

Neurological Death

- There is two ways to die: when your heart stops or when you brain stops working
- The brain controls the body
- When the brain stops working, the body cannot function on its own
- In brain death, it is the machine that keeps the body breathing and the heart beating
- Brain death means that the person is dead, even if the blood is circulating, and the body is warm and pink

When to Worry about your Child

As a parent you know your child and you will know when he/she seems to be in trouble. These are some of the reactions you might notice:

- *Nightmares, not able to sleep*
- *Acting out at school or failing tests*
- *Clinging, not talking to friends and family*
- *Aggressive*
- *Acting like the person who has died*

If your child's reactions seem to be excessive, ask for professional help

There are no predetermined time limits on grief, you must accompany your child in his/her grief in the years to come

Children and Donation

Experience shows us that:

- Children who participate in the family discussion need to be supported
- Children need to understand the overall process
- They wonder if the person is in pain and worry about the body being mutilated
- Need reassurance and answers to questions about the process so that he/she can work through his/her concerns
- Being part of the decision encourages feelings of generosity towards others as donation is part of the family's values
- Interactions between parents and healthcare professionals promote trust and open-mindedness

Keep in mind that:

- Children can influence a family's decision
- The decision to donate is not the child's responsibility
- At the age of 18 children can sign the consent form to donate the loved one's organs & tissues
- At the age of 14, children in Québec can sign the back of the Medicare card to say they want to be a donor

"Locked up grief won't go away on its own; instead it grows, poisoning and feeding on the silence, without us even knowing it. Encourage children who are ignoring their suffering to cry, this is the most charitable service you can offer them."
(Dupery, 1992)

Things to remember

Children and adults do not grieve the same way :

- Children express themselves more directly and physically
- Talking about the death is difficult
- Children will grieve/play/grieve
- The child's magical thinking can make them believe that their thoughts caused the person to die
- Children will understand death better as they get older

An adult might think that this experience is traumatic for a child. However, a child living with his/her family can grieve with them, have his/her questions answered, learn about death and grow emotionally with the experience.

Babies and young children will have very few memories of the deceased. Still, stories can told of "Remember when..." describing his/her involvement. This will strengthen their sense of belonging to the family and to the loved one who has died.

References

Masson, J. (2006). *Derrière mes larmes d'enfant, la mort et le deuil me font mal*. Édition Ressources.

Lebeau, C. & Goulet, L. (2008). *Le deuil et le don*. Montréal: Québec-Transplant.

JACQUES, J. (2005). *Un baume pour le cœur*, Corporation des thanatologues du Québec.

Suggested Reading

Legendre, G. (2009). *L'histoire de Palette le castor et le don d'organes*. Québec: Les Éditions de la francophonie.

Grieving Children and Organ & Tissue Donation

Parents Guide



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Parent's Questions and Concerns

- How do I talk about the death to my child?
- What are the normal grief reactions and needs of a child?
- How do I talk about organ & tissue donation to my child?
- Should I bring my child to the hospital? Should he see the body?
- Should I bring my child to the funeral home and to the ceremony?
- Should I talk to his friends, teachers? When should my child return to school?
- How will I know if my child needs help?

What is my Child Feeling?

- Confusion
- Sorrow, anger
- Lost in his/her thoughts, fear
- Insecurity
- Guilt
- Abandonment, separation anxiety

As well as number of other reactions

A Child's Needs

- Honesty and simple language
- To be able to trust people
- To be listened to and have answers to his/her questions
- Respect for his/her needs related to age, wishes, capabilities, etc.
- Love, security, routines of daily living
- To be involved in family discussions
- To find the words to express what he/she feels: "Do you feel sick to your stomach when you think of mom?"

How Death is Perceived by Children

The concept of death is very complex. Understanding comes with age and emotional development. When talking with a child we think they understand, but their questions tell us he/she that it is not quite clear:

"Will Daddy be home for Christmas? You aren't going to die, are you? What really happens when you die?"

It is difficult to verify if a child or adolescent has understood your explanations about death. Children need to understand that:

- Death means the body is no longer functioning
- Everyone dies
- Death is a physical cause and does not happen because of bad thoughts
- Death is part of the cycle of life
- A body cannot come back to life after dying

While death may seem easy to understand for adults, children rarely fully understand it before the beginning of adolescence (12 years of age). Respect your child's learning development and do not hesitate to say that death is mysterious and it is normal to feel confused.

Reference
Lonetto, R. (1998). "Dis c'est quoi quand on est mort?" L'idée de la mort chez l'enfant. France : Edition ESHEL.

Factors that could influence their reactions

- Support received from families and friends
- Age, maturity level, personality
- Relationship with the deceased
- The different types of losses already experienced
- The circumstances and cause of death

Discussing the Death

By the parents or a relative, as soon as possible :

- In a private place
- With the help of healthcare professionals
- Give time, answer questions, repeat as needed

If you need guidance speak with the professionals who are supporting you

The Hospital Visit

What is preferable :

- Involve children in family discussions
- Prepare and accompany them
- Allow children to see the dead body
- Respect the child's decisions
- Allow children to say goodbye (drawings, letters photos, etc.

*"In sorrow, familiar faces are comforting, even if they are sad»
Josée Masson, 2006*

Funeral Rituals

Four main functions:

- Confirms that death is final
- Encourages expression of grief and sorrow
- Expression of community support
- Confirms that life goes on

Participation in funeral rituals is just as important for the adult as for the child

Resources

Your Local CLSC

ODTSO (Ordre des travailleurs sociaux)
1 888-731-9420

Quebec Order of Psychologists
1 800-4561-1223
www.ordrepsy.qc.ca

Deuil-Jeunesse
418 670-9772
WWW.deuil-jeunesse.com

Suicide-Action
1 866-appelle (277-3553)

Grief Info Line
Maison Monbourquette
1 888-423-3596

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