

## Talking to Your Kids about the Update from YMCA Geneva Park

**Our staff team has put together some tips and tricks for talking to your kids about the YMCA's decision to sell Geneva Park. These tips come from our experience working with children and youth, and are based on the advice of various mental health professionals including Dr. Chris Thurber and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson.**

**1. Take a Pause:** For many, this will be a big deal. Geneva Park is hugely important and impactful for some kids. They deserve your undivided attention when you break this news to them. Covid-19 has been a difficult time for children and they may grieve many things. They might miss their friends, the staff, spending time in nature, a sense of independence and freedom, their favourite activities, and the general magic of the Park.

### **2. Resist the Urge to...**

- a) Use Euphemisms:** Instead, be direct, so that they understand that if Public Health restrictions allow them to go to Geneva Park in summer 2021, it might be their last.
- b) Problem Solve:** Try not to offer solutions right away. They may feel that there is no replacement, and that is okay. Listening without problem solving is key.
- c) Distract:** Though it may be uncomfortable, allow them to sit in their grief and really feel it. Though it can be tempting to offer distractions, it may make it more difficult to fully process their feelings.
- d) Point out Silver Linings:** There is a time for this, but it is not right away. If you point out the bright side, they may feel like you are belittling their problems. Perspective can be healthy, but it is not the time to compare hardships to others. Offering alternatives can come later, after they have had some time to process this loss.
- e) Point out the Inevitability:** Covid-19 has closed schools and paused many childrens' activities, but summers at Geneva Park have not been in question until Covid-19 arrived in advance of last summer. This may make it less shocking, but it does not make it less sad.

### **3. Let them lead the conversation**

- a) Let them feel what they need to feel:** Everyone processes grief differently, and it is not always a linear path. Children may have a wide range of emotions including sadness, anger, or confusion and these emotions may resurface in the summer. This may be difficult and upset your child, but being able to cope with negative emotions and situations is what builds resilience in kids.
- b) Ask open ended questions:** If they want to talk about Geneva Park, ask questions like "What might you miss most about Geneva Park?" and "What is your favourite Geneva Park memory?"
- c) Ask your child what they need from you:** Often, kids have an idea of what might help them. It may be a hug, to talk, to cry, or some alone time.