



GOOD GRIEF ADVOCACY

Greetings from Good Grief!

You are receiving this packet as part of our advocacy initiative that targets professionals who directly impact how grieving children and teens will respond after death and loss. We want to help you be grief-informed and equipped to support grieving families where they work, live and play!

CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND GRIEF

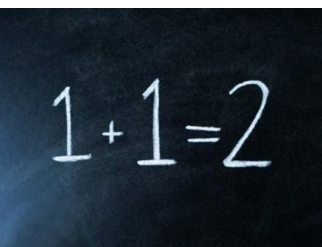
A child's grief experience is different from that of adults. One challenge professionals, parents, and other caring individuals can experience when trying to support grieving children is the tendency to project one's own experience onto the child without taking into account developmental factors that influence the grief response. Below are six aspects of a child's grief to keep in mind:



1) UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH VARIES

Children 5 years and under will have difficulty grasping the permanence of death, as abstract thinking has not yet developed. Children 5 years and older can struggle with feelings of guilt, self-blame, worry about their own mortality, and the potential death of others they love.

TIP: First, learn how to explain death to a child using the mechanics of biology and physiology (see the [Tips for Teaching Kids About Death](#) tip sheet our resources page). Children also want to know that they will be okay and that someone will be there to take care of them.



2) CHILDREN ARE CONCRETE IN THEIR THINKING

In order to process death, children need clear, simple, and direct communication. Adults often try to soften or put a silver lining on difficult discussions to protect children. This can often have the unintended consequence of further confusing children.

TIP: Stay away from describing death with euphemisms such as "lost," "passed away," or "gone to heaven." Always use the words, "dead," "died," and "death" instead.



3) CHILDREN GENERALIZE

If their person who died was in a car crash, then they may begin to fear car rides. If they died of a terminal disease, the child may fear that they or someone they love has the same disease.

TIP: Do not try and correct their irrationality. Listen to their concerns and respond with simple, clear, and direct reassurance. Over time, they will begin to accommodate new truths through positive experiences of safe car rides and positive trips to the doctor's office.



4) CHILDREN ARE REPETITIVE

Children learn through repetition. Repeated actions and questions are a means for processing and understanding. Answers do not always resolve their searching. The repetition, questions, and actions are themselves the work of grief.

TIP: Be consistent with responses to questions, and be flexible and patient with the repetition. Understand that this is all just part of their grief work.



5) CHILDREN ARE PHYSICAL

Often misunderstood as "bad behavior," grieving children that do not know how to express their emotions in healthy, safe ways will often be very physical and "act out" in their grief.

TIP: Anticipate this and prepare safe, physical outlets and expressions for grief. If a child does act in an unsafe, physical way, it should be engaged with the goal of helping them to understand that there are healthy and unhealthy ways of responding to the big, scary emotions they feel. This does not mean glossing over or trying to distract the child from the difficult emotion, but rather fully acknowledging it by talking them through it.



6) CHILDREN NEED CHOICES

Death is the great disruptor in a child's life. It causes their whole world to feel unsafe, consuming, and out of control.

TIP: You can help a child to feel like they are regaining control by giving them safe outlets and choices. At school, give them options for stepping back and taking a break if they need it. At funeral homes, give them choices on how to be involved in the funeral.