

Children and Grief

Terry Bradley, Peace Portal Alliance Church, White Rock, B.C.

There is no way to “fully” explain a child’s grief nor is there one right way to lead a child through it. My purpose is to simply heighten the awareness that children do grieve and share with you a few thoughts that have helped me in my role as pastor.

Adults grieve. So do children. A child who has experienced the loss of someone close to them will deal with the pain of grief in a similar way to the adult who is close to that child. A child models what they see and feel by observing an adult. Therefore, it is important that the adult understand death and grief and have wrestled through how it relates to them. In other words, if the adult has trouble facing death themselves, the child most likely will as well. If the adult cannot respond to a child who has lost someone in death, surround that child with acceptance, warmth and understanding. The reality is still that the child will grieve. Don’t allow a child to suffer in isolation. As pastors, we must observe and partner with parents to assist them in talking to their children about death.



■ “Let’s Connect” Assembly Luncheon

All Children’s Ministry Leaders are invited to join us for a luncheon during Assembly 2002 in Hamilton. “Let’s Connect” our vision, our passions, our relationships as together we connect kids to God! Registration details will be available through Assembly Packets.

■ Discipleship Dream

Our dream is to provide coaching relationships for interested individuals working in children’s ministries on a full-time or part-time basis and to provide “Weekend Walkabouts” where children’s leaders can learn from one another about what works and what doesn’t! For more details on these discipleship dreams, contact Carol Wiebe at cmachildren@hotmail.com or call on Wednesdays at 905-887-7428.

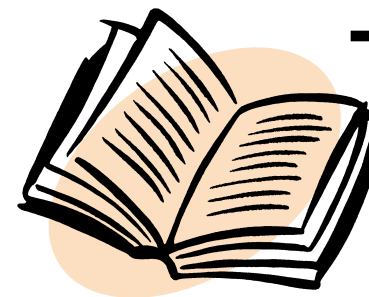
■ Mission Possible

“Mission Possible” is a manipulative trivia game that educates boys and girls on the Great Commission and Alliance Missions in particular. These games are inexpensive, fun and the perfect activity for kids to construct and play before class begins. Contact Gladys at 416-674-7878, ext. 211.

Common concerns parents have are as follows:

- 1 Should I take my child to the funeral? Yes. However, if a child expresses strong fears or objections about attending, do not force them.
- 2 Anticipate different questions children may have regarding a funeral. What is a casket? What is viewing? What is cremation and what does it mean? What is a cemetery? What is a hearse? Why does everyone cry?
- 3 Don’t try to rationalize the reason why someone has died. Don’t say, “It was a blessing,” or “They’re in a better place,” or “God needed another angel.”
- 4 The area of terminal illnesses is of incredible importance and not easily understood by children. In explaining where God is in this difficult issue, always try to put yourself in the child’s place.
- 5 Listen, listen and patiently listen some more. A child often repeats the same questions and says the same things over and over. This is their way of coming to grips with death.
- 6 Be sure to hug a child who has experienced the pain of losing a parent. Touch is healing. Remember to bend down and look the child in the eye – so much is told and understood from this perspective.
- 7 A funeral does not mark the end of the grieving process for children. A child does not “get over” grief. They learn to live through it. Put a reminder in your schedule to visit, phone, write a note and then visit again.

I always remind myself that in the flurry of events and emotions within the days immediately following a death, adults are often overwhelmed. Imagine how difficult it is for a child to absorb what is going on. Let’s pastor our children through their grief.



Children’s Pastors’ Picks

In talking with different Children’s Pastors about the difficult issues, here were some resources that they are sure to have on their library shelves.

▼ Children of Divorce

Debbie Barr-Stewart, Zondervan

A realistic, but compassionate book that tells the truth about divorce and practical support on helping kids when their parents are apart.

▼ Helping Kids Through Tough Times

Doris Sanford, Standard Publishing

Includes reproducible help sheets for children’s and family ministry; covers over 40 difficult topics that touch kid’s lives.

▼ Life Skills for Girls; Life Skills for Boys

Tim Smith, Cook Communications

A practical tool written by a dad, husband and pastor to help pre-teens and parents connect on over 35 issues of growing independence when teens are careening down the road of life and it’s all Mom and Dad can do not to grab the wheel and take control.

▼ Real Deal on Sexual Choices

Video Series, Zondervan

Real kids. Real life. Real faith. Provides discussion starters on sexual choices, family matters and loss.

▼ Someone I Loved Died

Christine Harder Tangvald, Cook Communications

A positive, practical book for children facing the death of a loved one.

▼ What Almost Nobody Will Tell You About Sex

Jim Hancock, Kara Eckman Powell, Zondervan

This book is combined with a video curriculum, “Good Sex,” that provides a whole person approach to teenage sexuality and God.

▼ When a Baby Dies

Dr. Ronald H. Nash, Zondervan

A book that provides answers to comfort grieving parents.

Comforting Little Hearts

In trying to assist children as they deal with the hard issues, there is a series entitled “Comforting Little Hearts” that has proven to be helpful. These books help parents and children’s leaders discuss these important issues from a Christ-centered perspective and all include a “How Parents Can Help” section. These books are published by Concordia:

- Balloons for Trevor – Understanding Death
- When Will I Feel Better? – Understanding Chronic Illness
- Why Don’t We Live Together Anymore? – Understanding Divorce
- I Have a New Family Now – Understanding Blended Families

Some tips to remember in helping children with the hard issues are:

- 1 **Be open and honest with your children.** Tell them the facts and help them not to be confused.
- 2 **Respect your child’s feelings.** Allow them to express their feelings even if it makes you uncomfortable. Show your own emotions too, in an appropriate fashion.
- 3 **Be your child’s parent, not their friend.** Resist the temptation to make your child your confidante. They need you to be the adult.
- 4 **Reminisce with your child.** Remember happy times as a family, especially in the case of a death. Create positive memories for them as well.
- 5 **Offer your child hope.** Tell them they won’t always feel this bad and that you will be there for them. Most importantly, assure them that God will never leave or die – He is the One Person who will never leave us.
- 6 **Use physical touch.** Hug your child, hold your child and give them those extra pats and hugs that will inevitably help them through some hard times.
- 7 **Give your child space.** In respecting your child’s feelings and emotions, don’t be “in their face” on days when they are not ready for that. Be sensitive to their emotional moods.
- 8 **Pray.** Pray with and for your child – there is nothing more powerful or helpful.

Monique Hodge, Moose Jaw Alliance Church, Moose Jaw, SK