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Grief and Children

From [Kimberly L. Keith](#),
Your Guide to [Parenting of K-6 Children](#).
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Children's experience of grief varies depending on the type of loss and the developmental stage of the child. Moving to a new town may precipitate a grief response that is mild and transient, while grief from loss of a parent threatens the foundation of the child's world. 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. If you've experienced grief in your life, you know this to be true. 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.

Learn how children at different developmental stages express grief and how you can help them at each stage:

- [How Preschoolers Express Grief and Ways You Can Help](#)
- [How Elementary School-Age Children Express Grief and Ways You Can Help](#)
- [How Pre-Teens and Early Adolescents Express Grief and Ways You Can Help](#)

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