

HELP FOR PARENTS

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Carefully aid children through grief



Bob Kisiki

The Good Book says whatever is born of a woman lives for only a short spell and, ultimately, dies. Unfortunately, this does not only refer to what is born of woman in the neighbour's household. It applies to all of us and, one day; it actually does come to us. Your child's father could pass on; or his mother, sister or brother. These things happen.

Bereavement is probably one of life's toughest moments. Knowing that the person you always knew; interacted with, went places with, ate with and did a lot besides with; is no more is heart-wrenching. And if it is tough on an adult, imagine what it means to a child!

When my own mother passed on many agonising years ago, I was an adult. I had just completed my first



Children may withdraw after the loss of a loved one if they are not helped

year at university, but after her burial, I told myself, what the heck, I am not returning to Makerere. So deep was the pain. But that is not the only resolve I made: I also determined to help my little sister, who I knew had been close to our mother, to cope with the loss. Indeed as time went by, I realised how hard hit she had been, being picked up from primary school and told, "Mummy has died."

A child's world is like

Alice's Wonderland – it is a world of blissful fantasy. It knows no pain, except maybe the pain of lack of food or keeping at home all day; all week, when just across the road his peers are busy playing all manner of games.

They do not understand death; they do not know why someone who has always been around is now no more. This is why you need to help them. You need to gently and carefully explain the concept of death to them and then

tell them that is what has happened to their little sister or to mummy or whoever.

Of course, there is the age that you should not even bother with; time will sort them out when they are due. However, there is the age which, should you ignore them, will most definitely cause them damage that you might never undo, if you do not help answer certain questions they are battling. Questions such as, did Ali do something bad to Allah,

for Him to take him? Could I have hurt Daddy so bad, that he decided to die, to punish me? Am I next? What if Evangelina too dies?

It is questions such as these which, unresolved, lead to having endless nightmares, being withdrawn... even to habit formation, as a means of coping. They could even declare a *fatwa* on God Almighty Himself.

Yes, you are certainly grieving yourself, but you have walked this road before. Chances are at least one of your own parents or siblings passed on long ago. Sometimes it is not even a family member who teaches us the agony of loss; it could be a friend.

Whatever the case, by now you know what it is like to lose someone you care about. Take your child through it. Be there for them. Become a closer friend than you have always been. Read the Word of God to and with them. Pray together. Go out together. Hold their hand and walk them through this season.

By and by, they will begin to show that the danger has passed and then you can begin to steer them back to the normal path.

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