

“...Kids are resilient, they’ll bounce back!” *

** Oh, how I wish that statement were true. As a loving parent, our desire for our children is that they will move through the death/divorce in their family without being hurt. However, this just isn’t possible.*

By: Suzy Yehl Marta, President and Founder, Rainbows

Parents are the primary teachers of their child. They teach their child to say their first words, to take their first steps, to love others, and to love themselves. As a child develops physically and emotionally, they develop feelings of being secure, of being loved, and of giving love. Because the family is where these feelings originate, each child’s identity is fashioned there. A child views themselves and the world through the eyes of the family.

When something significant happens in the family, the entire family is affected. When a parent dies or a divorce takes place, this event has a profound effect on the children it touches. As with the adults involved, the children are grieving as well. Grief is an expression of love. Grieving children struggle to verbalize the complex emotions inside. They have not loved long enough to understand the consequences of the change in their family of even to be able to put words around their feelings.

Grief is a normal human reaction to any important loss: moving from a neighborhood, losing a job, children leaving home, a divorce, or a loved one dying. As you journey through life, there are many turning points or crises that may cause grief. When there is such a significant loss, such as death or divorce, the grief process must be allowed to happen. If it is ignored or “buried” within (pretending everything is okay), it becomes what is called “unresolved grief” and this has a destructive effect on one’s life.

There have been many different authors proposing varied stages of grief. Rainbows philosophy was built upon the five stages of grief first proposed by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

Five Stages to the Grief Process:

Denial
Anger
Bargaining
Depression
Acceptance

Denial – is a period of rejecting or not believing what is taking place. It is often characterized by a sense of numbness of all the emotions or shock.

“This can’t be happening to me.”

Anger – is a deep-seated rage over what is happening. The anger may be displaced in all directions and projected at random to parent, friends, family, or a Higher Power according to one’s religious beliefs. It is essential to experience and express the anger, yet it must be done in appropriate ways.

“Why me?”

Bargaining – is an attempt to exchange something we are willing to do or give up, for something we want to keep. It is an attempt to postpone or fix up the inevitable.

“If only...” or “What if?”

Depression – is the feeling of being unable to cope, life seems out of control or overwhelming. It happens when the reality of the situation sets in. It may be a time of highs and lows.

“What’s the use?”

Acceptance – is learning to live with the change. It is a time when the past is no longer dwelt upon and the future holds hope once again.

“This change is part of me.”

It is important to pass through each of the five stages of grief, so that life may go on. This is a time of pain, anger, sadness, bitterness, and tears. The stages are not times or smooth or orderly.

If the grieving process is ignored by denying or avoiding the emotions, they will eat away at you from the inside. This process should not be rushed. Patience is important at this time for everyone experiencing grief.

One of the best ways to work through grief is to share your story, what exactly happened, with someone you care about or can trust. It is also important to read books and articles that address the issues being faced. Participating in a support group with others experiencing the same struggles and feelings can be most beneficial too.

As difficult as it is for the adults to adjust, the children too, are trying to get firm footing on the foundation of their new family unit. Children from loss situations can grow into healthy, responsible, and stable adults when they are guided through this grief process. This is accomplished through understanding, encouragement, acceptance and love.

*Remember...
we do not have to be perfect
parents...
only loving parents!*