

COPING WITH LOSS

By Leanna Krotzer, Director District 2

lkrotzer@northmasonschoools.org

We have learned as adults that when someone dies we go through a 5-stage process, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance to deal with the loss. This is considered normal and we have adopted ways of coping through the years. This last year our community lost several people who were close to our hearts, many of them personal to me.

Whether it is family, friend, teacher or someone in the community there is often someone overlooked while we are grieving, often it is a child. Kids express how they feel in different ways, they can be silent, cry, act mad, or even show their feelings by being mischievous. How do we know what is affecting them and how do we know what they feel when someone dies?

As a parent of a 7-year-old I am often perplexed at how my son is handling a situation. When others are crying he is silent or he is laughing and making a ruckus. It took me a short time to understand that he does not know what he is feeling but he is reacting to the unknown.

My son has lost 2 people that were part of his education and growth just these past few months. I wanted to make sure he knew what had happened each time and what that meant in real life. I asked him often how he felt about losing them and each time he answered, "I don't know", which is probably the most honest answer I could get. But as an adult my first thought was "How could he NOT know what he feels?"

It was a process for me to take myself back to the mind of my childhood years. I started by remembering things I would do as a child, then I tried to remember how I felt when someone died when I was a kid. I could not find a time in my young life when I lost someone that I knew well enough to miss. How am I going to help my son get through this and move forward? I decided that it would be a good thing to talk to him more about it as he is going through something I hadn't at this age. We talked and I cried. I noticed that while I was explaining how I felt, his face softened. It was comforting to me to see him look in my tear-filled eyes as I spoke and that he was learning through me what death meant and felt like.

Not always is it easy to help a child understand, most times we are still trying to make sense of it ourselves. I found that ensuring my son had me to come to was consoling for both of us.

I did some looking around on-line and found a link that was helpful to me:

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/death.html>

This is a list of tips on talking to your child about death that is explained pretty well on this website:

- When talking about death, use simple, clear words
- Listen and comfort
- Put emotions into words
- Tell your child what to expect
- Talk about funerals and rituals
- Give your child a role
- Help your child remember the person
- Respond to emotions with comfort and reassurance
- Help your child feel better
- Give your child time to heal from the loss

Another link that is very helpful is a list of local resources including crisis lines.

<http://mobile.4people.org/countydocs/Mason.html>

At each of our schools in the district we have teachers and counselors who are trained to help students deal with their feelings and answer questions they might have. They are also available for parents to come to if they need to talk or have questions.

Listen and have patience, the grief process takes time and it is different for everyone. It is up to us to be available for our kids and to let them know that there is no shame in taking the time needed to get through a loss.