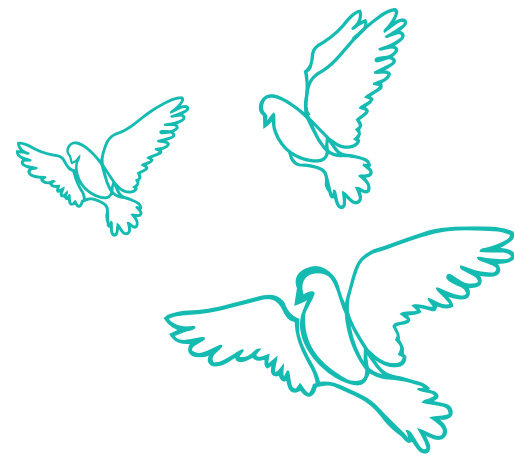




Canadian Mental Health Association  
Ontario

[cmhabereavement.ca](http://cmhabereavement.ca)

**We're a part of your story.**



## Because Everyone Experiences Grief

**You're not alone.  
We're here to support.**

There is no timeline for grief. Knowing there are supports and resources available can give hope as you move through your grief.

## Grief Across the Life Span

It is certain that as we age, we will have more experiences with death. These personal experiences, together with natural human development, will frequently change our understanding of death and dying, as well as how we respond to grief.



**We're a part of your story.**

0-2

## Infancy/Toddlerhood

Children at this age are unable to understand death. They are aware, however, that someone who cared for them is no longer present and experience separation anxiety.

### Grief Responses

Changes in behaviour are observed. Infants or toddlers may appear agitated or difficult to settle/soothe due to changes in environment, caregiver, and routine. Infants and toddlers may request to be held more, present with increased crying, sleeping concerns, and/or stomach-related issues.

3-5

## Young Childhood

Children at this age present with "Magical Thinking". This leads them to believe that they somehow caused the death or somehow can bring the person back.

### Grief Responses

Grief processing will shift between "grief, play, grief, play...". Children at this age will experience intense feelings and have difficulty self-regulating their emotions independently. They may experience increased irritability due to changes in environment, caregiver, and routine. A regression of behaviour may be witnessed (thumb sucking, bed wetting, etc.) Children can present as confused and raise concerns about their own safety.

6-10

## Middle Childhood

Children at this age present as "Concrete Thinkers". If loss is due to death, they begin to suspect that they may die as they start to understand death as final and inevitable.

### Grief Responses

They may develop an interest in causes of death and what happens to a body after death. They begin to search for reasons for death through asking questions. Children may experience intense feelings of sadness, anger, and guilt. Children may have difficulty paying attention in class, concentrating in school, and completing schoolwork.

11-14

## Older Childhood

Children at this age understand death as final and unavoidable. They may begin to show concern and worry for their and others' futures as a result of the death. At this stage, children may be focused on finding out answers to questions surrounding their loved one's death.

### Grief Responses

Children may present with unpredictable moods (ups and downs or moodiness), increased anger, and may take part in risk-taking activities. They may withdraw from others, experience anxiety, and/or suicidal thoughts. Children may have difficulty paying attention in class, concentrating in school, and completing schoolwork.

15-18

## Adolescents

Teens may appear to be handling grief in a mature and adult manner. However, they have not reached that developmental stage; the experience of grief can be extremely difficult and painful for teens during this already challenging life phase.

### Grief Responses

Teens may withdraw from others and worry that they will be treated differently by peers. They may also be preoccupied by death, engage in risk-taking behaviours, and internalize emotions (appearing as not being affected by loss). Teens may present with low energy, experience appetite and/or sleeping changes. They may experience fear, guilt, sadness, and/or oversensitivity, as well as have difficulty paying attention/concentrating in school, and completing schoolwork.

31-45

## Young Adulthood

In this stage, individuals have a strong sense of self, emotional regulation skills, are often active in their career development, and working toward building financial security. Adults in this stage may begin to settle down in communities, have long-term relationships (marriage), and create their own families.

### Grief Responses

Young adults may experience difficulty managing their current roles and expectations while taking on added responsibilities resulting from the death of a loved one. Young adults may experience increased feelings of isolation, loneliness, and/or a desire to withdraw from others. Due to external responsibilities, young adults can be at higher risk to engage in avoidant (ineffective) coping strategies such as substance use, overworking, and engaging in unhealthy relationships.

19-30

## Emerging Adults

In this stage, individuals are working towards self-sufficiency and independence from their family of origin. Individuals may be moving from their family home, taking on new responsibilities, and/or having new experiences; attending post-secondary school, creating new social networks, getting married, or having children, etc.

### Grief Responses

When coping with the death of a loved one, many emerging adults begin to reflect on their personal view of the world (safe/just vs. dangerous/unfair). Often when a sudden death is experienced, emerging adults experience feelings of abandonment and isolation, possibly raising questions related to their readiness for independence. Depending on the relationship the emerging adult had with the deceased, they may find that they have to adjust or put future plans on hold (i.e. increase working hours, take a leave from work/school, take on a more active role in family of origin).

46-65

## Middle Adulthood

Adults in this stage are known as the "sandwich generation, often caring for older and younger generations" (C. Walter). This also tends to be the timeframe when adults begin to reflect on their own aging, health, and plan for retirement. In this age range, adults commonly begin to experience their own health-related concerns, which can prompt reflections on the meaning of life.

### Grief Responses

Adults can feel overwhelmed by multiple caregiving roles which, coupled with grief, can lead to increased risk of low mood (depression). During this stage of life, individuals often experience multiple losses.

65+

## Older Adulthood

At the beginning of this stage, the majority of adults will continue to be active within their communities through employment, volunteer work, or taking part in activities/hobbies. However, it is also during this time period that individuals begin to experience decline in both their physical health and mind health.

### Grief Responses

Typical physical responses to grief such as muscle weakness, appetite, and sleep changes can lead to injury and other medical-related concerns. Confusion and memory recall can also feel more distressing. As support systems naturally downsize, adults in this age range may experience loneliness and isolation at more intense levels. During the latter part of this stage (85+), as physical changes impose limitations, adults may find reduced pleasure in daily activities, reduced interest in the future, and regularly reflect on their own mortality.

Grief Across the Life Span

