

GRIEF IN CHILDREN

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Pathway Counseling Services





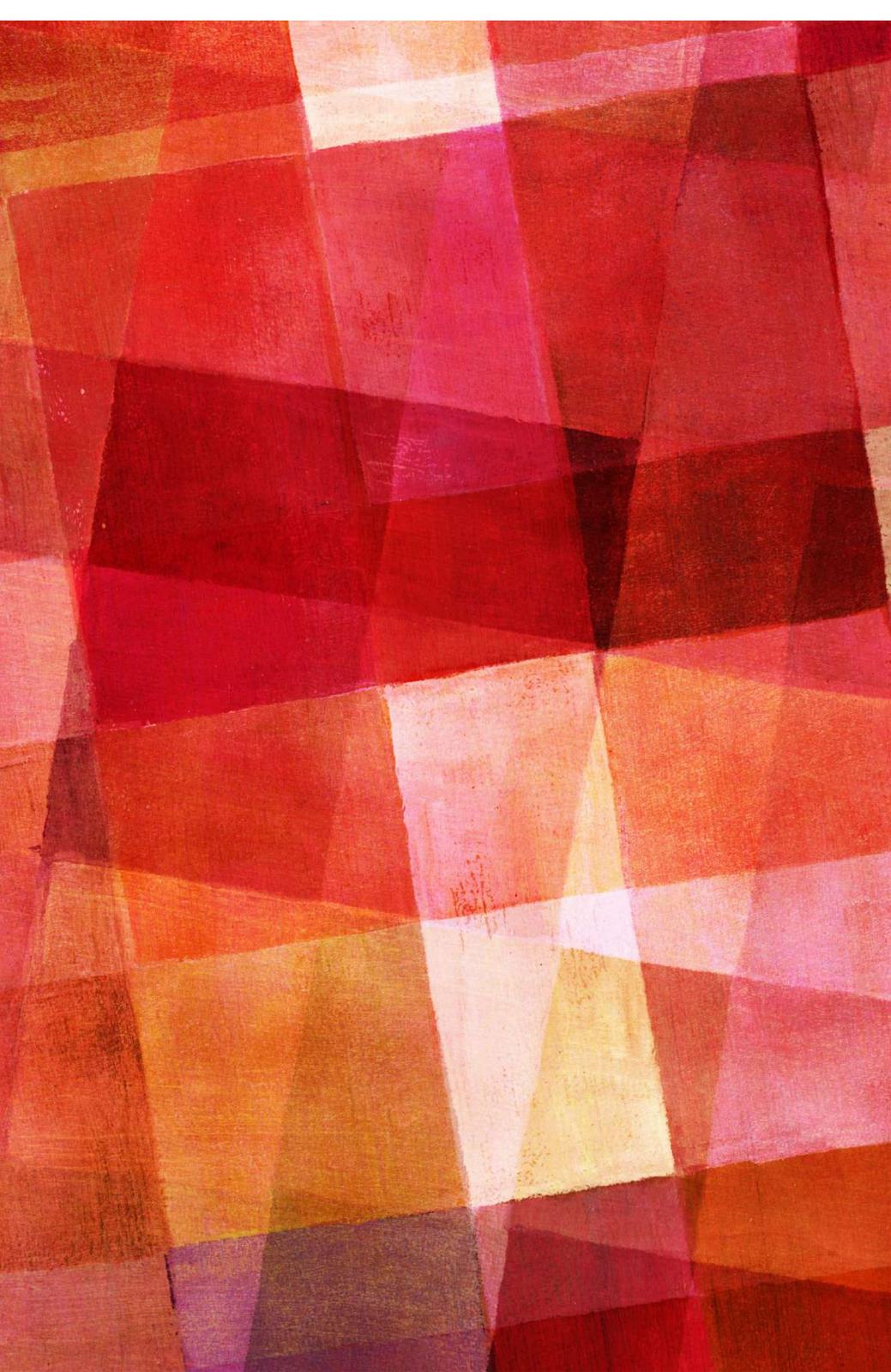
PRESCHOOL

- Developmentally they don't understand death. It's too abstract.
- Leads to "Magical" thinking such as they caused the death or the individual will come alive again like in movies, stories or like Jesus.
- Can talk about it a lot trying to understand.
- Sometimes only experience is from a movie or a pet's death.



COMMON REACTIONS

- Separation Anxiety including clinginess
- Behavioral issues trying to express their feelings they can't verbalize
- Toileting issues or other physical complaints (stomach, headache)
- Talking about, looking for & dreaming about the individual.
- Regression- baby talk, gestures, etc.

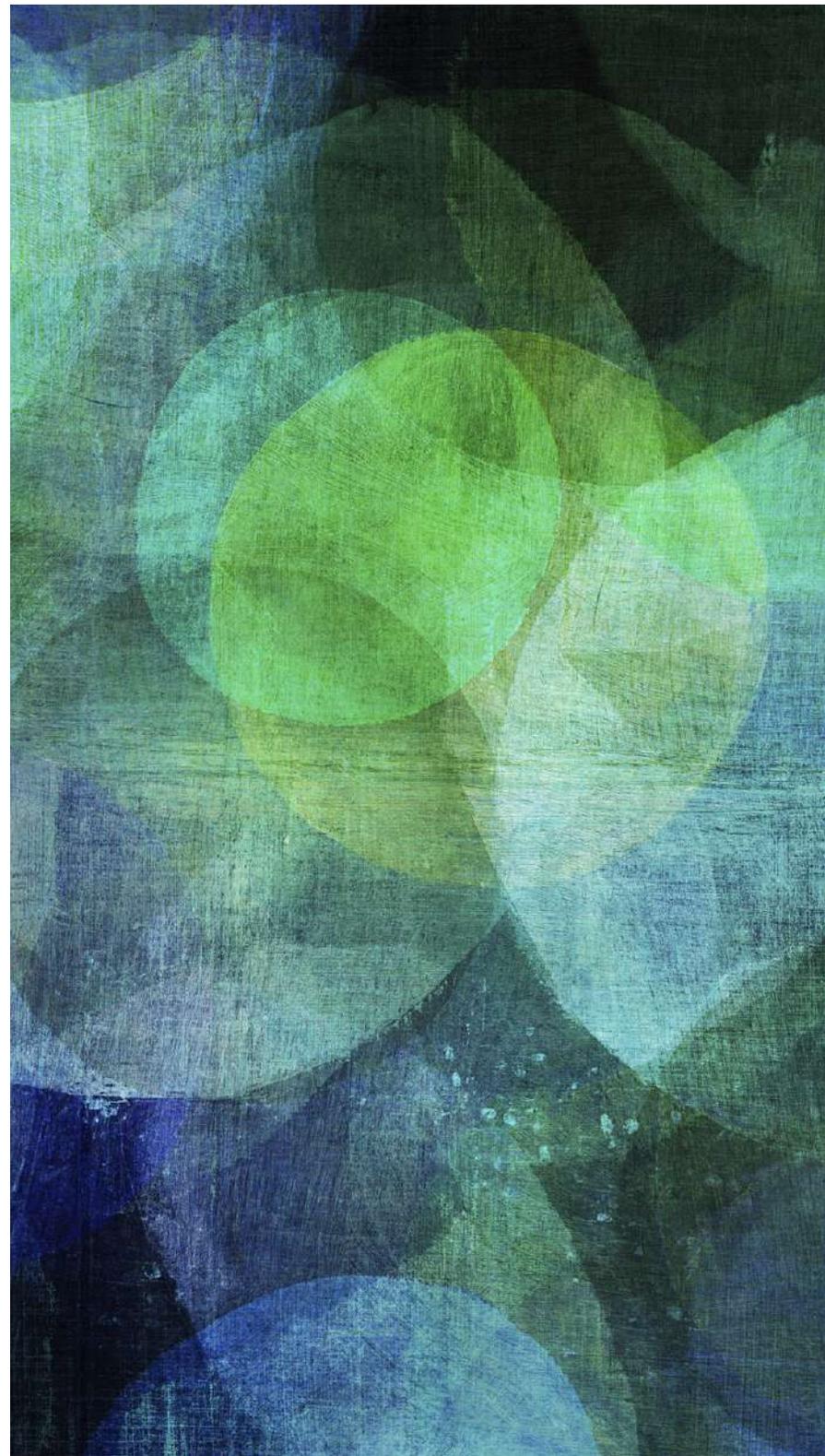


HOW TO HELP

- Lots of re-assurance, appropriate physical touch
- Books about death (Christian book store or christianbooks.com)
- Comfort items, opportunities to play, routine is critical
- Share your sadness with them to normalize it
- Extra patience, calm tone, understanding

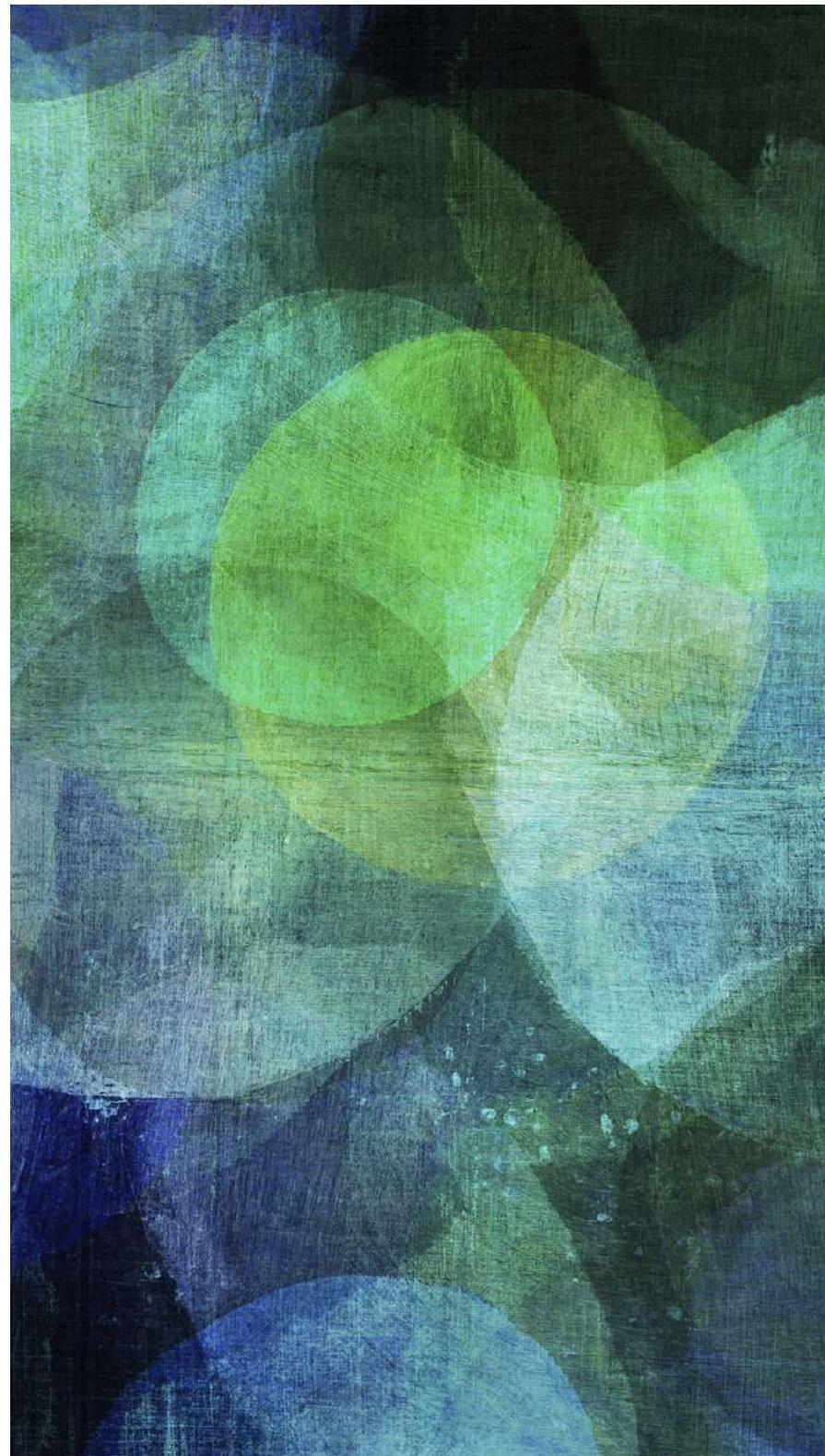
- Developmentally believe death is temporary. The individual will come back, still has feelings, lost, etc.
- “Magical” thinking lingering
- They ask a lot of very specific questions trying to understand what happened, death and often times questions about the individual’s body.

Primary School Aged



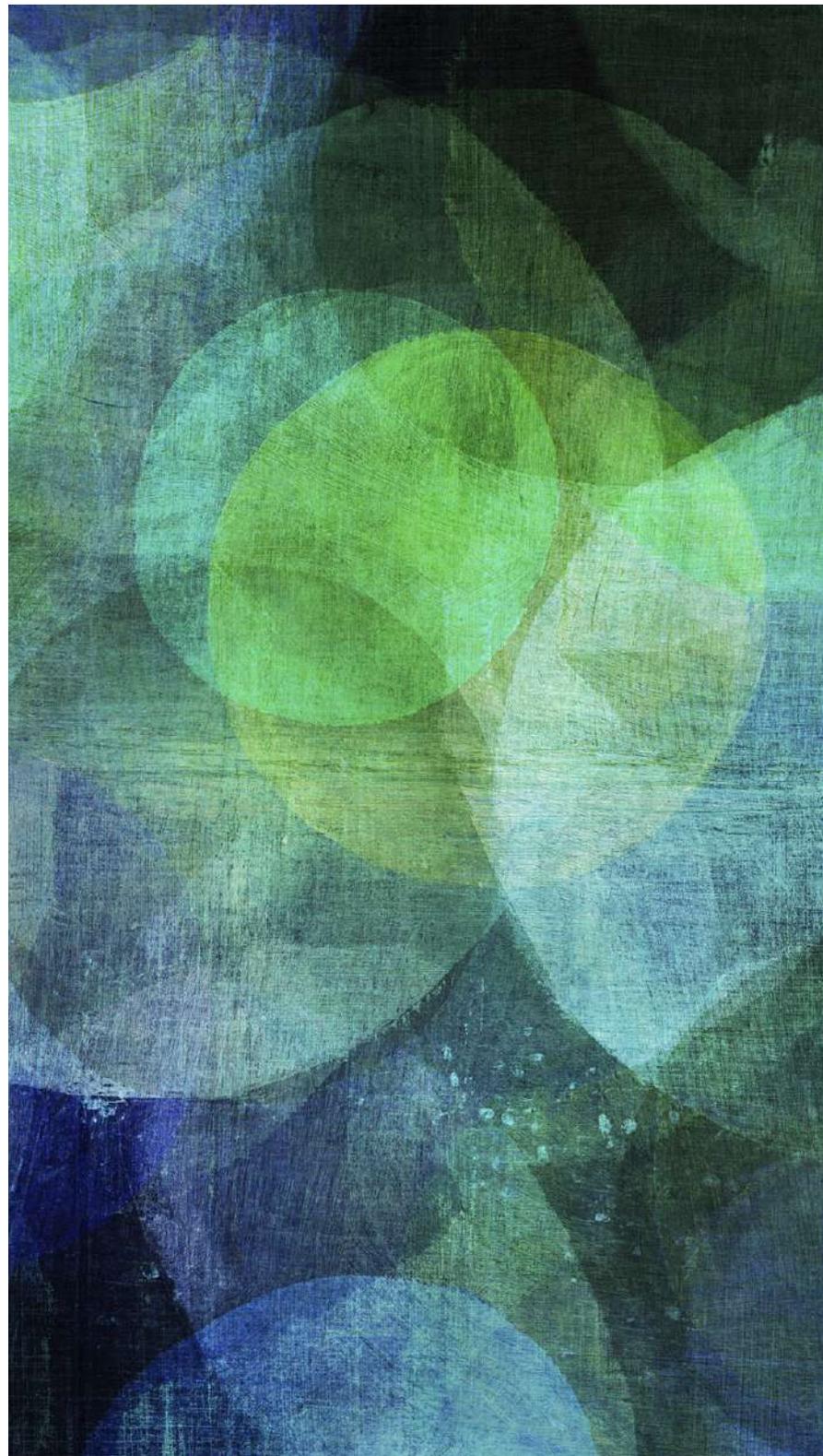
- Confusion about God and Heaven
- Fearful death is contagious thus will their parents be ok or die too?
- Separation anxiety
- Emotion dysregulation
- Fear of talking about it or other extreme obsessing about it.
- Only point of reference could be movies or a pet's death.
- Are very literal and obedient to please thus can become very confused.

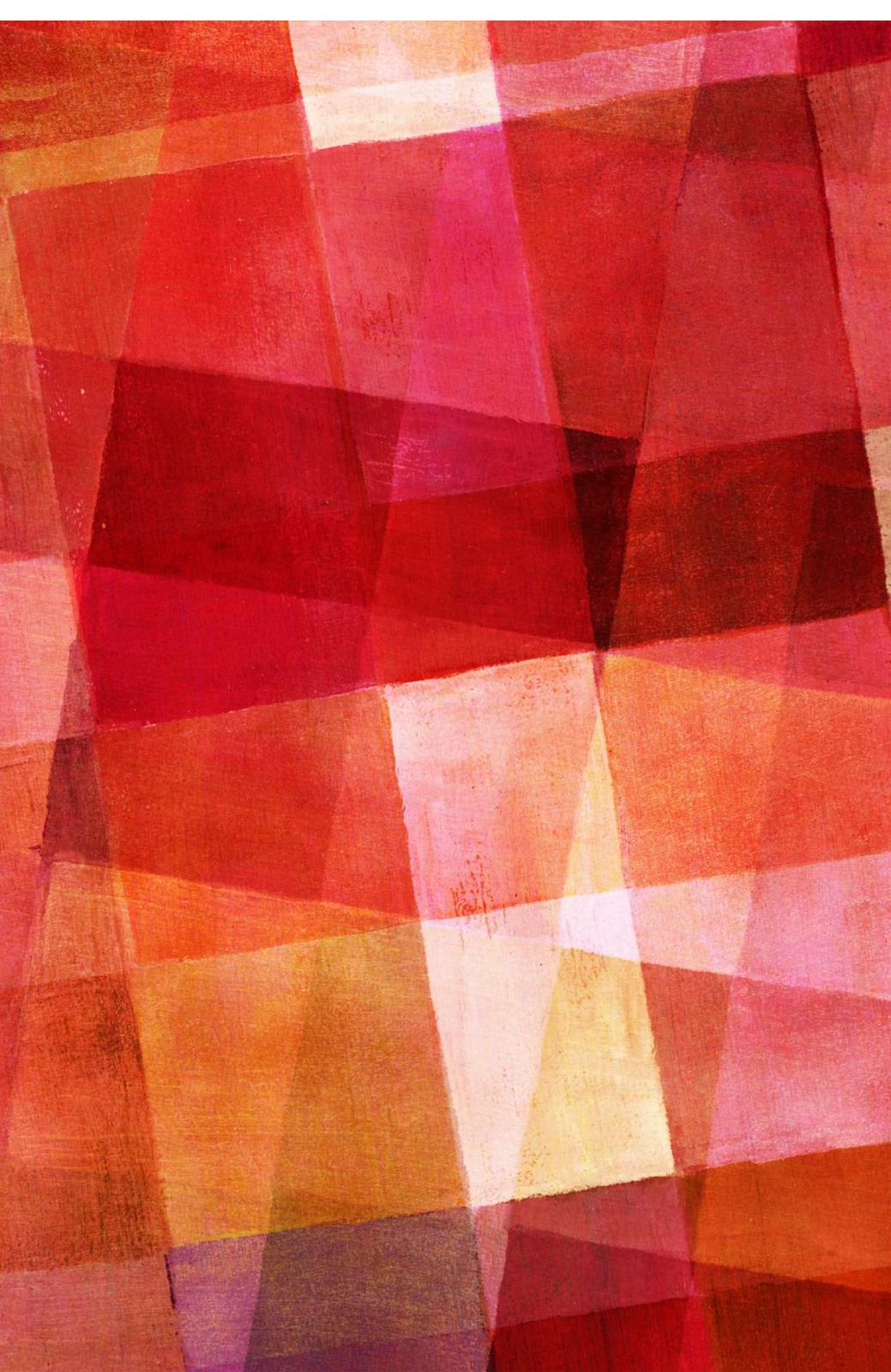
Common Reactions



- Again lots of comfort & reassurance they and family are safe.
- Show your own emotion appropriately. Be willing to talk about it. Use feeling language. Teaches their feelings are normal and reactions are ok.
- Be specific and concrete. Do not be abstract. Refer to death as death or died not passed, gone.
- Again books are helpful and art is helpful to express feeling they don't have language for.

How to Help





MIDDLE SCHOOL AGE

- Developmentally they understand death as permanent.
- Littles are watching closely but this age is now processing how others are reacting.
- Take cues on how they are “suppose” to react from above.



COMMON REACTIONS

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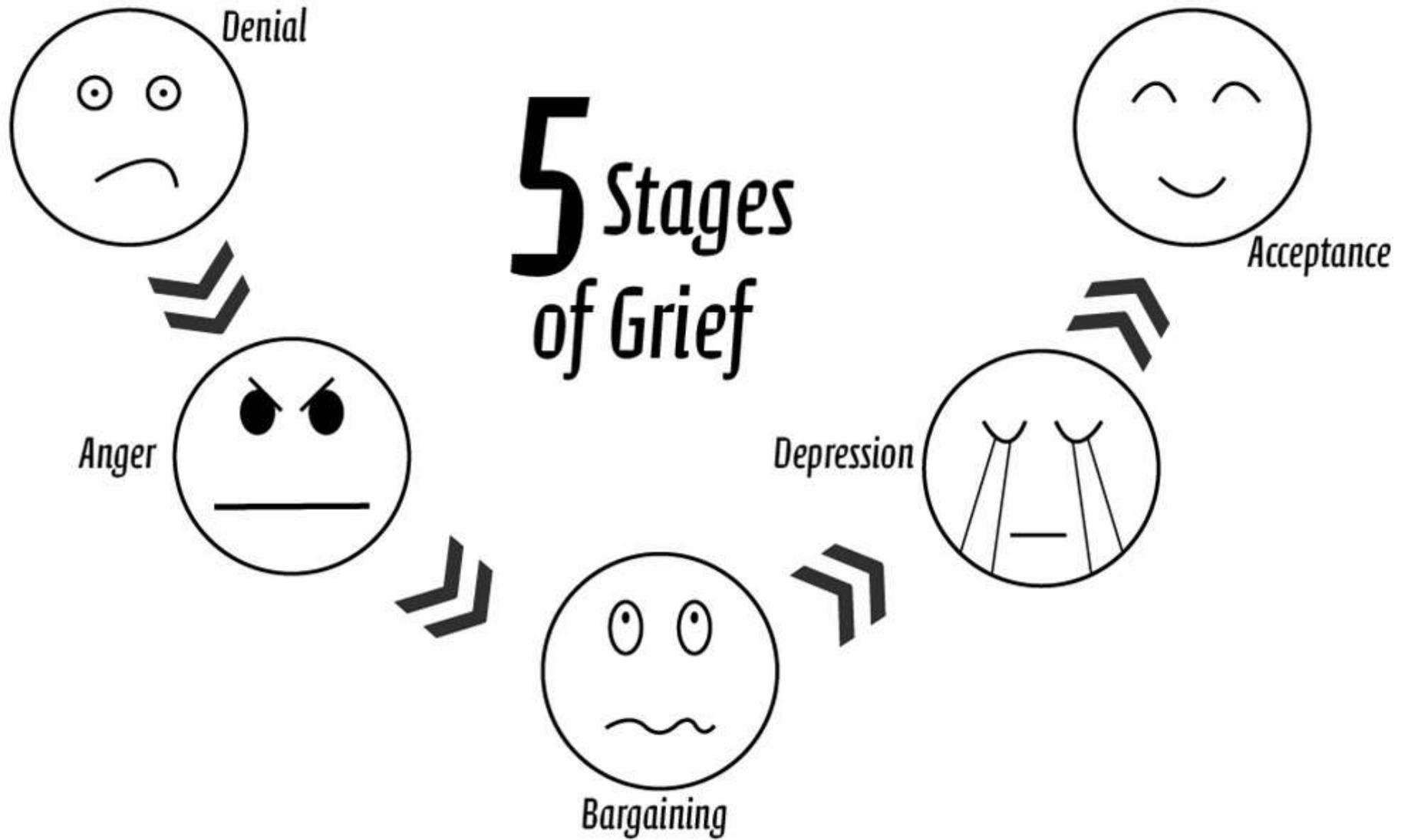
- They can compare their grief reactions to others.
- Their concern for safety can be stronger. Fearful of death of a loved one stronger.
- Won't let themselves express grief to protect others.
- Withdraw from others or over compensate by always talking about it, more needy.
- False sense of responsibility to protect loved ones from emotions, safety, etc.



HOW TO HELP

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- Let them talk if they are willing to..however they can express it. Repeatedly if needed.
- Extra patience with processing. Don't correct them unless the fact is wrong.
- Don't attempt the make them feel better with language like "At least", "Be strong", etc. Teaches emotions and thoughts are wrong.
- Share your thoughts, emotions appropriately to normalize. Shows you understand them.



DON'TS

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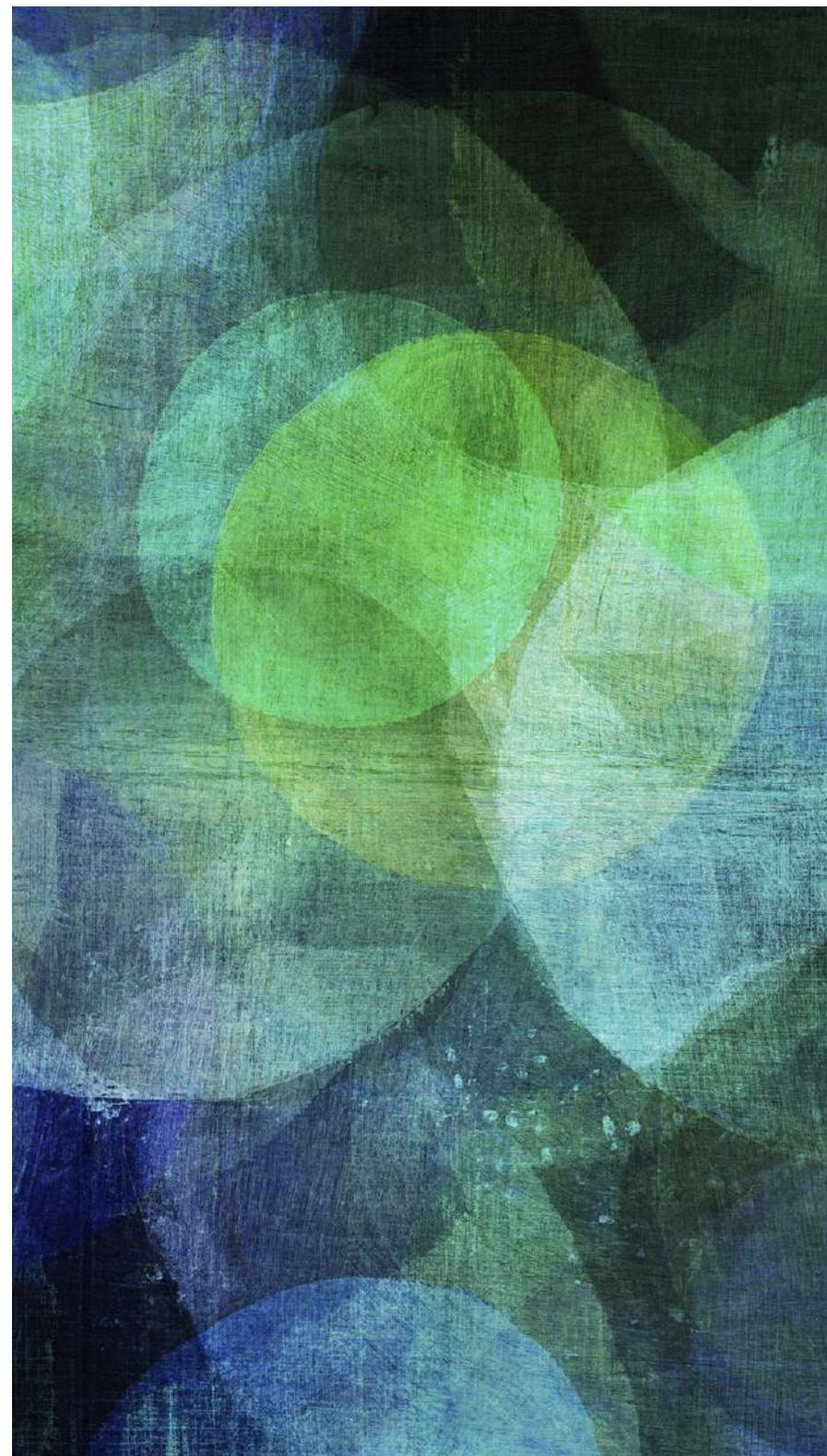
DO'S

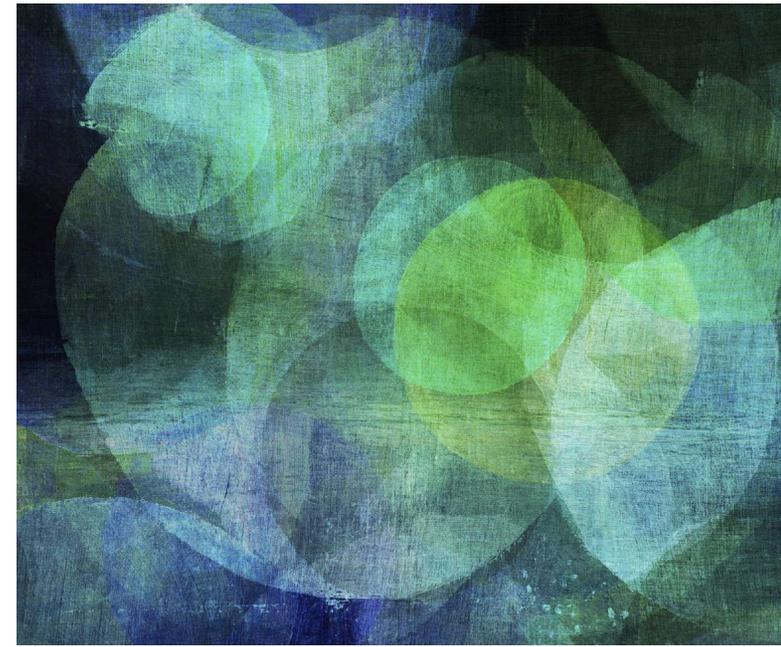
- Don't use abstract language like "passed" or "gone".
- Don't hide your own emotions & grief for fear of making it worse.
- Don't expect everyone to grieve in the same way or at the same time.
- Don't correct language or minimize emotions. "Be strong" or make "should" statements. It teaches feelings are wrong & creates expectations.
- Don't make up facts to answer questions or feel included.
- Don't try to make their pain/sadness go away.

- Do use specific language like "died" or "dead".
- Do talk, cry, share memories or stories together. It's honoring to their memory.
- Do be patient with each other and reassure each other grief takes time & comes in waves.
- Do encourage expression and emotions. Accept where each person is at. Remember each developmental levels.
- Do only give the facts you know are confirmed and admit when you don't know.
- Do validate you understand & be willing to sit with it.

- Has your child been to a funeral before?
 - Mrs. D and family will be in front with the casket open or closed.
 - Don't have to "say the right thing". Simply give her a hug & tell her you are sorry & love her. No "At least"s.
 - There will be many tears even from the teachers and adults your child knows & it is ok because they are sad too.
 - There will be stories told about him & their family.
 - The family will probably walk in together and walk out behind his casket from the church.
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FUNERAL PREPARATION

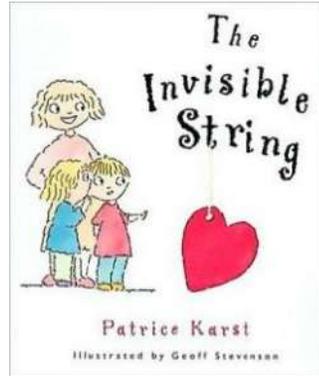
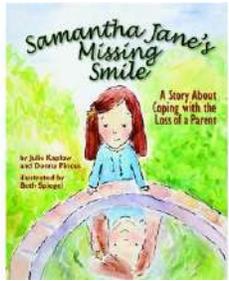




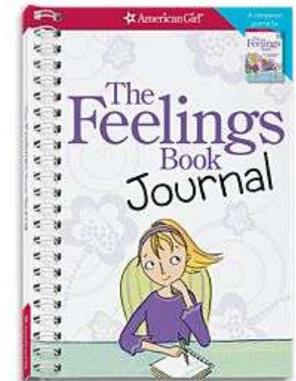
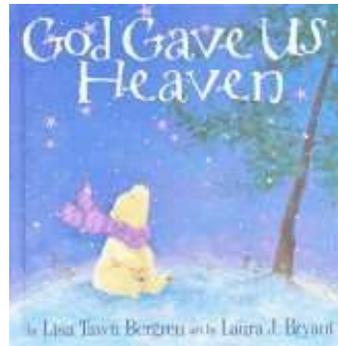
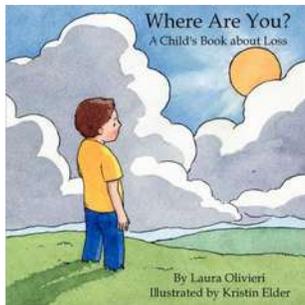
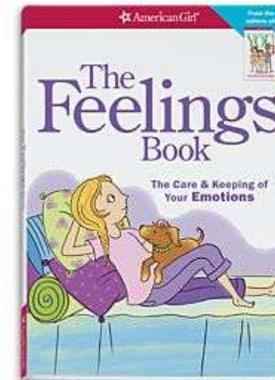
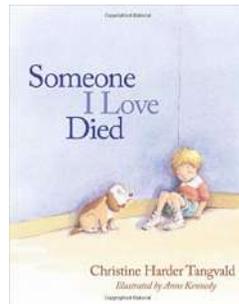
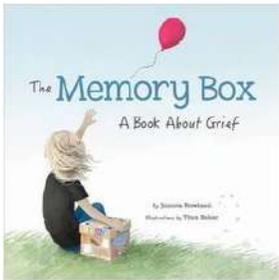
SALEM SUPPORT AVAILABLE

- ▶ Counseling will be available at the school for any child, parent, or teacher who needs it after Ryon's death & also the day after the funeral (the next school day).
- ▶ Comfort Dogs on campus
- ▶ presentation references:
<https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/bereavement-reactions-age-group>
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/two-takes-depression/201612/the-dos-and-donts-talking-child-about-death>

BOOKS TO HELP TALK ABOUT DEATH, GRIEF & HEAVEN



Grief Activity Books
for Kids
Ages 3-9



Focus on the family: Resource List- children grief (list of books, CDs, webpages, etc