

A CHRONOLOGY on the Response to Bereavement - A Commentary Guideline

Most newborns cry out with their very first breath - a sign that we are grieving the loss of the security we had in the womb? Were we born grieving? The developmental context influences the manner in which the pain is felt, expressed and internalized for all ages

0 to 36 months - babies cry when they need nourishment, comfort, security or feel pain of loss of the familiar arms that held them, or are presented with something that is unknown (i.e. inexperienced); they intuitively know loss when someone familiar is absent.

3 to 6 years - death is magical or a fairy tale; child equates death with sleep - that the deceased will wake up or come back from heaven or wherever they went; typically their grief is expressed in quick, simple, sometimes intense outbursts; they let it go and then go back to play; some of their play may revolve around funeral processions, burials, etc; if they cannot put words to their feelings, their behaviour reflects the pain of sorrow within, eg., tantrums, crying, nightmares, clinging, bedwetting, aggression, regression

7 to 14 years - the formative years, they grasp realization that the deceased will not be coming back; tendency toward morbid thoughts about burial, what happens to the body when it is buried or cremated; that the corpse can feel; this is the group that "freaks out"; "no way" is s/he going to see a dead body; group often overlooked by adults; tendency to shield their parents from pain, so avoid their grief also; ripe for learning how to be with grief from their role models

14 to 21 years - able to conceptualize death as final; timidity surrounds their expression of grief especially around peers; greater incidence of isolation, and of high risk behaviour, since these are the typical years of self-identity; questions, searches, wanders with attempting to make sense of death in the greater world; challenges or attempts to define their own connections to the death concept, or to spirituality; this is the group that feels "spooked"; they understand the phenomena of paranormal, forensics, but avoid the experiential process of grief.

21+ adult - though we understand that death is final, all that we experienced, whether consciously or unconsciously, with or without trauma, we bring to our adulthood grief experience, including that which was suppressed, oppressed or ignored; our history and example play the greatest role in how we grieve as an adult.

Seniors/elderly people - even if they are afflicted with Alzheimer's or dementia, they will experience the grief associated with the loss; they may not comprehend who died or how, but nevertheless intuitively recognize the absence of the person who may have been visiting for the past number of months or years.