

AGE AND DEVELOPMENTAL GRIEF REACTIONS

Preschool

Acting out, regressive behaviors, being more quiet than usual, increased anxiety

Elementary School

Difficulty in school performance or attendance, sleeping, eating; irritability, aggression, and disruptive behaviors; social withdrawal; guilt, depression, and anxiety; repeated retelling of events

Middle & High School

Difficulty in school performance or attendance; avoidance, withdrawal, high-risk behaviors or substance abuse; difficulty with peer relations, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional numbing, or depression



GRIEF MILESTONES

Children may experience and reexperience:

Acceptance of the loss

Feelings/emotional pain

Adjusting to changes/altered environments

Finding ways to remember/memorialize the deceased

ADDITIONAL ATTENTION

Children exhibiting the following might require additional attention:

Loss of interest in daily activities

Changes in eating and sleeping habits

Wishing to be with the deceased loved one

Fear of being alone

Significant decreases in school performance or attendance
Increased physical complaints

HOW TO HELP

Maintain normal routines as much as possible.

Ask questions to determine the child's understanding of the event and emotional state.

Give the child permission to grieve.

Provide age and developmentally appropriate answers/support.

Connect the child with professionals and other trusted adults.

Help children adopt healthy coping strategies.

THINGS TO AVOID

Inaccurate descriptions when referring to the deceased, such as "They are sleeping," or "They went away"

Reducing the loss (e.g., "It was just your great aunt")

Imposing a time frame to complete the grieving process
Overidentifying (e.g., "I know how you feel")

Oversharing (e.g., When I lost my mom to cancer); not everyone handles loss and grief the same way