



**Normal Development of Young School
Aged Children (6-9 Years)**

- ◆ Between the ages of 6 to 9, children's speech becomes less focused on themselves and more social. As a result, socialization and peer groups become more important.
- ◆ Child begins to understand cause/effect relationships and have logical thought processes.
- ◆ The child has developed a strong sense of who they are and a perceived sense of self-esteem.
- ◆ At this age, children are becoming aware of personal morals and family/societal values.
- ◆ The child can begin to see things from another person's point of view, but they are overall still very self-centered.
- ◆ Child views things as black and white, right or wrong, wonderful or terrible, with very little middle ground.
- ◆ Child has a strong desire to perform well, do things right.



**Typical Grief Responses
of School Aged Children**

- ◆ Child may seem outwardly uncaring, inwardly upset.
- ◆ Child may use denial to cope.
- ◆ Child may attempt to "parent" their parent.
- ◆ Child may act out in school or home.
- ◆ Child may play death games.
- ◆ Child may display an increase in neediness, aggression or excessively good behavior.
- ◆ Child may have nightmares.

***This information is provided by St.
Vincent Hospital, Child Life Services***



Some Things to Consider When Caring for a School Aged Child Under Stress

- ◆ Listen to determine what kind of information the child is seeking.
- ◆ Reassure the child that you will continue to be there for them.
- ◆ Talk to the child about the reasons why people die and encourage them to ask questions.
- ◆ Increase physical activity while role-modeling stress-reducing behaviors.
- ◆ Work on identifying feelings, which are becoming more sophisticated. (i.e. frustration, confusion)
- ◆ Encourage creative outlets for feelings. (i.e. drawing, painting, clay, blank books)
- ◆ Inform teachers and coaches of the family situation.



School Aged Child Understanding of Death

- ◆ Early school age children often view death in a personified and externalized form (e.g. Grim Reaper, skeletons, ghosts, etc.)
- ◆ Child thinks that death happens to others. Because of their fear of death, they often protect themselves with the defense that death only occurs to the weak, the old, the feeble, those who cannot run fast enough to elude the ghost or spirit that pursues them.
- ◆ Children between 6 and 9 may be uncomfortable in expressing feelings.
- ◆ The child may be fearful that other important people will die.

Language To Use With School Aged Children

- ◆ Look for questions within questions.
- ◆ Expect a more global view (i.e. death happens to everywhere).
- ◆ Encourage the child to answer their own questions, but clear up any misconceptions they may have.
- ◆ Explore feelings by questions such as “What do you think?”
- ◆ Answer all questions honestly and in understandable language.

Normal Development of Preadolescents (9-12 Years)

- ◆ Children of this age develop a sense of self and find it important to gain social acceptance and experience achievement.
- ◆ Friends become increasingly important. Close friends are almost always of the same sex, although children in this age group are usually increasingly interested in peers of the opposite sex.
- ◆ Rituals, rules, secret codes, and made-up languages are common.
- ◆ They tend to think that they do not need any adult care or supervision. Yet, when they are left to care for themselves, they are lonely, unhappy, and sometimes frightened. They may belittle or defy adult authority.
- ◆ Child may develop special interest in collections or hobbies.
- ◆ Outbursts of anger are less frequent.

Typical Grief Responses of Preadolescents

- ◆ Child may appear tough or funny.
- ◆ Child may express and demonstrate anger, fear, confusion, or sadness. At the same time, they may deny feelings of sadness or insist that they don't care.
- ◆ Child may withdraw from others and try to hide their feelings.

Typical Grief Responses of Preadolescents (cont.)

- ◆ Child may act like adult, but regress to earlier state of emotional response.
- ◆ Could be overly-emotional and difficult to console; may have difficulties concentrating, especially in school.

Some Things to Consider When Caring for a Preadolescent Under Stress

- ◆ Encourage creative expression of feelings.
- ◆ Let your child know that it's alright to show emotions by showing your own. Reassure them that some kids cry and others don't and that we all deal with the death of someone close to us differently.
- ◆ Explore support group/peer-to-peer connections.
- ◆ Establish family traditions and memorials.
- ◆ Incorporate children into rituals not just at time of death, but at important anniversaries (e.g., taking balloons to the cemetery; creating special ornament for the Christmas tree, which is always hung first; having birthday dinners and memory nights).

Preadolescent Understanding of Death

- ◆ Understanding death is inevitable, happens to everyone and is final.
- ◆ Child has personal fear of death.
- ◆ Child may be morbidly interested in skeletons and gruesome details of violent deaths.
- ◆ Although children at this age may have a more adult understanding of the concept of death, they may still have remnants of the “I made it happen” syndrome.
- ◆ Child realizes that things around them change because of death.

Language To Use With Preadolescents

- ◆ Provide more detail as needed, especially to explain cause of death in physiologic context. Their understanding is increasing, and children this age can probably handle most of the information given to an adult.
- ◆ Probe for thoughts and feelings, but recognize cues that suggest the child doesn't want to talk – remember, each person (and child) grieves differently.
- ◆ Allow for spiritual development.
- ◆ Address questions about an afterlife carefully, perhaps by stating, “We don't really know, but we believe that....”

Normal Development of Adolescents

- ◆ Adolescents, usually ages 12 to 18, have the ability to think and process information abstractly.
- ◆ Future goals become clearer for the teenager.
- ◆ There is an increased need for independence as well as privacy.

- ◆ Socialization and peer groups are a priority, sometimes appearing to replace the parental bond. (Parents now serve more of a “secure base” function).
- ◆ Children this age have indestructible attitudes, and egocentric thoughts and behaviors, which may induce more risk-taking types of behaviors and feelings of being unique or the center of attention.
- ◆ Teen gains the realization that parents are not perfect; identification of their faults.
- ◆ Child may express concerns about sexual attractiveness and have worries about being “normal”.



Typical Grief Responses of Adolescents

- ◆ Increased reliance on peers instead of family.
- ◆ Moodiness and irritability
- ◆ May turn to drugs, alcohol use or risky behaviors to cope.
- ◆ May act impulsively or without common sense.
- ◆ May display over-exaggerated outpouring of emotions.



Typical Grief Responses of Adolescents (cont.)

- ◆ May feel angry or guilty.
- ◆ May experience chronic depression, restlessness, difficulties eating and concentrating.
- ◆ May act like they don't want to talk about death.
- ◆ May become fascinated and preoccupied by death.



Some Things to Consider When Caring for an Adolescent Under Stress

- ◆ Provide honest and accurate information with detail.
- ◆ Allow for informed participation.

- ◆ Encourage peer support.
- ◆ Make sure to make them a part of family discussions and decision making.
- ◆ Suggest individualized and group expressions of grief, (e.g., school memorials).
- ◆ Recommend creative outlets, (e.g., writing, journaling, art, music).
- ◆ Adolescents don't like anything that makes them feel different from their peers. Losses may make teens feel more child-like and dependent. On the other hand, teenagers may feel their situation requires them to step into an adult role in response to the loss.

Adolescent Understanding of Death

- ◆ Adolescents have an adult concept of death, but their ability to deal with loss is based on experience and developmental factors.
- ◆ Their concepts of death are concrete and focus on the natural occurrence of death in life.
- ◆ Cognitively, teens are fully capable of appreciating death as final and inevitable. Emotionally, however, they have the most difficult time of any of the age groups.
- ◆ Death at this age provokes enormous anxiety as it brings into awareness the fragility of life and the personal awareness of one's own inevitable death.
- ◆ Many adolescents are developing a strong philosophical view and may question an existence of an afterlife.

Language To Use With Adolescents

- ◆ Treat the teen as an adult: with information, respect, and responsibility.
- ◆ Role model adult behaviors.
- ◆ Allow the adolescent to make informed choices.
- ◆ Some teens may not be sure how to handle their own emotions [public and private] and many adolescents seek adult guidance (grief process, coping skills) and need someone to listen and to talk with as they may feel guilt, anger, and even some responsibility for the death that occurred.