

Grief responses



Age Group	Understanding of Death	How to Support	Signs of Grief
0-2 years	Can not comprehend death but can sense emotional changes.	- Maintain routines, offer comfort, use simple language. - Continue to build and nurture connections with caregivers.	- Irregular sleep patterns - Unusual clinginess - Crying inconsolably
3-5 years	- May see death as temporary or reversible. - Will likely have heard about death in nature or in stories. - They may start to become concerned about their own death.	- Maintain a safe and predictable routine - Use short and honest phrases to explain death "This person died. Their body stopped working" - Benefit from opportunities for normalcy (play, building relationships, attending classes) - Give them choices	- Regression (needing help with skills they already learned) - Temper tantrums, difficulty regulating emotions - Repetitive questions or talking repeatedly about the person they lost - Disrupted sleep patterns
6-8 years	- Start to understand death is permanent. - May experience feelings of guilt and responsibility for the person's death.	- Answer their questions honestly and directly. - Validate their emotions. - Give reassurance. - Provide them with opportunities and choices to remember or memorialize their loved one.	- Increased fears (e.g., fear of losing others) - Difficulty focusing - Short periods of strong emotions - Physical complaints (stomachaches and headaches) - Changes in behaviour - withdrawal - aggression - Nightmares



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Age Group	Understanding of Death	How to Support	Signs of Grief
9-12 years	• Can understand the permanency of death • Can understand how the loss will affect them long term • May focus on details and gathering information	• Encourage open and honest conversations • Validate feelings • Be patient with mood swings • Find ways to engage or include them in rituals, discussions, and memorial opportunities • Establish and maintain routines • Encourage positive peer relationships	• New fears and anxieties may arise • Mood swings/acting out • Difficulty concentrating at school or in other activities • Nightmares and intrusive thoughts • Physical aches and pains • May display concerns regarding their role in the family
13-18 years	• Have an adult-like understanding of death • May have existential questions and concerns	• Reinforce safety and security at home • Assist them in establishing support systems and coping strategies • Be honest and include them in conversations • Model coping strategies • Set clear expectations and maintain a routine • Offer choice and be open to their own suggestions about how to memorialize their loved one • Would benefit from opportunities to connect with peers as they express their grief • Support spiritual curiosities and exploration	• May be hesitant to engage in conversation with adults or caregivers about their feelings/worries • May exhibit risk-taking behaviours • Difficulty focusing • Hypervigilance due to fears and anxieties • Identity and role confusion within the family • Unpredictable emotional reactions