

## Youth Developmental Stages and the Grieving Process

### Birth to Two Years

Many people may think that infants are too young to be affected by the death of a caregiver or significant adult in their lives, however, this period is sensitive to separation, therefore leading to potentially negative impacts on these children (Psychiatrist Rene Spitz). Infants are very sensitive to their surroundings, and are aware of changes in routine and increased stress in their environment. The loss of a caregiver can affect the infant's sense of security and well-being in the world. This may reveal itself in many ways via extreme crying, biting, rocking.

### Two to Five Year Olds

Children at this age may have feelings of sadness, irritability, anxiety and anger. They believe that death is kind of a magical and temporary state that can be reversed. It may be confused with sleeping and waking cycle and these children may believe their thoughts or behaviors caused the death of their loved one. The reactions to death can span from acting as though nothing happened, to separation anxiety and bedwetting.

### Six to Nine Year Olds

These children are better able to understand that death is final and grasp the biological element of it. However, they may not be aware that they can die and that everyone does. As such, they may also become obsessed with death, or may be fearful of losing other family members, and may cling to those family members more than usual. Children may have nightmares, difficulty sleeping through the night, or display regressive behaviors.

### Ten to Twelve Year Olds

Children this age may have fears and worries associated with death and may be afraid of dying themselves. They understand that death is final and happens to everyone. These children may have strong feelings but may try to hide them. A grieving youth in this age group may feel socially isolated from friends, since friends are a big part of their lives. They may also feel scared, confused, emotionally overwhelmed, and guilty.

### Thirteen to Nineteen Year Olds

Teens may be the oldest children in the family and therefore have a need to be "strong" for their family. As a way of coping they may engage in high-risk behaviors, like alcohol and drug use, unsafe sex, criminal activity, hurting themselves or others. They may be reluctant, or unable to express their feelings with others. Teens may feel a wide variety of emotions including sadness, loneliness, anger, confusion, fear, anxiety. They may also have difficulty concentrating, have trouble sleeping, display severe mood changes, and performance in school may change for the better or the worse.