

The Developmental Differences In Dealing With Grief And Loss
(taken from "It's Okay To Cry" by Yvonne Butler Clark)

How Preschoolers Express Grief

- Bedwetting and thumb sucking
- Clinging to adults
- Exaggerated fears and excessive crying
- Temper tantrums and Stubbornness
- Regression

Helping the Grieving Preschooler

- Answer the child's question honestly and simply; allow them to talk about the loss; help them share their fears and worries.
- Provide simple routines.
- Give the child affection and nurturing; attempt to connect with them.
- Provide more opportunities for play.
- Be patient with regressive behaviors such as thumb sucking.
- Provide opportunities for the expression of painful emotions through play, creative outlets, and talk. Teach them to recognize and name their full range of feelings.

How Elementary School-Age Children Express Grief

- School and learning problems ; fighting/anger
- Preoccupation with the loss and related worries; daydreaming; trouble paying attention
- Bedwetting; regression; developmental delays
- Eating and sleeping problems (overeating, refusing to eat, nightmares, sleepiness)

Helping the Grieving Elementary School-Age Child

- Keep tasks simple. Explain things before they experience them - new neighborhood, school, church, family routines and changes.
- Provide a structured environment that is predictable and consistent; limit choices; introduce small, manageable choices over time.
- Contain acting out behavior; insist that children express their wants, needs, and feelings with words, not by acting out.
- Encourage them to let you know when they are worried or having a difficult time.

How Pre-Teens and Early Adolescents Express Grief

- Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches, sleeping and eating disorders, hypochondria) Wide mood swings
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Increase in risk-taking and self-destructive behaviors
- Anger; aggression; fighting; oppositional behavior
- Withdrawal from adults; Depression; sadness
- Lack of concentration and attention
- Identity confusion; testing limits

Helping the Grieving Pre-Teen and Early Adolescent

- Accept that they will experience mood swings and physical symptoms.
- Encourage them to honestly recognize their painful feelings and find positive outlets in physical and creative activities.
- Listen for the feelings behind their words and actions and respond with empathy.
- Be truthful and factual in explaining the loss.
- Help them develop and maintain their sense of identity.