

Supporting Your Child: Covid-19 Summer Camp Cancellations

Sharing the News

How you deliver the message to your child is key. Some children may not be surprised because they have anticipated this or may have had previous discussions regarding cancellations. Some children may be very surprised. **Deliver the news with facts and in two to three sentences. The longer you wait to deliver the bottom line, the more stressful it will become.** In addition, when a person receives upsetting news, they tend to hear only the first part of the message. Be calm and let your child take in the news, then let them lead the conversation from there. They may need time to sort out their feelings, or they may want to discuss right away.

Start the Conversation:

"We just heard Sabra had to cancel camp for this summer because of the coronavirus. The experts and the staff at camp have decided that to keep everyone safe, they can't have camp this summer."

Be Respectful of Their Emotions

Every child has a different time sequence to their understanding. Their emotions and moods may go up and down. Some kids may be angry with camp or the experts or even you. Some children respond by acting out more or other temporary behavior changes. This is all part of the grieving process. **Allow them to push the boundaries a little, but be clear on your expectations that these difficult times are not an excuse for them to be disrespectful or unkind.** They still need to be good family members and honor your home expectations. Be patient with them. This is an adjustment.

Continue the Conversation:

"I realize how awful this is, and I don't blame you for being mad. I am here if there is anything I can do to help you at this moment."

Allow Them to Grieve

This is a loss for us all. When we grieve a loss, we experience a range of emotions. You may see denial, anger, attempts to negotiate or bargain and sadness. At some point, they will come to accept the outcome. **We have a hard time watching our children go through a difficult time. We love to see them "happy" and try to do things to make them happy all the time. Do not try to fix the situation for them. Rather, take the opportunity to help them through their emotions.** Remember, your child's brain is continuing to develop, and they don't think as logically as adults might. The best way to help them is by letting them take their time through the process and to go through all the stages of their feelings. Show them that you can patiently wait for them.

Continue the Conversation:

"I can imagine this is very hard, and I see that you are so sad. I would feel/am sad, too. Let me know when you are ready, and we can talk about your summer. For now, it is okay to be sad."

Model Healthy Coping Techniques

You have the power to model healthy coping techniques for your children. Remember, they are always watching you and looking for guidance. **It is okay to let them know that you also have feelings about camp and, in general, about what is going on in the world. Teach them how to respond to disappointments through your positive examples.** Show them that taking a walk; writing in a journal; reaching out to support systems to vent, cry or laugh; playing a game; cooking; and more are all appropriate ways to work through their feelings. Point out what you are doing that is helping you get through the hard times.

Continue the Conversation:

"Today I am so frustrated about being stuck in the house! I am going for a walk so I can release some tension. Want to join?"

and/or

"Since we cannot control this situation, we need to find ways to get through this. We can control how we react to hard situations."

Stay Connected

Encourage your children to stay connected to their Camp Sabra friends and community. Help them come up with ways to do this either by letters, emails, Zoom calls or FaceTime. **Keeping in touch will help them feel a sense of belonging and continue to build their great camp relationship and family. It also gives a child a sense of control over their relationships.** Bring a taste of camp into your home by wearing white on Friday nights and saying the prayers or make s'mores or foil packs.

Continue the Conversation:

"Let us do a Zoom song session with your camp friends tonight. I can help you set that up."

Participate in Acts of Kindness/Chesed

An act of kindness is a positive way to help yourself get through the grieving process. Use your sadness to bring support and warmth and to make a difference in someone else's life. Doing so reminds us that we are all going through many losses and changes right now, but we can still help. Make a card for an older adult, donate to the food pantry, deliver a challah on Shabbat, put a sign on your window thanking the USPS! There are so many ways to be creative and support the people around you. **Everyone is missing something right now, but we can reach out with kindness and try to help.**

Continue the Conversation:

"I am so sad about missing camp. I want to let my friends know that I am thinking of them, so I'm going to call someone!"

and/or

"The adults who live in retirement communities are so sad right now because they can't see their family members. I am going to make cards for them to cheer them up."

