

School-aged child (5-9 years)

- Usually understand universality and irreversibility of death- death as final and scary
- Magical thinking may persist- may think their actions/words/ thoughts caused the death
- May have increased anxiety over own health or chance of death, or wellbeing of other family members
- May feel abandoned
- May be forming spiritual concepts
- May think of death as becoming a skeleton, spirit or ghost
- Headaches, stomach aches
- Changed appetite
- Sleep issues, nightmares
- Loss of skills/ developmental regression
- Enuresis
- Inability to concentrate
- Separation anxiety
- Acting out and attention-seeking behaviours
- Sadness, unhappiness, loneliness
- Anxiety/ increased fears
- Protective of surviving loved ones
- Display anger and aggression
- Guilt, denial, withdrawal
- Hiding feelings
- Reduced school performance
- Interest in biology of death, requesting specific details of the death
- Erickson: Autonomy vs Shame or doubt (2-3 yrs.), Initiative vs Guilt (3-5 yrs.)
- Piaget: Preoperational- understand death in concrete way (e.g. death is closing eyes, temporary)
- Maintain normal routines and discipline as much as possible.
- Are developing an increased cognitive capacity to understand death.
- More advanced language skills – age group most likely to speak openly about death and dying
- However, should not make assumptions- consider the way explanations given
- Reassurance that they are not responsible may be necessary
- Allow regression
- May act out feelings instead of talking- e.g. outbursts, wanting to sleep with parents, reduced concentration, somatic complaints
- Will often find a place for the deceased to watch over them (e.g. heaven, in the sky)
- May use play to demonstrate grief and act out understanding
- May have a feeling of increased responsibility e.g. working hard, helping out
- Appropriate books can provide role models, open discussion and insight
- Peer relationships become increasingly important- encourage to play with friends.
- Death of sibling will make child 'different' from peers- may cause loneliness, inferiority
- Breaks from grief become more pronounced and necessary
- Allow opportunities for the child to be involved in death and mourning activities
- Work with school to individualise workload
- Give honest responses to questions.
- Encourage balanced memories
- Erickson Industry vs Inferiority
- Piaget Preoperational- Concrete Operational (increasing understanding of abstract concepts, such as irreversibility)