

Developmental Responses to Loss and Grief

Ages	Possible Behaviours	How to Help
4-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nightmares • Regression to earlier behaviours • Changes in sleep and/or eating • Violent play • Attempting to take on the role of a person who died 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage emotional expression through physical outlets or play (drawing/stories) • Talk about the loss or worry • Talk about the person who has died or been injured
7-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regression • School problems or refusal • Withdrawal from friends • Acting out • Changes in eating or sleeping • Overwhelming concerns over their own body • Thoughts about their own illness, injury, or death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage expression of feelings no matter what they are • Explain options around choices (i.e., to speak to a person they're worried about or attend a funeral or memorial) • Be present, but allow alone time too • Encourage physical outlets • Don't avoid talking about the illness, injury, or death
13-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme sadness • Denial • Regression • Risk-taking • Preference for talking to peers and others outside of the family • Depression • Anger • Acting out • Possible thoughts of suicide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage them to talk; if not to you, then maybe to friends, teachers, coaches, or a therapist • Do not attempt to "make it all better" or dismiss their grief • Allow them to mourn • Be available, but respect their need to grieve in their own way