



Children
and Grief
School-Aged
Ages 6 - 12



A Guide to Easing Your Child Through Loss

A child's age influences how they understand the death of a loved one. Mercy wants to provide support, and it's our hope that this information about age-appropriate grief response will be helpful to caregivers.



Mercy Kids

Every child. Every need. Every day.

While every child is different, school-aged children might experience...

- Belief that their actions caused the death
- Disrupted sleep, changes in eating habits
- Alternating between strong reactions and acting as though nothing has happened
- Regression: bed wetting, needing help with tasks already mastered
- Changes in behavior: aggression, being more clingy or less affectionate
- Physical complaints like stomachache or headache
- Reluctance to open up or ask questions
- Interest in rituals, such as the funeral planning
- School phobia
- Fear of their own death or the death of siblings or other loved ones
- Concern with how others are responding to the death, even above their own response

How to help.

- Make time for your child, and encourage open discussion
- Provide ample opportunities for self-expression through activities like writing and drawing
- Be patient with regressive behaviors; however, do address the impulse to act out. Model healthy coping behaviors for your child, and verbalize it when doing so
- Talk with teachers about providing additional support, as well as flexibility with school assignments
- Allow the child to ask frank questions, and answer them honestly, even if your answer is “I don’t know the answer”
- Use clear, concrete language, such as “dead” and “not coming back.” Explain the death in understandable terms. For example: “Daddy’s heart stopped working”

Also be clear that it’s OK for your child to grieve. Avoid things like, “You’re so strong, I don’t have to worry about you,” or “Big boys don’t cry.”

If you notice signs of self-harm, or your child has expressed suicidal thoughts, seek immediate professional help.

With time and patience, you can ease your child through the pain and confusion of loss.