

## Factsheet

# HOW TO HELP GRIEVING CHILDREN/ADOLESCENTS



Children/adolescents who are caught up in war are first and foremost fatal victims but there are also many orphans and children separated from one or both parents, as well as disabled children/adolescents, and a very large number of them psychologically traumatized.

What we know about bereaved children during a war is that the problem they experience is not just missing people and trauma, but also and above all, their survival. The risk comes from the cumulative effect of subsequent trauma, violence, abuse, and lack of resources.

In children, acceptance of death appears around 6 to 8 years old and by 10-11 years old at the latest.

Children between 8-10 years old are naturally resilient because they're self-centered, but they also tend to ask two questions:

- Who will take care of me now?
- Will it happen to me?

Only later will they ask questions about the cause of death.

Children who are bereaved during a war risk developing mental problems later that we need to watch out for. There is also survivor's syndrome, the guilt of not feeling guilty, and the void of missing the lost person because the child doesn't remember what the loved one they lost was like.

Prolonged grief in children and adolescents is similar to that of adults with a few age-related specificities. We may observe regression and loneliness, a drop in school performance. We need to ensure that the child/adolescent doesn't become isolated and to encourage him to reconnect with his peers.

How can we tell a child the truth, how can we explain death to a child? Children are not prepared for the death of a loved one, the loss weakens their emotional balance. The ability to overcome the loss will depend on the ability of the accompanying adult.

Four messages to convey to children of all ages (Alain Sauteraud, Living after your death, 2017)

- 1 The parent (the deceased person) can never be with them again.
- 2 The parent didn't want to leave them.

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- 3 The parent will never come back.
- 4 The child has nothing to do with the parent's death.

It will be up to the surviving adult to create the mental development around the deceased, to help the child to reconstruct his/her story, who he/she was, his/her life before the tragedy.

