each person. While there is a wide range of social and cultural factors that shape one's process, there is no right way to grieve. The experience of grief can result from a death, however, it can also arise due to more ambiguous losses including physical or psychological absence, or even the threat of a loss.

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely affected every one of us, and we are all dealing with some level of grief. We feel the anxiety about the possible losses ahead of us. There are so many threats of loss around us: loss of health, loss of job, loss of loved ones, loss of connection, loss of routines, loss of touch, loss of a sense of control, and the list goes on.

Feelings of grief and loss can be further compounded by the isolation that so many of us are experiencing right now. Many are grieving the ability to gather in order to process, hold and support one another. Not being able to grieve in person with those we love presents a unique challenge to our grieving journey. Due to these obstacles it is critical to consider new and creative ways of maintaining our connections with one another.

The three R's provide a framework for special considerations this year. The pandemic mixed with the holiday season is new for everyone. Let's be gentle with ourselves and others as we figure out how to navigate this time.

Regulation

The holidays can bring up many strong emotions regardless of any history of grief or loss. For many this season of celebration can also be a time of tension and stress.

- Acknowledgement
 - Start this holiday season by acknowledging and validating what you are feeling and experiencing. By doing this first for yourself you will better be able to self regulate when having these conversations with others. Author and neuropsychiatrist, Dr. Dan Siegel coined the saying: **“Name it to tame it.”** Naming your own emotions related to grief and loss can be a wonderful way to model healthy expression and regulation of emotions for your child. The ability to name an emotion provides the opportunity for choice: the ability to choose what is needed in that moment to self soothe and regulate the nervous system.
- Normalize Mixed Emotions
 - Feelings can co-exist. During the holidays one can feel guilty about experiencing sadness while others are celebrating. If you recognize yourself having mixed emotions, show yourself some compassion. Perhaps share what you are noticing in yourself with your child to provide a platform for them to share how they are feeling.
- Create a Holiday Menu of Coping Skills
 - Holiday celebrations often revolve around food. Coping skills should be added to the list of things to have on the holiday menu. Touch base with your child about what things could support their ability to feel safe and calm during these times. Brainstorm ideas together and create a visual menu that can be easily referenced. What are some things you are already doing that you enjoy? What are some new things you can add to your plate that will feel nurturing?
 - [Coping Skills Menu Example](#) [Blank Coping Skills Menu](#)

Relationships

Relationships can serve as a source of strength and support, especially during the holidays.

- Connect
 - Special occasions can be taxing. In order to care for yourself and others this season it is critical to start with self-reflection. What more are you in need of this year? What do you need less of this year? Your ability to connect with yourself will have ripple effects on your ability to connect in meaningful ways with others.
- Ask for Help
 - This year you may not be able to take on as much as you have in the past. Remind yourself that this is ok. Give yourself permission to ask for help. Often

there are specific family members or friends who are responsible for a certain task or part of the celebration. If a family member has died and they played a special role at your celebration, consider passing on this role to someone new.

- Have a Memory Time
 - Set aside a time to take turns sharing about the person who died. You can look through photos, write letters, make art, tell stories or and/or do something that the person who died enjoyed.

Routines

Holiday traditions can be impacted by loss, including the social impacts of the pandemic. Even if changes in holiday routines are not explicitly discussed as a family, children notice and absorb the reactions and responses of those around them. Routines and rituals can provide us with a sense of control in times where we feel like much is outside of our control.

- Plan Ahead
 - Prior to the holidays consider what routines you would like to maintain and which routines you will need to or would like to change. Is there a way to honor the loss or person who died through a new tradition? Share your plan with your child.
- Remain Flexible
 - Consider a back up plan. You will not know how you will feel until the day of. Give yourself permission to change your mind or change plans.
- Set Realistic Expectations
 - Be realistic about what you can expect from yourself and from your child. Discuss that the holiday/special occasion may feel different and/or difficult, however, you are there to support each other. Set boundaries for yourself by reflecting on wants versus needs this year. Let your child know in advance what expectations you have of them regarding their choices and behavior.

Additional Resources

Community Supports

- [Kara Grief Support](#)
- [Spanish Kara Grief Supports](#) (Video)
- [Sutter Health Grief Support](#)

Videos:

- [Grief and Loss – Managing the Holidays during COVID-19](#)
- [Road to Resilience](#) (Spanish subtitles available)
- [How do you help a grieving friend?](#) (Spanish subtitles available)

Articles/Resources:

English

- [Supporting Grief In a Global Health Crisis - COVID-19 Specific Resources](#)
- [Sesame Street Grief Toolkit](#)

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- [Holidays for Families with Children](#)
 - [Family Holiday Plan](#)
 - [Grief and Covid 19 Activity Sheet](#)
 - [Support Chain Activity Sheet](#)
 - [Supporting Your Child After a Death](#)

Spanish

- [DUELO Y COVID-19](#)
- [CUANDO TU MUNDO YA ESTÁ AL REVÉS](#)
- [Después de que muere un ser querido](#)

E-Books:

English

[The Golden Sweater](#)

[The Girl With the Locket](#)

[The Fishless Lake](#)

Spanish

[El suéter dorado](#)

[La Niña del relicario](#)

[El lago sin peces](#)