



TALK WITH THE CHILDREN ABOUT THE REALITY THEY ARE A PART OF

by Karen Glistrup, writer, social worker, family, couple and psychotherapist mpf.

Family life is no fairy tale, far from it, with grown-ups who are present and with happy kids. You find starry moments, and then you have periods where you can't find the good tune. Conflicts, crises, and chaos will be a part of life...and a part of the family life and the life of children.

A lot of us want to spare our children, spare them from the difficult and painful chapters. But this very project is impossible, and we shall not try to succeed with it. The truth is we can't conceal anything for the children for they are already a part of all the things going on in the family. That counts for what we talk openly about and what we attempt to hide.

Luckily the truth is also that it is not dangerous for children to experience crises and chaos...in fair amounts... in the family.

On the contrary. As long as the children have company, someone to share the things they experience. And for that very purpose: to make way into the good talk with the children about everything, well, for that purpose Pia Olsen and I have created our latest book, *Dad, Mum...and Kids*.

Dad, Mum...and Kids - a book about life in the family

We have closed our eyes and concentrated on several moments that children can experience in their family. Some situations are wonderful or full of fun while others will tell other difficult stories, i.e. fighting parents, a child's stomach ache, or a child hitting a friend. Some of the situations will cause recognition, others will seem far-fetched, but most will be interesting and thoughtful and worth talking about.

Pia's illustrations will touch your heart, and they will be supplied by a few words, a few lines, helping the grown-up reader to speed up the thoughts and the talk with the children.

Apart from this book I have written three other books about children, their feelings and about ways to be open about feelings.



How did it all start?

Initially, I helped mentally ill parents in psychiatry for grown-ups to talk with their children. The patients' children had very often many difficult experiences with their parents. Experiences that were hard to decode as the parents were beside themselves because of depression, anxiety or psychoses.

As no one talked with the children, they made their own vision of what was wrong. And that vision would have something to do with the child himself, unfortunately: It is my fault, it is because they don't love me, it is because I should have... When the child realized that it was all about illness, you could easily see the relief.

Since then I have worked with practitioners and psychiatrists, who would recommend my family talks. I have worked with and I have been teaching foster care, health care, schools, daycare centers and social psychiatry.

My contribution to change the culture of silence in the professional arena was the book, *What Children Don't Know, Will Hurt Them*. The German publisher Beltz named it: *SAG MIR DIE WAHRHEIT* / (eng: *TELL ME THE TRUTH*)

In addition to the teaching I have for the last 10 years in my own clinic in Ry helped parents to open the talk with their children about various things. Very often you find subjects that the parents are deeply affected by, and therefore they have agreed not to involve the children. But more often than not, the children have already been involved. For they have sensed that there were things not spoken of. And that 'something' made all in the family insecure and worrying.

The talks with the families are unconditionally the most meaningful kind of work, I can imagine. It is really a relief to experience the reactions of both parents and children when silence and concealment is broken. You might see tears being shed, but at the same time the room is full of relief and warm relationship. And the family walks out of the door with a new contact and a feeling of cohesion in the family.

But the children will not talk about it...!

When children say they will not talk about things with us, we must understand them properly. What they say, means most times, that they don't want to talk with us in the usual way.

Most grown-ups have the notion that a talk with the children consists of questions from the grown-up and answers from the child. The case is; however, no children like to be interviewed in that way.

The experience is strenuous for the children and it is far from a true relationship of equals.

What children will be in need of, is brave and trustworthy grown-ups, who dare to see and talk about the things the children sense and experience.

My books are all created from a desire of inspiring grown-ups to more openness and more good talks with children about the reality of which they – after all - are a part.

