



GRIEF

When it comes to grief, first and foremost, it is important to remember that grief takes as long as it takes. Furthermore, nobody grieves exactly the same. Working through grief is a personal process and we all are unique in how we grieve.

We also need to remember grieving children and teens need continual care, comfort, and support. Sometimes, unintentionally, we fail to check-in with our children/teens as we are making arrangements, planning services, all the while trying to cope with our own grief.

There are five commonly accepted stages of grief. Kids and adults all go through the same stages of grief. However, because children/teens have fewer lived experiences, they tend to grieve differently.

Stage One of Grief: Denial:

Denial refers to the period of grieving during which a person refuses to accept the reality of a situation.

In children, it can look like:

- A feeling of numbness and/or shock.
- Avoiding the topic (discussions about the death, funeral arrangements etc.)
- Appearing to have little or no response to the news that a loved one has died
- Asking when the person who has died is coming back home
- Thinking they have seen the person who has died in public/a crowd
- Avoiding telling their friends or teachers about the death

Stage Two of Grief: Anger:

Anger is a very natural and common reaction to death. Anger may show itself in different ways.

In children, it can look like:

- Feeling angry and/or blaming oneself
- Having a quick temper
- Low or loss of patience.
- Being angry with and/or blaming the person who died

- Irritability, tantrums, and defiance at home or at school
- Getting into fights with siblings or peers
- Feeling mad at God for taking a loved one away
- Expressing anger toward the deceased for abandoning them
- Blaming doctors or other caregivers for not doing more to help
- Feeling jealous of other kids whose loved ones are still alive
- Turning the anger inward by feeling guilty or ashamed

Stage Three of Grief: Bargaining:

Bargaining is when we start to make deals or compromises with ourselves, and/or perhaps with God/higher power. When we experience a death, we often feel overwhelmed and helpless, as we might feel a loss of control over what has happened. Accepting that there's nothing we can do to change what has happened is difficult.

In children, it can look like:

- Trying hard to be a perfect child (so that maybe their pain will go away and/or the person comes back)
- Avoiding showing negative feelings
- Regretting things they failed to do or say when the person who died was alive
- Asking God to bring their loved one back

Stage Four of Grief: Depression:

Feelings of intense sadness from missing the person who died is what we think of most often when we think about grief. The intense pain and sadness often comes and goes in waves.

In children, it can look like:

- Not wanting to do things they used to find fun, like sports or after school clubs
- Changes in sleeping and eating habits
- Spending more time in their room, instead of hanging out with friends or family
- Body symptoms, like headaches and stomachaches
- Frequent crying
- Suicidal Ideation

Seek immediate help or call 988 if you are concerned that your child/teen is thinking about suicide.

Click the link below for more information on suicide warning signs and resources.
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide>

Stage Five of Grief: Acceptance:

Most of us eventually work our way into the acceptance stage of grief. Moving into this stage of grief doesn't mean a child/teen is not sad about their loss but rather, they begin to move forward in a healthy manner while continuing to grieve. Children accept that their loved one died and that that person is not coming back. They are adapting to life

without that person and experiencing happiness and having a sense of normalcy. Of course, children, like adults, will continue to have moments of sadness and loss.

In children, it can look like:

- Showing interest in seeing friends again
- Beginning to talk about the future in hopeful ways
- Talking about and sharing memories of the person who died
- Creating memorials to help remember and mourn the person who died
- Decreased anxiety, sadness, and/or anger
- Developing new interests

As mentioned before, grief takes as long as it takes. It is important to remember it is common for grief to reappear months, and even years, later after a death. Milestones such as becoming a teenager, turning 16, graduating etc., may trigger grief, even years later.

What you can do if you are Concerned about a Grieving Child/Teen:

If you become concerned about your child/teen grieving due to any extreme reactions they are experiencing, or if you think your child/teen could be clinically depressed, you can contact trained professionals, such as a grief specialist, school and/or licensed individual counselor, school social worker and/or a local family support agency.

Seek immediate help or call 988 if you are concerned that your child/teen is thinking about suicide.

Click the link below for more information on suicide warning signs and resources.

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide>

For more information on Grief and Grief Support, click on the Nebraska Grief Resource links below.

- <https://www.mourninghope.org/>
- <https://thecollectiveforhope.org/>
- <https://scipnebraska.com/>

Article Resources:

- <https://nacq.org/>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8794619/>
- <https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-deal-grief>