

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
June 2005

National Conference
San Antonio
June 23 – 25, 2005

Administrators
Seminar Sessions
For School Management
www.crossmountainforum.com

June 27th
July 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th

Membership

Your membership in the fellowship is vital. Your support makes possible the newsletter, the national conference and the regional seminars around the country. The fellowship is a home base for people who are interested in developing the spiritual life of the children they teach. It is a resource for contacts, information, fellowship and encouragement. It provides gateways to other groups and organizations who are contributing to the Christian spiritual nurturing of children.

Please join today.

TEACHERS AND THE GRIEVING CHILD

By M. Joan Bishop

Joan is an experienced Montessori Teacher and director and is currently serving an internship in Clinical Pastoral Education.

This article will begin with two true anecdotes. Only the names are fictitious.

Cindy was three years old when her mother died of a brain tumor. The week after the funeral, Cindy returned to school. Teachers and staff were alert for changes in Cindy's behavior, but several weeks passed with no visible changes. One day, however, after playing in the sandbox, Cindy left her friends to sit next to her teacher. The following is a verbatim dialog.

Cindy: Do you have a Mommy?

Teacher: Yes, I do.

Cindy: My Mommy died.

Teacher: Yes, I know. I'm very sorry.

Cindy: I still have my Daddy. Do you have a Daddy?

Teacher: I have a Daddy, but my Daddy died a long time ago. He's in heaven.

Cindy: My Mommy is in heaven, too.

Do you think your Daddy will talk to my Mommy so she won't be alone?

Teacher: When I say my prayers tonight, I'll ask my Daddy to talk to your Mommy.

Cindy rested her head against her teacher's arm for a moment then went back to her games.

Cindy's first expression of grief was concern for the feelings of her deceased mother. Did Cindy fear that her mother was feeling as bereft as herself? We didn't know; we didn't ask. We simply addressed the immediate the issue of the moment.

Anecdote 2: One of our students, age 5, died after choking at home on a vitamin. We asked a child psychologist to visit our school and meet with the children. She gave the children opportunities to talk about Timmy and to ask questions which were answered honestly. Several activities were provided to allow the children to express their feelings and concerns. One child drew a two-part-picture. Part one showed the child at Timmy's grave crying. Part two showed Timmy standing between two angels --- and Timmy was smiling! What a beautiful gesture of faith!

Later, teacher and children planted a citrus tree in Timmy's memory which the children named "The Timmy Tree." Like all plants in our environment, it was lovingly tended.

Children often experience the death of grandparents, parents, friends, and pets. They frequently bring their grief to school unprepared how to handle this new, shocking emotion. (Are any of us really "truly" prepared?)

When death occurs in a family, grief extends throughout the child's entire home life. Family routine is upset so the child is dealing not only with his/her personal loss, but the loss of the ordinary, the usual, the expected. This is when the school community and the child's teacher in particular can play a major role in assisting and supporting the child through an extremely difficult time. The Prepared Environment is often the most consistent and comforting feature in the life of the bereaved child.

In the interest of space, this presentation will be divided into two major areas and sub-divided into three sections. First, I will outline some (1) feelings/thoughts (2) reactions of "younger" children (approximate ages

three through eight), with (3) appropriate helping activities. Second, I will repeat the outline for "older" children (approximate ages nine through twelve.)

EXAMPLES of FEELINGS, REACTIONS and HELPFUL ACTIVITIES

How Younger Children Think and Feel
Death is not permanent

How Younger Children React
Confusion/fear

Helping Activities
Loving, gentle constancy, teacher-read books such as LIFETIMES

How Younger Children Think and Feel
Death is like sleep.

How Younger Children React
Fear of sleeping/ nightmares

Helping Activities
Quiet music, regular physical exercise, nap or bed- time routine (Sometimes a child may need an adult nearby until he/she goes to sleep.)

How Younger Children Think and Feel

"Doesn't _____ love me anymore?"

How Younger Children React
Over-active/under-active

Helping Activities
Again offer comfort and assurance. Provide clay and finger painting for free expression.

How Older Children Think and Feel

Confusion/fear of her/his own response to grief (tears, anger, etc.)

How Older Children React

Impaired concentration/ forgetfulness

Helping Activities

Creative “doing” activities: woodwork (with safety tools), talking (if the young person will talk), art projects

How Older Children Think and Feel

Feels “detached” or vulnerable

How Older Children React

Inconsistent and/or changed behavior

Helping Activities

Journaling /new but low-stress responsibilities (class- pet food supplies, garden care, assisting in other classrooms)

How Older Children Think and Feel

Feels, in some way, responsible for the event.

How Older Children React

Sleep disturbance/ fatigue/ physical complaints

Helping Activities

HEALTHY food / Teachers: Keep a listening ear. Allow the young person to talk through the experience. Books - relating similar events in past or recent history.

Each child is unique in daily life and each child’s grief experience will also be unique. The above are but a very few of the emotions and responses in the lives of grieving children.

Opportunities arise, in a classroom situation, in which the teacher can offer activities that appropriate to the entire classroom community either as shelf-

work or as group activities. These activities can be enjoyable, learning experiences for all of the children, but may assist the grieving child in a personal, meaningful way. Below are lists of activities which I have found helpful:

Suggested Group Activities for Younger Children:

Draw “feeling” pictures

Provide paper doll outlines and allow the children to draw on faces and features

Animal charades

Teacher-read stories and poems

Music and movement (rhythm instruments)

Exercise!

General art projects

Simple prayer

Suggested Group Activities for Older Children:

Make scrapbooks

Keep journals

Write poems (group or individual)

Music (Music from other cultures is often interesting and effective)

Collage

Three dimensional artwork (clay, paper sculpture, woodworking)

Books

Spontaneous prayer

Even though a child may be a member of a strong faith community, when faced with the death of a loved one, the child may begin to fear death. When appropriate, keep an open dialog. Walk with the child as she/he comes to realize that all living things experience earthly death. This is the way we are created. Teachers, please try to avoid becoming “preachy”. Provide a calm, supportive presence allowing the child to gain confidence in your non-judgmental love.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Pilgrimage Through Grief by Miller, James

Cat Fancy, March 2002

Death at School, publishers: MADD

Dying and Grieving by Alicia Cook and Kevin Oltjenbruns

Good Grief, Granger, Westerg

Grief Observed, A by C.S. Lewis

Grief, Loss and Bereavement, San Diego Hospice and Palliative Care

Into the Way of Peace, James Lyons

On Death and Dying, Kubler-Ross, M.D.

Problem of Pain, The, C.S. Lewis

Private Worlds of Dying Children, The Bluebond-Langner, Myra

Working with Families in Play Therapy (workshop) Presenter: Laura Dewan, LMFT

Your Grieving Child by Dodds, Bill

BOOKS FOR GREIVING CHILDREN (re: Death)

AM I STILL A SISTER?

A. Sims
(death of a sibling)

BROTHER EAGLE, SISTER SKY

Chief Seattle/
(life cycle)

ILLUSTRATOR

Susan Jeffers

CAT HEAVEN

C. Rylant
(death of a pet)

CHILDREN'S LETTERS TO GOD

Hample and Marshall
(collected letters)

CHRISTMAS DAY KITTEN

J. Herriot
(shared love even after death)

DOG HEAVEN

C. Rylant
(death of a pet)

DOG THAT BELONGED TO NO ONE

G. Schiller
(beloved "town dog" dies)

EVERETT ANDERSON'S GOODBYE

Lucille Clifton
(a child's experience of the stages of grief)

FALL OF FREDDIE THE LEAF

Buscaglia
(life cycle)

HIAWATHA

Longfellow
(story-poem of life and its passing)

I HEARD YOUR DADDY DIED

Scrivani
(death of a parent)

I HEARD YOUR MOMMY DIED

Scrivani
(death of a parent)

IN GRANDMA'S ATTIC

Richardson
(learning about past generations/
respecting life and death)

JO'S BOYS

Alcott
(family life including death)

LIFETIMES

Mellonie and Ingpen
(explaining death to children)

LITTLE MEN

Alcott
(family life including death)

LITTLE WOMEN

Alcott
(family life including death)

LOVE YOU FOREVER

R. Munsch
(Love passes from generation to generation.)

MISSING MAY

C. Rylant
(remembering lessons from the ones we love)

NANA UPSTAIRS, NANA
DOWNSTAIRS dePaola
(death of a great-grandparent)

OLD ONES, THE

B&J Freeman
(Anasazi: respect for ancient life)

ONLY ONE WOOF

J. Herriot
(Animals love, too.)

OWL MOON

Jane Yolen
(remembering Pa)

PAINTING SUNSETS WITH THE
ANGELS Wesson
(illness and death of a sibling)

PUMPKIN PUMPKIN

Titherington
(remembering grandfather)

SECRETS OF A SMALL BROTHER

R. Margolis
(selected poems)

SKY WAS BLUE, THE
Zolotow
(story of generations)

SOMEONE I LOVE HAS DIED

M. J. Bishop
(activity book) Contact:
im-nana@cox.net

VELVETEEN RABBIT

M. Hague
(Love never dies.)

WHERE'S JESS?

Joy & Mary Johnson
(death of a sibling)

ZLATA'S DIARY

Filipovic
(death of a friend)

What is Love?

Out of the mouths of babes

“Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs.” Chrissy Age 6

“Love is what makes you smile when you are tired.” Terri age 4

“If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate.” Nikka age 6

National Conference

June 23-25

Respecting the Child
His spirit and his life

The conference begins at 10:00 A.M.
Thursday June 23rd and runs through
Saturday evening.

Conference cost is \$325 plus an additional \$25 discount for CMF members) and includes 3 lunches, morning and afternoon breaks and Saturday dinner.

Across from the Alamo
1-800-292-1050
Lodging costs \$98.28 (tax included)
Double or single
Rates are good if you register for the hotel by May 23rd

**Christian Montessori Fellowship
22630 East Range
San Antonio, TX 78255**

More details are available on our websites:
www.christianmontessorifellowship.com
www.crossmountainforum.com
Or call 210-698-1911
Send in your registration Now

**Make your reservations at
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