**CNL-518 Topic 8: Bereavement Across the Life Span**

**Directions:** One's understanding of death and the bereavement process changes over the life span. Using the matrix provided below, summarize how individuals understand the various stages of life, death, and how each might grieve the loss of a loved one. Create a short vignette for each age group that expresses your understanding of the age group's response to death and bereavement. Finally, hypothesize how a clinical mental health or school counselor might counsel each age group through the bereavement process. The first stage has been completed for you as an example. Include in-text citations in the chart and references at the bottom of the worksheet as appropriate. Do not exceed 50 words per box.

| **Age Group** | **Perception/Cognition of Grief** | **Response to Grief** | **Vignette**  **(short example/story of a child’s loss scenario)** | **Developmentally Appropriate Counseling Interventions (including empirically- sound interventions for this age group)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Baby and Toddler** | Does not understand the permanency of grief. | Excessive crying and yearning to be held. | A baby’s birth mother died during delivery. | Counsel the guardians of the baby to be sure to tend to the baby’s need for touch and comfort. |
| **Preschool Age** | Preschoolers tend to believe that death is temporary and magical, something dramatic that comes to get you in the middle of the night like a burglar or a ghost.  Kail, R. V., & Cavanaugh, J. C. (2016). | Typical reactions in early childhood include regression, guilt for causing  the death, denial, displacement, repression, and wishful thinking that the deceased  will return. |  | Sensitivity to these feelings and how they get expressed is essential so that the child can understand what happened and that he or she did not cause the death. |
| **Grade School Age** | Children do not understand that death is permanent and that everyone dies until they are 5 to 7 years old. | In later childhood, common behaviors include problems at school, anger,  and physical ailments | Death of a grandparent. | When explaining death to children, it is best to deal with them on their terms.  Keep explanations simple, at a level they can understand. Try to allay their fears and  reassure them that whatever reaction they have is okay. Providing loving support for  the child will maximize the potential for a successful (albeit painful) introduction to one of life’s realities*.* |
| **Adolescence/Teenage Years** | When teenagers experience the death of someone close to  them, they may have considerable trouble making sense of the event, especially if this is their first experience (Oltjenbruns & Balk, 2007). | The effects of bereavement  in adolescence can be quite severe, especially when the death was unexpected, and can be expressed in many ways, such as chronic illness, enduring guilt, low self-esteem, poorer performance in school and on the job, substance abuse, problems  in interpersonal relationships, and suicidal thinking. | Death of a close friend in a tragic car accident. |  |
| **Adulthood** | How we deal with such losses as adults depends somewhat on the nature of the loss and our age and experience with  death. | High anxiety, a more negative  view of the world, and much guilt*.* | Death of a child. | Seeking support from family and friends by sending time, asking for help can be comforting. Joining a support group and sharing the experience with others who have lost loved ones can be comforting as well. |
| **Late Adulthood** | In general, older adults are less anxious about death and more accepting of it than any  other age group (Kastenbaum, 1999). | Intense emotional upset, survivor guilt, regrets about the relationship with the deceased grandchild, and a need to restructure relationships with the surviving family. | The loss of a grandchild. | Seeking support from family and friends by sending time, asking for help can be comforting. Joining a support group and sharing the experience with others who have lost loved ones can be comforting as well. |

References

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