

How Children Experience Grief at Different Ages

Grief doesn't look the same at every age. Parents may see changes in routines or behavior at home, while teachers and counselors may notice shifts in the classroom.

Toddlers & Preschoolers (2-5 years):

- Believe death is temporary or reversible.
- Repeat the same questions often.
- At home: clinginess, regression (bedwetting, thumb-sucking).
- In school: themes of death in play, more separation anxiety, or withdrawal from group activities.

Early Elementary (6-8 years):

- Begin to understand death as permanent but not universal.
- Ask direct, sometimes blunt questions.
- At home: worries about parents' safety.
- In school: trouble focusing, disruptive questioning, emotional outbursts.

Older Children (9-12 years):

- Recognize death as universal and final.
- Want details about how death happens.
- At home: guilt, anger, or sadness about the future.
- In school: social withdrawal, grades slipping, missing assignments, less engagement in projects.

Adolescents (13+ years):

- Fully understand death as permanent, sometimes unjust.
- Ask big existential or spiritual questions.
- At home: withdrawal, intense emotions, or risk-taking behaviors.
- In school: declining performance, absenteeism, irritability with teachers, loss of interest in extracurriculars.



Children & Teen Grief Packs Available

CareFirstNY offers free grief support packs designed specifically for children and teens who are coping with the death of a loved one.

Each pack includes age-appropriate books, activities, resources, and tools to help young people express feelings, understand grief, and remember someone special.

To learn more or request a grief pack, contact:
CareFirstNY Grief Support
GriefSupport@CareFirstNY.org
(607) 962-3100

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For additional resources and support, visit CareFirstNY.org/GriefSupport, email GriefSupport@carefirstny.org or call (607) 962-3100.

Recommended Grief Books for Kids & Teens

Children often explore grief and loss through stories, which can help them process their emotions and spark meaningful conversations. The following books are organized by age and offer gentle, thoughtful ways to support children as they navigate questions about death, loss, and connection.

Preschool & Early Elementary (Ages 3-7):

- The Goodbye Book by Todd Parr — *A bright, simple book that explores different emotions children may feel when someone they love dies.*
- The Invisible String by Patrice Karst — *Offers reassurance that love keeps us connected to people we can't see or who have died.*
- The Dragonfly Story by Kelly Owen — *A parable about transformation and the idea of life after death, told through the story of dragonflies.*
- The Memory Box: A Book About Grief by Joanna Rowland — *Helps children process loss by encouraging them to keep memories alive.*
- I Miss You: A First Look at Death by Pat Thomas — *Explains death gently and directly, encouraging questions and open discussion.*

Elementary (Ages 7-10):

- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia — *A gentle allegory about the cycle of life told through the story of a leaf on a tree.*
- When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown — *Straightforward explanations of what death means, why it happens, and feelings that follow.*
- The Rough Patch by Brian Lies — *A beautifully illustrated story about a boy who loses his dog and finds healing through gardening.*

Older Elementary & Middle School (Ages 9-13):

- Charlotte's Web by E.B. White — *A beloved story that introduces themes of mortality, friendship, and the natural cycles of life.*
- Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls — *A classic tale that gently introduces children to the loss of beloved pets and the resilience that follows.*
- Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson — *A poignant novel about friendship, imagination, and coping with the sudden death of a loved one.*

Teens & Young Adults (Ages 13+):

- Welcome to the Grief Club by Janine Kwoh — *A candid, illustrated book that normalizes grief, offering comfort and validation for teens and young adults.*
- Death of a Pig by E.B. White — *An essay that reflects on the inevitability of death, suitable for older teens as a discussion starter about mortality and empathy.*

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