

CHILDHOOD TRAUMATIC GRIEF AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MURDER-SUICIDE

When children experience a traumatic death of someone close to them, such as by a domestic violence murder-suicide, they may have trouble moving through a “normal” or adaptive grief process. This is called traumatic grief.

Children experiencing traumatic grief may have ongoing difficulties that impact their everyday life. In the case of a domestic violence murder-suicide, children may have witnessed domestic violence before the deaths of their parent(s). They may experience trauma from witnessing or hearing about the death. Even if they did not witness domestic violence, they may be troubled by images and reminders that make it difficult to remember positive memories of the deceased. These images may occur repeatedly in the child’s mind and—because they are so upsetting—the child may avoid thinking or talking about the person, going places or doing things associated with the person or the death. Traumatic reactions may disrupt learning, be misinterpreted by parents, teachers, and others, and can exacerbate existing mental health issues.

SIGNS INDICATING TRAUMATIC GRIEF

Intrusive Memories About the Death

Children may experience nightmares, flashbacks, and/or intrusive thoughts about how the people died. They may suffer from guilt and self-blame.

Avoidance and Numbing

Children may avoid talking about the people who died and avoid any reminders. They may act like they are not upset and may express they are “over it.”

Physical or Emotional Symptoms

Children may have trouble sleeping, exhibit tantrums or angry outbursts, be irritable, have trouble concentrating, experience somatic complaints (headache, stomach aches), have increased fears and/or arousal.

TYPES OF STRESS-INDUCING REMINDERS

Trauma Reminders

Places, situations, people, smells, and sounds can remind the child of the person and/or their death. For example, hearing a loud noise such as fireworks or hearing sirens; seeing or even being near the place where the deaths occurred; smelling a food that was cooking around the time of the deaths, if the child was present.

Loss Reminders

People, places, objects, situations, thoughts, or memories that are reminders of the person or people who died. For example, looking at pictures, hearing music, or seeing other parents at school for programs.

Change Reminders

Situations, people, places, or things that remind the child of changes in his or her life resulting from the death(s). For example, moving to a new house or school.

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