

PERSPECTIVES ON
LOSS & GRIEF
ISSUE 8

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TRANSITIONS

A HOSPICE BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends of Hospice:

Grief is a family affair. It is hard to reach out to your children or grandchildren when you are experiencing so much pain yourself. For children, it may seem that they have lost you, too.

Children do grieve. It is different from adult grief, but just as real. They have many questions, but may be afraid to ask a distressed adult. They may have fears that show up in behavior. We do children a disservice when we attempt to hide our emotions of grief. Showing your emotions openly helps the child accept the naturalness and pain of death.

One conversation won't do it. It is important to "stay tuned" and respond honestly to questions and observations from them. You will feel less pressure if you accept that you don't have to have all the answers. In this issue of Transitions, we give you some clues on how children grieve and how you can help.

Sincerely,

The Bereavement Team

Tabitha Hospice, A Collaboration with Immanuel

YES, CHILDREN GRIEVE

Grief knows no age boundaries, but the impact of grief on children is not as well recognized as in adults. Adults cannot always know what a child is thinking or feeling, so cues must be taken from their behavior. Children tend to act out their feelings and fears, rather than talking about them.

The best way to deal with children is honestly. Talk to children in a language that they can understand. Remember to listen and try to understand what the child is saying, and—just as importantly—what he or she is not saying.

Children need to feel that the death is an open subject and that they can express their thoughts and question as they arise. They may need to ask their questions again and again. Repeated questions require patience and continued expression of caring.

Words of *Wisdom*

"What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others."

Pericles

"Our wounds are often the openings into the best and most beautiful part of us."

David Richo

GRIEF'S JOURNEY

Children ages 3 to 19 who have experienced the death of someone they love can get support through the Grief's Journey support program at The Collective for Hope in Omaha. The children meet in groups according to age and take part in activities such as making comfort pillows and memory boxes, writing stories, sand play and sharing experiences with others.

Parents or guardians have a chance to meet separately from the children and receive support and grief education. There is never a fee for activities at The Collective for Hope.

Ongoing support groups meeting times and dates may vary.

For more information, call: 402.502.2773.

OTHER RESOURCES

For additional support, please contact our Hospice Bereavement Team at 402.819.4949.

For additional reading materials, please contact The Centering Corporation at 866.218.0101 or www.centering.org



TABITHA
Hospice

A COLLABORATION
WITH
 **Immanuel**

► **Preschool Children (Ages 3 to 5)**

Perceptions of Death

- › Death is not accepted as permanent, but rather as temporary.
- › Death may be confused with being away or sleeping.

Possible Related Behaviors

- › Child may revert back to bedwetting, thumb sucking, baby talk or fear of the dark.
- › Child may show little emotion or concern over the death. Adults should not interpret this as lack of caring on the part of the child.
- › Child may have short “sadness bursts” and then resume normal play.
- › Child may show fear of separation at bedtime or when attending preschool.

What You Can Do

- › Keep explanations short, simple and truthful, using correct terms like “dead/death.”
- › Respond to child’s need for security—concerns about, “Who will take care of me?” or “Will I die, too?”
- › Keep routines, activities and schedules as normal as possible.
- › Hold the child often—hugs, soft talking, love and warmth are so important.

► **School-Age Children (Ages 5 to 11)**

Perceptions of Death

- › Death is more real and final.
- › Child may show interest in the biological aspects of death and details of the funeral.
- › Fear that they may also die or somehow caused the death.

Possible Related Behaviors

- › Crying, anxiety, abdominal pain, day dreaming, withdrawal, anger.
- › Inability to concentrate; poor grades in school.

What You Can Do

- › Call the child’s teacher and explain about the death.
- › Let the child know that their feelings are important and are okay.
- › Make time for one-on-one attention, listening and support.
- › Give honest explanations for all questions.
- › Physical touch (hugs, kisses, pats on the back, gentle squeezes of the arm)

► **Adolescent Children (Ages 12 to 18)**

Perceptions of Death

- › Understand death in an adult manner; know that life is fragile.

Possible Related Behaviors

- › Anger, fighting at school, lower grades, rebelling, running away from home.
- › May try to hide their emotions so peers will not see them as different or abnormal.
- › Want to assume more of the adult role and attempt to grow up too quickly.

What You Can Do

- › Encourage communication—may need to involve a trusted friend or counselor.
- › Important to have physical touch and “I love you” spoken often.
- › Look for a peer support group at school or through a mental health agency.

DO’S AND DON’TS FOR HELPING CHILDREN GRIEVE

DO Use the Word Death

Saying that, “God took Grandma to heaven,” “Daddy has gone on a long trip,” or “Grandpa is sleeping” can cause confusion, anger, fear, resentment and guilt that will be very difficult to resolve. Children need trust and truth.

DO Allow Children to Release Their Emotions

Let them name their feelings of hurt, sadness, anger, etc. Encourage them to express those feelings in a safe way. Allow them to pound a pillow, kick a ball or scream in the garage. Encourage them to draw a picture or write a story or poem.

DO Seek Help from an Understanding Adult, Clergy Member or Counselor

If you are unable to cope with your child’s needs, reach out to someone who can help.

DO Leave Room for Their Doubts, Questions and Differences of Opinion

It is okay to say, “I have questions, too. That’s why we need to talk together and help each other.”

DO Give Assurance of Love and Support

Children may feel that you are angry with them. They want to do something to help. Letting them know that their hugs are important when you are sad relieves them of a feeling of helplessness.

DO Remember the Good Times

Spend time together looking at pictures, recalling special family vacations and talking about things the deceased person did with the child.

DO Help Your Child Find Ways to Commemorate Your Loved One

Children like rituals. Planting a tree and caring for it, letting balloons loose at the cemetery, remembering the loved one in evening prayers, etc. are some suggestions. Ask for the child’s ideas, too.

DON’T Suggest or Encourage the Child to Assume a Different Role

Some children feel they need to “replace” a sibling who died or take over as “man of the house,” “little mother” or an equal companion. Children may hear that from others or slide into the role on their own, but it is important for them to remain the child.

DON’T Feel It Is Up To You to Help Your Child “Get Over” Their Grief

Each child’s grief is as unique as your own. With love and support, they will find healing in their own time.