



Death and Grief

Americans have a cultural inability to face death. Death is viewed as taboo and discussions about death are uncomfortable and regarded as morbid. Because of adult's anxiety about death and their desire to be protective of their child/children, there is a strong tendency to shield children from and the dying b/c it would be "too much" for them. But, the reality is that death cannot be hidden and when parents try it can add confusion and create anxiety in children.

Parent's attitude about death is one of many factors that influences a child's reaction. Others include their age and psychological development, what they are told about what is happening, their previous exposure to death, and the family's religious beliefs. A child's reaction is also contingent on who has died and their relationship with that person.

When a sibling has died, the remaining child may experience feelings of

- fear (that they are responsible for the death, that the family is falling apart, and that they will be abandoned)
- anxiety (about the fact that the adults are acting stressed and worried, and just generally things are not right, lack of control over events and never know what to expect)
- anger (at the sibling for getting sick/dying and ruining everything, at parents for not paying attention to them, at the world because it does seem good anymore)
- jealousy (because if the sibling was sick before death, they got all the attention and gifts while being excused from chores/ school/ homework)
- guilt (that they are not the one who got sick, that they're causing more trouble for their parents, for thinking bad thoughts about parents/sibling, and for all the previous negative emotions).
- grief (for their losses and for those of their family; the loss of a normal life/childhood, vacations, carefree happiness)
- left out and for alone (the parents may be physically or emotionally absent; everybody may ask about the child who died, but nobody asks about the sibling or notices the A on a test).

When an immediate family member has died, a child may feel as though life will never be normal or happy again and they may have a realization/fear that they can/will die. The child may revert to babyish behavior (to magically prevent growing up and dying) or may act differently (i.e., act like the sibling to make everything alright for parents). The child

may fear that another family member will die, experience guilt when feeling happy, be reluctant to talk to parents because they don't want to bother them, and/or may experience physical/somatic complaints (body aches and pains).

If your child has experienced the death of a relative and you are concerned about them, please call the Linden team for support and guidance for helping them through this most difficult time.