



Children's Development Stages and Reactions to Death

<i>Ages</i>	<i>Common Developmental Characteristics</i>	<i>Grief Reactions</i>	<i>Helpful Approaches</i>
2 - 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Magical, fantastical thinking. ▪ Active fantasy life ▪ Highly egocentric ▪ May blame self for bad things. ▪ May not be able to verbalize needs and fears ▪ Reversibility of concepts. ▪ Need to repeat things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confusion. Agitation at night; may be afraid to go to sleep. ▪ Child may be able to appreciate a profound event has occurred, but may not understand permanence of death. ▪ May seem unaffected. ▪ Repeated questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Simple honest words, and phrases. ▪ Reassurance. ▪ Secure and loving environment ▪ Drawing, reading, books, playing together, active play. ▪ Support play as form of expression. ▪ Include in the funeral rituals
5 – 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child can think concretely and logically. ▪ Ability to use language increases. ▪ Increased memory capacity, both long and short term. ▪ Increased awareness of feelings and expectations of others. ▪ Peers important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Want to understand death in a concrete way. ▪ Denial, anger, sorrow ▪ Distress. ▪ May act as though nothing has happened. ▪ Desire to be like peers. ▪ May repeat questions. ▪ May need physical activity regularly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Answer questions simply and honestly. ▪ Look for confused thinking. ▪ Offer physical outlets. ▪ Reassurance about the future. ▪ Drawing, reading, playing together. ▪ Include in funeral rituals.
8 - 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enjoy games, and competing. ▪ Begin to have increased understanding of self and relationship to world. ▪ Increased propensity for language. ▪ Able to reason through situations using problem solving skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shock, denial, anxiety, distress. ▪ Try to cope. ▪ Understand finality of death. ▪ May have morbid curiosity, or want to know specifics about death and dying. ▪ May need regular physical activity. ▪ Want to be like peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Answer questions directly and honestly. ▪ Reassurance about the future. ▪ Create times to talk about feelings and questions. ▪ Offer physical outlets. ▪ Reading. ▪ Include in funeral plans and rituals.
12 – 18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need independence. ▪ Can think abstractly. ▪ Puberty usually has begun by now. ▪ May have false sense of immortality. ▪ Peer group important. ▪ May begin to have intimate relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shock, anger, distress. ▪ May become depressed or withdraw. ▪ May react similar to adult, but have less coping mechanisms. ▪ May feel isolated, especially from peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allow and encourage expression of feelings. ▪ Encourage peer support. ▪ Groups may be helpful. ▪ Utilize other adults. ▪ Maintain consistent environment. ▪ Include in funeral plans and rituals.

*Adapted from Dougy Center Handbook