Most grade-school age children have probably been exposed to the concept of death through movies, TV, books, and even conversations with classmates. that it is a permanent thing that can happen to anyone. However, unless they have had to deal first-hand with the death of someone close to them, it can still remain an abstract thing -- something that happens to other people.

Some ways you can help your student understand death:

**1. Be open to questions related to child grief**

Children are naturally curious about death, even before they experience a personal loss and child grief. Be as honest as possible while keeping it still simple enough for a grade-schooler.

**2. Don’t avoid the word “death”**

Don’t use phrases like, “gone away,” “lost,” or “went to sleep” to refer to someone who died, even when talking to a kindergartener. This can just create more confusion in a younger child, and give an older grade-schooler the impression that death is something to be feared and not discussed.

**3. Don’t assume children understand everything the first time**

A child may ask the same questions over and over again, over a period of weeks or even months. There are several reasons for this. It can be tough for a grade-school age child to digest everything at once. S/he may also be trying to work it out in her mind through repetition. And the same information can become meaningful to him/her in different ways as s/he matures emotionally and intellectually.

**4. Don’t be afraid to admit you don’t know something**

A child may pepper you with questions about things like what it feels like after you die and why you cannot still talk to a person once he or she passes away. It is better to be honest about the fact that you do not know everything than to lie or give her an explanation that you think she will want to hear.

**5. Expect it to take some time**

Grief can be a process, even for adults. A child may seem nonchalant about the death of a loved one, and then fall apart over a broken toy.

**6. Anticipate some emotions**

A child may become angry over the loss of someone. S/he may feel guilt, especially about the death of a sibling or parent (a young child may believe that the person died because s/he was “bad.”). S/he may regress, becoming more clingy

**9. Give your students room to grieve**

Let the child know that you are ready to listen or answer questions but do not press him/her if s/he seems reluctant to talk.

Children's experience of grief varies depending on the type of loss and the developmental stage of the child. Young children express grief in vastly different ways from teens and adults. A child's grief is complicated because it is linear, circular, and developmental.

**The Stages of Children's Grief**

**Disorganization** - The initial expressions of grief in children range from regression, temper tantrums, and exaggerated fears in younger children to physical symptoms, lack of concentration, and mood swings in older children. The disorganization of early grief is a true crisis for children, but parents and loved ones can help the child through this stage.

**Transition** - Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and despair follow the stress and chaotic behaviors of the disorganization stage. Many children will exhibit true depression. More common are symptoms of withdrawal, aggression, and giving up in school.

**Reorganization** - When painful feelings are expressed their emotional energy wanes, and detachment becomes possible. During this stage children have more energy and motivation for moving forward to a positive resolution of their grief.

Though children's grief follows this progression, it is complicated by the circular nature of grief. Just when you have moved forward in your resolution of grief, a reminder of the loss floods you with emotions that bring you right back to feelings of despair and great sorrow. Adults can recognize and understand what is happening with their emotions; children often cannot. Parents must recognize the circular nature of grieving to help their child through difficult times during their development.

The final consideration in helping children live through grief is the developmental stage of the child. It's important to note that a grieving child's developmental stage may lag behind his chronological age. Regression is expected and developmental accomplishments take longer to achieve.

**TRAUMATIC BEREAVEMENT: CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A PARENT.** Taking a child development perspective, this paper provides an overview and analysis of children's responses to the traumatic death of a parent. Questions under consideration include the following: How does a child's stage of development affect his or her grief response? Do children have the same "tasks of grieving" as adults? What are some of the mitigating factors affecting the child's negotiation of the grief process? To what degree are children exposed to the traumatic death of a parent at risk for the development of post-traumatic stress disorder? KEYWORDS: bereavement children grief grieving child traumatic parental death.

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