

Children and Bereavement – Developmental Perspectives

Age	Concepts	Likely Feelings and Behaviour
Up to 6 months	<p>Experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal of care and nourishment from a familiar person • Emotional withdrawal of carer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abandonment • Insecurity • Anger • Cries in protest • Disrupted sleep and feeding routines
6 months – 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Object constancy awareness’ is developing • Begins to have mental image of person when absent and can ‘miss’ them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest and distress • Withdrawal • Separation anxiety • No interest in food and toys • Searching behaviour
2 – 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing that he/she is a separate person • Interested in the idea of death in birds & animals etc • Understands that death is a part of a natural order however lacks ability to appreciate the finality and irreversibility • ‘Heaven is a Physical Place’; Concrete thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of return and consequent sadness and disappointment • Constant questions • Anxiety about provisions of physical needs by other adults • Toilet regression • Clinging and marked increase in separation anxiety, even when left for short periods
5 – 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of magical thinking • Believes he/she can influence events with thought and behaviour • Developing ‘conscience’ so can feel guilt about what (their supposed) power brings about • May think independent events at time of death caused it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can fear death of others • Be espccially ‘good’ to compensate for sense of badness (which apparently contributed to the death) • Be compulsively caring towards surviving adult or siblings (especially girls) • Behave badly and therefore draw the punishment they deserve • Cover up sadness by behaving as if nothing has happened

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops fuller understanding of concept of death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'is big now' and fears behaving in an infantile way
8-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to have an adult concept of death as permanent separation • Develops fear of and understanding of own mortality, especially in cases of sibling death • Can imagine how the death will alter his/her future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will display many symptoms of adult grief • Express adult grief in childish ways • May develop anxiety about their own health for fear they may die too • Preoccupied and difficulty in concentration, may lead to failure at school and social withdrawal
12 years +	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puberty – time of great change • Feelings of ambivalence – separation/dependency • Moving from familiar ties to increased involvement with peers • Becoming aware of issues of life, death and meaning of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings may be similar to those of adults but have strong inhibitions about expressing them, partly to be 'grown up' and partly to avoid being different in the peer group • May lead to apathy, withdrawal, depression • May express anger in anti-social ways e.g. stealing • May take grief outside of family