

What Do Children Need?

1. Children need to feel safe in the world.
2. Children need love, care, consistency, continuity and connection.
3. Children need to know that there are people in their lives who are there for them.
4. Children need to be allowed to grieve. We should be there for them as they experience their pain instead of trying to hide the death or shield them from the pain.
5. Children need us to respect where they are in their grief. All feelings should be validated. Everyone grieves in their own way and in their own time. Loss involves not only the death of the loved one but the changes in life because of the loss.
6. Children need simple, truthful, age-appropriate information. Too much information can be confusing. Find out what they know. Allow them to ask the questions that they want answered.
7. Children need us to listen to them carefully so we may understand how they are feeling and to be able to clear up fears, misconceptions or misinformation.
8. Children need us to know that they want to be included, not excluded from the truth.
9. Children need us to be authentic and share our feelings with them also. They learn by watching how we deal with loss.
10. Children need us to help them keep a connection with their loved one who has died. Give them the opportunity to remember and share your memories with them also.
11. Children need us to know that they grieve sporadically and will re-grieve the loss through each developmental stage.
12. Children need us to challenge magical thinking.
13. Children need us to help them understand that going-on does not mean forgetting or loving the person who died any less. Going-on honors the person who died because as long as we remember, the memories never die.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Buscaglia, Leo. *The Fall of Freddie The Leaf*. Henry Holt & Company, Inc, 1982.

Cohen, C.K., Heiney, J.T., & Gordon, M.J. *Daddy's Promise*. Promise Publications, 1997.

Fitzgerald, Helen. *The Grieving Child*. Simon & Shuster, 1992.

Fitzgerald, Helen. *The Grieving Teen*. Simon & Shuster, 2000.

Moser, A. *Don't Despair on Thursdays!: The Children's Grief Management Book*. Landmark Editions, 1998.

Schweibert, Pat & Deklyen, Chuck. *Tear Soup*. Perinatal Loss, 2005.

Shriver, Maria. *What's Heaven?* Golden Books Adult Publishing Group, 2007.

Smith, Boris B. *A Taste of Blackberries*. Harper Collins Children's Books, 2004.

Viorst, Judith. *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*. Simon & Shuster Children's, 1987.

DEVELOPMENTAL AGES AND POSSIBLE REACTIONS TO DEATH

AGE	THINK	FEEL	DO
3 – 5 years (preschool)	<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 deceased is doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad • Anxious • Withdrawn • Confused about changes • Angry • Scared • Cranky (feelings are acted out in play) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cry • Fight • Are interested in dead things • Act as if 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 • about who will care for them if a parent dies • their actions and words caused the death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad • Anxious • Withdrawn • Confused about the changes • Angry • Scared • Cranky (feelings acted out in play) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behave aggressively • Behave withdrawn • Experience nightmares • Act as if death never happened • Lack concentration • Have a decline in grades
9 – 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about and understand the finality of death • death is hard to talk about • that death may happen again, and feel anxious • about death with jocularity • 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 • Isolated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behave aggressively • Behave withdrawn • Talk about physical aspects of death • Act like it never happened, not show feelings • Experience nightmares • Lack concentration • Have a decline in grades
12 years and up (teenagers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about and understand the finality of death • if they show their feelings they will be weak • they need to be in control of their feelings • about death with jocularity • only about life before or after death • their actions and 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 impulsively • Argue, scream, fight • Allow themselves to be in dangerous situations • Grieve for what might have been • Experience nightmares • Act like it never happened • Lack concentration • Have a decline in grades

GRIEF RESPONSES IN CHILDREN

Children may experience grief or anxiety as they cope with a family member who is ill. The following are common feelings and symptoms which children may experience.

Physical Symptoms

- * A feeling of tightness or heaviness in the chest or in the pit of one's stomach.
- * Loss of appetite or a desire to eat more than usual
- * Difficulty sleeping, waking in the middle of the night, or troubling dreams.
- * Feeling exhausted and lacking in energy.
- * Being overly concerned with health and developing symptoms similar to the person who is ill.

Emotional Responses

- * Feeling emotionally numb.
- * Feeling sad on birthdays, holidays, and special occasions.
- * Experiencing mood changes over the slightest things.
- * Feeling guilty for not doing enough.

- * Magical Thinking- Children may try to figure out what in their behavior Caused the illness or will reverse the illness.

Behavioral Responses

- * Feeling restless and having difficulty completing tasks.
- * Being angry at the wrong person or circumstance, or angry at the world.
- * Teenagers may have a desire to smoke, drink, or use drugs.
- * Difficulty making decisions.
- * Crying at unexpected times.
- * Assuming traits and mannerisms of the person who is ill.
- * Withdrawal or apathy.

If you are worried about any of these symptoms, you might want to seek professional guidance and reassurance. For many, these symptoms may be a needed expression of grief which will respond to reassurance and comfort. For some, they may indicate a more serious problem needing further assessment and intervention.