

Grief at Different Ages and Stages

	AGE 2-4	AGE 4-7	AGE 7-11	AGE 11-18
Developmental Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Believe world centers around them Lack cognitive understanding of death and related concepts Limited language skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaining a sense of autonomy Exploring the world outside of self Gaining Language Fantasy wishing and thinking Concerns of guilt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concrete thinking Self-confidence develops Beginning of socialization Development of cognitive ability Beginning of logical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal operational problem solving Abstract thinking Integration of one's own personality Increase connection with peers
Concept of Death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Death seen as reversible, as abandonment, not permanent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Death still seen as reversible Feeling of responsibility because of wishes and thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Death seen as punishment Fear of bodily harm and mutilation Death is seen as universal and permanent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A more "ADULT" approach Ability to abstract Beginning to conceptualize death Work at making sense of teachings
Common Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Did you know my mom died? When will she be home?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "It's my fault. I was mad and wished she'd die" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A
Grief Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensive but brief Very present oriented Most aware to changes in patterns of care Asking questions repeatedly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More verbalization Great concern with process How? Why? Repetitive questions May act as though nothing has happened General distress and confusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific questions Desire for complete detail Concerned with how others are responding What is the right way to respond? Starting to have ability to mourn and understanding mourning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extreme sadness Denial Regression More often willing to talk to people outside of family and peer support Risk taking Traditional mourning
Signs of Distress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regression Changes in eating and sleeping patterns Bed wetting General irritability and confusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regression Nightmares, sleeping and eating disturbed Possible violent play Attempts to take on role of person who died 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regression School problems, withdrawal from friends Acting out Sleeping and eating disturbed Overwhelming concern with body Role confusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depression Anger often towards parents Suicidal thoughts Non-compliance or acting out Rejection of former teaching Role confusion
Possible Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short, honest answers Repetition Lots of re-assurance and nurturing Consistent Routine Play as outlet for grief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symbolic play using drawings and stories Allow and encourage expression of energy and feelings through physical outlets Talk about it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer questions Encourage expression of range of feelings Explain options and allow for choices Be available but allow alone time Allow for physical outlets Listen and allow for talk about the death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage verbalization Allow for choices Encourage self-motivation Be available and listen Do not attempt to take grief away

***Disclaimer: Grief is unique and impacted by a variety of factors, such as age, development, past experiences and coping style. It is common for children to not fit neatly into a specific box. This resource is intended to provide a general overview of what grief *may* look like for children at different developmental stages.

Resource summarized by Children and Youth Grief Network and developed using content from the following websites: The Dougy Centre, Vitas Healthcare, and University of Rochester Medical Center.