

## "THE GUILT WILL ALWAYS REMAIN"

By Mansi Parosh Kumar | Updated: Jul 27, 2011, 09:33 AM IST



Amurta Kashyap stands devastated and haunted. Her 18-month-old son, Armaan, had slipped out of her arms and out through an open window from the ninth floor of their residence on Monday. Still in shock, she wears a dazed look and family and friends wonder if she would ever get over the horror of watching her child crash to his death. **Baby plunges from mum's arm to death**



This painful paradox is a parent's worst nightmare. A child is not meant to die ahead of his/her parents. Yet, as this unspeakable tragedy touches one more family in the city, psychiatrists and psychologists explain the grieving process and what support can be offered to help grieving parents come to terms with the incident.

"The most important part of the grieving process after any trauma is the guilt," says Dr Gangadhar, head of the department, psychiatry, Nimhans. "In this case, the guilt will be magnified severalfold because the mother watched the child die. And because the child was a dependent, the feeling will be severe. It is this guilt that one needs to deal with." Immediately after the incident, Amurta was rushed to a hospital where she was diagnosed with mental shock and was administered glucose. She returned home the same day. Neighbours in the apartment complex say that the family plans to move her away from the scene of the tragedy until she comes to terms with the loss.

"The most important and indispensable support system to a parent is the family support that he or she has. The spouse also plays a very important role in dealing with the trauma. It's very important that the spouse does not blame the other for the tragedy. They need to get through the trauma together and understand that it's the worst kind of accident and not intentional. Blaming the other will only increase the feeling of guilt which is not what is needed right now. Support of the spouse is pivotal," says Gangadhar.

Prabhu S, a private psychiatrist, concurred.

"The survivor's guilt, that of having lived beyond their child, will be the worst to deal with," Prabhu said. "The bereavement that a parent feels after losing their child includes initial shock, depression and then the guilt.

Each one of these issues needs to be handled carefully," he said.

While the family plans to move Amurta away from the scene of the tragedy, doctors ask that they keep watch for warning signs.

"Each person has their own way of grieving and nobody can put a time frame to it," says Mamatha Shetty, another psychiatrist. "Keep the lines of communication open and do not allow the patient to go into a shell. Watch out for signs of intense depression that is accompanied by suicidal tendencies. Watch out for violent reactions where she could hurt herself. To deal with this, one needs to make sure she is surrounded by people who care for her."

Neha Doshi, a psychologist with Cadabams Mind Talk, Centre for Psychological and Psychiatric Services in the city, says, "We normally use the bio-psycho-socio model to understand the grieving process in an individual, which varies from person to person. Your upbringing, genetics and conditioning all determine the way you deal with a trauma. But a common yardstick to gauge the mental health of the patient is the sleep-

### "The guilt will always remain" - Bangalore Mirror

food-hygiene factor. Neglect in these three areas will tell you that the person is not coping well," she says. Gangadhar, however, also warns that the mother could turn her attention to the older child that the couple have.

"Sometimes an older child can evoke painful memories for the parent and they may even anger them. But more often than not, the surviving child becomes therapeutic to the wound. The danger is that the parent could become overly protective and that could cause problems. Her attention will border on a hyper vigilant attitude which needs to be kept in check, more for the well being of the child," says Gangadhar.

The experts are very clear that professional help requirement is a subjective matter. "If support within the family is good, then professional help may not be necessary. But if there is no improvement in her condition even after about six to 10 months, one should consider professional help," says Mamatha.

Neha, however says, "No amount of counselling or talking will take the guilt away. It always remains in a corner of the parent's heart. All that the help that comes your way can do is equip you to deal with it better."