



# Helping children when a parent has died...

By Andrea Kellerman

When a loved one has died we feel overwhelmed and don't know how to handle our own emotions. Often as a parent we are at a loss how to help our children who might need us more than ever before.

Some children do not open up about their feelings and bottle up their emotions. Everyone grieves in a different way and that is ok.

Here is what my 13 year old niece wrote about how she dealt with her mom's death. Trixie, who was a keen cyclist, always healthy and fit, died of motor neuron disease. In 2012 she felt that her hand and foot went numb and she couldn't move them properly any more. The doctors diagnosed her with motor neuron disease and gave her little hope. Within a few months she had to be in a wheel chair and couldn't move much at all any more. They tried any possible therapy, medication or treatment but her disease was unstoppable. Trixie's children were 11 and 7 at that time and it was very hard for them to understand what she went through and that the disease was not curable.

## ***What happened to my mom***

When I found out she was sick I thought she would get better but then my mom and my dad and all other people were talking about what is going to happen when she's gone. I got angry and when my dad and my mom wanted to talk to me about her illness I would either ignore them or walk away. My relationship with my mom changed because when she wanted to talk about her illness I felt weird talking about it with her or with anyone. I felt like I was pushing my mom away because I was too scared about what was happening around me. She went to many different doctors and even flew to London for medication and treatment. I thought she would get better but she didn't- she got worse.

The morning that my mom died my grandparents were visiting and my aunt was sleeping with my mom that night so my dad could get some rest. In the morning I saw that my mom was breathing very heavily and something didn't feel right. I look at my gran and saw sadness in her eyes. I asked her what's was wrong and she walked over to my mom and gave her a kiss and told me to give her a hug and then we left and let her sleep. I went back to my room and told my dad how mom was breathing funny and he must come right away. He came in the room and when I saw that same sadness look in his eye as I did with my grandmother- I still didn't understand. My dad phoned my moms best friend and our family and they arrived quite quickly. I thought to myself: Why were they all crying? My dad asked me if I would like to stay here at home or go to school. I chose go to school and my godfather dropped me off. My brother came too. I was at school that morning looking at our apartment; I could see it from the window in our classroom. That morning I had to sing in assembly I looked at the clock and it was 9 am I felt sadness in my heart for some reason I didn't understand. After assembly I went back to my classroom. I arrived there first and saw that my teacher was crying and I didn't understand why. She asked me to go to another room, sat me down and told me that my mommy has gone to heaven.

## ***Dealing with the pain***

The first year went by and I still felt a lot of pain obviously, that will never go away. Time and schoolwork made me feel better but I didn't know how to deal with my emotions. When my dad wanted to talk to me about my mom and asked me how I'm feeling, I would feel awkward and walk away.

My mom is dead for over two years now and I'm feeling better. I do try and avoid talking about her at times. But every now and then I get a memory and at times I miss her lots. Like on mothers day or her birthday or if I see one of my friends cuddling with their moms and I feel left out. Everyone deals with grief in their own way. After the loss of my mom, I went to see a therapist, but after a while I decided to stop going to my sessions. I found different techniques that worked for me, like drawing my emotions, listening to music, crying and distracting myself at times. In the beginning I also dealt with my emotions I dealt by not talking or thinking about them because it made me sad. I would mostly cry in my room when nobody was around me or sometimes when I went to bed. I'm one of those people who don't like attention or people feeling sorry for me. So I didn't like crying in front of people, and tried to avoid doing so. Although I don't always express my emotions to others, allowing myself to cry in moments of sadness is comforting to me and I often feel better afterwards. I may not be an expert on the topic of grief, but if I had to give any advice on how others can deal with theirs, I would tell them that accepting the loss of a loved one is never an easy thing to deal with, and to be truthful the pain will never ever really go away, but I want them to know that things do get better over time. It might take a little longer than they want it to, but they will feel happiness again. I would also suggest that, as difficult as it may be, they should try and find the positive in the situation that they are dealing with. For those who are religious, they can find comfort in the idea that their loved one is in Heaven and is watching over them every day. For others, they can find comfort in the idea that their loved one is no longer suffering and can find joy in celebrating their life and everything that they loved. In a moment of loss, your life feels like it is crumbling around you, but overtime things will get better. I know that my methods may not work for everyone, but I hope that what I have said will help someone deal with their grief in some way or at least give them hope that things will get better over time.



### **Useful hints to help others grieve:**

- *Teach children that death is part of life.*
- *Include them and be honest about what is going on.*
- *Don't delay telling about a death and be open to listening to them.*
- *Recognize their emotions and help them with negative ones like fears.*
- *Let them see you grieve and allow them to grieve their way- there is no right or wrong way to grieve.*
- *Cherish the memories and also allow them to accept the situation.*

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