

# DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF GRIEF AND AGE APPROPRIATE RESPONSES

For more information, call the Healing Patch at 1-800-445-6262

AGE	CONCEPT OF DEATH	EMOTIONS	POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS	WHAT MIGHT HELP
<b>BIRTH - 2 YRS.</b>	No understanding of death Child does not have words to describe feelings Notices changes in routine and family emotions	Longing Fears of abandonment Anxiety Misses contact, sounds, smell, and sight of loved one May be more “hyper”	More crying Thumb or finger sucking Sucking, biting Rocking Throwing May cling to adult (doesn’t want parent to leave)	Keep to a schedule as much as possible Meet immediate physical needs Provide extra physical contact such as cuddling and hugging Talk to the infant as you hold him/her Be gentle and patient
<b>3 - 5 YRS.</b>	Does not understand the permanence of death (to be dead is to be “sleeping” or “away”) May wonder what deceased is doing Magical thinking and fantasies Can understand that biological processes have stopped, but sees this as temporary and reversible May wonder what will happen if other parent dies (or other family members)	Fear Sadness Insecurity Confusion Anger Worried Guilty	Regressive behaviors May have increased play Withdrawn Increased interest in death and “dead things” Crying Fighting Physical Complaints	Allow child to regress Give extra physical contact such as hugging Encourage child to play and have fun Allow safe ways to express feelings Explain what death is by using words like “dead” and “died” Be sure the child knows that he/she did not cause death Maintain structure and routine Answer repetitive questions Allow the child to cry Include child in family rituals and mourning
<b>6 - 9 YRS.</b>	Understands that death is “final” May still think that their thoughts or actions may have caused their death May see death as “punishment” Forming spiritual concepts	Sad Anger Lonely Withdrawn Worried Anxious Irritable Confusion	Regressive behaviors Specific questions - looking for details May act as if the death never happened Hides feelings Withdrawn Nightmares/sleep disturbances	Answer questions truthfully - be honest Allow some regression Provide physical contact Provide “special” times together Be sure he/she knows that nothing they did caused the death Allow expression of feelings through verbal and physical outlets Encourage drawing, painting, art, music, dance, sports, etc.

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<b>6 - 9 YRS. CONTINUED...</b>	Thinks about life's milestones without the deceased (graduation, marriage, etc.)	Fear Guilt	Difficulty concentrating Declining or improving grades Protective of surviving loved ones	Let the child choose how to be involved in the death and mourning Find peer support for the child Work with the school guidance counselor, teacher
<b>9 - 12 YRS.</b>	Understands the finality of death Denial May think that their thoughts or actions caused the death Thinks about life's milestones without the deceased (graduation, marriage, etc.) Formulating spiritual concepts	May feel "different" Shock Sad Anger Confused Lonely Vulnerable Guilty Isolated Abandoned Anxious	Fluctuating moods Hides feelings Acts like death never happened Aggressive - acting out Withdrawn Sleep disturbances and/or nightmares Concentration difficulties Changes in grades	Allow regressive behavior Expect and accept mood swings Encourage expression of feelings through art, writing, sports, etc. Find peer support groups Be available to listen and talk Answer questions truthfully - be honest Offer physical contact Give choices about involvement in death and mourning
<b>12 YRS. &amp; OLDER</b>	Understands finality of death Denial Thinks about life milestones without deceased (graduation, marriage, etc.) High death awareness (death may happen again) May sense own impending death Needs to be "in control" of feelings ("If I show my own feelings, I will be weak") Internal conflict about dependence and desiring dependence May utilize spiritual concepts to cope	Highly self-conscious about being "different" Shock Sadness Anger Confused Lonely Fear Worried Guilty Isolated Abandoned Anxious	Mood swings Hides feelings Acts like death never happened Aggressive acting out behavior Withdraws Sleep disturbances and/or nightmares Changes in peer groups Fighting, arguing, screaming Changes in eating patterns	Allow regression Expect and accept mood swings Encourage expression of feelings unless there is a risk of harm Encourage teen to talk with teacher or school counselor Be available to listen Create rituals of memory Join peer support group Share your grief