

Grieving Children

Parent's Guide

Funeral Rituals

Four main functions:

- Confirms the finality of death
- Encourages the expression of grief and sorrow
- Expression of community support
- Confirms that life goes on

"In sorrow, familiar faces are comforting, even if they are sad"

Josée Masson, 2006

Return to School

- Parent-Teacher communication
- Rest and return to daily activities, respect child's rhythm
- Open communication, sharing
- With the child's permission, speak with their friends as they can be a source of support
- Consult with other professionals as necessary

When to Worry about your Child

As a parent you know your child and you will know when he/she seems to be in trouble. These are some of the reactions you might notice:

- *Nightmares, not able to sleep*
- *Acting out at school or failing tests*
- *Clinging, not talking to friends and family*
- *Aggressive*
- *Acting like the person who has died*

If your child's reactions seem to be excessive, ask for professional help

There are no predetermined time limits on grief, you must accompany your child in his/her grief in the years to come



Things to remember

Children and adults do not grieve the same way :

- Children express themselves more directly and physically
- Talking about the death is difficult
- Children will grieve/play/grieve
- The child's magical thinking can make them believe that their thoughts caused the person to die
- Children will understand death better as they get older

An adult might think that this experience is traumatic for a child. However, a child living with his/her family can grieve with them, have his/her questions answered, learn about death and grow emotionally with the experience.

Babies and young children will have very few memories of the deceased. Still, stories can be told of "Remember when..." describing his/her involvement. This will strengthen their sense of belonging to the family and to the loved one who has died.

Reference

Masson, J. (2006). *Derrière mes larmes d'enfant, la mort et le deuil me font mal*. Édition Ressources.



*Renée L'Heureux
Infirmière-ressource*

Parent's Concerns and Questions

- How do I talk about the death to my child?
- What are the normal grief reactions and needs of a child?
- Should I bring my child to the hospital? Should he see the body?
- Should I bring my child to the funeral home and to the ceremony?
- Should I talk to his friends, teachers? When should my child return to school?
- How will I know if my child needs help?

What is my Child Feeling?

- Confusion
- Sorrow, anger
- Lost in his/her thoughts, fear
- Insecurity
- Guilt
- Abandonment, separation anxiety

As well as number of other reactions

The Child Needs

- Honesty and simple language
- To be able to trust people
- To be listened to and have answers his/her to questions
- Respect for his/her needs related to age, wishes, capabilities, etc.
- Love, security, routines of daily living
- To be involved in family discussions

How Death is Perceived by Children

The concept of death is very complex. Understanding comes with age and emotional development.

When talking with a child we think they understand, but their questions tell us he/she that it is not quite clear:

"Will Daddy be home for Christmas? You aren't going to die, are you? What really happens when you die?"

It is difficult to verify if a child or adolescent has understood your explanations about death. Children need to understand that:

- Death means the body is no longer functioning
- Everyone dies
- Death is a physical cause and does not happen because of bad thoughts
- Death is part of the cycle of life
- A body cannot come back to life after dying

While death may seem easy to understand for adults, children rarely fully understand it before the beginning of adolescence (12 years of age). Respect your child's learning development and do not hesitate to say that death is mysterious and it is normal to feel confused.

Reference

Lonetto, R. (1998). "Dis c'est quoi quand on est mort?" L'idée de la mort chez l'enfant. France : Edition ESHEL.

Factors that could influence their reactions

- Support received from families and friends
- Age, maturity level, personality
- Relationship with the deceased
- The different types of losses already experienced
- The circumstances and cause of death

Discussing the Death

By the parents or a relative, as soon as possible :

- In a private place
- With the help of healthcare professionals
- Give time, answer questions, repeat as needed
- Simple and direct language:
"Your father was in a bad accident and he died. You won't be able to see him anymore."

The Hospital Visit

What is preferable :

- Involve children in family discussions
- Prepare and accompany them
- Allow children to see the dead body
- Respect the child's decisions
- Allow children to say goodbye (drawings, letters photos, etc).

"Locked up grief won't go away on its own; instead it grows, poisoning and feeding on the silence, without us even knowing it. Encourage children who are ignoring their suffering to cry, this is the most charitable service you can offer them. "

(Dupery, 1992)

Resources

Your Local CLSC

ODTSQ (Ordre des travailleurs sociaux)

1 888-731-9420

Quebec Order of Psychologists

1 800-4561-1223

www.ordrepsy.qc.ca

Deuil-Jeunesse

1 418 670-9772

WWW.deuil-jeunesse.com

Suicide-Action

1 866-appelle (277-3553)

Grief Info Line

Maison Monbourquette

1 888-423-3596

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