



How Can I Help My Neighbor's Child Who Just Lost Her Mom?

by Karen Lockard, LCSW Children's Counselor

"I wish I could get another mom." "I want a mom to tuck me in at night when Dad is busy." "I want a mom to play with me and help me with my homework." These words of yearning and need are very common in children whose mothers have died. They are not a suggestion that their mothers can be replaced, but rather a reflection of their grief in very concrete and specific terms. Children can do a wonderful job of describing what is missing, and what they need, especially when asked. They often express their grief in terms of behaviors, things they miss, rituals the deceased parent did, as their emotional vocabulary is still developing and often there are no words for their feelings of grief.

For the surviving parent who is already overwhelmed, hearing these needs can be devastating and guilt producing. The surviving parent is often holding things together by the skin of their teeth, so being told or reminded they aren't doing everything is adding yet another layer of grief for them. One of the tasks of therapy with a parent can be to talk about how to make up the "deficit" of attention and time by talking and asking other family members, such as aunts, uncle, grandparents, friends to include his child in everyday events, such as Friday night pizza, slumber parties, holiday events, going to the park etc. The benefit for being included in those run of the mill activities is immeasurable. It also allows the surviving parent some time to recharge his batteries.

While keeping in mind many people are reluctant to ask for help, this is a reminder to all of you who are related to or who work with, or who live next door to a family who has lost a parent to death. Don't be shy or afraid to ask the child(ren) to join your family for an afternoon or evening. It doesn't need to be anything fancy or exciting, just being included will be wonderful. Your time and attention is really all a child needs.

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