



Age Related Concepts to Grief

Ages 0-2

- Don't understand death as a concept, but will react to the feelings of those around them.
- It has been assumed that the limited memory and relational abilities of under 6mths means they do not get affected by loss, but a lot of evidence shows that LAC removed at birth will feel the loss of mum/other care givers.
- Young children can feel loss, abandonment and will experience this as a 'vague sense' of difference, something wrong.
- May see restlessness, changes in sleeping or eating, increase in distress/crying.
- Not able to verbalise feelings.
- Need a consistent caregiver, nurturing approach.

Ages 2-6

- Cannot understand the permanence of death, may believe the person can/will return.
- If in contact with the dead body will believe it can still sense, feel, think.
- Magical thinking - perhaps that they can will a person back to life, also can relate to a sense of responsibility for the death, may see it as punishment.
- Take explanations literally - beware of 'gone to sleep'.
- May experience increased anxiety, depression, separation anxiety, become withdrawn, have nightmares.
- Will tend to 'act out' feelings, have a limited ability to verbalise feelings.
- May dip in and out of feelings.
- May be very interested in the death.
- Need to ask questions, often over and over again.
- Need consistency of care, questions answered honestly and inclusion in death rituals.

Ages 6-9

- A clearer concept of death is forming (particularly if experienced before, even with pets), may understand death is not reversible.
- Don't necessarily understand that death will happen to everyone.
- Magical thinking still very strong and can influence thinking about the reason for the death.
- Might have a concept of dead person as a ghost.
- May ask for detail about the death, curious wanting details of illness or injury.
- May 'act out' and have be more physical in their emotional responses.
- May dip in and out of grief.
- Can demonstrate sorrow, anger, and confusion.

- Need adults to explain things clearly and simply, avoiding euphemisms, may feel insecure and need some reassurance about surviving parent. physical outlets for feelings. Inclusion in death rituals.

Ages 9-12

- Good concept of death as permanent and inevitable.
- Death seen as frightening, painful, lack of magical thinking.
- Could be curious or phobic about death, may start to develop own ideas or 'philosophy' about death, increased interest in what happens after death.
- May experience shock, denial, and anger, aware they feel different to peers whilst wanting to be the same as peers.
- Acting out, increased aggression, more argumentative, try to avoid power struggles.
- Regressed behaviour, may present as clingy to adults or care givers.
- May appear to be completely unaffected.
- May find concentrating difficult.
- Need support with their self esteem and difference, big emotional outbursts may happen that the child can find scary and need support with - be there to listen and understand.
- Need honesty, realistic answers, physical outlets, inclusion in death rituals and may need reassurance about surviving parent.

Ages 12- adolescence

- Understand concept of death, start to consider their own death and think about the meaning of life.
- Can feel insecure, will understand the impact on other family members.
- Shock, denial, anger, depression, sadness, withdrawal & physical responses, fatigue, drowsiness.
- May hide (or try to hide) feelings in attempt to be 'normal'.
- Death can be romanticised, seen as a beautiful gesture or statement - can lead to risk if linked to other mental or emotional health issues.
- Impact of the death may exacerbate existing 'issues'.
- Can have difficulties with school, concentration, sleeping, behaviours can become regressed.
- May not feel comfortable talking about feelings, may feel they should cope like an adult, can take cues from TV or film for how they 'should' feel.
- Keep an eye out for risk; unresolved grief can lead to drug or alcohol taking, impulsive or risk taking behaviours.
- May grief like adults, but have fewer resources/coping skills.