



# SCHOOL DISTRICT 46 SUNSHINE COAST

## GRIEF AND DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

The way we understand and process death differs over our lifespans. Here is some general information. Children and youth will change as they age, and their responses will vary depending on factors such as previous life experiences, culture, society, personality, and their relationship with the person who died.

### YOUNG CHILDREN (UNDER 5 YEARS OLD)

Young children may:

- Not understand that death is permanent and may ask if the person who died is coming back.
- Want to be close to or wish to cling to their caregiver.
- Show some behaviours that they had no longer been exhibiting such as wanting a bottle, wetting the bed etc.
- Experience some sleeplessness or nightmares, act out, or not seem bothered by the loss.
- Experience sadness in short doses and then quickly cycle into other feelings.
- They may not fully understand until they are supposed to see the person who has died. For example, if their grandma always takes them to an activity and Grandma is not there to take them, this might be when they start to process the information.

### OLDER CHILDREN (6-11 YEARS OLD)

Older children may:

- Be trying to make sense of death. They may ask many questions as they try to understand.
- Have fears about “catching” death or have fears about dying.
- Take words literally. For example, if they hear a loved one is “gone” they may think means missing or away for a while.
- Worry they have somehow caused the loss.
- Experience nightmares, restlessness, bedwetting, difficulties at school, lack of appetite, fear of being alone, or difficulty playing with friends.
- Carry around pictures or items that remind them of someone they've lost.
- Understand death and loss, but may not be able to express their feelings or thoughts.
- Find comfort in family, cultural beliefs, and values.
- Become very quiet or very talkative
- Worry a lot about the future, their health, or the health of loved ones.
- Express their grief as anger or as physical aches and pains.

### YOUTH (12 – 24 YEARS OLD)

Young Teens and Youth may:

- Understand death as adults would, but have a harder time with bigger, existential questions, such as the meaning of life and death.
- Have reactions that can include apathy, anger, extreme sadness, and poor concentration.
- Feel at odds with their desire to be independent and their desire to help the family through the loss.
- Try not to be “different” from their peers while they're grieving.
- Feel very different (and in some ways older) than their peers. May not feel they have as much in common with peers anymore, depending on the loss.
- Hide their feelings or avoid feelings altogether.
- Turn to risky behaviours such as alcohol or drugs.