



Children React to Death in Many Different Ways

Feeling Insecure

It is not uncommon for kids/teens to worry about their own health or the health of their family.

Guilt

Be aware that they may feel guilty because they are still alive or wished that the person had died because their illness was going on for so long. They may also feel guilty for misbehaving or being afraid to be around the person who was dying. Normalize this for them.

Acting out Feelings

Often, for younger kids, they may not have words to express their feelings of grief, so they start acting out with aggressive behavior, rough play, unusual anger, or games about death.

Real and Imagined Physical Complaints

They may start complaining of headaches and stomach aches. They may start having some imaginary illnesses.

Holding in Feelings

Kids/teens may not talk to the adult in their home for concern of being a burden with their grief. Try to find other trusted adults for the kid/teen to share with if possible.

Denial of Death

Kids/teens may pretend that the death did not happen.

Changes in Sleeping Behaviors

Kids/teens often have difficulty with sleep issues: nightmares, not wanting to sleep alone, changes in their bedtime routine.

Sense of Relief

Kids/teens may experience a sense of relief that their special person is no longer in pain. They may also hope that life will return to “normal” at home.

Regressive Behaviors

These are very common behaviors for kids/teens as they are assimilating the reality of the death of their special person. They may become clingy, thumb sucking, have temper tantrums, bed wetting, etc.

School Issues

Anticipate poor concentration, not wanting to return to school, poor performance, and not turning in assignments. It is important that the school knows what has happened and comes up with a plan.