

Children – Dealing with Grief

Is the grieving process made easier if parents work together with their young children when faced with bereavement?

Preschool children aged between 3-6 years old may find the concept of death abstract. They tend to look towards the adults to learn how to react to the situation. They do understand the concept of losing something. For them, it may feel the same as losing a material object or having a change in a familiar environment.

Often, when a child loses material things, they often find that it can be easily replaced as their parents would find a substitute for it. As such, they learn to move on quickly. However, when the loss is one that they have a personal interaction with – such as a pet or a family member – they may not be able to move on. It is also important to note that the closer they are to their pets or family members, the more emotions they would feel, without actually understanding what they are feeling. In addition, they may be even more confused if they have to attend a certain ritual such as a funeral where people will be crying.

Parents can explain to their child what is happening and what they are seeing. This would help them to comprehend everything they are observing. Furthermore, it is alright and encouraged for the parents to be open to their children about their own feelings. This is because children tend to have a lot of fantasies and if we are not open with them, they may become traumatised by the whole affair and experience. Sometimes, if one parent or both parents are too distraught, a relative closer to the child may fill the role of explaining to the child first.

How can parents help themselves and their children cope with grief?

As aforementioned in the first question, it is encouraged for the parents to be open about their own feelings toward their loss to their children. Talking about the feelings may calm the parents down and in turn, the children as they tend to pick up on the feelings of the adults. It is important to note that most of the time it is unavoidable for the children to pick up on certain negative emotions the adults have when going through the cycle of grief. As a result, the children may unknowingly act out.

Doing a scrapbook or looking through old pictures may help work through feelings. Most of the young children tend to express themselves by drawing. By allowing them to do the aforementioned activities, it allows us to observe how the child perceives certain things and if they have any incorrect fantasies. Sometimes children may blame themselves for certain things or even create stories in their minds which did not happen at all. These can all be observed through their drawings.

If you notice that the child's drawing is odd, or that the child appears to not be coping well and has recurrent nightmares or the child has behavioral changes, it is very

important to not blame them for it. Parents are encouraged to find out about what happened.

Should you have any concerns or if you feel that you are at a lost, The Therapy Room is here to help. With a team of experienced psychologists – led by Geraldine Tan, the principle psychologist – that has worked with many children, they offer therapeutic interventions to help the child. Please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.

Are children likely to experience adverse repercussions later in life if early experiences with grief are not handled efficiently?

Yes, children are likely to experience repercussions later in their life if their emotions are not handled efficiently. It is also important to note that not only children but teenagers and adults will also experience repercussions if their emotions are not handled efficiently.

As a child is very vulnerable, if the situation is not handled well and has an impact on the child, the child may show some signs later in his life when he is facing a similar experience or situation. It is also important to note that the child may not show signs now but later in the future.

For example, a young girl was not allowed to visit her grandmother whom she was very close to. The reason given was because “young children should not be present”. She recalled that she badly wanted to see her grandmother but there was no one to bring her to the hospital. Instead, she had to stay in the big empty house. Later on, when everyone was crying at the funeral, she started to be very resentful. Although she was encouraged to do a card for her grandmother, she felt that there was a missing piece. She blamed herself for not waking her parents, believing that she could have “saved her grandmother”. She was angry that she was not allowed to see her grandmother again, believing that her grandmother may have lived if she had done so. She had recurrent nightmares of her grandmother. She started to be worried about staying at home alone. As a teen, she often went out with her friends and refuse to come home. These were almost a forgotten memory until she went for counselling and the memories of fear, guilt and self-blame came out.

There was another example where a young child lost his older sibling and his distraught parents were not able to deal with the child’s emotions having lost a child themselves. The child grew up believing that he had been the cause of the death of his older sibling. As such, he had to suffer the neglect of the parents. Thus, when the child grew up, he continued to believe that he was the cause. The parent and child relationship worsened until this was brought up and resolved.

If you believe you or your loved one needs help, The Therapy Room is here for you. The Therapy Room consists of a team of experienced psychologist – led by Geraldine

Tan, the principle psychologist – who conducts therapeutic interventions with people of all ages, starting from as early as 2 years old. In addition, parent-child bonding programmes are available and conducted by our experienced psychologists. Please feel free to click [here](#) to find out more about our upcoming programmes. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.