

## **Rachel J. Kramer, Ph.D.**

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Good afternoon,

I hope you and your family are safe and healthy. In Massachusetts this week, the governor announced that schools will be closed for the rest of the school year. While many (if not most) adults knew that this news was likely to be coming, it still felt incredibly shocking to hear the definitive announcement. While many parents were prepared to take on the challenge of a middle distance race in regards to supporting children learning at home, we're now in the process of shifting to the reality that this process will be a marathon. A key component of that shift will be learning how to pace ourselves, and that topic will be the focus of my webinar this week (see below).

Children and parents are feeling so many things right now – frustration, worry, disappointment, deep sadness, and grief. Some may be grieving over a traumatic loss such as death of a loved one, but others are grieving about the loss of milestones such as prom or graduation, loss of time with a beloved teacher, or loss of the freedom to move about freely in the world.. Much has been written recently about coping with loss and grief. My intention is not to overwhelm you with more material to read, so I'm going to summarize a few bullet points about helping children and adolescents cope with the losses involved in the pandemic.

- Begin by considering the losses you have experienced due to the pandemic, and think about how you allow yourself to process and experience that grief – are you able to talk with a family member or close friend? Write in a journal? Create art or music to express your feelings?
- Now consider the losses your child is experiencing. Acknowledge the loss as well as the accompanying grief and sadness (“Sounds like you’re so deeply sad that \_\_\_\_\_ has been cancelled”). If you feel overwhelmed by your own sadness, remember that saying, “This is so hard,” can feel very supportive to a sad, frustrated child or teenager.
- Use words to help children identify what they are feeling. You can model putting feelings into words by either asking a question (“I wonder if you’re feeling lonely?”), sharing what you are noticing about your child’s physical

- response (“Your voice is getting so loud, I wonder if you’re frustrated?”), or making a general comment about feelings (“Looks like you’re having a big wave of sad feelings”).
- While it may be useful for adults to think about loss in a relative way and to consider how lucky we are in relation to many others, this reasoning may not be useful for children and adolescents. I’d suggest you resist the urge to talk about people who are coping with more serious losses and focus instead on what your child is feeling right now.
  - After allowing your child some time to sit with the difficult feeling – perhaps crying, hugging you, spending time alone, or ranting about a cancelled event – try to shift the focus to finding a positive coping strategy such as playing a game together, going outside, getting some exercise, or listening to a favorite playlist or audiobook.
  - Keep in mind that a useful strategy for coping with negative feelings about losses during the pandemic is to shift the focus to what your family can do to support other people in the world who are struggling: pick up groceries for an elderly neighbor, reach out to a friend or family member who lives alone, or send a card to teacher who’s working hard to teach online classes.

A couple of other resources that may be useful:

- In my webinar last week I talked about using a glitter jar as a mindfulness tool – making a [DIY glitter jar](#) could be a good project for this week.
- The National Child Stress Institute collaborated with an author and an illustrator to develop this downloadable [picture book for young children](#). The book is long (more than 40 pages) but does a nice job portraying some of the experiences and feelings young children and families might be having during the pandemic.
- The Yale Child Study Center and Scholastic Collaborative for Child and Family Resilience has designed a [free, downloadable workbook](#) to help elementary school aged children cope during the pandemic.
- Many parents are wondering whether summer camps and other summer programs will be offered this summer. We don’t have much practical information about that yet, but if you want to explore remote options for the summer, TeenLife has compiled a [directory of online summer programs](#). While most of the programs are for high school students, there are a few offerings for younger children, as well.

This week’s webinar:

**School's Closed and Children Are Home: Practical Strategies for Helping Families Cope**

Wednesday, April 29, 2020 at 10:30am EDT

As always there will be ample time for parents to ask questions. Can't join live? There are links to all of the recorded webinars on my website

– [www.drrachelkramer.com](http://www.drrachelkramer.com)

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85406382777?pwd=ZlFsUTZzbCt6bXBZSVhQVmxpeVBTdz09>

Password: 813729

Warm regards,

Rachel