

Grief and Death



How to support your school-age child (ages 6 to 12 years)

Grief understanding and reactions

A school-age child usually understands death, but he still may have many questions. Some younger children may still think that the dead will come back. School-age children still believe their thoughts and words can cause death. At this age, children may fear the death of a parent. They may also fear how death impacts their family financially.

They may view death as something or someone who takes people away. They may often feel that others can catch death. So, it is important to explain what has happened and why, using firm examples. To cope, children act younger—even behaviors not seen for some time. A school-age child's schoolwork and activities may be affected by grief.

How adults can help

Answer all of the child's questions openly and honestly. Help them to understand and deal with the new feelings they may be experiencing. You can help by listening, providing information and offering ways to express feelings.

Inform the child's school about what has happened for additional support. Role-play with the child to help him think about his feelings. Be sure there is a teacher or counselor available to talk with your child. Offer children's books about death for the school-age child to read alone or with an adult. Physical outlets and play are generally the ways a child expresses his grief. Support each child's unique way of coping.

Let the school-age child choose how to be involved in the mourning processes, such as:

- Developing a memory book or choosing an item to be buried with deceased person
- Involving in funeral and family rituals
- Keeping a special item from deceased person's room

Closure is important for the school-age child. It is a way for children to say goodbye, such as:

- Letting balloons go
- Planting a memory tree
- Writing a letter or poem

Even after a child has participated in closure activities they may still have difficulty coping with the death.