



11/27/2025

# Age-by-Age Guide: What to Say When a Child Is Grieving - Memorial Merits

Children and Grief Support  
Guide

# Age-by-Age Guide: What to Say When a Child Is Grieving

*A Quick Reference for Parents, Caregivers, and Educators*

Children experience and express grief differently at each developmental stage. This guide provides age-appropriate language, helpful phrases, and common pitfalls to avoid when supporting a grieving child. Keep this reference handy for moments when you're unsure what to say.

## Quick Reference Chart

Age Range	Understanding of Death	Common Grief Reactions	Helpful Phrases	Avoid Saying
<b>Ages 2-5</b>	Death is temporary and reversible. May not grasp permanence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Repeated questions about return</li><li>• Regression (bedwetting, thumb-sucking)</li><li>• Clingy behavior</li><li>• Nightmares or sleep issues</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Grandma's body stopped working"</li><li>• "It's okay to feel sad"</li><li>• "I'm here with you"</li><li>• "We can talk about them anytime"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "They're sleeping"</li><li>• "They went away"</li><li>• "Lost them"</li></ul>
<b>Ages 6-9</b>	Begin to understand permanence. May engage in magical thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fear they caused the death</li><li>• Physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches)</li><li>• Curious about death details</li><li>• Difficulty concentrating at school</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "You didn't cause this"</li><li>• "All your feelings are okay"</li><li>• "Death is permanent"</li><li>• "I'll answer your questions honestly"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Be strong"</li><li>• "Don't cry"</li><li>• "It was God's plan"</li></ul>
<b>Ages 10-13</b>	Understand death fully but may struggle with abstract concepts like mortality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mood swings and irritability</li><li>• Withdrawal from friends</li><li>• Expressing grief through anger</li><li>• Interest in death rituals</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Grief looks different for everyone"</li><li>• "I'm here when you want to talk"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Get over it"</li><li>• "You need to move on"</li><li>• "At least..."</li></ul>

[Memorial Merits](#) | [Child Grief Support](#)

Read the full guide at: <https://memorialmerits.com/children-and-grief-helping-young-ones-understand-and-cope/>

Document May Be Re-Published & Distributed with Contents Intact

Age Range	Understanding of Death	Common Grief Reactions	Helpful Phrases	Avoid Saying
Ages 14+			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Your feelings matter"</li> <li>• "It's normal to feel confused"</li> </ul>	
	Mature understanding but may mask grief to maintain independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk-taking behavior</li> <li>• Social isolation or overcompensation</li> <li>• Academic struggles</li> <li>• Questioning beliefs and meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I'm available without judgment"</li> <li>• "You don't have to have it all figured out"</li> <li>• "Your grief is valid"</li> <li>• "I won't force you to talk, but I'm here"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "You should be over this by now"</li> <li>• "Stop being dramatic"</li> <li>• "I know how you feel"</li> </ul>

## Universal Tips Across All Ages

### Do:

- Use clear, concrete language
- Validate their feelings without dismissing them
- Maintain normal routines when possible
- Encourage creative expression (art, play, journaling)
- Be patient with repeated questions

### Don't:

- Use euphemisms that confuse ("passed away," "lost," "sleeping")
- Force conversations before they're ready
- Compare their grief to others
- Shield them from all sadness (healthy to witness appropriate grief)

## Need More Support?

Visit [MemorialMerits.com](https://www.memorialmerits.com) for additional grief resources, including professional counseling recommendations, age-appropriate books, and memorial activities for families.

© Memorial Merits | [www.memorialmerits.com](https://www.memorialmerits.com)

[Memorial Merits](https://www.memorialmerits.com) | [Child Grief Support](https://www.memorialmerits.com)

Read the full guide at: <https://www.memorialmerits.com/children-and-grief-helping-young-ones-understand-and-cope/>

Document May Be Re-Published & Distributed with Contents Intact