

Kids and Teens Resources Guide

Elementary Age

Developmental Responses to Grief (from the Dougy Center) Ages 5-8

Developmental Stage

Children of this age are exploring their independence and trying tasks on their own. They are very concrete thinkers, with a tendency towards magical fantasy thoughts.

Concept of Death

In this age range, children often still see death as reversible. They can also feel responsible and worry that their wishes or thoughts caused the person to die. They may say things like: "It's my fault. I was mad and wished she'd die."

Common Responses to Grief

- Disrupted sleep, changes in eating habits
- Repetitive questions – How? Why? Who else?
- Concerns about safety and abandonment
- Short periods of strong reaction, mixed with acting as though nothing happened
- Nightmares
- Regressive behaviors – may need help with tasks they've already learned (can't tie shoes, bedwetting)
- Behavior changes: high/low energy, kicking/hitting
- Physical complaints: stomachaches, headaches, body pain

Ways to Help

- Explain the death honestly using concrete language. "Daddy's heart stopped working." Use the words dead and died. Avoid euphemisms such as gone, passed on, lost.
- Be prepared for repetitive questions.
- Provide opportunities for big energy and creative play.
- Allow children to talk about the experience and ask questions.
- Offer lots of physical and emotional nurturance.
- Give choices whenever possible. "Your room needs to be cleaned. Would you like to do it tonight or tomorrow morning?"

Books

When Dinosaurs Die – A Guide to Understanding Death (Ages 4-8)

When Someone Dies – A Child-Caregiver Activity Book

The Invisible String (Ages 4-8)

Dad Songs Remembering a Loved One's Melody

The Lumpy Grumpy Frog

Ben's Flying Flowers

Muddles Puddles and Sunshine – Your Activity Book to help when someone has died

Lifetimes –The beautiful way to explain death to children

Sun Kisses, Moon Hugs

The Cardinal's Gift

The Acorn & the Oak

My Big, Dumb, Invisible Dragon

The Golden Sweater – Downloadable at <https://www.newyorklife.com/foundation/kais-journey>

Healing A Child's Grieving Heart – 100 practical ideas for families, friends, and caregivers

Online Resources

<https://childrengrieve.org/resources> - National Alliance for Grieving Children

<https://www.tdcschooltoolkit.org/kids> - The Dougy Center

<https://good-grief.org/resources/> - Good Grief

<https://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org/resources/talking-kids-about-tragedies/> - National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

[Home Page - Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#) - Talking to Kids about Tragedies and Back to School 2022 Grieving Students, Transitions and COVID 19

[Children's Grief Awareness Day \(childrensgriefawarenessday.org\)](https://www.childrensgriefawarenessday.org)

<https://www.covidcollaborative.us/initiatives/hidden-pain> - Children who lost a parent or caregiver to COVID 19

[NYL-1B-What-to-Say.pdf \(grievingstudents.org\)](#) - What not to say to grieving children

[Developmental-Responses-to-Grief-ages-2-18.pdf \(dougy.org\)](#)

[Beloved Community & Grief: Tips for Supporting Children When Someone... \(dougy.org\)](#)

[Bereavement Support | New York Life Foundation](#)

[NYL-6B-Suicide.pdf \(grievingstudents.org\)](#) - Coalition to Support Grieving Students

[192907M 1-19-Supporting-Your-Student CHLA-.pdf \(grievingstudents.org\)](#) - Supporting our students after the death of a family member or friend

Local Grief Support Groups

New Hope Center for Grief Support (Northville)

www.newhopecenter.net

Family Fridays (monthly group for children and their caregivers)

Annual Kids Grief Camp (2-day camp held in summer)

Angela Hospice (Livonia)

<https://angelahospice.org/>

Virtual Music Therapy Group for Kids

One-on-one grief counseling

Ele's Place (Ann Arbor)

<https://www.elesplace.org/>

Sandcastles (Detroit)

<https://aboutsandcastles.org/>

Bi-weekly support groups for kids and families

Sandcastles Kids Camp (Held in Summer, Grades 2-12)

Middle School

Developmental Responses to Grief (from the Dougy Center) Ages 8-12

Developmental Stage

Elementary school age children may still be concrete thinkers but are beginning to understand abstract ideas like death and grief. They often start making closer connections with friends and activities outside their home and family.

Concept of Death

Children this age begin to understand that death is permanent and start thinking about how the loss will affect them over the long term. Some children will focus on the details of what happened to the body of the person who died. Feelings of guilt and regret can lead to concern that their thoughts and actions made the death happen. They may say or think things like: “If I had done my homework, my teacher wouldn’t have died.” or “I think it was my fault because I was mean to my brother.”

Common Responses to Grief

- Express big energy through behavior sometimes seen as acting out
- Anxiety and concern for safety of self and others - “The world is no longer safe”
- Worries about something bad happening again
- Difficulty concentrating and focusing
- Nightmares and intrusive thoughts
- Physical complaints: headaches, stomach aches, body pain
- Using play and talk to recreate the event
- Detailed questions about death and dying
- Wide range of emotions: rage, revenge, guilt, sadness, relief, and worry
- Hypervigilance/increased sensitivity
- Withdrawal from social situations

Ways to Help

- Inform yourself about what happened. Answer questions clearly and accurately. Even though children this age are starting to grasp abstract thought, it’s still helpful to use the words dead and died and avoid euphemisms such as gone, passed on, lost, expired.
- Provide a variety of activities for expression: talk, art, physical activity, play, writing.
- Help children identify people and activities that help them feel safe and supported.
- Maintain routines and limits but be flexible when needed.
- Give children choices whenever possible, “Would you rather set the table or put away the dishes after we eat?”
- Work to re-establish safety and predictability in daily life.
- Model expressing emotions and taking care of yourself.
- Be a good listener. Avoid giving advice (unless they ask for it), analyzing, or dismissing their experiences.
- Talk with teachers about providing extra support and flexibility with assignments.
- Seek professional help for any concerns around self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

Books

Muddles Puddles and Sunshine – Your Activity Book to help when someone has died

Deconstruction Reconstruction a grief journal

Lifetimes – The beautiful way to explain death to children

Tear Soup – A recipe for healing after loss

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf – A Story of Life for All Ages

Healing A Child's Grieving Heart – 100 practical ideas for families, friends, and caregivers

Online Resources

<https://childrengrieve.org/resources> - National Alliance for Grieving Children

<https://www.tdcschooltoolkit.org/kids> - The Dougy Center

<https://good-grief.org/resources/> - Good Grief

Local Grief Support Groups

New Hope Center for Grief Support (Northville)

www.newhopecenter.net

Family Fridays (monthly group for children and their caregivers)

Annual Kids Grief Camp (2 day camp held in summer)

Angela Hospice (Livonia)

<https://angelahospice.org/>

Virtual Music Therapy Group for Kids

One-on-one grief counseling

Ele's Place (Ann Arbor)

<https://www.elesplace.org/>

Sandcastles (Detroit)

<https://aboutsandcastles.org/>

Bi-weekly support groups for kids and families

Sandcastles Kids Camp (Held in Summer, Grades 2-12)

PDF Resources to print for families

[whole_school_approach_to_lossandbereavement.pdf](#) - NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

High School

Developmental Responses to Grief (from the Dougy Center) Ages 13-18

Developmental Stage

Teens are cognitively able to understand and process abstract concepts about life and death. They begin to see themselves as unique individuals, separate from their role in the family and may wrestle with identity and who they want to be in the world. There can be significant changes in their priorities, spirituality/faith, sexuality, and physical appearance. Teens often rely on peers and others outside the family for support.

Concept of Death

While teens understand death is permanent, they may have unspoken magical thoughts of the person being on a long trip, etc. They may also delve into questions about the meaning of life, death, and other traumatic events.

Common Responses to Grief

- Withdrawal from family or other support networks/focused on connection with peers
- Increased risk taking, drugs/alcohol, unsafe behaviors, reckless driving
- Inability to concentrate (school difficulties)/pushing themselves to succeed and be perfect
- Difficulty sleeping, exhaustion
- Lack of appetite/eating too much
- Unpredictable and at times intense emotional reactions: anger, sadness, guilt, relief, anxiety
- Uncomfortable discussing the death or their experiences with parents and caregivers
- Worry about safety of self and others
- Fear about death or violence happening again
- Confusion over role identity in the family
- Attempts to take on caregiving/parent role with younger siblings and other adults
- May have thoughts of suicide and self-harm
- Hypervigilance/increased sensitivity to noise, movement, light

Ways to Help

- Reinforce assurances of safety and security, even if teens don't express concerns.
- Maintain routines and set clear expectations but be flexible when needed.
- Allow for expression of feelings without trying to change, fix, or take them away.
- Answer questions honestly.
- Provide choices whenever possible. "I'd like to do something to honor your dad's birthday, would you like to be part of that? What ideas do you have?"
- Adjust expectations for concentration and task completion when necessary.

- Assist teens to connect with support systems, including other adults (family, family friends, teachers, coaches).
- Model appropriate expressions of grief and ways to take care of yourself.
- Ask open ended questions (“What is it like for you?”) and listen without judging, interpreting, advising, or placating.
- Have patience with teens’ wide range of reactions and questions.
- Seek professional help for any concerns around self-harm or suicidal thoughts

Books

~~Deconstruction~~ *Reconstruction - A Grief Journal*

Fire In My Heart, Ice In My Veins – A Journal for Young Adults and Teenagers

Healing A Teen’s Grieving Heart – 100 practical ideas for families, friends, and caregivers

Online Resources

<https://www.tdcschooltoolkit.org/teens>

Local Grief Support Groups

New Hope Center for Grief Support (Northville)

www.newhopecenter.net

Teen Group (6-week group that meets on Tuesdays at 7:30pm via zoom)

Angela Hospice (Livonia)

<https://angelahospice.org/>

One-on-one grief counseling

Ele’s Place (Ann Arbor)

<https://www.elesplace.org/>

Sandcastles (Detroit)

<https://aboutsandcastles.org/>

Bi-weekly support groups for teens and families

Anticipatory Grief

Books

Anticipatory Grief: A Guide to Impending Loss

When Someone in Your Family Has A Serious Illness – Arbor Hospice

Family Ties Through an Advanced Serious Illness – Activity Journal for Kids and Teens

Online Resources

<http://petersplaceonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Anticipatory-Grief-and-Children.pdf>

Local Support Groups

Cancer Support Community of Greater Ann Arbor

<https://www.cancersupportannarbor.org/>

Lesson Plans

Getting To Know You Activity with Jenga

Objective – Using the game of Jenga to get to know each griever and learn more about their loss through all while building trust, sharing, and through play.

Materials – Jenga with questions placed on blocks

Basic Directions for Playing:

For this game, the participants will take turns removing a block and stacking that block on top. When choosing a block, the participant will read the questions and answer before placing the piece on the top. choose a colored block to remove (either by allowing them free choice or having them roll the dice included with most sets). The students will find the color in the table on the directions page. Then, they choose to read and share answer ONE of the three questions for that color.

Directions: Choose a block to remove. Read the question, answer the question, and place the block on top of the tower. Repeat with each turn.

Here are just a few of the questions:

What subject in school do you like the best?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

What was your loved one's name?

What is your favorite memory from last school year?

Who did you lose?

What makes you laugh?

Do you have any pets? What kind?

What was your favorite memory with your loved one?

How will this loss impact you?

What do you do to help make yourself feel better?

What emotions do you feel when you think about your lost loved one?

Who is in your herd (support system)?

How do you celebrate special days and holidays?

What do you miss most about your special person?

What is your favorite food?

What do you remember about your loved one?

Who do you admire most?

If you could do anything, what would it be?

How do you grieve?

Do you think others understand what you are going through?

Share a story about your loved one.

Grief is Puzzling

Grief is Puzzling Objective: To help participants understand that grief is puzzling and takes time to return to a “new” normal, but they can be whole again, but they will be different.

Activity: We will divide the kids into two groups. 1st session the older kids will play Genius Star and the second group will assemble Mr. Potato Head and they will switch.

Discussion: Utilizing the structure of the game; label the different colored triangles with an emotion that comes from the loss of a loved one. After discussing some of our emotions think of the other pieces in the puzzle as people or things that help us cope and make us whole again even though we are different then before the person died. The completed puzzle shows how we can live with our emotions and work through our grief.

Questions:

1. What are some of the emotions or feelings you have related to the loss of your loved one? Anger, guilt, loneliness, hate, frustration, sadness, fear, emptiness, missing the way things used to be.
2. Who or what helps us deal with these emotions in a healthy way? Love, family, friends, teacher, kindness, sharing our feelings, remembering the good things about the person we lost, prayer, etc.
3. Do you ever feel like you're missing pieces to the puzzle, or you can't make it fit together? Sometimes these feelings come out inappropriately by having a temper tantrum, disobeying your parents or teachers, uncontrollable crying or a fight with our friends or siblings. When we have so many changes in our life it's difficult to stop big feelings from helping us feel normal or whole again.

The puzzle represents our emotions that may make it difficult to put our life back together. Sometimes the stars or emotions in the game are easy to get around and all the pieces fit easily. Other times the stars or emotions may create real blockages and we need to work longer and harder to make it work. The good news is there are people in our lives that can help us put the pieces of our life together and support us.

4. Do you ever have a hard time putting the puzzle pieces back or dealing with your emotions? Who do you turn to for help?

5. Do you sometimes feel like you are smiling on the outside, but that doesn't reflect how you are feeling on the inside

The Invisible String

Objective: To understand that we remain connected to our loved ones even when we can't see them physically.

Activity: Make our own strings using bracelets and bookmarks utilizing the beads to display initials and designs that help us remember our loved one. We will use playdoh to cut out hearts and discuss what strings are connected to your heart. Lastly, we will create a web of hearts. Each child will be given a heart-shaped paper cutout to represent your special qualities on your personal heart. We will string all our hearts together to explore the concept that everyone is connected to someone or something.

Questions During Bracelet & Bookmark Activity:

1. How do you remain connected to your loved ones when they are away?
2. How did you feel making your bracelet/bookmark?
3. Tell me about who your bracelet/bookmark represents.

Questions During Playdoh Activity:

1. Who is connected to your heart by invisible strings?
2. Which connection feels the strongest?

Questions During Web of Hearts Activity:

1. What do you think of when you see all the connections?
2. How would you invite someone into the web?
3. What quality is most important to you?

Grow Through What You Go Through

Objective: To learn we need to make safe and healthy choices to get through the hard times. We grow because of our grief and life experiences. When we care for something, we can watch it begin to bloom and grow. All living things need nourishment (love, communication, food/water, connection, etc).

Activity:

1. Decorating planters and choosing flowers to plant and to care for at home.
2. Story with author Rhonda Accardo.
3. Decorating our own memorabilia acorn boxes.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you grown since losing your loved one? (Physically, mentally, or emotionally)
2. What other life experiences have you grown from or through?
3. How have you grown since coming to Family Fridays?
4. How do you hope to grow in the future?
5. Have you grown from knowing other kids are experiencing similar grief?
6. How do you keep things going when things get tough?
7. How have you helped others grow?