

Grief: Developmental Stages in Children

PRE-VERBAL

- No language to attach to story, thoughts
- Memory is sensory
- Immediate need—replace caregiver - new bonding

MAGICAL THINKING (3 - 6)

- Believe s/he caused the death by magic
- Death = concurrent events, places
- Grief = Brief but heavy spurts
- No concept of finality
- Fears loss/abandonment
- Few fears about distress/pain of Deceased
- Death = caused by external forces

CONCRETE REASONING (6 - 9)

- Personify
- Deaths not imminent
- Material facts death (angel of...)
- Superstitious, ghost stories
- Death = non-movement
- Explore death relative to family
- Believe death will happen to others, not self
- Sadness about = funny

ABSTRACT THINKING (9 - 12)

- More realistic view of death
- Pervasive fear—sudden, poisoning, falling
- See universality of death
- Fear of “the void”
- May ask intrusive questions
- Fascination with physiology
- Want to view body—morbid intrigue

ADOLESCENCE:

- Closer to adult views
- Philosophical ability to talk about grief
- May be apt to idealize deceased
- Conflict in developmental stage is that they want strong peer identification but need family support
- Greatest fear = separation/nonexistence

CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT

- Changes in views continue over lifetime
- Age-related awareness - as we age, we view life and death differently
- Continued experience may be of less idealism and more realism