



Common grief reactions of children on different developmental age (Child Life Grife Reaction and Counseling)

Every child responds differently to loss. Allow children to grieve in their own way. Below are some of the common grief reactions children may exhibit based on their developmental age.

Developmental Age Group	Grief Reactions	Helpful Approaches
Infants/Toddlers (Birth-2) No cognitive understanding of death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Separation anxiety (restless sleep, crying) ➤ Developmental regression ➤ Child can take cues from caregiver distress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maintain routines and schedule ➤ Avoid separation from significant others ➤ Provide access to familiar comfort items
Preschool (2-5) No sense of permanence of death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General anxiety, clinginess ➤ Crying, irritability ➤ Irregular sleep patterns ➤ Temper tantrums ➤ Repetitive questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create a consistent routine ➤ Short, honest explanation of death ➤ Provide opportunities for play ➤ Give choices whenever possible ➤ Help your child name and label feelings
Younger School-Age (5-8) Understands death is final	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create a consistent routine ➤ Short, honest explanation of death ➤ Provide opportunities for play ➤ Give choices whenever possible ➤ Help your child name and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create a consistent routine ➤ Short, honest explanation of death ➤ Provide opportunities for play ➤ Give choices whenever possible ➤ Help your child name and label feelings

label feelings

Older School-Age (8-12)
Understands death is final

- Create a consistent routine
- Short, honest explanation of death
- Provide opportunities for play
- Give choices whenever possible
- Help your child name and label feelings
- Explain death honestly and concretely
- Answer questions clearly and accurately
- Encourage child to identify people and activities that help them feel safe and supported
- Listen and be open to all feelings
- Provide therapeutic outlets for expression
- Give choices whenever possible

Adolescent (12-18)
Understands death is final

- Withdrawal from family and peers
- Increase in risk-taking behaviours (drugs/alcohol, driving recklessly, etc.)
- Desire to take on the caregiver role
- Confusion over role identity in family
- Potential thoughts of self-harm
- Irregular sleep patterns and/or exhaustion
- Changes in eating habits
- Intense emotional reactions
- Explain death honestly and concretely
- Answer questions clearly and accurately
- Encourage child to identify people and activities that help them feel safe and supported
- Listen and be open to all feelings
- Provide therapeutic outlets for expression
- Give choices whenever possible

Sources: [Cohen Children's Medical Center Child Life & Creative Arts Therapies Department](#)