

How to Talk with your Child:

News of Impending Death-

- Have daily conversations; find a quiet area at home to talk
 - Maintain eye-contact
 - Speak in a quiet, calm voice
- Accept your own feelings of death; sharing feelings and crying with the child is all right
- Honesty is best; when a child's family member is dying or has died it helps to be truthful about the death
 - Use words like *dying, will die, died, and dead*
 - Using phrases such as *gone away or gone to sleep* may confuse the child

Suggestions when Talking with Children about Death-

- Be honest; give age appropriate information
- Follow the child's lead
- Adults need to answer the hard questions about death for ourselves so that we can answer the children
- Allow death to be discussed openly in the home
- Use teachable moments (news, pet loss, friend's grandparent died, friend moved away, uncle is ill)
- Do not be afraid to openly express your emotions in front of your children. This is a way to give the child permission to grieve
- Listen and answer questions
- It is all right to say, "I don't know" or "I don't have that information right now"
- Avoid phrases such as, "he passed away", "we put the cat to sleep", "we lost him", "he went on a long journey." These phrases confuse children.
- It is all right to discuss your own belief in an afterlife or heaven but only after you explain to the child that the person died which means his/her body stopped working
- Include children in funerals. Give information and allow choice. Funerals are a good way to teach children about support, rituals and gives them a chance to say goodbye
- Help children establish a living memory of the person or the animal that has died
- Give children helpful ways to express their feelings; remember child and adolescents deal with loss through energy and play
 - Get your child moving
 - Pound clay
 - Write
 - Sing
 - Play with puppets
 - Cry
 - Scream
 - Draw
- Don't assume that because the child seems "fine" that they are fine
- Children may re-grieve as they reach new developmental stages
- Grief has no time line and happens over a long period of time
- Teens often want privacy during grief. Offer yourself from time to time. Let them know you care

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When a Parent has Cancer-

- Children need accurate, age appropriate information (the name of the disease and that the doctors are doing all that they can do to help)
- Children need to know what is happening now and what will happen in the immediate future. This eases their anxiety, fears and worries
- Children need to know that they didn't cause it
- Children need to know that they can't catch it
- Children need to know about the treatment plan and how it will affect their life (rides to school, play dates, routines)
- Children need their questions answered truthfully (not everything at once, but never tell an untruth)
- Children need hope and reassurance
- Children need a support system outside the immediate family
- Children need to be able to participate in the care of a parent
- Children need to know that they will continue to be cared for
- Children need to know that the parent has less energy now
- Children need lots of attention and love

Helping Elementary School Age Children when Parent is Ill-

- Since school is a second home for many children, it is common that emotional issues show up at school. School problems, acting out, school avoidance and fighting with classmates may indicate the child needs assistance
- Share information about the health issues with school
- Children may seek out the school nurse often with somatic complaints
- Children may be extra tired from not sleeping well
- Ask child if he/she wants to tell classmates about parent with cancer
- Ask child if he wants someone to help him tell the class
- Ask class to make cards or a book for the parent
- Some children will eat a lot of lunch or not be hungry at all
- Children typically have outbursts over minor issues
- Children may be clingy with a teacher or become very quiet

Definitions-

Casket or Coffin: The special box in which the dead person's body is placed before it is buried. With an open casket people can see the body of the person who died. With a closed casket the body cannot be seen because the lid is shut.

Dead: When a person's body no longer works, that person is dead. All that is left is the body. The life in that person; the feelings---tasting, moving, eating, going the bathroom, thinking and talking, the laughter, the tears---are gone. The body is like a peanut shell with no peanut. Remember the person will not come to life again.

Funeral Service: A special time after a person has died when family, friends and neighbors come together to say goodbye and offer condolences. Sometimes it is in a funeral home, church or synagogue. It is a time to remember the person, to say goodbye and thank you to the person who lived.

Eulogy: When someone shares about the person who died and what memories they want to talk about.

Suicide: When a person kills himself or herself on purpose. When a person makes his/her body stop working.

Discussing Death With Children



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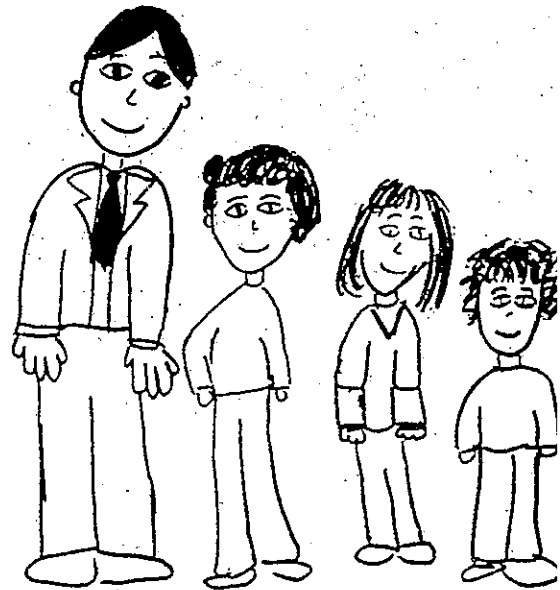
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This brochure honors the work of Sybil Stahl, an educator who dedicated her life to children. Printing was made possible by donations to the Sybil Stahl Fund at Samaritan Hospice from family and friends in her memory.

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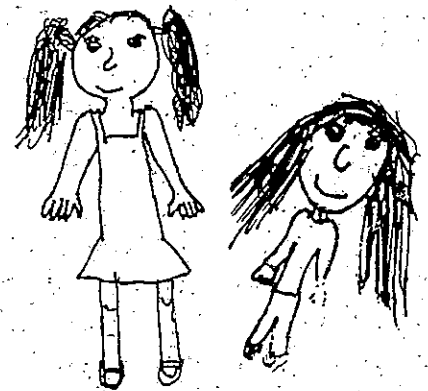
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When a family is dealing with a life-threatening illness, questions often arise about how to explain the situation to children. This pamphlet attempts to help answer some of the difficult questions they may ask about illness and death. It has been prepared by Samaritan Hospice specialists with professional expertise in helping families cope with the loss of a loved one.

RESPONDING TO CHILDREN

The most important guideline in helping children cope with death is **to be honest**; tell your children the truth. Explain the situation as simply and clearly as you can using words like "dying" and "death." This may prevent them from asking later, "Why didn't you tell me?"

Children usually respond more to what you do than to what you say. Talking and grieving openly with them allows them to learn healthy ways to cope with a loss. However, their needs, understanding, and the way they react to death and express their feelings will vary greatly depending on their ages and life experiences.



Birth to Age 2

Very young children have no concept of death; however, they often sense that something has changed. Therefore, maintaining the regular daily routine and providing a lot of attention is important. It is also helpful for other family members and friends to assist with child care to create a secure environment.

Ages 2 to 6

Children at this stage are starting to understand the cycle of life and death. It is therefore important to share your feelings. Try to maintain your normal routine to help your child feel secure. Reading books together can be helpful.

Ages 6 to 11

At this age children often have a clearer understanding of the permanence of death. It is crucial to answer any questions simply and honestly, even if the responses are: "I don't know," "Let's find out," or "I've wondered about that, too." Ask children how they feel about what is happening and listen to those feelings.

Teenage Years

This is the time when teenagers discover their identity and better understand the meaning of life. They often have many questions, but they usually turn to people outside the family, especially peers, for answers. In many instances, they feel angry about the injustice of death and sometimes act out these feelings by "tempting

fate" with unsafe behaviors. It is important to encourage them to share their feelings with you. Set firm limits and seek professional counseling if you see signs of unusual or self-destructive behavior.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

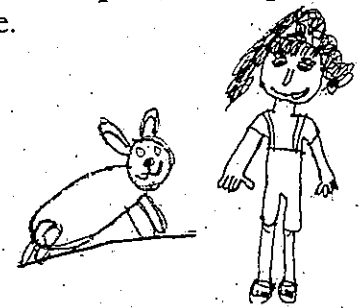
Children generally ask many questions to help them understand and cope with the changes in their lives. They are often based on fear and the uncertainty of the future. Following are some of the questions your children might have.

Why do people die?

A simple explanation for young children is that death happens when the body stops working. Try to help them understand that all things have a life cycle, and eventually all things will die.

What did Grandpop do to make himself sick?

Explain to your child that people don't get sick on purpose; in fact, no one wants to be sick at all. However, all people get sick and sometimes the body cannot heal. When that happens, the person dies. Not all diseases can be cured and sometimes medicines only help ease the pain, not stop the disease.



Did I do anything to make him sick?

Even if this question is not openly asked, many children feel guilty and believe that their thoughts and actions caused illness. Assure them by saying, "Nothing you said or did caused him to get sick. You can help him, though, by telling him that you love him."

Will I catch what Granny has and die, too?

Let children know that some diseases can be transmitted from one person to another, like a cold, but the disease that Granny has is not contagious. Urge them to be careful, wash their hands, and when necessary, wear gloves so Granny doesn't get any of their germs.

Will Mommy and Daddy die, too? Will I die some day?

It is important not to promise that you won't die. Let children know that all people die. Some day Mommy and Daddy will die; some day you will die. That is why it is important to enjoy every day as much as possible. Explain that you expect to be around for a long time to take care of them and watch them grow up.

Who will take care of me if anything happens to Mommy and Daddy?

Assure your children that arrangements have been made for them just in case anything should happen to Mommy and Daddy. Aunt June or Uncle Bill, or whomever you

have designated, promises to make a wonderful home for them. Explain that you also have a will which ensures their well being.

How can I help?

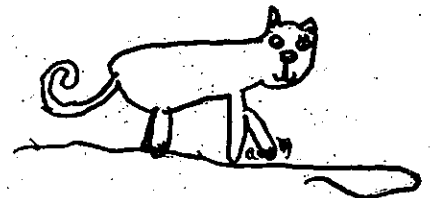
Let children know that asking questions helps everyone talk and share feelings. Gestures of help can vary: caring for the cat, picking flowers, drawing a picture, or giving a hug. This can be a comfort for the whole family.

Will I hurt Grandpop if I touch him?

Medical equipment can frighten children. They need to understand its purpose and how to handle it with caution. Your team of Samaritan professionals will provide guidelines for safety and comfort.

Do animals feel sad when someone dies?

Patients and children get love and comfort from having pets near them during illness and even at death. However, pets sense a change also and need special attention after the death of their friend. They often grieve the loss of a family member and seem to want to be part of the group in mourning. During this time they are often sensitive and can be easily frightened by human actions and loud noises.



THE RITES OF MOURNING, VIEWINGS, FUNERALS, AND BURIAL

Children usually have many questions about what happens after death. Take the time to explain **how** and **why** certain things take place. Some families choose burial and others, cremation. Help them understand your family's preference.

Simple explanations are best. Try to answer all questions. Even if they seem silly to you, they are important to your child. Do not use phrases like, "He looks just like he is asleep," or "He has gone away." Children may be afraid to go to bed at night, or they may wait for his return.

Each family shows feelings in its own way. Some will be openly emotional, stoic, or spiritual. Share your feelings and your culture with your child.

Children may or may not want to be part of the normal rites of mourning. It's important to give them options and respect their decisions. However, they should respect the needs of other family members. Allow children to attend the ceremonies if they want to participate. If young children do attend, it may be helpful to have an adult other than someone from the immediate family accompany them in case they wish to leave the services. Most adult family members want to stay to mourn and gain closure.

Children may be like the tides that ebb and flow . . . sometimes seeming distant and oblivious to all that is

happening, and then coming back with questions or clinging to you. Sometimes they may not want to share their grief for fear of getting you upset. Try to discuss this with them and encourage them to talk about how they are feeling, as shared grief teaches both the child and the adult about life's most important lesson.

Recognize that for children, grieving goes on long past the rites of mourning. School work and concentration can be upset long after the death. It may take months before they finally realize the person who died is not coming back.

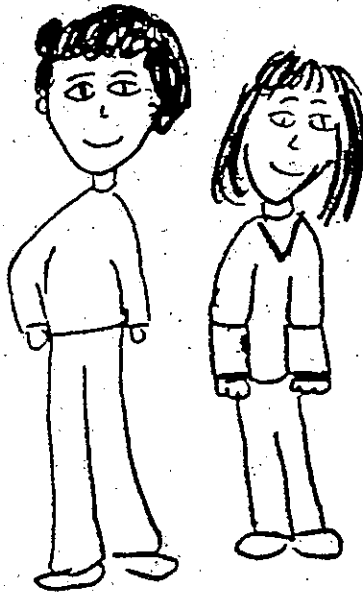
Remember, too, that memories of the person who has died are an important part of grief; be sure to share those special moments with a grieving child.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

As you help your child to understand death there are many resources available including:

- * The Samaritan Hospice Team
- * Friends and Family
- * School Counselors
- * Teachers
- * Clergy
- * Coaches
- * Librarians
- * Support Groups



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Here is a partial list of some highly recommended publications to read to, with, or suggest to your child. Reading to younger children can offer opportunities for discussions and questions.

YOUNG CHILDREN

I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU

by Hans Wilhelm

LIFETIMES

by B. Mellonie & R. Ingpen

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS

by S. Varley

THE TWO OF THEM

by Alike

TIGER FLOWERS

Quinlan & Wilson

OLDER CHILDREN & TEENS

TEENAGERS FACE TO FACE WITH
BEREAVEMENT

by K. Gravelle & C. Haskins

HOW IT FEELS WHEN A PARENT DIES

by J. Krementz

THE KIDS BOOK ABOUT DEATH AND DYING

by E. Rofes & Unit of Fayeweather School

ADULTS

HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH GRIEF

by A. Wolfelt

TALKING ABOUT DEATH: A DIALOGUE
BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD

by E. Grollman

LEARNING TO SAY GOODBYE

by E. LeShan

HOW TO GO ON LIVING AFTER SOMEONE
YOU LOVE DIES

by T. Rando

Normal Grief

Even children who are able to express their feelings of grief through words, still at times will show signs of grief through verbal, emotional, and physical behaviors at times. Each child is unique so each child will express grief in his or her own way and own time. There is a wide range of normal behavior. Remember that the only normal you will ever find is a setting on a dryer. These are some of the normal and worrisome behaviors that may be signs of grief in **children or teenagers**.

Normal Verbal Behaviors:

- Talking about the deceased or loss a lot
- Not talking about the deceased or loss at all. (Some children initially act like everything is fine)
- Asking numerous questions
- Not asking any questions
- Wanting to hear the story of the loss over and over
- Not wanting to hear anything about the loss
- Wishing to be with the deceased (be careful not to jump to the conclusion that a child or teen is necessarily suicidal, but don't ignore the possibility either)
- Engaging attention by talking a lot
- Saying silly things, being the class clown
- Mentioning nighttime dreams about the person who died
- Talking about having "seen" or "felt" the person who died
- Voicing fears of almost everything and anything
- Voicing worries about safety, other people getting sick or dying

Normal Emotional Behaviors:

- oceans of tears
- crying at unexpected times
- having strong feelings about seemingly small things
- over-reacting to a situation
- inability to concentrate or focus
- noncompliance with adults
- needing to be near an adult all the time
- being angry at everyone and everything
- seeing someone and believing it is the person who died
- forgetfulness
- lowered self esteem
- irritability
- clowning

Normal Physical Behaviors:

- eating a lot
- not eating much
- sleeping a lot

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- not sleeping
- urine and bowel accidents
- pains in the stomach and other areas unexplained by physician
- non-serious, recurrent illnesses such as colds, sore throats, and headaches.
- older children regressing: clinging, wanting to do babyish things such as suck a bottle, play with dolls
- aggressive behavior such as hitting, pinching
- needing to touch people frequently
- weariness and fatigue, even with enough sleep
- wanting to rip and destroy things

Worrisome Behaviors:

- **dangerous risk taking**
- **self-destructive behaviors**
- **threatening to hurt self or others**
- **violent play**
- **total withdrawal from people and environment**
- **a dramatic change in personality or functioning over a long period of time**
any of the "normal" behaviors happening over a very long time or to an extreme

High Risk Students (For Educators and Counselors)

In a grieving student, the following changes in behavior and/or occurrence of symptoms constitute a high risk student for whom a referral for professional evaluation may be appropriate.

Drop in grades: It is not uncommon for students to have a lapse in their grade point average for a short time after a loss. Although some students struggle with school work more than others. Grief takes top priority so studying, concentrating and retaining information are difficult. However if there is no improvement after some time, consider seeking further support for the student. Try to understand when a student is avoiding homework because of associated depression or inability to focus. Often teachers can work with such students and break down assignments or have them get support from a homework buddy.

- **Angry Outbursts**
- **Hyperactivity**
- **Depression and/or Anxiety**
- **Discussions about wanting to die:** Watch for the student expressing a wish to die through writing, speaking or drawing. In young children be attentive to their play, however remember that it is also normal for children to re-enact their experiences through play.
- **Changes in Physical Symptoms:** Watch for symptoms like lack of appetite, nightmares, restlessness, inability to concentrate, clinging to parents or physical complaints.
- **Feelings of Guilt:** Watch for students who express a responsibility for the death of a loved one or friend. He or she may blame themselves for something they said, did, or didn't say or didn't do.
- **Lack of communication:** Watch for students who don't want to talk about the loss or exhibit prolonged inability to acknowledge a loss.

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- Identity Change: Watch for students who seem to be assuming the identity of the person who died.
- Isolation or Withdrawal: Watch for the student who becomes isolated, drops out of clubs or sports, or cancels events with friends. Early on this is normal but this should not continue.
- Use of drugs or alcohol, self-injurious behaviors, or other risky behaviors.

Categories That Contribute to Complicated Grief in Children

1. Sudden or traumatic death

Sudden or traumatic death can include murder, suicide, fatal accidents, or a sudden fatal illness. Immediately an unstable environment is created in the child's home. Children feel confusion over these kinds of death. Desire for revenge is often experienced after a murder or fatal accident. Rage and/or guilt emerges against the person who has committed suicide. Terror of violence and death unfolds, and the child feels shock and disbelief that suddenly this death has occurred.

2. Social stigma of death

Social stigma and shame frequently accompany deaths related to AIDS, suicide, and homicide. Children as well as adults often feel too embarrassed to speak of these issues. They remain silent out of fear of being ridiculed or ostracized. These suppressed feelings get inwardly projected towards themselves in the form of self hatred. Often times these kids feel lonely and isolated. They cannot grieve normally because they have not separated the loss of the deceased.

3. Multiple losses

Multiple losses can produce a deep fear of abandonment and self-doubt in children. The death of a single parent is a good example of a multiple loss. When the only remaining parent of a child dies, the death can cause this child to be forced to move from the home, the rest of his or her family and friends, the school, and the community. The child is shocked at this sudden and complete change of lifestyle and surroundings, and may withdraw or become terrified of future abandonment. Nightmares and/or bed-wetting could appear.

4. Past relationship to the deceased

When a child has been abuse, neglected, or abandoned by a loved one, there are often ambivalent feelings when the loved one's death occurs. A five-year-old girl whose alcoholic father sexually abused her felt great conflict when that parent died. Part of her may have felt relieved, even glad, to be rid of the abuse yet ashamed to say those feelings out-loud. She may carry the secret of the abuse and become locked into that memory and be unable to grieve. Children often feel guilt, fear, abandonment, or depression if grief of a loved one is complicated by an unresolved past relationship.

5. Grief process of the surviving parent or caretaker

If the surviving parent is not able to mourn, there is no role model for the child. A closed environment stops the grief process. Many times the surviving parent finds it too difficult to watch his or her child grieve. They may be unable to grieve themselves, or unwilling to recognize their child's pain. Feelings become denied and expression of these feelings withheld. The surviving parent might well become an absentee parent because of his or her own overwhelming grief, producing feelings of abandonment and isolation in the child. Children often fear something will happen to this parent or to themselves and as a result become overprotective of the parent and other loved ones.

Activities to help young children with complicated grief

1. Read stories to children that allow them to project their feelings onto the story characters. This opens a dialogue with a child in a way that is not threatening.
2. Allow children to visualize their hurt, fear or pain. Then can then draw, make use clay, or imagine these symbolic feelings being able to talk. If the hurt could talk, eight year old Nancy explained, it would say "Why me?" Nancy had experienced multiple losses, including the death of her younger sister.

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Feelings of having bad luck or being punished began to emerge.

3. Invite children to make a Loss Time-line, filling it in with people and dates in chronological order according to when they died. This Loss Time-line becomes a concrete representation of all the losses one has experienced.

4. Create with children a geneogram of family tree using a circle and square to represent those people still living and those people who have died in their life. Kids can not only see the extent of the losses they've had, but the support system of the people that are still remaining.

Prolonged Grief Disorder (Proposed Criteria for DSM-V) by Dr. Holly Prigerson, 2007

Criteria A: Bereavement

1. The reaction has to follow a significant loss

Criteria B: Separation Distress

The bereaved person must experience at least 1 of 3 separation distress symptoms, such as:

1. Intrusive thoughts related to the deceased
2. Intense pangs of separation distress
3. Distressing long yearnings for that which was lost

Criteria C: Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral Symptoms:

The bereaved person must experience 5 of the following 9 symptoms daily or to an intense or disruptive degree:

1. Feeling emotionally numb
2. Feelings stunned or shocked
3. Feeling that life is meaningless
4. Confusion about one's role in life, or diminished sense of self
5. Mistrust of others
6. Difficulty accepting the loss
7. Avoidance of the reality of the loss
8. Bitterness over the loss
9. Difficulty with moving on with life

Criteria D: Duration:

Symptomatic disturbance must endure at least six months

Cultures and Grief

Should a child attend a funeral?

The funeral will have a long term impact on the child, whether he attends or not. Attending without preparation, information and support can leave a child scared and confused. Not attending can isolate a child and often leads to regret or resentment later. Grief experts have found that giving children information and letting them decide in what capacity they feel comfortable participating is best. It is best not pressuring them into making a decision based on the parents' needs. The most helpful thing an adult can do is offer choices.

Give the child clear explanations of what will happen at the funeral:

- Who will be at the funeral services?
- What is going to happen?
- Where will the service take place?
- When will the funeral happen?
- Why are we doing this?
- What is expected of the child?

What about viewing the body? (A list of important facts the child may want to know before choosing to view the body.)

The body:

- is an open or a partially open casket
- is cool in temperature
- does not move
- can not talk, see you or feel anything
- will not come back to life
- may have markings, etc. from injury or illness
- will look and feel different than the person did before death
- may have a different smell

What are the options for involving children and teens in the memorial service?

- Attending or not attending the service
- Selecting the casket
- Deciding whether or not to view the body
- Choosing special objects to put into the casket
- Choosing which clothes the deceased will wear
- Choosing the grave marker and what will be written on it
- Picking out the urn for cremated remains
- Choosing the location to spread the ashes
- Selecting the funeral site
- Selecting flowers, music, and readings for the service
- Participating in the service
- Closing the casket for the last time or being involved in the process

After the memorial service/funeral

- Would you like to sleep at home or somewhere else tonight?
- What of the person's possessions, if any, would you like to keep?
- When do you think you will be ready to return to school? (talk to school counselor, nurse, teacher, and ask child what his concerns are).

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- Do you want to see the cremated remains? (they do not look like ashes, but crushed up bone pieces).
- Would you like to see the death certificate or the obituary?
- Would you like to participate in a support group like Good Grief? (he/she will be with other young people (ages 3-18) who have also lost a parent or sibling. www.good-grief.org 908-522-1999)
- How would you like to memorialize the person on the anniversary or special occasions?

Funerals do not have to be scary . Children get to see how many people loved their loved one as well as see how we support each other at times of loss. It gives us a chance to say goodbye to our loved one and the way things used to be. This is extremely important for healing. However if one cannot attend there are still ways to say goodbye.

Impact of Culture on Trauma

Cultural perspectives can shape people's reaction to a traumatic experience. Specifically, culture:

- a. Influences what type of threat is perceived as traumatic
- b. Influences how individuals and communities interpret the meaning of a traumatic event and how they express their reactions to the event
- c. Forms a context through which traumatized individuals or communities view and judge their own response
- d. May help define healthy pathways to new lives after trauma

Observances and Practices of Various Cultures

1. *Practices of the Native American Culture:* Native American observances also vary considerably in their traditions, religions and rituals, but there is a strong commonality among many tribes that centers on the natural world - the earth, the animals, the trees, and the natural spirit. Even among those who have been converted to Christianity, there is an emphasis on the reunion with nature that occurs with death.

Common practices include:

- a. The Medicine Man or spiritual leader usually moderates the funeral or death service. It may or may not follow a particular order since each individual is unique. In some tribes or clans, burial is not traditional.
- b. Some tribes call on their ancestors to come to join the deceased and, in effect, help in his or her transition.
- c. Most Native American cultures are not concerned about preserving the body and so embalming is not common. However, dismemberment and mutilation outside the natural deterioration of the body is taboo.
- d. There is a belief that the spirit of the person never dies; therefore, sometimes sentimental things and gifts are buried with the deceased as a symbolic gesture that the person still lives. The spirit of the person may be associated with a particular facet of nature - animal, bird, plant, water, and so forth. Symbols of such spirits may be a part of the ritual in the death ceremony.
- e. It is important to ensure that the burial of the person takes place in their native homeland, so that they may join their ancestors, and so that they may also inhabit the land to which their loved ones will also return.
- f. In some tribal cultures pipes are smoked at the gravesites.
- g. In some tribal cultures, there is significance to burying people with symbolic reference to a circle.

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- h. In some, there is significance in non-burial, but allowing the deceased to pass on to the other world in a natural way.

2. Practices of the Asian-American Culture: Asian-Americans may follow Buddhist, Confucian, or Taoist practices regarding death, with some elements of Christian traditions.

Common practices include:

- a. A family gathering at the funeral home to make arrangements, with the family elders assuming ultimate responsibility for the ceremony.
- b. There is great respect for the body. Warm clothes may be used for burial and watertight caskets are used to keep the elements out.
- c. Stoic attitudes are common, and depression may result from the internalization of grief.
- d. An open casket allows for respect to elders. Often poems in calligraphy are left for the deceased. Among Chinese Americans, a cooked chicken may be placed by the casket as a last meal for the deceased and spirits. The chicken will be buried with the body.
- e. Music is often used. A band may wait outside the funeral home and accompany the procession to the cemetery.
- f. The funeral route, burial location, and the choice of the monument are important. Incense may be burned at the grave. Among some populations, sacrifices may be made at the funeral.
- g. A gathering of family and friends for a meal after the funeral shows respect for the spirit of the deceased, and gives thanks to those who came to pay their respect.
- h. A picture or plaque is usually kept in the home and displayed with items that create a shrine

3. Practices of the African-American Culture: Black/African-Americans have traditions concerning death that draw from many cultures, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Some common patterns include:

- a. High involvement of a funeral director in preparations for mourning and burial.
- b. A gathering of friends and family at the home of the deceased to offer support and share in the common grief.
- c. A wake during which music, songs and hymns are played or sung. Some African-Americans hold a service known as a "Home-Going" service. It usually reflects the personality of the deceased and celebrates the conviction of going home to Jesus and being reunited with past friends and relatives.
- d. A shared meal among grieving loved ones after the wake and funeral.
- e. A funeral service followed by a burial. Cremation is less accepted in the Black community.
- f. A deep religious faith and integration of church observances.
- g. Memorial services and commemorative gifts.
- h. Many in African-American communities mourn by dressing in white as a sign of resurrection and celebrate with music and hope. However, Native Africans often wear red or black.
- i. Black/African-Americans often express grief at death with the physical manifestation of great emotion.
- j. African-Americans may believe in the concept of the "living dead". This concept refers to people who have died but whose spirits live in the memories and thoughts of those still living. These people are the ones who will help others who die move to the next world

4. Practices of the Haitian-American Culture: Although there is diversity in religious practices among the Haitian/Haitian-American population, they tend to share the following common patterns in the aftermath of death:

- a. Close family members and relatives make arrangements for the funeral and church services.
- b. A gathering of family members and close friends at the home of the deceased to pray and to offer support.

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- c. A wake is held at the home of the deceased every night from the time of the death to the time of the burial. At the wake, they chat, eat, drink, and share jokes.
- d. A viewing is followed by the funeral service and burial.
- e. Close family members mourn by dressing in black or white. The wearing of bright colors such as red is not considered an expression of mourning. It is preferable to wear dark colors such as blue, purple, and brown to attend a funeral.
- f. Many Haitians express grief with the physical manifestation of great emotion.
- g. After the burial, family members and friends usually gather at the home of the deceased for a reception, where flaky pastries, black coffee, tea, and other foods are served.

5. Practices of the Hispanic-American Culture: Hispanic/Hispanic-American populations also have diverse cultural backgrounds including individuals from the islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, and those who come from Spain, Mexico, and Central and South America. Most Hispanic populations practice the Roman Catholic faith, but not all.

Common patterns in the aftermath of death are:

- a. High involvement of the priest in the funeral plans.
- b. Family and friends are encouraged to be part of the commemoration
- c. The rosary is said by surviving loved ones, often at the home of the deceased. Among some Hispanic groups the rosary is said each night for nine nights after the death. Some families say the rosary every month for a year after the death and then repeat it on each anniversary.
- d. Funeral services often include a Mass. Loved ones are encouraged to express grief and many are involved in the procession to the grave.
- e. Many Hispanic survivors commemorate the loss of their loved ones with promises or commitments. These promises are taken very seriously and those who fail to honor them are considered sinners.
- f. Money gifts to help cover the expense of the funeral and burial are not unusual.

6. Practices of the European-American Culture: European-Americans follow various cultural, ethnic, and religious traditions regarding post-death ceremonial and bereavement practices.

General tendencies include:

- a. Friends and family gather at the home of the deceased or family member to support and share in the common grief. This practice usually occurs following the announcement of the death.
- b. High dependence upon a funeral director and/or person of the clergy in preparations for mourning and burial.
- c. A visitation and/or viewing at a funeral home is typically followed by a religious and/or graveside/crypt side service.
- d. Funeral services tend to rather subdued.
- e. Traditionally, dark clothing tends to be worn during ceremonial services; although this trend has shifted in recent years to a more color-based wardrobe focused on creating an atmosphere of celebration and hope.
- f. Interment is followed by a gathering at the home of the deceased, or a family member where food and refreshment are provided.

Religious Observances of Death

The role of religion is important for most victims/survivors because their answers to religious questions form their view of life, death and meaning. Many people do not know their position on religion until disaster strikes, and then their religious faith and beliefs are formed. Some religions give individuals more power over life than others. Some religions give collections of individuals power over life. Some religions give spirits more power over life than the living. Some give free will. Some give fatalism. All have defined ways of dealing with death. Some religious differences include:

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1. *Jewish observances*

- a. All customs are designed to treat the body with respect; therefore, autopsies and embalming are generally prohibited. Viewing the corpse is also considered disrespectful.
- b. The emotional needs of the survivors are very important.
- c. There is variance among Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jewish practices.
- d. No funeral is allowed on Saturday (the Sabbath) or on major religious holidays.
- e. Music and flowers are *not* encouraged.
- f. Eulogies are given by rabbis, family and friends. When the deceased person is held in high regard, there are usually several eulogies.
- g. Family members and others accompany the casket to the grave and are encouraged to place a shovel of earth on the casket, as a sign of the finality of death.
- h. The period of mourning lasts for one year. The mourner's "Kaddish" or declaration of faith is said at the gravesite: "Blessed, praised, glorified and exalted; extolled, honored, magnified and lauded be the name of the Holy One. May abundant peace from the heavens descend upon us, and may life be renewed for us and all Israel, and let us say Amen."
- i. "Sitting shiva" refers to the seven-day mourning period immediately following burial. The family cooks no food and a candle or lamp is kept burning in the memory of the deceased. The Kaddish is said every day during this time.
- j. Some people observe a period of three days following the burial during which visitors are not received and the time is devoted to lamentation.
- k. After the first seven days, survivors are encouraged to rejoin society but still maintain mourning by reciting the Kaddish twice daily for thirty days.
- l. Many mourners may wear a black pin with a torn ribbon, or a torn garment during the funeral and for the next week as a symbol of grief.
- m. Newborn babies may be named after the deceased. (This is important to remember since many cultures believe it improper to name people after the dead and, in fact, adults may change their names to avoid being named after someone who was died.)
- n. The first anniversary is marked by the unveiling of a tombstone at a special ceremony.

2. *Roman Catholic observances*

1. Since the Second Vatican Council, the terms "last rites" and "extreme unction" are no longer used by the Catholic Church.
2. The Sacraments of the Sick are prayers that are said as the person is dying, and involve confession and communion. If a person dies before the sacraments are given, the priest will anoint the deceased conditionally within three hours of the time of death.
3. There is often a wake and, if so, the priest will conduct the service or say the rosary.
4. There are distinct phases to "The Mass of Christian Burial."
 1. Prayers at the funeral home
 2. Welcoming the body to the church
 3. Covering the casket with a white cloth
 4. Sprinkling the casket with holy water
 5. The Eucharist is celebrated
 6. Prayers are said after the Mass
 7. Casket is escorted to back of church
 8. At the cemetery, the grave is blessed.
5. Consecration is a reaffirmation that the person will rise again. Prayers address not only the dead but the survivors - their faith in eternal life is encouraged.

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6. The one-month anniversary of the death is often celebrated by a Mass, as are those of other anniversaries.

3. Protestant observances

There are a wide range of Protestant observances, including:

1. Often there is a family gathering at the family home or funeral home.
2. Caskets, open or closed, are part of passage. Memorial items may be placed in the casket.
3. Cremation is an accepted option for some.
4. Black dress is a part of mourning.
5. Funeral services include music and testimonials. Music may include traditional hymns and/or songs of praise celebrating the Christian experience and the hope of everlasting life.
6. Gravesite visits may be made.
7. Memorial services are common, and sometimes replace funerals and other immediate observances of death.
8. Flowers and donations are preferred ways to express condolences.
9. Church members and friends will usually assist in providing the food needs of the family. The period of time will vary according to the needs of the family.
10. There is no formal structure to observe the death, month after month or year after year.

4. Islamic Traditions

Traditions differ in every country and the Turkish interpretation of Islam is in some ways different than those in other Arabic countries. These comments are basically relevant for Turkish culture:

1. Death is considered an act of God is not questioned. Faithful followers believe that all the events in the life-course of an individual, including the time and type of death, are pre-written by God.
2. People in grief are encouraged to show their feelings openly. They are encouraged to cry loudly as it is believed that crying cleans the soul. Any expression of rebellion against God's decision to take a person away from her/his dear ones is considered a sin.
3. Friends visit the house of the deceased and talk with the family members, encouraging them to describe how the death occurred, what they were doing at the time of death, etc.
4. For seven days, the family members are never left alone. Friends and neighbors bring food, as no cooking is supposed to be done in a funeral home during those seven days.
5. Traditionally, no television, radio or any musical devices would be allowed for 40 days but this practice has waned in recent years.
6. There is a religious prayer at the 40th and another at the 52nd day after the death.
7. Muslims are very sensitive to where their beloved ones are buried. They definitely want them buried in a cemetery for Muslims. They also want the funeral prayers to be led by a Muslim, not by a rabbi or a Christian priest.
8. A special ceremony and prayers accompany the funeral. The body is buried without the coffin and wrapped in white clothes, as it is believed that the body should touch the earth.
9. The body must be washed/bathed with certain rituals before the funeral ceremony begins. This usually takes place at either a special section of the mosque or in the morgue of the hospital. It is very upsetting when a body is buried without being washed.
10. When meeting with someone who has lost a relative, conversations start by saying: "May you be alive and May God's blessings be on him/her - the deceased."

March 2003. Adapted from material posted on the NASP website following the September 2001 terrorist attacks.

Practices of the Haitian-American Culture:

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A wake is held at the home of the deceased every night from the time of the death to the time of the burial. At the wake, they chat, eat, drink, and share jokes.

A viewing is followed by the funeral service and burial. Close family members mourn by dressing in black or white. The wearing of bright colors such as red is not considered an expression of mourning. It is preferable to wear dark colors such as blue, purple, and brown to attend a funeral.

Many Haitians express grief with the physical manifestation of great emotion. After the burial, family members and friends usually gather at the home of the deceased for a reception, where flaky pastries, black coffee, tea, and other foods are served.

Helpful Websites

www.good-grief.org/

www.griefspeaks.com

www.comfortzonecamp.org/ - Camp

www.hellogrief.org

www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org/

www.newyorklife.com/achildgrief

www.commongroundgriefcenter.org

www.dougy.org

<http://jfkmc.org/patients-visitors/support-groups> (Growing through grief for children)

Local Grief Counseling Services

JFK Medical Center:

Teresa Reitz, LCSW

Children's Counselor

63 James Street

Edison, NJ 08820

Phone: 732-321-7000 Ext. 62071

Email: treitz@jfkhealth.org

www.jfkmc.org

Kimberly Stolow, LCSW

Licensed Clinical Social Worker

623 Georges Road

2nd Floor, Suite B-2

North Brunswick, NJ 08902

908-227-2688

Email: KimStolow@yahoo.com

Lynne Einhorn, LCSW

Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Psychotherapy

623 Georges Road, Suite B2

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973-214-7745

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Cindy Kozicki
Private Practice
24 Northern Street
South River, NJ
732-967-9238

Kellie Cuzzola
Kitchen Table Counseling
In-Home Counseling
732-259-5970

Lisa Athan
Grief Speaks
Springfield, NJ
973-985-4503

Claudia Weiss, LCSW
Children Counseling/Social Skills
7 South Main Street Suite B
Marlboro, NJ 07746
732-446-4224

Stress Care NJ
Community Mental Health
4122 Route 516
Matawan, NJ 07747
732-679-4500

Good Grief
12 Stockton Street, Princeton NJ
38 Elm Street, Morristown NJ
Support@goodgrief.org
908-522-1999 x8012

Children's Bereavement Support Groups
"Growing Through Grief"
Children Ages 3-21
JFK Medical Center
65 James Street
Edison, NJ 08820
732-321-7769

Grief Speaks Consulting
www.griefspeaks.com

RWJ Champlain 24 Hour Services