

Bereavement in children

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Introduction Old good American proverb says that ‘ nothing is certain in this life but death and taxes’. Both have a similar feature because they are inevitable.

Although, leading scientific luminaries persevere hardly, trying to create the elixir of immortality, their efforts are still fruitless. Therefore, the issue of death or other significant bereavement is still significant for the people, especially for the youngest among us, whose mindsets are still considerably undeveloped and who cannot fully comprehend the seriousness of the situation with mortality and the set of actions that shall be undertaken in order to prevent more serious repercussion (Autman, 2007). Children of different age categories react differently to the demise of the beloved ones of various layers of kinship or other connections (Grollman, 1967). These peculiarities must always be taken into consideration while communicating either to a very young child of a pre-school or to the adolescent that someone who once was of great importance for him has already passed away and is no longer accessible. Even the leading practitioners in the field of children psychology are often immensely perplexed with the issue on how the children and the teenagers shall be treated at the most effective way when someone within their closest circles dies.

The most widespread opinion, which is majorly advocated by the British and the Australian schools of children psychology, is that the children do not grieve at all, because neither physical nor mental consequences of the death are comprehended by them in full scope (Heine, 2008). However, their Americans colleagues are firmly convinced that the grief and sufferings are indeed experienced by the children and this grief has many similar features

with the grief and sorrow suffered by the adults (Worden, 1996). The aim of this report is to outline the age peculiarities that must be taken into consideration when communicating to a child or an adolescent that someone has passed away, to accentuate the rights and privileges that children enjoy both under the law and moral principles of the society and to stress the approaches that must be followed when someone close dies and his death should be somehow explained to a child. Reaction of the Children of Different Ages Categories to the Issue of Death and Their Understanding Children of preschool age category The main peculiarity with this age category is that the kids of this age do not fully comprehend the concept of eternity, in other words they do not entirely understand that someone has left this world forever. When they are informed that someone has passed away forever and will not return, they start immediately to search for him, hoping that they have been deceived or that it has been merely a bad joke (Grollman, 1967). The kids of early childhood and middle years Children of this age category regard death as something temporary that will not last for long and they hope that their deceased parents or grandparents will return soon.

It is better not to communicate to them that their demise is eternal and that nothing can be done to restore the normal state of affairs. The children of this age category have been reported to treat the possessions of the dead people with particular attention, trying even to steal and to conceal some clothes or personal belongings in order to return them to the demised one upon his arrival in order to make him happy (Autman, 2007). Moreover, many of the kids of this age still secretly hopes that the deceased person has travelled somewhere and the funeral and burial of him or her are the big joke

or some play of the adults. Overall, the reactions expressed by different children are considerably different in their natures and directly depend on the individual peculiarities of a specific child (Worden, 1996). Grief Reactions among Children When someone dies different symptomatology is expressed by the children. Their reactions are reflected in the changes of their physical well-being and their mental processes.

This phenomenon must be carefully studied in order to diminish the negative consequences caused by the death of the close people. Physical Reaction to the Death of the Relatives and Close Friends As far as the complaints on their physical health are concerned, the kids usually say that they suffer from intense headaches, excessive fatigue and ache in their stomachs as well as skin irritation and drastic changes in eating and sleep habits.

Nightmares are also permanently present and often accompanied by daily hyperactivity or of hypersensitivity. The latter one is often reported to take place when some of the closest relatives die. It must be mentioned, that the greatest portion of the grief symptoms disappear when the child begins to obtain adequate moral support and consolation by the adults, who assures him that neither his physical, nor mental or financial well-beings are endangered (Autman, 2007). The peculiarity that must be particularly highlighted is the practice when children start to imitate the physically painful symptoms that were suffered by the deceased person.

Leading children psychologists explain that this is the way to associate himself or herself with the deceased person and to stay as close to him as possible (Grollman, 1967). The most ingenious children often try to imitate the sickness the deceased one suffered in order to obtain the due attention

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of the adults. To summarize, when the kids receive the attention from the surroundings adults, the exaggeration of their physical deterioration is gradually ceased by them. It can be inferred that if someone close to them dies, even a mother or a dead, serious physical illnesses or deviations do not endanger the well-being and healthy state of a child (Worden, 1996). The Issues of Cognition When the loss of the beloved one occurs, an overwhelming majority of children report that they lack concentration and nothing can be done from their viewpoint in order to restore the normal state of affairs.

The good features of the deceased one became being overvalued and overestimated by a child, and gradually the process of idealization takes place. Therefore, the shortcomings and other negative features of the one who has died began deliberately omitted by the child, who entirely concentrates on the positive side of the deceased person. Another group of the kids became interested in the physical essence of the death and start to seek explanation of what the death mean and how it can be averted and what it really signifies (Autman, 2007). The big groups of the children become preoccupied with the reminiscences of the deceased person. They permanently enjoy visiting places, where they were together with the dead persons and they permanently send requests to the rest of adults to tell stories about the deceased person. Cases of repetitive looking at the photos of the deceased may take place.

When the child is too shocked with the notice that the person died, he merely says that this someone is still alive and has not died, and all the people around him merely try to deceive him and to play jokes with him. The <https://assignbuster.com/bereavement-in-children/>

leading luminaries of the contemporary children medicine and psychology extensively report that this is a natural reaction of the children nervous system to the news which currently cannot be fully comprehended by their mindsets. It is most frequently encountered during the first several months following the demise or death of the deceased person (Worden, 1996). The painful feelings, such as the sense of despair, sadness or depression are expressed by the children through various mechanisms. They do this either verbally or non-verbally.

Although, the cases of the depressed behavior and weeping are reported to happen regularly, some of the affected children who were used to be energetic and always play, jump and express active emotions when the beloved one was still alive, started to prefer loneliness, locking in their chambers and refusing to take meals or somehow otherwise responding to the actions of the adults. A significant group of children is reported to express their emotions and to alleviate the stress suffered by them by means of anger actions and deeds perpetrated by them and their wrath is personified. They usually focus their anger on the deceased person, because he or she has decided to abandon them and their consent has not even been asked. Another kids channel their wrath, anger and spite to the Lord, the rest of adults or to the physicians who failed to take all necessary precautions to save their beloved one. Sometimes their anger is focused on themselves, because they considered that they did not take sufficient actions to save the deceased one or because they think that he or she died because of their own actions.

Another cognitive symptom which is undeniably worth mentioning in this report is the fact that a great majority of the children begin to fear and feel depressed that they are likely to die too if serious actions are not taken (Autman, 2007). Children are often noticed to be seized with terror while realizing that their fear and negative feelings are too intense. They become preoccupied with the question on how the adults are going to subsist without the deceased one, who often happens to be the major source of income, from the child's point of view. Children often fear that they will be no longer cared, nurtured, provided with food and other basic and fundamental necessities of their lives. Some aggrieved kids are immediately preoccupied with the thought that all adults will die soon and there will be no one to take care of them and they will have to go to work to provide for themselves with all necessities and to take care of their younger brothers and sisters (Grollman, 1967). These children often began to avoid communicating with the rest of the adults in order to avoid being hurt so heavily the second time.

The last, but not the last symptom is that majority of the kids of almost all age categories are often intimidated that they may easily die themselves or fall sick. The symptoms expression involves the fear to be alone or to sleep alone or to stay in a house for a long time without the supervision of the adults and their support for a long time (Grollman, 1967). The same apprehensions concern their younger brothers and sisters. The strategy to treat the child or a teenager whose beloved person has just died When it is already known for sure that the close relative or a friend of a child is going to pass away very soon, the surrounding adults must take every possible precaution to ensure that the child will be treated properly when this news

shall be communicated to him or her (Worden, 1996). The Preparation before the death The first stage is known as a pre-death preparation. First and foremost, it is vitally important to ascertain what is already known by the child about the circumstances of the illness or circumstance which may engender the demise.

For instance, it is important to find out whether the child is aware of the fact that his mother suffers from cancer or that his dad serves in the Army and that his detachment has been sent to Afghanistan or Iraqi where military operations are under way (Autman, 2007). Then, the child must be slightly communicated about the peculiarities of the death or the military service. The fact that must be particularly highlighted is that the adults must produce the information in a clear, slow and gentle manner that allows the child to their pose queries and receive detailed responses to the questions that he or she may ask. The moments when the child is open for absorbing and digesting information must be detected and momentarily used by explaining him or her that the plants, the animals and the reptiles all die someday and go to the Lord, to the Paradise where they enjoy everything that they lacked during their mundane period of the life. The gentle explanation that all human beings will someday die must follow these moments.

The children must be explained that the televising propaganda where immortal heroes are depicted is false in its nature, and ultimately the demise of the every living soul including mammals, insects and even Batman and Superman is irreversible. A good tool to alleviate the pain that may be caused by this explanation is to tell that the death is the continuation of the life in another world, where the superheroes and other good people reside <https://assignbuster.com/bereavement-in-children/>

permanently after they have passed away. When the child is mature enough to understand the gravity of the process that happens, and the dying person expresses the wish to see the child, the child should be brought to the deathbed (Autman, 2007). The thorough preparation must take place and the child must be informed what he or she can hear or see and what emotions he or she may experience or the dying one. The ways to communicate to the child that the death has already occurred The rule of paramount importance is that the child must be communicated about the death of the beloved one by the one who enjoys their confidence and their trust.

The news must be communicate in a clear and explicit manner, beginning with the phrase that some bad news are waiting for the boy or the girl and he must be prepared to receive these news. The important aspect of communication is that the child must not be said that the deceased person went to sleep, because the child may become afraid of going to sleep. The child must be told that person died, and did not go to another country or was recruited for the service of the president or sent with the space mission to the moon (Grollman, 1967). This is done to minimize the phantasies of the child about the future of their beloved one. When the sad news has been communicated to the child, he or she must be given as much time as he or she requires to ponder over the issue of the death and to raise pertinent questions and to express the relevant concerns. The child must be told that the adults share his feelings and suffer the same mental tortures, and that nothing can be done to restore the normal state of affairs.

As far as the most frequently encountered questions are concerned the children often ask about the reasons of the death. In this case the reasons must be clearly elucidated to the child and he must be reassured that the causes of the death are in no way connected with the wrongdoings of the dead one and that the death is not usually fair in its nature. Besides, the child must be convinced that he has nothing to fear about his personal life or the lives of the surrounding significant adults (Worden, 1996). When the child asks about the comeback of their relatives, he or she must be told that after the death takes place the people never return (Grollman, 1967).

However, it shall be accentuated that the deceased one will be always in the memories of the living ones. Another group of the commonly encountered questions are the questions about the location of the deceased person.

In this case, the response is dictated by the religious beliefs of the family (Autman, 2007). If the family believes in the God Almighty, it is advisable to say that the relative or a close friend is now in Heaven near Jesus Christ. The Rights of the Children whose Relative or Close Friend Died Leading children psychologists have composed the set of rights and privileges that must serve as a guiding principles while deciding when the grievous child acts properly and whether his opinion is not exaggerated and the advice of the children mental therapist should be sought or not. The child is allowed to be informed about the death of the beloved one and the circumstance of the death must also be communicated to them The children are allowed to participate in the issues relating to the processes of funeral, burial or cremation of the deceases person or to abstain from this participation The children are entitled to have their questions replied with honesty and without the

intentional concealment of the information The children are entitled to see the dead body and the place where the death took place The children are allowed to disagree with the reflections and understating of the death expressed by the significant adults The kids are allowed to express their grief in their individual, unique way which may significantly vary from the ways which are usually outlined in the medical and biology books. The child is permitted to have his or her own philosophical and theological conceptions about the death and the repercussions of the death This list has been compiled as a result of the interviews of thousand young people who experienced the grief of the death of their close relative or a friend (Autman, 2007). It must be particularly accentuated that this list is non-exhaustible in its nature and it can prolonged, as these rights are permanently developing and different children react differently to the death related issues (Worden, 1996).

Summary The vast majority of children of different age categories and ethnic origins react differently and individually when they are informed that their relative or a close friend died. In order to smooth their painful feelings to the very utmost, the supervising adult shall follow special steps and the child shall be treated with the due care and support. In particular, mourning children differ from the mourning adults by the fact that they considered that the adult who has passed away would nurture and take for them eternally, and now this belief has been disrupted (Grollman, 1967). The children are forced to comprehend the tough fact that some adult people sometimes die prematurely. If a proper procedure is followed by the alive close adults while communicating to the children that their beloved one has died, ethical, legal

and moral principles are strictly observed and the process of the death is presented as something natural, irreversible and normal, also the understanding and comprehension of the children will be simplified to the greatest extent and the set of negative emotions will be minimal.

The concept of the death will be properly pondered over and ultimately admitted as something regular by the children of all age categories.