

FINDING THE WORDS

When someone in your community has died of COVID-19



The Dougy Center

The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

As a school administrator or leader of an organization, you may be faced with notifying students, staff, families, and participants that someone in your community has died of COVID-19. Prior to physical distancing, sharing news that someone has died would ideally happen in person, in small groups and classrooms, with time for children and teens to process their reactions. Now, with an inability to do so in person, you may be faced with communicating this news via email, text, or video meetings. We created these sample scripts for you to use in crafting these communications. There are scripts specifically for sharing the news with children and teens and a version for notifying parents and caregivers. Please adapt as needed to ensure that the information and wording are accurate and culturally relevant for your particular community.

These scripts can be adapted for different situations by changing the first two lines. If the cause of death is not confirmed or if the family has not given permission to share that information, you can say “The family has requested that their privacy be honored at this time.” These scripts can also be used if someone in your community dies from another cause such as an illness, accident, suicide, or violent death.

CHILD AND TEEN SAMPLE SCRIPT

I have some very sad news to share with you all. (Student/teacher’s name) died on (date) and their family gave us permission to share that they died of COVID-19 - which some of you might know as coronavirus.

Many of you will have lots of different feelings — you might be sad, angry, confused, or scared. Some of you will feel numb or like you don’t feel anything at all. If you knew (Student/teacher’s name), you might have a lot of memories of times you spent together. Even if you didn’t know them, you might feel worried or concerned about your health and the health of the people in your life, or you might be thinking about other people you’re missing.

There are no right or wrong feelings to have when someone dies. It’s different for everyone.

Unfortunately, with the physical distancing rules, we can’t be together in person, but our school is still here for you and your family. Your teacher will reach out with a day/time to meet online to share any thoughts, feelings, or questions you have.

You can also reach out to your school counselor (contact information) or to me personally (contact information).

If we receive information about plans for a memorial, we will share that with you.

Here are two important resources that are available 24/7 if you need additional support:

National Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line: text Hello to 741741

PARENT AND CAREGIVER SAMPLE SCRIPT

I have some very sad news to share with you all. (Student/teacher's name) died on (date) and their family gave us permission to share that they died of the COVID-19 — which some of you might know as coronavirus.

Your children may have a variety of reactions, depending on their age, relationship with the person who died, and past experiences with grief and loss. You might notice your children expressing sadness, anger, confusion, fear, or no visible reaction at all. Even if your children did not know (student/teacher's name), this death might bring up additional fears for their health and the health and safety of people they care about. Your child might need additional emotional and physical reassurance and nurturing during this time.

It can be helpful to remember that there are no right or wrong feelings to have when someone dies, and that grief is different for everyone.

Unfortunately, with the physical distancing rules, we won't be able to gather in person, but

our school is still here for you and your family. Your child's teacher(s) will reach out with a day/time to meet online to share any thoughts, feelings, or questions your child has.

You can also reach out to your school counselor (contact information) or to me personally (contact information).

If we receive information about plans for a memorial, we will share that with you.

Here are some resources for you and your children during this time:

[Developmental Responses to Grief](#)

School & Community Toolkit [COVID-19 page](#) & [Kid & Teen Pages](#)

[When Your World is Already Upside Down Supporting Children & Teens When a Close Friend Dies](#)

[Now What? Tips for Grieving Teens](#)

[Your Friend is Grieving – Tips for Supporting Them](#)

If you or your children need additional support, these two crisis lines are available 24/7:

National Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line: text Hello to 741741



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Our Mission

The Dougy Center provides support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families grieving a death can share their experiences. Our *Pathways* program provides support for families living with an advanced serious illness.

The Dougy Center Bookstore/Resources

The Dougy Center has been helping children, teens, young adults and their parents cope with death since 1982. Our practical, easy-to-use materials are based on what we have learned from more than 45,000 Dougy Center participants. To order online, visit dougy.org or tdcbookstore.org, or call 503.775.5683.