



Domestic Violence - The GRIEF OF A 6 Year-Old BOY

THE SEASHELLS

His tiny hands clenched into a fist as I opened my hands, welcoming him.

His eyes pierced mine, defiant! Challenging me to rebuke him, as many had done, for his unwelcome.

I smiled. He glared! I questioned. He frowned. Silence.

Crouched into a corner, he watched my every move.

The seashells on my desk distracted him. Recognizing opportunity, I ventured in.

Explaining the journey of the snail, and the armour worn for protection, hard and rough...a gleam arose.

I weaved my watery web, crouched on the floor beside him.

Silently, with measured breath, he stretched forth his hand to touch the seashells.

I watched his every move...a bridge was built.

Silence still - no words from this young stranger.

I invited him to keep the seashells until we met again.

He glanced at me. Disbelief! Mistrust.

But he quickly pocketed the seashells and rose up from the floor.

Afraid that I may change my mind, perhaps, he ended the session.

I opened my arms. He turned away. Too soon.....This time, a faint smile on his lips.

Grief is pain. Loss is pain.

Dr. Margaret Nakhid-Chatoor - MNC Psychological Testing and Counselling Centre

This boy could not explain why his heart was broken and why the window had closed in on his joy. Perhaps the seashells would reach the stony shore, where words could not.

(For Joel – not his real name-, 6 years old, who lost both his parents to a murder/suicide which he had witnessed)

In Trinidad and Tobago, there are many homicides, vehicular accidents, terminal illnesses and other incidents where death occurs. When these persons die, they inevitably leave behind surviving children and adolescents to mourn their loss and to continue their daily lives (as if nothing had happened) in the midst of the trauma of bereavement.

What are the emotional, social and psychological repercussions of these deaths on children and adolescents? When a child is witness to domestic violence, the grief can be complicated if there is no follow-up. Are these factors taken into account when constructing interventions in the classrooms for bereaved students, or in the provision of social services for families who may face financial difficulties after the death of a loved one?

The death of a parent or a loved one is traumatic to most persons. For children and adolescents, it is one of the main causes of deviancy, substance abuse, aggression and depression, if the loss is not addressed and/or supported by other significant persons who may serve as protective factors, in the sociocultural contexts of school and home.

Let us pay close attention to those students in our schools, who may suffer the loss of a loved one in their families. If the death occurred under tragic circumstances, be hesitant to talk about this in an assembly as many children and adolescents are further traumatized at the careless remarks made by pupils and teachers. For many young children, the loss of a parent is a stigma and many children are further teased – *“Why yuh getting on so? Is because yuh mother dead?”*

Observe these children for reactive and aggressive behaviours. DO NOT TELL them, especially boys, that they are just like their father when they misbehave. Do not expect adolescents to finish their SBAs and other examinations in the face of a death. Let us be cognizant that grief and loss can be traumatic for anyone, especially for our most vulnerable – children and adolescents.