






# DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF GRIEF AND AGE APPROPRIATE RESPONSES

For more information, call Home Nursing Agency's Healing Patch staff at 1.800.445.6262.

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Withdrawn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Withdrawn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Withdrawn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

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