

## Grief Reactions and Interventions Differ by Age/Cognitive Development

### Early Childhood 3-5 Years

Common Belief of this Age Group	Fears	Suggested Intervention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death is temporary and reversible.</li> <li>• The dead maintain all the qualities of being alive. For example: they see, hear, eat, play and need to keep warm.</li> <li>• There is a magical connection; children conclude that an angry thought or wish may have resulted in the death.</li> <li>• Life is associated with movement and death with lack of movement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children at this age fear loss of love, protection and abandonment.</li> <li>• Fear personification of death, skeletons, ghosts, fear of graveyards, haunted houses, “bad people”, darkness and being alone, Halloween.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be reassuring, “Yes ___ was 5 when he/she died, but that doesn’t mean that you will die when you turn 5”.</li> <li>• Reassure them that their caregivers are unlikely to die.</li> <li>• Reassure them they will be looked after.</li> <li>• Talk about what death means and what the dead person can no longer do in terms of bodily functions, feelings and awareness. Don’t push children to understand more than they are ready to understand. Provide simple explanations, but accurate information to their level of understanding.</li> <li>• Address their concerns about the physical comfort of the deceased.</li> <li>• Painting, drawing, stories and other commemorating activities will help students express what they can’t describe verbally.</li> </ul>

It may be helpful to reprint this page for staff.