

A child in the face of a parent's death: Aspects of children's loneliness

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Among bereaved families, numerous tensions, stressors, and anxieties that are direct consequences of the loss of close relatives can be observed. Effective mitigation of these concerns depends heavily on the depth of the feeling of loneliness as well as on various factors that determine it.

Purpose: To determine the impact of the death of a parent on children's feelings of loneliness within their own families.

Material and methods: A total of 10 families (6 mothers, 4 fathers, and 15 children) from the city of Białystok who had been in mourning during the two-year period were included in this qualitative research. The case study method was applied in addition to the following research techniques: structured interview, narrative interview, the Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank projective technique, and an analysis of children's activity products (essay entitled "My Family").

Results: The youngest children were characterized by less-intense feelings of loneliness, as they do not yet understand the irreversibility of death, whereas children at ages 12 to 14, aware of human life's

stability and persistence, felt the state of loneliness significantly more deeply. To cope with its presence, the children and their families usually used informal social support (parents, grandparents, siblings, or friends) rather than seeking the help of qualified social service professionals.

Conclusions: Talking with children about death and remembering a deceased parent with them are integral parts of the mourning process. Before children can accept their loss, they feel a great need for talking and having the company of other family members in experiencing their pain. There are a number of critically important tasks that a family in mourning needs to face, including the following: helping to understand the need for breaking personal ties with the deceased and reducing the internal tension caused by the loss; modifying former structure, duties, and family roles; and the need for the bereaved family, especially its children, to find new relationships in the outside world.

Key words: Family; death of a parent; solitude; loneliness.
