

Joint Handbook

of the Orphan Ministry at the LBS Mwika (HUYAMWI)

and the Orphan and AIDS-program of the ELCT ND (OAPND)

paper 17: Orphan´s grief relief

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1) Basic reflections concerning grief of children

- To anticipate grief – the relief of tomorrow arises today

Talking about grief usually means dealing with a human being´s inner feelings after the death of a closely-related person. In doing so an important part of grief is neglected: the grief that precedes the death of this person. Probably every individual person has experienced some moments in life, when he/she was picturing in his/her mind the death of his/her parents. In such moments we are feeling the real pain of losing the beloved person, we anticipate grief.

To me it is necessary to focus the sorrows of those children whose mother or father is about to die, suffering from Aids or other diseases. Children usually are a hundred percent aware of this situation. In some way they hang between the times and wait for the day to take over full responsibility of caring for the family. To bring them back to a firm ground they need attention by their social environment, most of all by the dying relative. This leads to one question: **How can HuYaMwi invite parents to participate in the work on grief relief of their children?**

- Memory

Memory plays an important role in the process of grief. There are two points of view to the issue of personal memory. On the one hand all the different pieces of memory about the relative like pictures [cognitive or photos], texts, smells, materials or symbols. On the other hand the question: How was I seen by him/her? It is mainly the question about the moment of Saying Goodbye: Did I say or do everything that needed to be said or done in this moment? Did I do anything in my power to help him/her?

A personal example to point out the meaning of memory: Several times I made the attempt to remember the face of an adored family member. It was shocking: I could not create a complete visual picture. This experience made me looking for other ways to collect memories of this person and finally I was planning to write down the story of her life.

I assume that many orphans are in the same situation struggling to keep the memory alive. Memory is a worthy treasure. Some children might already have lost pieces of it and, of course, there are others who do not have any idea about their parents, for they died very early. The question is: **Which methods can be used to reunite children's memories?**

2) Methods to relief grief

❖ Memory Book

This book provides enough space for a mother or father to write down her or his story of life. It is a medium for parents to say goodbye and equip their child with personal thoughts and messages.

Children's lifelines are closely related to their parents'. This book enables children to find their own way being aware of the challenges and questions faced by their parents. Within the process of collecting memories the child can be prepared sensitively for the coming loss.

In former times stories were delivered orally from one generation to another. This chain of information nowadays is about to be interrupted. By memory books stories can even be delivered without a single word. A picture or a flower can be sufficient to tell a whole story.

Besides the orphan's personal benefit (which of course is the first aim) this project could also lead to an increasing understanding about HIV/Aids in society. The final aim of a memory book would then be that one day there will be no more need of it.

➤ Challenges seen:

- To engage in a memory book means accepting that you are going to die.
- Cultural background: To what extent do people talk frankly about death? What is the meaning of death for Tanzanians/ for Chaggas? (*Land of the dark or Christian vision of heaven? A natural part of life or punishment?*) What do people consider to be the source of HI-Virus ?

❖ Memory box

Children are asked to find a symbol that reminds them of their dead parents. These materials are being put in a box or glass and closed in.

A problem that was faced in the pilot phase: Children did not want to take the glass home. Maybe they were concerning unpleasant reactions from their relatives at home.

It might be helpful to think of a certain place to keep the memory boxes, for example the grave of the parents (if known and reachable).

❖ “Plant and grow “– symbols of life

Holding on to life helps bearing the reality of death. This attitude is obvious with dying people. When death is an every-day companion people stress the signs of life: they are dressed well and surround themselves with beautiful things.

Often, the medium of language is no sufficient way to express grief, especially children are short of words to express themselves in this theme. Creative and artificial work, such as planting or drawing tunnels children´ s feelings and implies strong symbolic power.

3) How to introduce these methods to HuYaMwi organs

a) Orphan Meetings

To Student Committee members the major challenge of monthly Orphan Meetings is the following: How can they be organized with special regard to the different age groups of the children? Experience shows that mainly the elder children lost interest in playing games. “Teaching about future life” is what some propose instead.

My suggestion is to introduce a “gardening workshop” that could be set on the long run (all over the seasons´ circle). This workshop could cover two interests at the same time: On the one hand to get practical experiences in gardening and planting with special advice to the Orphan´ s own possibilities to mitigate the economical situation at home. On the other hand to create a suitable “language” to express feelings of grief and share experiences with others.

b) Orphan Seminar

Children mainly learn from each other. This basic fact makes Orphan Seminars so essential.

A professional in working on grief could be invited in 2008 to work on reproducing children´ s memories. The outcome of this seminar could be a personal memory box as “take away” for the children.

c) Fieldworker

To carry out the idea of memory books it is necessary to reach people right in their homes. The Fieldworkers are those among all HuYaMwi Staff with the closest personal connections due to frequently home visitations. In many cases people have already developed a trusting relationship to the Fieldworker, which is helpful to win people for this project. Of course, the fieldworker needs accompaniment by an “expert” of this method. Also a seminar for fieldworkers to introduce them to basic issues concerning grief of children should be considered.