

Living Through Loss Counselling Society of BC

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Symptoms of Grief in Younger Children

Nervousness	Hyperactivity
Uncontrollable Rages	Nightmares/Recurring Dreams
Frequent Sickness	Depressive symptoms
Accident Prone	Compulsive Behaviour
Antisocial Behaviour	Memories Fading In and Out
Rebellious Behaviour	Excessive Anger
Excessive Dependency on Remaining Parent	

Children's Development Stages and Reactions to Death

Understanding children's developmental levels are important in order to talk to them in a language they will understand. Children need information, but giving them more than they can take in is not helpful and may further confuse them.

UNDER TWO YEARS OLD

- Don't understand what death is
- Sense feelings of adults
- Depend on non-verbal communication (need physical care, affection and reassurance)
- Won't remember the deceased person

THREE – FIVE YEARS OLD

- View death as being temporary
- Question cause of death
- May feel the loss of someone loved is punishment
- Have difficulty abstracts, such as "heaven"
- Feel sad, but often is short-lived
- Regressive behaviour
- Increase aggression
- Idealized the lost person
- Give up attachment to the loved one; attach to substitute people (teachers, neighbours, etc.)
- Often escape into play to relieve themselves of the reality of loss; may seem not to be reacting to loss.
- May not remember the deceased person
- Need reassurance, love, care, honesty, daily routine and structure.

FIVE – TEN YEARS OLD

- Begin to conceive finality of death
- Fear own death and others dying
- Feel anger and guilt (blame self for death)
- Have difficulty expressing feelings in words
- Express feelings through behaviour (compulsive care giving and good behaviour, or aggressiveness as a defense against feeling helpless)
- Ask concrete questions
- Identify with the deceased person as a means of hanging on to him/her
- Have difficulty with abstractions, such as "heaven"

TEN – EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD

- Recognize irreversible nature of death
- May be troubled about own death
- May experience denial (try not to think about it; don't want to talk about it)
- Fear of future
- Hide feelings
- May feel anger, repress sadness, be depressed
- Religious beliefs are questioned