

Responding to Loss - Developmental Differences

Children respond to the loss of a loved one differently based on their age and personality. Here are some general guidelines to help understand what is typical and appropriate for various age groups:.

****Birth to Age 2****

Infants do not grasp the concept of death but can sense the emotional loss around them. They pick up on the feelings of parents or caregivers, which may lead to changes in their eating, sleeping, and toilet habits. These children primarily need a sense of physical security, so maintaining structure and routine is crucial.

****Ages 3-5****

Children in this age range can perceive non-verbal cues and view their family as central to their lives. They start to grasp the idea of impending death but may think of it as temporary or reversible. Magical thinking and regressive behaviors are common during this time. Play becomes a way for them to process their feelings, and it's important to maintain structure and routine.

****Ages 5-8****

Children in this group have a better understanding of terminal illness and recognize that death is final. They might feel a sense of blame or responsibility for the illness and worry that others in the family could also become sick or that it could be contagious. Maintaining structure and routine is essential.

****Ages 8-12****

Children in this age bracket comprehend that the illness is terminal, leading to death being irreversible. They may internalize their emotions, expressing increased fear and anger, which can result in notable behavioral changes. Concerns about who will care for them during this time may arise. It is important to maintain structure and routine.



*****Ages 13 and Up****

Adolescents fully understand the implications of terminal illness and death. They often turn to social interactions for coping. Increased anxiety, intense sadness, and feelings of isolation may be present. They might struggle with their emotions, question the meaning of life, and engage in risk-taking behaviors while grappling with their identity. Guidance from adults is important, and maintaining structure and routine is crucial.