

10 YEARS OLD AND UP

10-12 years old

- Some have false ideas about why death happened or feelings of responsibility.
- Acting out may increase; may become angry, irritable, aggressive, and victimizing to friends and siblings.
 - Grades may suffer.
 - May have complaints of vague aches and pains.
 - May appear unaffected, but be inwardly frightened.
 - May have strong ideas about memorial rituals for the baby.
 - They may be critical of the way family or friends react to the baby's death. However, they can also be very sensitive to others' needs. They may reflect more on how this death will affect the family dynamic.

Teenagers

- Your teenager will be capable of an adult understanding of death. but because they are very new to adult behavior, they may be unsure of how to respond to the death of the baby.
- May deny grief by withdrawal or depression.
 - May become angry; feel life is unfair.
 - Indulging in risky behavior is common.
 - Adolescents may also be more interested in the biological details of the baby's death and may have very strong feelings about the unfairness of death.
 - It is normal for children to grow apart from you at this age. They may not have peers who have experienced this type of grief.
 - It would be most helpful if someone listened to them rather than offering solutions.
 - Boys tend to act out by fighting, driving fast, testing authority, or acting out sexually.
 - Girls tend to seek out comfort which may become sexual with or without their awareness.
 - Encourage teens to talk with a teacher or school counselor if they won't discuss feelings with you.

WESTERN NEW YORK PERINATAL BEREAVEMENT NETWORK, INC.

150 Bennett Rd
Cheektowaga, NY 14227
(716) 626-6363
www.wnybpb.org

CHILDREN & SIBLING GRIEF

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF DEATH AT DIFFERENT AGES

BIRTH TO 5 YEARS OLD

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP SUPPORT CHILDREN DURING THIS DIFFICULT TIME

1. Listen to your child.
2. Try to maintain your child's routines by keeping your family together. Don't send children away, to protect them. If you need help handling things ask a friend or family member to stay with you at your home.
3. Be patient with yourself and your family. Grieving is hard work and exhausting.
4. Many times children express what is happening in their lives by drawing. Encourage younger children to draw or maybe write a story or journal. These can often give you an idea of what they are thinking. This can be therapeutic and can also be given as a gift to the baby (placing them in the casket, or tying them to the balloons before releasing them) which will be special to the surviving child.
5. Don't compare grief and crying with weakness.
6. Have more than one talk with your child at different times. Children are ready to know different things, but not necessarily all at once. Children can also develop more and different questions as they experience their grief. More talks will allow ALL of their questions to be answered.
7. Don't hide your own grief.

0-18 months

No conception of death. May respond more to parental grief; senses anxiety and sadness. May cling, and refuse to have parent out of sight. May sleep more, but awoken more frequently.

18 months-5 years old

See death as an altered and permanent state, but have trouble understanding it. Respond to parental grief. May have feelings of confusion and grief, especially if they didn't want the baby. May experience disturbances in sleep and eating. May regress to wetting, soiling, baby talk, and other baby habits. May start psychosomatic complaints like stomach aches, etc. May become withdrawn, irritable, dependent, and demanding.

At this age, children respond best to lots of physical comforts from you or another adult they know well. They are able to understand words before they can speak them well. So, simple explanations can be given to preschoolers. They are least likely to understand death and may think it's temporary or reversible: that the baby will be coming back. They may also worry about the baby being buried. Very young children often believe that their wishes or thoughts could have caused the baby to die. The power of this "magical thinking" makes it important to use clear, simple explanations. A real fear for children this age is that they might die, too, or that their parents will. You might want to reassure them that sometimes a baby stops growing before it is ready to be born. Or, that sometimes little babies' bodies stop working. But that this is not going to happen to them, or to you. You may find yourself answering the same questions about the baby's death several times. Preschoolers learn by repeating things over and over again.

6-9 YEARS OLD

6-9 years old

Feelings of guilt may be more prominent (wonder if they could have caused or prevented death).

May be very upset, yet appears outwardly unaffected.

May hide tears out of fear of loss of control or parental disapproval.

Pretend plays death or funeral.

School-age children usually understand that death is forever, so it may be more frightening for them.

They may wish to avoid places or things they associate with someone who has died, such as the baby's room. Death may seem like an enemy they can try to avoid or beat.

Children of this age may still develop theories that are not based on facts about why the baby died. Because the conscience develops at this age, they may feel responsible.

Your children are also better able to sympathize with you, now. Because they are so young, they may misjudge what they think you need.

They may not talk about the baby or their own feelings for fear it would make them sad. This protective burden can feel overwhelming to a young child.