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Yesterday he was still there!



Children want to have an answer to their questions. Therefore, we adults ourselves must first become clear about what death and eternity mean.

As far as death and dying are concerned, one can observe two contrasting developments in our time and society: On the one hand, we are constantly confronted with death, often in great detail. On the other hand, talking about death and dying seems to be taboo.

Death, that's what others experience, you hear and see about it on TV, you read about it in the newspaper. But it has nothing to do with me and my life. One is not prepared for death - one's own or that of a loved one. That's why you're hit so hard by it when it happens. The thoughts of death are scary for many, they are frightening and show the limitations of human life. For this reason, the thoughts are repressed and silenced.

And that is why it is clear that we adults have difficulty when children ask us about death and eternity. We have little or no experience or conversational practice. But children want answers to their questions. Therefore, we ourselves must first become clear about what death and eternity mean.

Situation for a conversation with children

To talk with children about the topic, there are basically two situations: before a death occurs and in the death itself.

Before a death occurs

You can prepare experiences by talking to children about distressing experiences or death before they experience such situations themselves. This allows them to develop an awareness of death. They can deal with it calmly when they are not yet so emotionally gripped by it.

Opportunities for conversation arise through: Observations in nature (dead animals, plants, transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly), reading children's books on the subject, Bible stories, deaths in films, news, etc.

In death

In the death itself, respond to the child's questions and behaviors as they emanate from them, or address what has happened and their feelings. The advantage of this is that there is interest and concern on the part of the child. However, the personal concern can also make a conversation with the

child very difficult

Rules and tips for the conversation

How can you talk to children about death? What should you keep in mind when children have experienced the death of someone close to them?

Facing the Questions

When children have questions, don't avoid them. Children need the knowledge and support of adults as they process a death.

The answers given to children should be honest and accurate. Half-truths unsettle children, they scare them or only raise new questions. Statements that you have to correct later destroy trust. If you don't know the answer to a question, you don't have to invent one. One may also expect the child his own uncertainty.

Examples of misleading answers to a question about someone who has died: "He has passed away." - Why has he gone? Doesn't he like us anymore?

When will he be back?
"He fell asleep." - This statement can raise fears in children that if they sleep at night, they too will die. Sleep disturbances can result.

"He's lost to us." - Well, let's go look for him! We'll find him again!

"God was lonely and wanted Mommy with him in heaven." - That can make kids mad at God: How could he do this to us!

Overall, be careful not to overwhelm children in conversations. Children often need only short, simple answers and not a long, theoretical lecture. Before you end a conversation, you should ask the child whether he or she has understood everything, whether the explanations are enough for him or her, whether he or she is satisfied. You can also let the child tell you what he or she has understood. Then you get an insight into the child's imagination and know what he or she has taken in. One should also assure the child that he can come back if he has further questions.

Involve the child

It is important that the child is included in the grief in the family. This will allow him to act out his own pain. It is not good to shield a child from all the things that happen after a death. Children have extremely fine antennae for moods and feelings of others and for the atmosphere that prevails around them. It would be very unsettling for them to perceive the turmoil and sadness in the family and not know the reason for it.

If a child wants to, they should also attend the funeral. It is a good way to consciously say goodbye to the deceased. The sympathy of relatives, friends and acquaintances at the funeral can make it clear to the child that although a person has died, there are still many others who stand by his family.

Showing and giving love

The most support a child needs is when someone close to him has died: a parent, one of the siblings, one of the grandparents. They need reliable closeness and security then, because they cope much better with grief and sorrow when they are near loving people than when they are left alone. In addition, the mourning for the deceased and the frequent talking about him or her raises the question in children whether they are still important and loved at all. This is another reason why it is necessary for a child to receive a lot of love during this time.

Allowing feelings

Children react very differently to the death of a person. There are also wide variations in their expressions of emotion. It is important to give children the opportunity to allow their feelings. By showing their feelings as an adult, such as sadness or anger, children see that it is permissible to grieve, cry and be angry and take courage to do the same. Openness with each other can clarify why who is behaving how and who needs what now. However, adult grief can also put additional stress on children. Until now they have experienced the adults as strong, now they are weak and insecure. Who will give them protection and security now? Sometimes children suppress their own feelings, for example, in order not to make their parents even sadder. If parents are too busy with themselves and have no eyes and strength for the grief of the children, it is important that friends and acquaintances turn to the children and help them to admit their grief.

Sometimes children seem numb and unaffected at first. This may mean that the loss is too great for them at the moment. The children cannot yet realize and allow it. Some children laugh again soon, are cheerful or ask questions that sound "impious" to adults. This is also not a sign of insensitivity, but is usually a protective mechanism with which the children help themselves against the strong pain of separation and loss. Death can cause grief as well as anger, because the deceased has destroyed the child's previously perfect and happy world. Everyone only talks about the dead and is sad. Does the child who remained alive count for nothing anymore?

The best way for a child to come to terms with the pain is to occupy himself mentally with the deceased (e.g. by looking at photo albums), by telling about things they have experienced together and possibly by drawing pictures about his feelings.

Clearing out feelings of guilt

There are always feelings of guilt in children when a loved one dies, because they believe that the death has to do with bad behavior on their part. It is a punishment for it, so to speak. After all, in their experience, unpleasant things happen when they have been "naughty". Perhaps in anger they have wished the person dead or away, or have recently quarrelled with him, or have been too little kind to him, or have neglected to do something. Here we may and must assure children that such wishes, thoughts, or actions had no bearing on the person's death.

Letting the child be a child

The child must not take the place of a deceased person or become their substitute. It cannot replace other siblings mother or father, it cannot replace the remaining parent's partner. It is already hard for a child to lose a beloved person. You can't deprive it of its childhood on top of that.

Doing Something

Children often feel the need to do something for the deceased, such as laying a flower, lighting a candle at the grave. Regular visits to the grave (e.g. also at Christmas, on birthdays) can be a help in dealing with death and grief

Informing the people close to the child

The people close to the child - e.g. teachers, educators, group leaders - should be informed about the death so that they can better understand the child's deviant behaviour and help them.

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Weitere Informationen

Tags
Death
Eternal life
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Dedication
Article

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No data available.

Number of participants
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