

Keeping death from children (Maria Dimitriadou, Pedagogue)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



[Previous post: <http://bit.ly/2kGka4G>]

Most people today have grown up in this atmosphere [‘This artificial atmosphere typified by a hypocritical optimism which seeks to silence the truth concerning life and death’. See ‘When we avoid the thought of death’ the previous post by this author] and, as a result, bring up their own children in a similar manner. The majority prefer to hide death from children and to keep quiet about it, since they naively believe that it’s an event which is ‘foreign’ to them. Foreign either because it doesn’t directly concern them since they’re ‘at the dawn of their life’, or because they can’t conceive of death at such a young age, or because they’re thought to be too young to be able to mourn the death of someone they loved, or, finally, because death is considered to be a process which should in no way be experienced by the soul of a child.



And yet, for all that, death is a universal and unavoidable phenomenon. It concerns grown-ups, but also children. It's very important, especially in today's day and age, that people should be properly equipped to transcend death and should be given correct information about this mystery from an early age. Through being taught about death, children will gradually be able to reach the point of understanding the meaning of life. Then, as they grow up, they'll develop into spiritually aware people and will be able to fulfill their calling as human beings.

Children are able to learn from the experiences they gain in every different environment in which they take part in their lives, be it parental, school, parished, or the wider environment to which they presumably belong. It follows that the people who can contribute most to their understanding of death are their parents, teachers and shepherds. There are two necessary conditions for successful instruction on the transcendence of death. One is the ability to handle the subject with tact, and the other that those who are responsible for bringing up the children should have come to terms with the fact of death in accordance with the faith and content of Orthodox Christian teaching.

3.1 The concept of death in childhood

It's difficult and also damaging to the natural development of children to hide from them the reality of death and its tragic conditions as an inseparable part of the

emotional experiences of life. Children are very sensitive to changes in their emotional environment and so it's impossible for grown-ups to 'deceive' them and they therefore have to be properly prepared. Teaching about death normally begins through experience of the loss of other people. Children don't know the concept of death only in this way, however, but also through every small and great loss they experience in life, what the terminology of psychology calls 'little deaths'.

From the time of birth, with the separation from the placenta, the infant has its first experience of death. Birth is contact with primordial grief, since the embryo leaves the first paradise of bliss and security in the womb, only to be received into a different, unknown world. By analogy, on their path through life, the inevitable, natural losses which accompany every stage of children's development reconcile them to the process of the loss of a familiar, recognized situation and the acquisition of a new, unknown one.

Beyond these developmental losses, children can also experience greater, unexpected ones, such as emigration, natural disasters, the divorce of their parents, being diagnosed with a disease and so on. Besides, by identification, children also know the emotions evoked by loss and death even through television, the cinema and literature.

More generally, the loss of any thing, situation or person connected to us by an emotional bond induces pain. According to Piaget, at the pre-school and early school age, animism and anthropomorphism are widely used by children in their assessment of things around them, so the pain caused by the destruction of a favourite toy, the death of a pet or of a person close to them can be equally great for the soul of a child, depending on the depth of the loving relationship they'd developed.

(to be continued)