

Children's Reactions to Grief

What They Think, Feel and Do Based on Developmental Stage

Age	Thinks	Feels	Does
3-5 Years <i>(Pre-school)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death is temporary and reversible • Finality of death is not evident • Death mixed up with trips, sleep • May wonder what the deceased is doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad • Anxious • Withdrawn • Confused about changes • Angry • Scared • Cranky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cry • Fight • Become interested in dead things • Act as if the death never happened
6-9 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About the finality of death • About the biological processes of death • Death is related to mutilation • A spirit gets you when you die • Their actions and words caused the death • About who will care for them if a parent dies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad • Withdrawn • Confused about the changes • Angry • Scared • Cranky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act aggressively • Become withdrawn • Have nightmares • Act like it never happened • Lack concentration • Have a decline in grades
9-12 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About and understands the finality of death • Death is difficult to talk about • That death may happen again, and feel anxious • About death with humor • About what will happen if their parent(s) die • Their actions and words caused the death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable • Anxious • Scared • Lonely • Confused • Angry • Sad • Abandoned • Guilty • Fearful • Worried 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behave aggressively • Become withdrawn • Talk about physical aspects of death • Act like it never happened • Have nightmares • Lack concentration • Have a decline in grades
Teenagers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About and understands the finality of death • If they show their feelings, they'll be weak • They need to be in control of their feelings • About death with humor • Only about life before or after the death • Their actions or words caused the death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable • Anxious • Scared • Lonely • Confused • Angry • Sad • Abandoned • Guilty • Fearful • Worried • Isolated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behave aggressively • Become withdrawn • Allow themselves to be in danger • Grieve for what might have been • Have nightmares • Lack concentration • Have a decline in grades