



OF THE
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RESERVE The Elisabeth
Severance Prentiss
Bereavement Center

Behavior Changes In Young People Who Are Grieving

A grieving child may feel:
Extremely shaky without the person who has died;
Scared about death;
What causes death?
Who will die next?
Will I die?
Filled with confusion and emotion.

**YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE NATURAL PROTECTION FROM THIS
CONFUSION AND EMOTION.**

**We call this protection
* A DEFENSE ***

Defenses are protective behaviors that allow young people to travel in their worlds (school, neighborhood, home) without showing any more of their insecurity than they would like.

Our job as adults is to honor young people's defenses.

Defenses	Behavior	Meaning	How to Help
Combative Acting Out	Showing a Display of Power	Hiding Powerlessness	Direct child in safe ways to express anger (i.e. sports, punching bags, etc.).
Overachieving	“Trying” To Be Good	Feeling “Bad” or Responsible for the Death Hiding Powerlessness	Encourage the child to "play."
Withdrawal	Quiet, Unproductive	Expressing Powerlessness	Let the child know that you are aware of him/her and that you care.

If a young person uses defenses for a long time and it seems to be intensifying, or if the defense is causing harm to the person or others, refer him/her to counseling.

Behavior Changes in Young People Handout 1/19
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DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AND CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO GRIEF

Approximate Developmental

Age

Infant to 2 Years

Grief Reactions

General distress, sleeplessness, shock, despair, protest. Child's responses to parental grief.

Helpful Approaches

A consistent nurturing figure to take the place of the mother. Include in funeral rituals.

Ages 2-5

Confusion, agitation at night, frightening dreams, regression. Child often understands that a profound event has occurred. May seem unaffected. Repeated questioning. Child's understanding of 'death' is limited.

Simple, honest words and phrases. Reassurance. Secure, loving environment. Drawing, reading books, playing together. Include in funeral rituals.

Ages 5-8

Wants to understand about death in a concrete way, but thinks "won't happen to them." Denial, anger, sorrow. General distress, disoriented, confused. May behave as though nothing has happened. Desire to conform with peers. May ask questions repeatedly. May need physical activity on a regular basis.

Simple, honest words and phrases. Answer questions simply and honestly. Look for confused thinking. Offer physical outlets. Reassurance about the future. Drawings, reading books, playing together. Include in funeral rituals.

Ages 8-12

Shock, denial, anxiety, distress. Facade of coping. Finality of death understood, phobic behavior, morbid curiosity, peer conformity. May need physical activity on regular basis.

Answer questions directly and honestly. Reassurance about future. Create times to talk about feelings. Offer physical outlets. Reading. Include in funeral plans and rituals.

Adolescents

Shock, anxiety, distress, denial, anger, depression, withdrawal, aggression. May react similar to adult, but have less coping mechanisms. May feel young and vulnerable, and need to talk.

Allow and encourage ventilation of feelings. Encourage peer support. Groups are helpful. Appropriate reading. Invoke other supportive adults. Maintain consistent environment. Include in funeral plans and rituals. Encourage involvement in family.

**Prepared by
THE DOUGY CENTER**

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