



How to communicate with and care for children in situations of loss (of a close person)

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Viviana Abati, psychologist

Schweizerische Nationale Stiftung für Organspende und Transplantation
Fondation nationale Suisse pour le don et la transplantation d'organes
Fondazione nazionale svizzera per il dono e il trapianto di organi
Swiss National Foundation for organ donation and transplantation

What would you do?



Yannick's grand-mother passed away two days ago.

His father:

Prefers to wait before giving the message. He worries that Yannick's behaviour will become even more extrem.

His mother:

She is in grief for the loss herself. But she wants that Yannick goes through this together with his parents.

What experience shows



- Adults try to keep children away from everything that has to do with death and dying
- This leads to the situation to „overlook“ children regarding emotions, decisions, actions or questions.

But children:

- Need to grieve as well
- Have questions (answers help to control fear and uncertainty)
- Want to be part of this social experience and contribute

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Signs of grief

Adults

Longer phases of grief. Switch between grief and „normal life“ (distraction)

Culture tolerates and accepts different behaviour after a loss



Children

Adults have a global understanding of death, often combined with spiritual beliefs

Generally exists the ability for verbal expression of emotions and to withstand negative emotions

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Signs of grief

Adults

Limited ability for verbal expression of emotions (to talk is not enough) and to withstand negative emotions

Discontinuous grieving. Abrupt switch between crying and e.g. playing

Children

Limited concept of death

Don't want to be different

Do not talk to children of same age. Opposite for teenagers: talk with peers

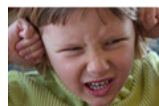
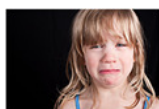


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Reactions after a message of loss (of a person)



Keep in mind:

All reactions are normal and ok. But they depend also on cognitive understanding and therefore on the stage of development



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Aspects of the concept of death



Unpredictability



Universality



Irreversibility

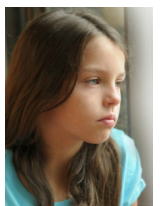
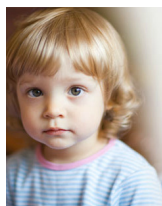
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Concept of death in different age levels

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Approach for professionals

- The parents decide if the child is present during conversations
- If parents are uncertain: recommend to integrate children
- If parents to send the child out, ensure that someone looks after the child (pastor, care team, etc.)
- Tell the message again in a more simple way. Advantage: the parents can hear the message a second time
- Always be honest with children
- Let you lead by the child's questions
- Just answer the questions the child asks
- Ask the child about his emotions
- Convey certainty and security (voice, attitude, behaviour)
- Admit not knowing everything

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Your questions.....