

Grief Reactions and Interventions Differ by Age/Cognitive Development

Middle Childhood 5 – 9 Years

Common Belief of this Age Group	Fears	Suggested Intervention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many children shift to accepting death as permanent by eight of nine years of age. • Children at this stage are still magical thinkers in terms of wishes and fears. • Death is an external event. If you're careful and don't do anything wrong, it can be avoided. • Death is remote. • Children at this stage may be very curious about cessation of bodily functions and fascinated with the physical details. • Concepts such as afterlife, universality, or finality of death may still be confusing for some. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children at this stage are becoming concrete thinkers and fears of death increase as its finality is understood. • They fear abandonment. • Fears may be manifest in regressive behaviours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If children inquire, give biological details such as absence of pulse, breathing and cessation of other bodily functions. • Relate this death to previous death experiences such as the death of a class pet or a grandparent. • Reassure students that they did not cause the death by their thoughts or actions, nor was it a punishment for them or for the dead person. • Clarify confusing concepts such as life after death, finality, or universality of death while maintaining respect for a variety of beliefs. • Reassure children that they will be looked after and accept that their level of concept and understanding is a concrete view.

It may be helpful to reprint this page for staff.