

Reconciling with Children during Death, Divorce, and other Crisis'

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A decorative graphic consisting of several horizontal lines of varying lengths and colors (teal and white) extending from the right side of the slide.

Crisis

- an emotionally significant event or radical change of status in a person's life
- an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending
 - divorce, death, moving, illness, sibling birth, etc.
- the Coddington Life Stress Scale, which measures how much emphasis a major life event has on a child and thus the amount of stress a child is really under.

Reconcile

- To cause a person to accept or be resigned to something not desired or unpleasant
 - **How to promote reconciliation:**
 - Be honest, appropriate to developmental level
 - Listen and offer reassurance; monitor his/her reactions
 - Provide stability and structure; routine
 - Spend time with the child; affection
 - Take care of yourself; keep emotions in check
 - Offer the child choices
 - Let other adults who are with your child know the situation
 - Know when to seek help

Child Development

- An understanding of child development is essential, allowing us to fully appreciate the cognitive, emotional, physical, social and educational growth that children go through from birth and into early adulthood.
 - Erickson - each stage of development was focused on overcoming a conflict
 - Piaget - stage theory of cognitive development
 - Freud - importance of childhood events (mostly negative)
 - Conditioning – deal only with observable behaviors
 - Attachment Theory -early relationships with caregivers
 - Social Learning Theory- learn new behaviors from observing other people

Signs Associated with Distress

- Frequent vague, non-specific physical complaints such as headaches, muscle aches, stomachaches, nausea or tiredness
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school
- Talk of or efforts to run away from home
- Outbursts of shouting, complaining, unexplained irritability, or crying
- Being bored
- Poor concentration
- Lack of interest in playing with friends
- Social isolation, poor communication
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability, anger, or hostility
- Reckless behavior
- Difficulty with relationships

A Grief Response and Its Stages

- Crisis experiences can elicit a grief response and its stages in children.
- Emotional and Behavioral Responses
- Stages:
 - **Denial** (this isn't *happening* to me!)
 - **Anger** (why is this happening to *me*?)
 - **Bargaining** (I promise I'll ...*if*...)
 - **Depression** (I don't *care* anymore)
 - **Acceptance** (*I'm ready* for whatever comes)

Depression and Anxiety

- Depression is a prolonged or deep emotional sensation of sadness, being "blue", or "down." It becomes a clinical problem if a person's mood becomes too depressed or if the episode lasts more than two weeks.
- Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension and fear characterized by physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating, and feelings of stress.
- Depressive and anxious feelings are perfectly normal if they do not become too severe or last too long.

Mood Swing or Depression?

- Signs of depressive disorders in young people often are viewed as normal mood swings typical of a particular developmental stage.
- Professionals may be reluctant to prematurely "label" a young person with a mental illness diagnosis.
- Children and adolescents who have depression can not just "snap out of it," and may require treatment.

When to Seek Assistance

- Episode lasts more than two weeks
- Physical complaints are severe
- Dangerous behavior
- Talk of hurting self or others
- Runs away
- Significant drop in grades

Self-esteem

- Self-esteem is the collection of beliefs or feelings we have about ourselves, our "self-perceptions."
- Self-esteem also can be defined as feelings of capability combined with feelings of being loved.
- With young children, self-esteem refers to the extent to which they expect to be accepted and valued by the adults and peers who are important to them.
- The development of a positive self-concept or healthy self-esteem is extremely important to the happiness and success of children.

Why Is It important

- Healthy self-esteem is a child's armor against the challenges of the world. Kids who feel good about themselves:
 - Seem to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures.
 - Tend to smile more readily and enjoy life.
 - Are realistic and generally optimistic.
- In contrast, kids with low self-esteem can find challenges to be sources of major anxiety and frustration. Those who think poorly of themselves
 - Have a hard time finding solutions to problems.
 - Give into self-critical thoughts such as "I'm no good" or "I can't do anything right"
 - May become passive, withdrawn, or depressed.
 - Faced with a new challenge, their immediate response is "I can't."

How Parents Can Help Strengthen Self-esteem

- Give positive, accurate feedback – Praise
 - Identify and redirect your child's inaccurate beliefs
- Be a positive role model
- Teach your child about decision-making
- Be spontaneous and affectionate
- Create a safe, loving home environment
- Help kids become involved in constructive experiences.

Books

- “Self-esteem Games: 300 Fun Activities That Make Children Feel Good about Themselves: by Barbara Sher
- “The Fall of Freddie the Leaf” by Leo F Buscaglia
- “Sad isn’t Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss” by Michaelene Mundy
- Dinosaurs Divorce (Dino Life Guides for Families) by Marc Brown and Laurene Krasny Brown
- “Talking with Children about Loss: Words, Strategies, and Wisdom to Help Children Cope with Death, Divorce, and Other Difficult Times” by Maria Trozzi and Kathy Massimini
- “When My Worries Get Too Big! A Relaxation Book for Children Who Live with Anxiety” by Kari Dunn Buron
- “Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents” by Ronald Rapee Ph.D., Ann Wignall D. Psych., Susan Spence Ph.D. and Heidi Lyneham Ph.D.