

Strategies to Support a Child through Sibling Grief

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Professional staff at an Early Education and Care Service can play an integral role in supporting a child who has lost a sibling to death. This loss experienced by the child may be difficult for the adult to support. In addition to allowing the child to talk about death and what feelings are, staff need to support the child to be included and want to be included back into the community of the service. Children know sorrow. As adults it is difficult to understand how they suffer. However a child's needs should not be overlooked.

Behavioural changes of the child are firstly an obvious sign that the child is trying to understand what is occurring in their world. Although it is important to allow the child to have the time to express their feelings, be alone at times and initially make their own decision to be apart from the group, the reality is that being included is important for all humans.

Inclusion Strategies

The following strategies are just a start to support the inclusion of the child back in with their peers. Staff may recognise that they are already attempting to implement some of these strategies. Keep them up. It is important that the service provides at least one consistent place for the child to be to enable them to cope with the inconsistencies which may be occurring in the rest of their lives.

- Talk to the parent/guardian in regards to what the child has been told and what they feel comfortable for the staff to talk about. Make sure you are using the correct terminology for the developmental age and that it complements what is being used at home.
- Continue to discuss with the parent/grandparent the concerns that staff have in working with the child. Rather than saying the child is the problem, stress that you as staff need support.
- Identify what the child's interests are e.g. trucks, sandpit and allow times for that child to explore and play in those interest areas.
- Provide opportunities for the child to 'play out' or explore their feelings through activities such as dolls, art materials and dress ups.
- Discuss with the child who they could go to for comfort when they are feeling sad. Suggest adults in the setting and as well as peers who they may feel secure around.
- Acknowledge those times when the child has been on their own while reinforcing the idea that all the child's friends want the child to join in with the group activities.
- Allow areas within the room for the child to go when they need quiet time to themselves while still ensuring safety and supervision.
- Be consistent with your usual behavior expectations. Knowing that they can expect some things to stay the same helps children to manage change. Avoid punishments for misbehaviour as that can compound the negative feelings. Stay calm when reinforcing expectations explaining clearly what behaviour is unacceptable and why.
- Think about creating certain routines to "do jobs" or rituals on arrivals etc. to allow the child to be part of the inclusion process.

References

Linke, Pam (2008) *Everyday Learning Series: Everyday Learning about Loss and Grief (Vol. 6, no.1)*. Early Childhood Australia: Canberra

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