

WHAT LOSS LOOKS LIKE TO A CHILD.

For children who are developmentally on par...



Infant to Age 2

Establishment of trust, attachment, and security are essential for infants. When their sense of security is challenged, infants may cry loudly, withdraw, be apathetic, and cry mournfully. Older children may be clingy, cranky, cry, and have sleep disturbances. They may rock, bite, cry excessively, and demonstrate anxious behaviours.

Between Ages 2 and 5

Toddlers and pre-schoolers have not developed logical thinking abilities, and don't understand cause and effect and permanence. When they experience loss, they may feel sadness, hopelessness, denial and guilt. They may behave as clingy, anxious, and stubborn. They may regress with talking, feeding, or toileting. They may have bad dreams, and temper tantrums.



Between Ages 5 and 9

Children may show grief by crying, regression, anxiety, headaches or stomach aches. They may show hostility, have trouble concentrating, have bad dreams and have school problems. They may hide their feelings. And they may have a strong need to control behaviours but have trouble doing so.

Between Ages 9 and 11

Children are able to understand cause, effect, and time. They begin to form logical and concrete thoughts. There may be learning problems or issues at school, preoccupation and worries. They may exhibit anger or hostility, experience anxiety or physical pain. They might be inattentive.



Between Ages 12 and 18

The primary task of a child at this stage is to form their own identity, and issues of independence and differentiation are occurring. They also want to fit in and feel normal. Grief may take the form of withdrawal, resistance, regression, acting out, or mood swings. They may take part in risky behaviour, like substance abuse, eating disorders, cutting, or delinquency. They may have sleeping disturbances. They may act angry or depressed, including expressing suicidal ideation.



While this list is a general guide, it does not account for children who have delays or disabilities and careful attention must be paid to the unique needs of each child. Grief is a complex process, influenced heavily by the unique experiences of a child's previous trauma and losses. The impact can often be compounded and co-existing.

SOURCES:

Supporting Grieving Children. (n.d.). Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. Retrieved from <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en-us/care-services/family-services/programs/heartlight/Pages/supporting-grieving-children.aspx>

Berrier, S. (2001, November). The effects of grief and loss on children in foster care. *Fostering Perspectives*, Vol 6(1). Retrieved from: http://www.fosteringperspectives.org/fp_vol6no1/effects_griefloss_children.htm