



formerly HospiceCare of Boulder & Broomfield Counties

COMMUNITYCARE

Hospice | Supportive Services

Supporting Children Ages 6-9 through Grief

Children of all ages respond to death in unique ways. Children need comfort and support. They need someone who will listen to their thoughts and provide reassurance to ease their fears and concerns.

How Children This Age Understand Death:

- Begin to understand that death is final and irreversible
- Death seen as possible for others but not for me, may be curious about physical details
- May have a hard time talking about feelings about death
- The child may show their anxiety and fear of death by becoming fearful of the unknown, or of separation from family and friends; may think that death is something or someone that gets you like the "boogeyman"
- May blame self for death and experience feelings of guilt

Common Behaviors after Hearing of the Death of a Special Person:

- May have trouble concentrating or have a lack of attention, including difficulties at school
- May have changes in behavior such as increased aggression or withdrawal
- May have changes in physical symptoms such as stomach aches, headaches, trouble sleeping
- May have difficulty separating from family members or caregivers
- May have a hard time going back to school after the death of a loved one

How to Help Your Child:

- Be honest and use concrete terms to describe death, "Grandma's body stopped working"
- Answer questions truthfully. Speak calmly and gently. Do not use words like "passed on, went on a trip, sleeping" but use the actual word *died*.
 - "When you are alive you can breathe, walk, talk, see and hear. Grandma can't do those things anymore because she died."
- Maintain daily routines and provide opportunities to play, draw, or write about experiences or feelings; read books about death to help talk about it
- Encourage the child to take part in family funerals and memorial services
- Be sure to explain what is involved in the ceremony including who will be there, where the body will be (i.e. casket), and that many people may be crying or feeling sad
- Model healthy coping behaviors by taking care of yourself to support your child

Ways Your Child Can Remember Your Special Person:

Encourage the child to express feelings and make times to share positive memories about the special person who died. Ideas for creating memories:

- Write a story about the loved one. Let them keep an item of that special person.
- Plant a tree or garden in memory of the special person, light a candle
- Create a memory box or story book about the special person
- Decorate something that represents or reminds you of the loved one.

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