



The Benedictine Counselor

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Message from the Director:

This issue is the first of two parts on children's experiences of grief and loss. This edition provides and overview, and the May edition will highlight interventions that may be helpful with children.



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Grief and Loss through Death.

Grief is a reaction that occurs when we have lost something or someone who is important to us. Many losses occur over a person's lifetime, such as death, divorce, ending of important relationships, physical and mental changes, moving, new employment, financial setbacks or job changes

Grief is a process, not an event. Healing takes time and cannot be hurried. The process and common reactions to grief are outlined in many books and include emotional, physical, mental, social and spiritual reactions. (McMahon and Persson, 2006, pp. 4-10) Your

grief will not be exactly like anyone else's even if you are grieving the loss of the same person. Children in the same family will experience the loss differently because of the unique relationship that existed between the two.

It is important to remember that most significant losses happen within the family. A death impacts each member but also can upset the balance in the family group as well. If the loved one had been the peacemaker, the family may find itself in conflict.

Continued from previous page

If the loved one had been the organizer, the family may now be in chaos and need help. (Worden, 2002, p. 149) For those of us who are working with a child in school or elsewhere, knowing the significance of the relationship between the child and the person who died can help our understanding of the intensity and disruption the child may be experiencing.

The 6 to 12 year old has some understanding of death and knows that he or she could also die. He/she realizes death is final and that those they love can die. Some of the grief reactions seen at this age include crying, high anxiety, and an ebb and flow of feelings. The 12 year old will have developed a more realistic view of death. All will be concerned that more bad things can happen.

Some of the other symptoms for this age group are denial, guilt, and distancing. Most grief counselors share that all children experience some sense of guilt when a loved one dies, especially a parent or sibling. Most children seem to believe they should have or could have done something to prevent the loss from occurring.

School age children also focus on the disruption that death causes. There may have to be a move. The surviving parent may not be able to maintain the normal household routine. The loss of other special moments shared just with the loved one will no longer be available to the child and this has a sorrowful impact. The loss of control and the loss of innocence (things like this do not happen to us), are direct results of death. No longer believing that bad things only happen to other families can shape the way children see the world after loss.

Bibliography

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- McMahon, R, and Persson, K L. (2006). *Good Mourning: A Resource for Healing*.
- Worden, J.W. (2002). *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*. Springer Publishing Company, Inc. New York.
- Continued next month.**

Eastertime:

On Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday we experience again the death and resurrection of Jesus. Just as we had the 40 days of Lent to prepare for Easter, we have 50 days after Easter to celebrate and grow in the new life of the resurrection and the Holy Spirit, whose coming we celebrate on Pentecost. It is significant that the time after Easter is longer than the Lenten preparation. We are an Easter people: Jesus is alive and we were baptized into his death and

resurrection. We are meant to live like people who have a secret source of life-giving hope and joy that radiates to those who meet us. In the early Church the non-Christians said "see how they love one another." Jesus said in the Gospel, "they will know you are my disciples, if you love one another." May our homes be the places in which we learn how much God loves us and that we are to spread that love to all we meet.

The **Anita Moreland Foundation** was begun to help BCS provide counseling and psychological assistance for people who would otherwise be unable to pay for services. For more information contact: *Benedictine Counseling Services* below.

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