



Developmental Responses to Death:

Birth – 18 Months:

- Disturbed sleeping patterns.
- Eating changes.
- Clinging to the caretaker.
- Lethargy.

18 Months – 2 years:

- Fears losing primary caretaker's love.
- Can't cope well with multiple changes.
- Keenly aware of non-verbal responses.
- Begin to realize they are missing someone in their family.
- Unable to verbalize feelings; therefore, they act them out in misbehavior.
- May regress to previous behaviors – bedwetting, thumb sucking, etc...
- Clingy – demands for affection and approval.
- Daily asking for person who is not present.

3 - 6 years:

- Death is understood as temporary.
- Child will act out feelings or act as if nothing has changed.
- Blames self; views death as being punished for being naughty.
- Maintains fantasies of their loved ones return.
- Fears abandonment.
- May be irritable and/or show aggression.

7 – 10 years:

- Child can become preoccupied with death.
- Prevailing sadness increased crying, or withdrawal.
- Fear of the future; concerns about money, food, shelter, etc...
- Self-conscious about the family being different.
- Conflict with friends.



11 – 13 years:

- Child begins to understand the concept of death.
- Child begins to believe that death is irreversible.
- Anger can be covering emotional pain.
- May withdraw from friends and activities; indifference.
- May feel shame that their family is different or changed.
- Busy themselves with activities and friends seeking approval.
- May suffer a loss of identity; low self-esteem.

14 – 20 years:

- Overwhelmed with additional responsibility.
- Frequent mood swings.
- Outward denial of inner turmoil.
- Dependent/independent conflicts.
- Needs peer approval; prefers friends over family.
- Wants to compensate feelings of loss with more “things”.
- Fears parental illness.
- Tests limits.
- Sensitive to family tensions.