

Saying Goodbye From Afar

While visitor policies are temporarily restricted, it may not be possible for children to say goodbye to a loved one who is dying. Despite these restrictions, there are other ways for children to say goodbye from afar.

Just like adults, children benefit from feeling included in decision-making related to communications, rituals, and practices when a loved one is dying. If children choose not to participate, let them know that this is OK and there are ways to honour the person in the future, even after they have died.

Remember: Use words like “die,” “dead,” and “dying,” and name the illness or cause of death. Phrases like “passed away,” “asleep,” and “really sick” can be confusing for a child to differentiate.

Activities that children can do independently:

- Write a letter to their loved one
- Draw a picture of themselves and their loved one
- Write a poem, song or story about their loved one
- Choose a treasured item of theirs to give to the loved one
- Listen to music or read a book that reminds them of their loved one
- Look at photos or watch videos of their loved one

Activities that children and adults can do together:

- A phone call or video chat with the loved one
- Sing a song, share a story, or say a special message to the loved one (recorded or virtually face-to-face)
- Prepare a meal with the loved one’s favourite foods
- Create a playlist or online photo album of the loved one that family members can add to

These are some ideas to get started, but there are lots of ways to say goodbye from afar. Start by asking children what they understand and how they would like to say goodbye.

Children's Grief Resources

- Lighthouse: Peer Support for Grieving Children, Youth and Families– Oakville, Ontario
<https://www.grievingchildrenlighthouse.org/>
- Dr. Jay Children's Grief Centre – Toronto, Ontario
<https://drjaychildrensgriefcentre.ca/>
- Seasons Center for Grieving Children – Barrie, Ontario
<https://www.grievingchildren.com/>
- The Dougy Centre
<http://www.dougy.org/>
- Winston's Wish Foundation
<http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>
- Sesame Street: Grieving as a family
<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/grief>
- Kids Grief
<https://www.kidsgrief.ca>
- MyGrief.ca – Canadian Virtual Hospice
<https://www.MyGrief.ca>
- Children and Youth Grief Network
<https://www.childrenandyouthgriefnetwork.com/>
- Bereavement Ontario Network
<http://bereavementontarionetwork.ca/>
- National Alliance for Grieving Children
<https://childrengrieve.org/>

Children's Grief Books

- Brown, L.K. (1996). *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death*.
- Goldman, L. (2005). *Children Also Grieve: Talking about Death and Healing*.
- Hanson, W. (1997). *The Next Place*.
- Heegard, M. (1996). *When Someone Very Special Dies*.
- Karst, P. (2000). *The Invisible String*.
- Schweibert, P., & DeKlyen, C. (1999). *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*.

Always review websites and books before sharing them with children to ensure they are developmentally appropriate and align with family beliefs about dying and death.