

Grieving families can expect a new local resource

By VIRGINIA JUSTICE

People who lose their spouse are widows or widowers, children who lose their parents are orphans. But there is no term for parents who lose their child and no title for siblings who lose a brother or sister – perhaps because this loss defies the normal order of things.

Children grieve, often quite differently from adults. How can we help children understand and adjust to losing a loved one? How do you explain to a child that a parent or sibling has died? Remember that grief is unique to each individual; there is no right way or wrong way to grieve. Grief has no time



limits; the amount of time needed is as unique as a fingerprint.

According to The Dougy Center,

the National Center for Grieving Children and Families, there are several ways to help grieving children. They recommend complete honesty, not telling a child that a loved one passed, expired, or was lost but rather telling them the person died. Listen to what children have to say and offer comfort. Do not be afraid to talk about the person and feelings of loss, sadness, and/or anger.

Prepare children for the funeral by explaining in simple terms what will occur, the rituals involved and what to expect. If your family has certain traditions or rituals you may want to explain why things are done the way they are. You may want to talk about things like cremation, interment and burial so the child understands what these mean. Explain that all people react differently and that some people may cry, and assure children that you are there to provide comfort in the form of a hug or a hand to hold. If possible, involve children by giving them a part in the service; just make sure their role is age-



Family Health

appropriate.

Currently the nearest resources for grieving children and parents in Eastern Oregon are in Kennewick (Cork's Place), local private mental health counseling, or a long drive to The Dougy Center in Portland. Jan Peterson-Terjeson and her husband, Matt, are spearheading efforts to open "Cason's Place" in Eastern Oregon to provide our area with a location to help those who are grieving. Jan and the board of the new organization are hoping to open around September in a Umatilla County location to be determined after the new year.

Following the Dougy Center model, Cason's Place will offer age-appropriate sessions for children and parents. "Everyone's child is important," says Jan. "We are looking for a way to help parents help their children." In the future, they hope to offer sessions that are related to the manner of death, as this is often important to the healing process.

Jan welcomes the opportunity to speak at civic clubs, churches or city meetings and is always looking for individuals willing to volunteer. Anyone interested in donating, volunteering or having Jan speak to your group may contact her by email at janpt.loss@gmail.com or phone at 541-720-1620.

Home economist Virginia Justice holds an education degree. The Pendleton resident and her husband have two college-aged daughters.

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