



Encouraging, Educating, Equipping,
and Empowering Camp and Retreat Leadership

“No! They Can’t Cancel Camp!” Guidance for Parents Talking with Kids about Camp Being Canceled

Adapted By Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper. Program Director for Ministry with Children, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). This is an adaptation of “How to Talk to Your Kids About Canceled Summer Plans”, a publication of The Union for Reformed Judaism Briut Team and used with their permission. This adaptation is presented by Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM), the association of camps and retreat centers affiliated with the ELCA.

As many of the camps that are members of LOM announce 2020 summer closures due to COVID-19 risks, adults are searching for the right words to share the news with their children.

LOM is here to help. This article, provided by LOM with collaboration of the whole ELCA, hopes to address in practical terms the emotions of young people at a variety of maturity levels and provide guidance for how you might talk with them about camp closures this summer.

First, it is helpful to remember that for children of all ages, the greatest gift we can give as parents is to listen to them and provide validation for their feelings. Resist the urge to “fix” the situation or problem-solve for them, as it will leave children feeling unsupported and fear that you do not think they can manage things on their own.

How to Talk to Elementary School-Aged Children

Kids of this age need information shared with them with few words that are direct and to the point. Every time you have a conversation with your child about a difficult topic, you are helping your child to grow and learn. With children of this age, parents need to be in charge and direct the conversation.

Keep in mind that behavior is communication, and often, you can determine how a child is tolerating the information you’ve shared by watching their behavior both during and afterward – and then asking them about it without judgment. You might say:

“I notice you are stomping your feet a lot, and that isn’t like you.”

“I see your eyes are tearing up, and I wonder if that means you are sad?”

The tone of your questions helps to assure your child that they are safe to share their feelings. Be sure that once your child begins talking, you stop talking, giving them the opportunity to share what’s on their mind.

If kids have been to camp before and were hoping to return, you might say:

*“It’s hard when you don’t get to do what you thought you’d be doing.”

*“I’m so sorry that you won’t get to experience _____ because I know you love it.”

*“It’s normal to feel sad about this; I am sad for you, too.”

*“Everybody at _____ cares so much about campers being safe and healthy, and this summer it will be too difficult to keep everyone safe.”

If kids would have been campers for the first time, you might say:

*“I’m so sorry this won’t be the summer you get to experience _____.”

*“I can’t imagine how you’re feeling, but I am here to listen, and give hugs.”

How to Talk to Middle & High School-Aged Youth

Teens and tweens need information in an honest manner. The conversation might go best if it’s collaborative; with you sharing the information and then following their lead. Teens may be interested in talking about the situation all at once or may need time to process and then revisit.

And remember that at this age, peer relationships are also very important, and may want to talk with their friends before they talk with you. Acknowledge that this is a grieving process for them and validate the emotions that they are experiencing. It may be helpful to avoid using words like “I understand” and instead use statements such as “I can imagine…” or “It sounds like…”

Some statements that might be helpful are:

*“I know you may want to talk with your friends first, but let me know if you want to chat with me about _____ later.”

*“I know how much you were looking forward to returning to _____. Are there things we can do at home that will be helpful to you during this time?”

*“_____’s biggest concern is always your health and safety, and in this time, they are not able to provide that same safe environment that they would normally because of COVID-19.”

*“It is so normal to be upset and experience a lot of emotions around this news. I’m here to talk about it anytime you need.”

Helpful Books For Processing Feelings with Kids:

For Lower Elementary Aged Kids:

Grumpy Bird by Jeremy Tankard - a short picture book that allows for a bird to work through their emotions with the patience of good friends.

The Pout-Pout Fish by Deborah Diesen and illustrated by Dan Hanna - a picture book with a fish feeling it’s their nature to be pouty then challenged by friends that perhaps it is also the fish’s nature to feel uplifting.

Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld - a short picture book of how well meaning friends tried to cheer the little boy’s sad feelings but what he really needed was someone who listened.

For Upper Elementary Aged Kids:

Dorothea’s Eyes by Barb Rosenstock and illustrated by Gerard DuBois - a picture book about how Dorothea Lange managed to care for people during the Great Depression and treat them with integrity through her art.

She Persisted: 13 American Women Who Changed the World by Chelsea Clinton and illustrated by Alexandra Boiger - a picture book that focuses on how people received hard news but persisted despite it.

Resources for Faith Formation at Home:

Wonder Stories from Lutherhill Camp: Join Pastor Jen Kindsvatter for a delightful series of Wonder Stories recorded at various places at Lutherhill in La Grange. Be sure to check out the Wonder Questions in the comments of each video!

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/LutherhillMinistries/>

Faithful Families at Home: 15 Easy Family-Friendly Prayers and Activities: From Chalice Press and author Traci Smith - Download 15 easy prayers, practices, and activities to share with your children for less than \$5!

<https://chalicepress.com/products/faithful-families-at-home-15-easy-family-friendly-prayers-and-activities>

Illustrated Ministry: Free weekly coloring pages and devotionals during the pandemic.

<https://www.illustratedministry.com/flattenthecurve/>

Covid-19 Specific Helpful Websites:

Coronavirus, Anxiety, Children and the Church <https://buildfaith.org/coronavirus-anxiety-children-and-the-church/?fbclid=IwAR3tUBL9ckh4DAnzxoJDORFNqMuvtBA5j3PeHEpu13r9vm0BdXW5PtvSKFI>

Covid-19 Time Capsule for Kids - FREE Time Capsule booklet download created by Natalie Long of Long Creations <https://letsembark.ca/time-capsule?fbclid=IwAR1bDkjqNighdvtvq5HWy20lwF9zqQ0T4VsBXgLbgSHBlmCk0rm2dnHzCgLc>

Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting From COVID-19

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>

Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper serves as the Program Director for Ministry with Children for the ELCA. She's married and has two elementary aged kids who were terribly sad to hear they would not be going to their favorite LOM camp, Lutherhill, this summer. She curates: www.ministrylinks.online/faith-at-home