

What do you tell children when their mother dies?

The children stood by quietly and impassively as their father registered them for elementary school. After walking them to their new classrooms, he approached school counselor Janice M. Hammond.

"Their mother died last week," he told her with some hesitation. "I don't want anyone at school to mention it. But I thought you should know in case they seemed upset."

"They seem to be adjusting quite well," he went on. "Neither has cried or even talked about her."

"Was it a long illness?" Hammond asked, thinking perhaps the children had been well prepared for the loss.

"No," he replied. "It was a suicide."

"I was skeptical at once about the 'good adjustment,'" relates Hammond, a consultant for the Wayne County Intermediate School District and a post-doctoral student at the University of Michigan. "It is important for bereaved people to mourn, to express their emotions, especially in such a crisis situation."

She convinced the young father to discuss this wife's death and his sadness with the children. To make it easier for them, she searched for a comforting book about death that the three

could read together. But she could find nothing in print for young children on the death of a parent.

SO, WORKING with the family, Hammond developed her own picture book, "When My Mommy Died." As she read it to the children, they began to talk more openly about their own feelings and fears.

"Todd, who was 9, said he felt lonely and guilty, and wondered if he had done something to cause his mother's death. He was scared that his father would die also. Once he began to express these feelings, it was easier for his father and me to reassure him," Hammond said.

"One page showed a child with a wide open mouth and the caption 'Sometimes I want to scream.' Todd said that boy would be screaming, 'I want my mommy back!' After I added that sentence, Todd showed it to others as part of the book he helped to write."

Seeing the comfort it brought one family, Hammond decided to publish "When My Mommy Died" and is currently completing a similar book on the death of a father. ("When My Mommy Died" may be ordered for \$4.70 including postage from Cranbrook Publishing Co., 2915 Cranbrook, Ann Arbor 48104.

Quantity discounts are available.)

The words and illustrations, Hammond says, are simple, depicting a central character who can be either black or white, a boy or a girl. It is intended for children aged about 3 to 10, to be read aloud and discussed by a caring adult.

THE BOOK has been well received by educators and school counselors, Hammond says.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, author of "On Death and Dying," wrote: "I loved your book because it encourages and helps children to cry and scream and express their anger without feeling guilty, which is very much my own philosophy. I hope that people who work with bereaved children will use."

In the preface of the book, Hammond points out some of the steps adults can take to help their child:

- As soon as possible after the death, set aside time to gently, yet truthfully, tell the child about it. Choosing a familiar room or outdoor setting to talk may make the child feel more comfortable.

- Be truthful. Don't make up stories that will have to be changed later. Even learning that the parent died as the result of a homicide, suicide or violent accident may be less frightening for the child than leaving the details to his or her imagination.

- Don't over-explain, however, burdening the child with more information than he or she is ready for. Children need a logical explanation, but they may not want more details until days or weeks afterward.
- Encourage the child to express feelings and share your own. Cry together. Give the child an opportunity to give you comfort.

HAMMOND BELIEVES that it is important for children to attend the funeral, to observe other people mourning and to be able to talk about the death as openly and comfortably as possible.

"When we express anger or grief, some people may try to be helpful by saying, 'You shouldn't feel that way.'"

Ford to dedicate library in Ann Arbor April 27

The Gerald R. Ford Library will be dedicated April 27. Located on the North Campus of the University of Michigan, the library houses Ford's congressional, vice presidential and presidential papers, as well as other papers donated by his administration officials and records of federal agencies.

Ford will attend the dedication, which will be held at the library. Other dedication details and the names of others who will participate in the ceremony, including members of Ford's cabinet, will be announced later.

Fifteen million pages of documentary material reflecting Ford's service in the federal government are among the

7,500 cubic feet of papers housed at the library. Staff members of the National Archives and Records Service are processing the papers and staffing the library. An audiovisual collection of 200,000 hours of videotape, audio tape, and motion picture film, as well as 275,000 still photographs, are housed in the Ford Library.

Both the library and the Ford Museum in Grand Rapids were built with private funds raised in a national campaign. Like all the other presidential libraries and museums, they are operated by the National Archives and Records Service of the General Services Administration. The museum will be dedicated during a separate ceremony Sept. 18 in Grand Rapids.

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— Janice M. Hammond, author of 'When My Mommy Died'

What we really need is to have our emotions accepted," she stresses.

"There is also an impulse to protect and shelter the child from the reality of death. Yet it is important to realize children have very real fears that should not be suppressed, such that some behavior of theirs made the parent ill, or that no one may be around to take care of them."

"A death in the family is always a painful experience," Hammond said. "Especially tragic is the death of a young parent. The remaining spouse,

involved in his or her own grief, as well as the many arrangements and readjustments, may find it difficult to be available and helpful. Yet the child's need for the parent during this time will perhaps never be greater."

Statistically, about one child in 20 will experience the death of a parent before the age of 18, Hammond says. "Although it is a terrible crisis, it need not leave emotional scars. The death of a parent can be an opportunity for the remaining family to grow stronger and draw closer together."



gerontology
A. Jolayne Farrell

Cataract is common

Dear Jo: My father has cataracts on both of his eyes. He sees quite well although he no longer likes to drive at night. His doctor, who is an eye specialist, told my father that he will operate on the cataracts when they are ripe. Exactly what is a cataract — and what is meant by ripe?

D. Kent

Dear D. Kent: A cataract is a condition involving the lens of the eye. The lens becomes less transparent, and this loss of transparency is an age-related change that occurs in most individuals.

In certain people it progresses to the point of opacity. This opacity of the lens is known as a cataract. Cataracts are the most common eye disability of the aged, and it is proposed that all persons would eventually develop them if they lived long enough. Cataracts interfere with proper focusing, causing the vision to be blurred.

When your father's eye specialist (ophthalmologist) used the term "ripe" in relation to his cataracts, he meant ready for removal. This is when your father's vision is significantly impaired by the cataracts that he can no longer carry out his daily tasks. At this time cataract surgery (removal of the lens) can be performed.

Dear Jo: My boss has had eye surgery. He had a lens implanted right into his eye. Could you explain what this is?

A.T.

Dear A.T.: I thought I would combine your question with the one on cataracts because in certain circumstances the operating surgeon will, after removing a cataract, insert into the eye an optically ground small piece of plastic that is similar to the human lens.

The plastic lens is fine for distant vision but will not change shape to compensate for near vision. So persons with plastic lens still need glasses for reading. These glasses are of the type worn for reading, not the thick "Coke-bottle bottom" type that we see people wearing after they have had their cataracts removed (although even the thicker glasses have been improved).

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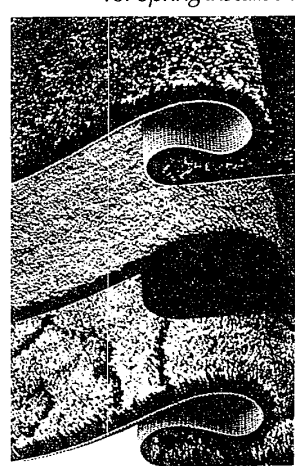
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