

## How Older Children Think and Feel

Children who go to school have built complex social networks. They're learning how relationships are built outside of their families, how to deal with peer conflict, and how friendships can end. They likely have a few close friends who share their worries, fears, hopes and dreams. They depend on their friends. And their friends depend on them.



The sudden and urgent need for physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted our children's social worlds. They've lost the social contact that is so important in their lives. And they've lost the special time they spend with their friends, away from their families.

Disconnection from school also means a loss of contact with teachers. For many children, teachers are important people in their lives. Teachers who have created safe spaces for children to talk, express ideas, and 'hang out' after school will be deeply missed.

For many children, these losses are felt as grief.

Some children will express their grief as sadness. For some children, this can happen right away; for others, it may be a more delayed response. They might cry frequently or interact less with their families. They might spend a lot of time alone, just being sad. They might sleep a lot, and have trouble waking up in the morning. Their grief might feel like a weight pressing down on them. They might feel broken-hearted.

Other children will express their grief as anger. They might be short-tempered and moody. They might resist physical distancing, going out to meet their friends against our advice.

All these behaviours are signs that children's worlds have been suddenly turned upside-down. They're still young; they haven't lived through anything like this before. They don't know when it will end – or what will be left of their friendships when it does end. They're worried about their friends' and teachers' health.



They're experiencing sudden, drastic and painful losses. Social isolation can have a powerful impact on their emotional well-being.

Punishments like taking away phones or other valued items won't help. This only makes children feel that we don't understand what they're going through, so they'll miss their friends even more. They need connection more than anything. As parents, we need to regulate our own responses and then:

- focus on our long-term goals,
- ensure that their homes are places of safety and support, and
- problem solve with them to find ways of connecting meaningfully with their friends.

Many school-aged children are experiencing profound emotional upheaval that feels like a storm is raging inside of them. It's our job to provide them with a safe port in the storm and guide them through these challenging times.