



formerly HospiceCare of Boulder & Broomfield Counties

COMMUNITYCARE

Hospice | Supportive Services

Supporting Children Ages 9-12 through Grief

Children 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:

- Realistic understanding of the finality of death, that it is permanent
- Curious about the process of death and what happens to a person after death
- Begins to question their own death and what may happen to them after death
- Fear of the unknown, loss of control, and separation from family and friends
- May blame self for death and/or experience feelings of guilt or resentment
- Interested in spiritual aspects of death and good-bye rituals (funeral, burying, cremation)

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

- Avoidance or withdrawal, may be reluctant to share grief reaction
- Peer/family relationship problems: May express anger towards/withhold information from caregivers, mood swings, may act as if death never happened
- Decrease in academic performance or school attendance, changes in sleep patterns
- May become more interested in participation around spiritual rituals.

How to Help Your Child:

- Give an honest explanation of the person's death "Grandma died and her body stopped working." Allow space and time for discussion of death and grief
- Be available, but respect need for privacy
- Encourage participation in good-bye rituals: It is appropriate to involve children in funerals and memorial services just be sure to explain what is involved including who will be there, where the body will be (i.e. casket), explain that many people may be crying/feeling sad
- Model healthy coping behaviors by taking care of yourself to support your child

Ways Your Child Can Remember Your Special Person:

Encourage expression of feelings and create opportunities to share positive memories about the special person who has died

- Scrapbook with photos, drawings, letters or words about loved one
- Letter writing activities (i.e. letter of goodbye to loved one or poem about loved one)
- Decorate and create a memory box that includes what the child will miss about the loved one or for older children, using a feeling expression journal

Recreated with permission from Children's Hospital Colorado 2012