

Children/Adolescents and Grief

Ages 9 – 12

Understanding of Death

- Becoming less egocentric and developing social concerns, such as the impact of the death on others
- Transition from concrete to abstract thinking
- Allows children to understand the universality and inevitability of death, although it is still seen as removed in time from them
- Can generalize about death and understand its magnitude
- Begin to believe that it can happen to anyone and struggle with this
- See death clinically (*resulting from internal causes, fear it is painful and scary*)
- See death as a part of life, as cessation of life and bodily functions
- Interest in what happens to the person's body and spirit after death: fear of non-existence and separation

Common Reactions

- Anxiety and general fearfulness
- Covering up emotions and trying to appear normal (*joking, acting tough, being cool and in control*)
- Concern about other survivors
- Concern about personal future and security
- Regressive behaviour (*bedwetting, nightmares, acting out*)
- Withdrawal or often endless questions about the death

Specific Requirements

- Honest and accurate information about the death
- Opportunities to ask their own questions
- Reassurances about their future. (*if the other parent died, who cares for them*)
- Adults to model appropriate grieving
- Respect for privacy as required (privacy of their thoughts, feelings, writings) may not share these feelings so need to model/share your own feelings
- Inclusion, as wished, in adult activities associated with the death, (rituals, funeral, discussions, and plans)