

Developmental Approaches to Grief

There is no one way to grieve and each member will grieve differently. The age and development level of a member can influence their understanding and reaction to grief and loss. Their responses influence the ability of staff to provide a safe and supportive environment for grieving members. Below is a grief approach guide by developmental level that can help Club staff support grieving members.

| Age | Reaction to Grief and Loss | Grief Approach by Club Staff |
|--------------------|---|---|
| 2-4 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding about death and related concepts • Sees death as reversible, not permanent • Most aware of changes in patterns of care • May ask questions repeatedly • May regress, wet the bed or change their sleeping patterns; generally irritable • Common statements: "Did you know my mom died, when will she be home?" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide short honest answers • Frequently repeat what happened • Provide constant reassurance and nurturing • Provide consistent routines • Provide constant opportunities for play which will be their primary outlet for grief |
| 4-7 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death still seen as reversible • May blame themselves because of their own thoughts and wishes • Concerned with the process of death and loss, like how and why; general confusion • May also have repetitive questions • May act like nothing has happened • May have nightmares, engage in violent play or take on the role of the person they lost • Common statements: "It's my fault. I was mad and wished she'd die." | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage members in play focused on drawings and stories • Encourage expression of energy and feelings through play involving physical activity • Encourage members to talk about how they are feeling and their loss |
| 7-11 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death seen as punishment and starting to see it as final; fear of bodily harm • Starting to mourn and understand it • May have school problems, eat and sleep disturbed and withdraw from friends • May have death thoughts and the desire to join the person they lost or self-harm • Common statements: "How do I respond?" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage expression of feelings verbally or through writing or drawing • Explain options and allow for choices • Be there to give support but allow alone time • Allow time for play involving physical activity • Listen and make time to talk about loss |
| 11-18 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands death and mourning • May have sadness or denial and engage in risk taking; more willing to talk to others • Can have anger and act out • May have suicidal thoughts • May have role confusion and reject former teachings about death • Common statements: "They are gone, I don't care anymore, what's the point?" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage verbal expression of feelings • Allow for choices • Encourage self-motivation by having them create their own project at the Club • Be available and listen • Do not minimize grief or take away |

Adapted from The Dougy Center "Developmental Grief Responses" <http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/developmental-grief-responses/>