

Sibling Grief

When a brother or sister dies, the sudden reality of the death may be too much for families to accept. Siblings who are left with this pain may experience extreme loneliness because they believe that no one understands what they're going through. They may feel they cannot share their feelings with other members of the family because they want to protect them from additional pain. Due to the shock and confusion that murder brings, there will be no comprehension of why their brother or sister was so quickly taken from them.

Why Sibling Grief is Different

Siblings have their own method of grieving. Their parents lost a child, they have lost a sibling and the relationship is completely different. Many times siblings will experience a loss of identity as their self-image is inter-related with the person lost. Siblings may experience varied emotions including anger, guilt, grief and abandonment. They may attempt to deal with these powerful feelings through denial or suppression. Sometimes the sibling's experience may be further complicated by the failure of others to recognize their loss. They may be coping not only with the loss of a sibling but also with the loss of functional parents.

Suggestions for Helping Parents

Helpful

- Accept your child's feelings. Allow them to grieve in their own way and encourage the expression of feelings.
- Work on your own grief. Express sadness, anger and frustration. Parents and children may be drawn together by sharing each other's grief.
- Spend time regularly with each child. This will offer assurance that they are loved. Show them that they are as important as the lost sibling.
- Each child needs individual acceptance. Try to nurture their own identity.
- Get help. Getting outside help may make it easier for them to communicate.

Not Helpful

- Judging. Don't tell them not to cry or suggest they be strong. Their loss needs to be recognized.
- Keeping feelings to yourself. Withholding your emotions from the rest of the family may inhibit others.
- Avoiding them. This will make them feel rejected and abandoned. Don't make them feel that they have become a burden.
- Taking down family pictures. This may be interpreted by the sibling as a loss of family and may be devastating.
- Comparing the lost child to the living child. It could cause them to think they can't measure up.
- Limiting their space. This may happen if you feel a great need to be over-protective.