



Developmental Stages and Children's Responses to Grief

Approximate Developmental Age	Grief Reactions	Helpful Approaches
<u>Ages Infant to 2</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General distress, irritability, shock, despair • Changes in amount of crying, eating and toilet habits • Sleeplessness • Fear of abandonment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a consistent nurturing person if that key person has died • Include in funeral rituals
<u>Ages 2 to 5</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion • Separation anxiety • Depressed or withdrawn • Nightmares • Regression to earlier stages of development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer honest and direct answers to questions • Reassure the child that there are others who will care for her • Foster a secure, loving environment • Read books depicting other families who have experienced death • Draw • Include in funeral rituals
<u>Ages 5-8</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggles to understand death in concrete way • Denial that it could happen to themselves or other family member • May ask questions repeatedly • Anger, Sorrow, Confusion • Activity levels increase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use simple, direct words or phrases • Avoiding euphemisms aids in ability to trust • Offer physical outlets • Reassure the child about the future and the surviving parent or guardian • Draw, read grief-related books and play together regularly • Include in funeral rituals
<u>Ages 8-12</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to formulate realistic concepts • Finality of death is understood • Death is universal, an inevitable experience that can happen to everyone • Death as the end of life is perceived as a very frightening and painful event • Concept of death as magical is replaced by the belief that death is terminal • May be morbidly curious or phobic about death • Begin searching for their own philosophy of life and death • May have difficulty concentrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer honest and direct answers...children need trust and truth • Remember avoidance may create further anxiety...the difficult reality is better than uncertainty • Offer physical outlets • Create opportunities to talk (as a family) • Reassure the child about the future and the surviving parent or guardian • Draw • Read books about other families dealing with death • Include in funeral rituals

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<u>Adolescents</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness, shock, denial, anxiety, anger, depression • Difficulty concentrating • Decline in quality of schoolwork • Withdrawal from family and friends • Physical complaints, constant fatigue or drowsiness • Unresolved grief may be reflected in drug or alcohol abuse, impulsive/risk taking behaviors • Separation/Individuation process may be impacted due to increased responsibilities at home, ensuing guilt or fear • Desire to protect the surviving parent, guardian or siblings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactions may appear similar to adults, however, they have fewer coping skills • May feel vulnerable and need to talk • Inquire about who they are talking with (most adults assume that that adolescents are talking with their friends about the death and most of their friends assume they are talking with an adult)...often they are not talking about death and need to be encouraged to do so. • Include in funeral rituals
	Several Grief Indicators	
<u>Physical or Behavioral</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accident Prone ○ Alcohol Drug Abuse ○ Appetite Changes ○ Constipation ○ Diarrhea ○ Dizziness ○ Hives ○ Insomnia ○ Low Energy ○ Nausea (recurrent) ○ Overeating ○ Stomachaches ○ Weakness (especially in legs) ○ Weight Gain ○ Weight Loss 	<u>Emotional</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agitation ○ Anger ○ Overly compliant ○ Depression ○ Guilt ○ Irritability ○ Envy ○ Loss of Self-esteem ○ Moodiness ○ Nightmares ○ Preoccupation with the past ○ Restlessness ○ Sadness ○ Self critical ○ Thoughts of Death, Suicide ○ Either avoidance of or excessive need for intimate relationships 	<u>Intellectual</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Confusion ○ Disbelief ○ Forgetfulness ○ Inability to Concentrate ○ Memory Loss ○ Over Achievement