



Children up to Six Years of Age

Young children especially under the age of three years don't comprehend the universality of death. If someone close to them dies they may believe that someone else may also die.

This age group believes that death is reversible and that the dead lives somewhere else such as in the cemetery.

Children in this age range believe that the dead walk, talk, see, hear, eat and breathe.

For young children death may be associated with being good or bad and the predominant fear for these young children is the fear of being separated from their parents, especially their mother.

*We cannot expect to explain the loss instantly
and a child cannot learn it instantly.*

-Linda Goldman

*Remembering the past makes hoping for
the future possible.*

-Alan Wolfelt

Children Six Through Eight Years of Age

Children begin to recognize that everyone including themselves will probably die.

Children in this age range move toward understanding the irreversibility and finality of death.

The children recognizes the cessation of all bodily function including hearing, smelling, eating, moving, talking, seeing, and breathing.

It is suggested that children in this age group externalize death and personify it as a monster, ghost, or bogeyman. Some children may believe that if you see death coming you can outwit death or escape its grasp.

Death is viewed as scary and disturbing, leaving children feeling afraid of bodily injury or mutilation.

*Our earlier experiences with loss and death leave us with messages, fears, feelings, and attitudes
towards death that we will carry throughout our lives.*



Children Ages Nine Through Twelve Years

The end of this age range generally accepts that universality of death, including them.

Children believe that death is irreversible although advances in medical science create questions regarding the boundaries between life and death and may create uncertainties for the child regarding this concept.

Most children by the beginning of this age range recognize that all bodily functions cease completely when someone dies.

Children realize that death occurs as a result of the deterioration of the body as well as a full range of internal and external causes. They are concerned about the relationship between illness and death and many younger children in this age group believe that old age is the cause of many deaths. They gradually include deaths of children and young people but continue to believe that death is still far away in the future.

Children begin to wonder how much they will suffer, where their bodies will go after death, whether they will suffocate, whether their bodies will deteriorate and how death will impact on them and their families.

Adolescents

The risk taking behavior of adolescents is a challenge to death wherein each survival of risk is a victory over death. Perhaps adolescents who engage in risk taking behavior are challenging the universality of death this defying the reality that they will die if they tempt fate.

While believing that death is irreversible, some teens may have doubts concerning the irreversibility of death due to the advances and changes in medicine.

Some adolescents may question the non-functionality of death. Medical technology, which can maintain the body on life support systems, challenges the status of being alive or dead and creates doubts about the cessation of bodily functions.

Adolescents daydream frequently, and this may provide relief from thoughts about death especially their own death. Daydreams may also harbor anxieties that accentuate their concerns and fears. Such anxieties may be associated with failure at school, loss of friendship or social support, injury or serious illness.

*Grief is universal.
At the same time it is extremely personal.
-Earl A. Grollman*

*When young children are shielded from death,
Silence does not take away their pain; it only
Increases their sense of isolation and
abandonment.*

-Earl A. Grollman