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Children and disappearance of a family member

Barbara Preitler

Children and disappearance of a family member

When a family member is “disappeared” the whole family system is changing. The situation of children in such families is special vulnerable. They need special attention and care, if possible through their parents. But often they are themselves confused and under traumatic stress. Social workers, teachers and therapists might give (additional) support the child in this difficult phase. Children need to know as much as possible: In protecting the child it might not be told what has happened. But children feel the difference before and after the “disappearance” and with the lie the child becomes separated and will feel lonely. Children should be guided with their apprehensions and fears according to their age. Parents need support to be in this difficult situation good enough parents. Families should be encouraged to speak to each other and respect different thoughts about what has happened. In some cases new forms of rituals can help the family to go ahead with their lives without the “disappeared” family member. Based on my experience as psychotherapist with traumatized refugees in Europe and in different areas in Southern Asia the presentation will focus on possible therapeutic interventions for children who have to cope with the situation of “disappearance” as described also in my book *“Grief and Disappearance: Psychosocial Interventions”*.

Biography

Barbara Preitler is currently working as Trauma Therapist and is a Supervisor for Psychotherapists and Social Workers. She is a Lecturer at University of Klagenfurt, Austria. Her main areas of research are psychotraumatology, trauma and grief and psychological aspects of international development cooperation. She has published numerous articles and has also developed diploma courses on trauma counseling in Austria and Sri Lanka.

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