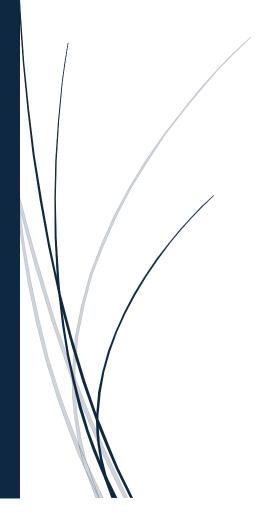
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# Age-by-Age Guide: What to Say When a Child Is Grieving Memorial Merits

Children and Grief Support Guide



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# 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 Rang e	Understandin g of Death	Common Grief Reactions	Helpful Phrases	Avoid Saying
Ages 2-5	Death is temporary and reversible. May not grasp permanence.	<ul> <li>Repeated questions about return</li> <li>Regression (bedwetting, thumb-sucking)</li> <li>Clingy behavior</li> <li>Nightmares or sleep issues</li> </ul>	<ul> <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> <li>"They're sleeping"</li> <li>"They went away"</li> <li>"Lost them"</li> </ul>
Ages 6-9	Begin to understand permanence. May engage in magical thinking.	<ul> <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> <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> <li>"Be strong"</li> <li>"Don't cry"</li> <li>"It was God's plan"</li> </ul>
Ages 10-13	Understand death fully but may struggle with abstract concepts like mortality.	<ul> <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> <li>"Grief looks different for everyone"</li> <li>"I'm here when you want to talk"</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>"Get over it"</li> <li>"You need to move on"</li> <li>"At least"</li> </ul>

Age Rang e	Understandin g of Death	Common Grief Reactions	Helpful Phrases	Avoid Saying
			<ul> <li>"Your feelings matter"</li> <li>"It's normal to feel confused"</li> </ul>	
Ages 14+	Mature understanding but may mask grief to maintain independence	<ul> <li>Risk-taking behavior</li> <li>Social isolation or overcompensation</li> <li>Academic struggles</li> <li>Questioning beliefs and meaning</li> </ul>	<ul> <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> <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 for additional grief resources, including professional counseling recommendations, age-appropriate books, and memorial activities for families.

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