

Developmental Considerations Concerning Children's Grief

Age	Developmental Stage/Task	Concept Of Death	Grief Response	Signs Of Distress	Possible Interventions
2-4	Egocentric. Believes the world centers around them. Narcissistic. No cognitive understanding. Preconceptual - unable to grasp concepts.	Death loss is seen as abandonment. Seen as reversible not permanent. Common statements: "Did you know my doggie died - when will he be home?"	Intensive response but brief. Very present oriented. Most aware of altered patterns of care.	Regression: Eating & sleeping disorders bed wetting, insecurity.	Short interactions. Frequent repetition. Comforting. Touching. Needs consistency more than anything else.
4-7	Gaining sense of autonomy. Exploring world outside of self. Gaining language. Fantasy thinking/wishing. Concerns of guilt.	Death still seen as reversible. Great personification of death. Feeling of responsibility because of wishes or thoughts. Common statements "It's my fault; I was mad at her and wished she'd die".	Verbalization. Great concern with process. How? Why? Repetitive questioning. Wanting the answers to stay the same. May have dying, death or funeral themes in play.	Regression: Nightmares, sleeping and eating disturbances. Violent play.	Symbolic play. Drawings /Stories. Allow/encourage expression of energy/feelings anger. Talk about it.
7-11	Beginning of socialization. Development of cognitive ability. Beginning of logical thinking.	Death as punishment. Fear of bodily harm, mutilation. This is a difficult transition period - still want to see death as reversible but beginning to see it as final.	Specific questioning. Desire for complete detail. Concerned with how others are responding. What is the "right" way? How "should" they be responding? Starting to have ability to mourn and understand mourning.	Regression: problems in school withdrawal from friends. Acting out. Sleeping and eating disturbances. Overwhelming concern with body. Role confusion.	Answer questions. Encourage expression of range of feelings. Encourage/allow control. Be available/but allow alone time. Symbolic play. TALK ABOUT IT!
11-18	Problem Solving. Abstract Thinking. Integration of one's own personality.	"ADULT" Approach. Ability to abstract. Beginning to truly conceptualize death. Work at making sense of teachings.	Depression. Denial. Repression. More often willing to talk to people outside of family. Traditional mourning.	Depression. Anger. Anger toward parents. Noncompliance. Rejection of former teaching. Role confusion. Acting out	Encourage verbalization. Do not take control. Encourage self motivation. Listen. Be available. Do not attempt to take grief away.

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