

Grief in Pediatric Patients

Presenting Problem:

A participating PCP emailed a consultation request to WI CPCP regarding a 10-year-old female patient whose beloved grandparent had just died in a motor vehicle accident. The whole family is understandably upset, and the parents request recommendations on how to help their daughter cope.

Consultant's Response:

Grief is an individual process that rolls out in its own way and in its own time. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Additionally, there can be differences in how kids grieve compared to adults.

- A child's capacity to deal with big feelings tends to be smaller, so children may not sit in their grief for long periods of time as an adult may.
 - For example, a grieving adult may feel intense sadness continuously for weeks, but a grieving child might cry intensely for an hour and then ask to go outside to play. They'll come back to their grief again when they feel ready.
- Kids show their big emotions in different ways that may be hard for adults to recognize as expressions of grief. Separation anxiety, clinging, nightmares, acting babyish, tantrums, and problems paying attention at school can all be symptoms of childhood grief.
- Here are basic ways a caregiver can support a grieving child - [When a Loved One Dies: How to Help Your Child](#).

Teaching Points:

Children's grief can manifest differently than in adults - [Do Children Go Through the 5 Stages of Grief?](#)

If grieving children are struggling to express their emotions verbally, encourage them to use a combination of these strategies to express their emotions - [Helping Kids Cope With Grief: 6+ Tips to Support Children](#)