

Kind lies in difficult situations

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Seven years ago, María's diagnosis was that of breast cancer. From that moment, everything has become hardship, with chemotherapy and its derived conclusions. There were ups and downs in this situation but it was under control. Juan, her husband, is with her, struggling for her and for him in order to keep on living.

Álvaro is 11 years old and Jaime is 8 years old. They, the most vulnerable people in the family, are at a lower level. This is, both María and Juan decided to keep them aside of this situation. They are young and we do not want them to suffer.

But last news are not good. There is a new relapse and there is brain metastasis. Sometimes María does not feel well because of the symptoms and because of her new treatment. Although she vomits and her bad sensations, she hides her suffering so that the children do not suffer. Juan, very sad because of this new complication, also hides his suffering and smiles when he is with his children so that they do not suffer.

Although Álvaro and Jaime are children they are not silly, they smile, they do their homework and they play as quietly as they can because they know something is going on. Mum has been ill for some time, she gets better and worse and then she feel worse again. Then, they are left with their grandparents' for the weekend or with their uncles. They enjoy that because they can do whatever they want to and because that weekend, mum and dad are busy.

They hardly ask because they understand the prevailing sadness atmosphere from time to time. They would like to see their mum and tell her not be sad because they will take care of her, kiss her injuries so that she gets cured, visit the paediatrician to get some medicine to cure her, sleep with her in the same bed because they feel frightened, help her when she is cooking, watch TV with her, come closer and stay with their father because he is sad although he does not seem to be ill, shake hands with him or drawing with him. But it is better not to because if they do, they will get sadder because they also know that mum is very ill. It is better to hide this suffering and keep on doing the same without coming closer.

Everybody is a victim of silence, of silence conspiracy and the longer it takes, the more difficult that leaving it will be.

And this is the way that time goes by. Time does not go back and there are missing hugs, kisses, stories, words, tears, gestures, problems ... so that some people do not suffer and in order to hide this suffering for others although tears do not convey weakness but humanity. The important thing is to explain children the reason of those tears so that they do not feel guilty.

Despite anguish and uncertainty, children have to know the truth. Furthermore, if we tell children about the hidden suffering, they will feel better if they feel useful.

Why is it advisable to talk with them? Because imagination is worse than reality, because home life changes, it is not the same and they will start understanding partly your conversations and because they listen to them although it seems that they do not hear them. And it is better that you tell them about this, not other people. Thus, they will trust you now and then. If you do not talk to them, those fears might appear as nervousness, aggressiveness, sleep, food or school disorder. These are warnings to be taken into account so that they do not take long. Reality will protect them from the dreadful effects of silence and their parents' lie.

Firstly, it is necessary to assimilate this situation so that it can be properly transmitted. It is better if we do this from the beginning and with information related to the progressive evolution.

Answer the questions, wherever you are, driving, in the bathroom or having dinner. They will set the conversation pace. It is good that they show their worry, that makes their concern decrease.

It is better to talk about improving than curing and do not promise something which is not under your control or which are not sure to fulfil.

If a relapse occurs, explain them that everyone is doing their best but things are not going well. Hence, they can have doubts concerning a total cure. Bad evolution will not be a surprise for them.

If this illness progresses and active treatments are finished, the question of death will appear. This must be done progressively and it will be good to think about this before it takes place.

Some children are not affected by the situation. This is not true, they are shaken. Keep them under your control and

ask them for permission to talk about feelings.

For a child (1-3 years old), death is equivalent to leaving. It is linked to fear of parents' divorce. When a child is 4, they think that dying is like being asleep. When a child is 5-6 years old, they think that dying is not permanent and that their parents can protect them from any danger, including death. This is a magic stage for them. Everything is possible. From 6 years old onwards, the idea of death is more real, they are more conscious of an idea of death closer to what adults think but they sometimes avoid to talk about it with their parents since they know they are being deceived. The notion of personal death appears between the fifth and ninth year and in the 10th year is understood as something fatal, a similar idea to an adult's.

There are some guidelines to take into account when a child loses a beloved person:

- Do not lie: answer all their questions.
- Do not make promises that cannot be fulfilled, or say things that can be wrong later on.
- Explain what death is with partial truths, according to the child's maturity, intellectual and emotional age. Refer to death before it takes place. Take advantages of the opportunities that take place for this.

- Do not use a relative or a friend to give an explanation. Parents are the ones who know their children best and the possible impact caused.

- Do not link death to sleeping or travelling because a child's imagination is bigger than yours and they can have sleep disorders. Do not link death to problems since a child can link the death of a beloved person as a punishment.

- If you have suffered from a personal loss, do not hide your suffering, share your sadness with them talking about the lost person.

- Reinforce death irreversibility and do not create false expectations.

- Look for your teachers' and partners' support since they can comfort you.

Bibliography. Recommended reading.

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