

Children grieve very differently than adults. How they respond to the loss of a loved one can change depending on the child's developmental level, emotional maturity, relationship with the deceased, previous experience(s), specific circumstances of the death, and support systems available to them. Children often have trouble verbally expressing their feelings of grief, so it's important to understand other ways it may be presenting. Common grief reactions in children include:

Emotional Reactions

- anger
- anxiety
- fear
- guilt
- helplessness
- irritability
- loneliness
- numbness
- physical reactions
- relief
- sadness
- shock
- feelings of abandonment
- confusion

Physical Reactions

- crying often or unable to cry
- headaches
- stomachaches
- changes in sleep habits
- changes in eating habits
- nausea
- tightness in throat or chest
- lack of energy or increased feeling of being tired
- rashes/hives
- increased illnesses
- increased stress

Psychosocial Reactions

- May have a decreased interest in or withdrawal from friends, family and/or normal activities
- May often act as though "nothing is wrong"
- May act out with inappropriate, aggressive, impulsive or risky behaviors
- May have an increased difficulty concentrating
- May have a change in grades/academic performance (grades and get better or worse)
- May start displaying regressive behaviors
- May display hypermaturity
- May have intrusive thought, nightmares, or dreams about the person who died
- May ask detailed questions about the situation, death, and what happens to body

How Can You Help

- Encourage them to talk about their feelings and be available for them when they're ready to talk
- Listen, validate their feelings, but don't attempt to take the grief away
- Have patience for their change in mood, behavior, and the many questions they may ask
- Keep with the regular daily schedule/routine whenever possible
- Practice relaxation and meditation daily to decrease stress and manage emotions
- Model healthy grieving