

About the Grief Resource Center

The Grief Resource Center has been created to reach out to those in the community who are grieving and to promote an awareness of the many ways grief can be experienced.

At the Grief Resource Center, service providers can come together and work in partnership to help individuals define their own unique pathways to healing.

Contact Information

*Linda H. Phelps, Ph.D., LMFT
Executive Director
Grief Resource Center
1113 University Blvd. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505.842.7166
lindap@griefnm.org
www.griefnm.org*

Board Members

*Duffy Swan, Chairman
LaDonna Hopkins
John Moore
Jim Myers
Peter Mwei
Diane Harrison Ogawa
James Saya*

The Grief Resource Center is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Children Who Grieve

by Linda Phelps, Ph.D.



Children Who Grieve

Grief touches every child in a unique way, and just as adults, grief impacts their lives on all dimensions - physical, emotional, spiritual and social. Consider the following:

Infants and toddlers are aware when changes occur in their small world. They're especially aware of changes in the behavior of their parent or caregiver. Since children of this age cannot verbalize their thoughts and feelings, they respond to these nuances through actions characteristic of their age group. They may become irritable and cry more often, or they may have restless bouts of sleep or refuse their food. They may become clingy and insist on more attention. It can be helpful if parents or caregivers try to maintain the child's usual daily routine. Extra reassurance can be provided by using a baby backpack carrier or just holding the child more often. Soothing music and a quiet voice may offer additional consolation. However, the most important help for these children comes by providing support and comfort to their parents or caregivers who can then more easily reach out and nurture their own children.

Children between *four and six years of age* often view death as a temporary separation in anticipation of their loved one's eventual return. They also have inquiries about the physical aspects of death. It's helpful to speak to children in this age group in simple, concrete terms avoiding euphemisms such as saying that the loved one "went to sleep" or has gone on a "special trip." Such phrases can unintentionally instill fear of sleeping or leaving the home. When these children encounter death, encourage expression of their thoughts and feelings through play or art activities. Be available to provide extra reassurance. If a child becomes excessively quiet or conversely, agitated or upset for a prolonged period of time, speak to a professional counselor.

Children between *seven and eleven years of age* begin to understand the finality of death. Sometimes they perceive it as a punishment and something that happens to others, but not to oneself. Children deal best with death when given accurate, clear, simple and honest explanations about what has happened. If children begin having problems in school, become aggressive or subdued for prolonged periods of time, again, don't hesitate to seek professional help.

Adolescence can be a particularly vulnerable time for children to experience the death of a loved one. Adolescents can understand the inevitability and inclusiveness of death and sometimes see it as unfair and inequitable. Many may protest the death of a loved one through displays of anger or acting out. They may seek comfort from friends instead of family or they may withdraw. It may be helpful for adolescents to write their thoughts and feelings down on paper so that they're no longer bottled up inside. Adolescents with a history of chronic depression or risk-taking behaviors including chemical dependency are at a higher risk for complicated grief reactions. Help adolescents find safe and nurturing opportunities for assistance during this difficult time.

