

SHARING THE NEWS

Your approach as the messenger is key. Many children may be expecting this news, so they may be saddened but not surprised. Approach your child calmly, avoid catastrophizing or minimizing. Do not create a big build up. Deliver the news with facts, in 2-3 sentences. Let your child take in the news and then let them set the tone. Some have prepared for this and may have less of a reaction than you expect, and some children may be very overwhelmed. The longer you wait to deliver the “punchline”, the more stressful it will become.

- *“We just heard that camp will be closed this summer because of the coronavirus. Health officials and camp professionals agree it isn’t safe this year.”*

IT TAKES TIME

Some kids may need more time to understand. Emotions may change from day to day. Some may be angry with camp, Girl Scouts, or even the CDC! This is a normal part of the grieving process. Their behaviors may change temporarily; they may regress. Allow them to push boundaries a bit, but be clear that these hard feelings are not an excuse to be unkind or disrespectful. Be patient; they will regain their equilibrium soon.

- *“I know this really stinks. I don’t blame you for feeling this way in this moment.”*

MODEL HEALTHY COPING

It’s okay to tell your child that you are sad for them and for everyone who loves camp! Do the healthy things that help you get through hard times, and let your child know that you are doing those things. Take a break to recharge. Exercise, reach out to your support system, engage in a creative outlet, or do something fun. This is a loss for you also. Your children’s happiness affects you, their disappointments affect you, and this also represents a loss of freedom that you typically have during the summer. They are watching you closely; you have great power in modeling your own healthy coping. Through your example, you can teach them how to respond to disappointments and hardship.

- *“We can’t control the virus, but we can control how we react to hard things. Let’s figure out how to get through this.”*
- *“Wow, today I am feeling really angry about camp being closed! I am going to take a walk to help myself calm down.”*

LET YOUR CHILD FEEL

Allow space for your child to experience a range of feelings. Avoid rushing to “fix” even when it is hard for you to watch. Sadness, anger, attempts to negotiate, anxiety, and silence are all normal. Some reactions may be intense. Remember, your child’s brain is still developing. It’s likely they are acting on pure emotion. Logic may not be in play yet. They are grieving a loss. As therapists often say, the only way out is through. If we move too quickly towards solutions, they may miss the opportunity to practice resiliency in the face of disappointment.

Tips for Navigating COVID-19 Summer Camp Cancellations

- *“I don’t blame you. This is really hard. When you’re ready, we can problem solve.”*

STAY CONNECTED

Encourage your child to reach out to their camp friends. The camp community is one of strong support and strong relationships. Staying connected with friends will give your child a sense of connection and belonging instead of focusing on isolation and a lack of control.

- *“I know you are so sad about camp being closed. I am sure your friends are sad too; let’s give them a call.”*

MAKING MEANING

One of the most effective ways to process hardship is to use sadness to bring support and warmth to others. Make cards for healthcare workers, send real letters to camp friends and staff, start Take Action projects that positively impact your community. Each child is missing a camp experience that is unique to them, but our community is in this together.

- *“I’m so sad for everyone who is missing camp. I’m going to make a card for my favorite counselor to show her I am thinking of her.”*
- *“Not being able to go to camp is really hard for me; I am sure everyone is missing something right now. Let’s make a chalk mural with a positive message on the sidewalk!”*