

## Grief Reactions in Childhood & Adolescence

Age	Beliefs about Death	Grief Reactions	How to Help
<b>Birth-2 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No understanding of death</li> <li>• Aware that loved one is gone</li> <li>• Senses change in routine</li> <li>• Senses parental grief</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General distress, protest</li> <li>• Crying</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Sleeplessness</li> <li>• Indigestion</li> <li>• Sucking or biting</li> <li>• Throwing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical contact and reassurance</li> <li>• Consistent nurturing figure</li> <li>• Maintain routines</li> <li>• Meet immediate physical needs</li> <li>• Include in funeral/ mourning rituals when appropriate</li> </ul>
<b>3-5 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No understanding of permanence of death</li> <li>• Believes death to be like sleep, temporary, reversible</li> <li>• Magical thinking and fantasies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety/ Fear</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Agitation (especially at night)</li> <li>• Regressive behaviors</li> <li>• Repeated questioning</li> <li>• Nightmares</li> <li>• Reenacts scenes of death in play</li> <li>• May act as if nothing has happened</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical contact and reassurance</li> <li>• Allow time for play and fun</li> <li>• Simple, honest answers to questions</li> <li>• Patience with repetitive questions</li> <li>• Maintain routines</li> <li>• Allow for expression of feelings</li> <li>• Include in funeral/ mourning rituals</li> </ul>
<b>6-9 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands death is final and irreversible</li> <li>• Interested in physical aspects of death</li> <li>• Does not think death will happen to them</li> <li>• Early spiritual concepts</li> <li>• Worries that caregiver(s) will die too</li> <li>• Worries that his/her thoughts or actions caused death</li> <li>• Does not want to appear different from peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Anxiety/ Fear</li> <li>• Guilt</li> <li>• Regressive behavior</li> <li>• Lots of questions</li> <li>• Hide feelings/ withdrawal</li> <li>• Nightmares/ sleep disturbance</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating, completing school work</li> <li>• Acting out/ Aggression</li> <li>• Attempt to be "perfect child"</li> <li>• May act as if nothing happened</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical contact and reassurance</li> <li>• Allow some regressive behavior</li> <li>• Spend time together</li> <li>• Allow time for play and physical activity/ sports</li> <li>• Simple honest answers to questions</li> <li>• Watch for confusion, feelings of responsibility for the death</li> <li>• Encourage drawing, music, reading, art, dance</li> <li>• Reassure child that he/she will always be taken care of</li> <li>• Include in funeral/ mourning rituals; let child choose how to be involved</li> <li>• Work with teacher/ school to make school work manageable</li> </ul>

<p><b>9-12 years</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands death is final and irreversible</li> <li>• Denial</li> <li>• Worries that his/ her actions caused the death</li> <li>• High death awareness (worries someone else close to them will die)</li> <li>• Thinks about future life milestones without deceased (weddings, graduations, etc.)</li> <li>• Continuing to form spiritual concepts</li> <li>• Does not want to appear different from peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concurrent developmental changes heighten grief feelings</li> <li>• Shock</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Loneliness/ Isolation</li> <li>• Fear/ Vulnerability</li> <li>• Regressive behavior</li> <li>• Fluctuating moods</li> <li>• Hides feelings, withdrawal may act as if death never happened</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating, completing school work</li> <li>• Sleep disturbances</li> <li>• Acting out/ Aggression</li> <li>• Focuses on physical aspects of illness and death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be understanding of mood fluctuations and regressive behaviors</li> <li>• Make yourself available to listen and talk</li> <li>• Answer questions honestly</li> <li>• Offer physical contact</li> <li>• Encourage expression of feelings through art, music, writing, sports, etc.</li> <li>• Find peer support groups</li> <li>• Involve in funeral decisions/ mourning rituals; let child choose how to be involved</li> <li>• Work with teacher/ school to make school work manageable</li> </ul>
<p><b>12 years &amp; older</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands death is final, irreversible and universal</li> <li>• Denial</li> <li>• High death awareness (worries someone else close to them will die)</li> <li>• Thinks about future life milestones without deceased (weddings, graduations, etc.)</li> <li>• Personal death awareness</li> <li>• May use spirituality to cope</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-conscious; does not want to appear different from peers</li> <li>• Desire to be in control of feelings, reluctant to show feelings in public</li> <li>• Shock</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Loneliness/ Isolation</li> <li>• Fear/ Vulnerability</li> <li>• Fluctuating moods</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating, completing school work</li> <li>• Sleep disturbances</li> <li>• Changes in eating patterns</li> <li>• Acting out/ Aggression</li> <li>• Fighting, screaming, arguing</li> <li>• Impulsive/ High risk behavior</li> <li>• Role confusion (e.g. have to be the “man of the house” now)</li> <li>• Similar reaction as adults, but has fewer coping skills to draw on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be understanding of mood fluctuations and regressive behaviors</li> <li>• Make yourself available to listen and talk</li> <li>• Answer questions honestly</li> <li>• Allow privacy and keeping feelings hidden unless there is risk of harm</li> <li>• Offer physical contact</li> <li>• Encourage expression of feelings through art, music, writing, sports, etc.</li> <li>• Watch for high risk behavior</li> <li>• Find peer support groups</li> <li>• Involve in funeral decisions/ mourning rituals; let teen choose how to be involved</li> <li>• Work with teacher/ school to make school work manageable</li> </ul>