

Helping Them Cry

When children face tragedy ...

“Clancy! How could you do such a thing!” the children screamed. They had just arrived at their Grandparent’s ranch when the beloved old ranch dog grabbed a kitten and mangled it to death.

Hysteria reigned supreme, and Grandma did her best to comfort them. Who would have thought that Clancy would do this?

She let the kids talk through their terror and guided them toward thinking about what needed to be done now. They decided to put the remains in a shoebox and bury it in the trees.

But first, for these youngsters who had never been to a funeral, everyone had to get suitably attired: fresh outfits, hat and “gloves”, and a great deal of solemnity.

Regardless where they got the idea how a funeral should be conducted, their focus on “a proper funeral” brought some healing, though their conversation would often return to Clancy’s dastardly act.

None of us can escape the reality of death. But, for children having pets that don’t live forever, a wise adult can help them work through these early experiences with tragedy.

I’ve been asking how children are reacting to what is happening to the children in Haiti. It seems these happenings are as remote as are most extreme happenings that occur on TV. But for those who have Social Justice groups in their schools, teachers are wisely encouraging their students to put their feelings into action through such endeavours as fund-raising.

I appreciated, too, the story told to me of the little girl who was late getting home from school. She explained to her dad that her best friend’s doll got smashed in an accident. “Oh”, he said, “so you helped her try to put the pieces together.”

“No,” She replied. “I sat with her and helped her cry.”

(Written by Joyce Sasse, February 2010)