



Grieving the Loss of Summer 2020

Concepts Adults Must Understand before Talking with Campers

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.

Be direct and avoid euphemisms.

When children are coping with death, euphemisms such as "went to sleep" can be confusing. Little kids might take what you say literally and start to fear bedtime; older kids might feel like you are too uncomfortable to have an honest conversation. Be direct instead. It's OK to say, "There won't be on-site camp this summer."

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.

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.

Cancellation is not death.

There are two important points here: (1) All but the youngest children understand that death is final, but everyone knows 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.

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To support young people who are grieving the loss of regular summer camp, the following concepts may be helpful for adults to read and reflect on before a family discussion. Remember to listen and empathize, not problem-solve. Your answers to questions do not have right answers, only thoughtful, creative ones.

TALKING POINTS for ADULTS to CONSIDER with CHILDREN & TEENS

1. **You may be getting some upsetting news.** Kids have friends or family members who have gotten sick with corona virus. And kids have heard that their camp is cancelled. All of this bad news is upsetting.
2. **Summer will be very different without Camp.** The choice that Camp Belknap made was based on the health and safety of all the campers. Belknap is doing all they can to manage the financial situation and staff for future summers. Belknap has come up with the best solution they can.
3. **We are doing what we have to do...but it's hard.** No doubt about it: Sheltering in place and social distancing are slowing the spread of corona virus, but it is also making people feel lonely and isolated.
4. **Being careful can be really lonely.** Just when you thought you might get to see your friends at camp, you get the disappointing news that the directors have cancelled on-site programs.
5. **It's normal to feel whatever you feel.** You might feel angry at the virus, upset with the camp director, sad about not seeing your friends in person, or confused about cancellation. All feelings are normal.
6. **It's hard to cope with a thing you can't see.** One of the things that makes camp cancellations, *because of a virus*, so frustrating is that you can't see a virus, unless you have a microscope. Camp *looks* OK.
7. **Belknap cares most about campers and staff.** Remember that Belknap cares much more about the *people* than the *facilities*. The Directors and Belknap's board and staff made the healthy decisions for people.
8. **Camp is about spreading joy, not germs.** Sharing, playing, eating, and living together is what people love most about camp. Unfortunately, there may not be healthy ways to be together right now.
9. **This is way worse than a rainy day.** However, when we figure out a way to stop this virus from making people sick, we will be able to be back together, enjoying our favorite activities at camp.
10. **The adults are sad and frustrated too.** The adults have not had to deal with something like this before. They have had to work hard, figure out some tough problems, and make some difficult decisions.
11. **Belknappers know how to make their own fun.** You know it! Belknap will be back in touch with ideas and connection points for everyone.
12. **How can you add to camp fun this summer?** It's time to start thinking about your talents and interests so that you can add to the fun this summer. Your positive attitude and creativity will make it awesome!
13. **Doing camp differently is unselfish.** One of the most important lessons we learn at Belknap is how to put other people's needs before their own, God First, The Other Fellow Second, Myself Last. We all have an important opportunity to do that now.
14. **Here's how you can start a great summer:** Write two hand-written letters, on paper, the old-fashioned way—one to an adult at camp and one to a same-age peer. Find their addresses in the Masqua and get them mailed. You'll brighten their day.

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