

TABLE 6.1. Developmental Stages and Their Implications for Childhood Bereavement

Stage	Designation of stage by developmental theory				Implications for bereavement
	Piagetian (cognitive and symbolic processes)	Freudian (emotions and defense)	Eriksonian (psychosocial issues)	Integrative (relationships and representation)	
Infancy	Sensorimotor	Oral (id/passion)	Trust vs. mistrust (hope)	Emotions patterned through mutually regulating interaction; symbolic representation through action-in-the-body; balance between self-assertion and emotionally attuned environmental adaptation negotiated	Grief experienced through disruptions in caretaking or parental depression; grief represented and remembered in body images or action symbols; potential for deep self-blame because of incomplete understanding of causality
Toddler stage	Representational intelligence (preoperational)	Anal (ego/reality)	Autonomy vs. shame and doubt (will)	Language first used for symbolic processing of emotions; id (passions) now modulated by ego (reality); first individuation accompanies first awareness of dependency; intense conflicts experienced in balancing attachment and self-assertion	Loss experienced directly, with action representations as well as language used to express grief; death understood as a separation; issues of self-blame can become entangled with the beginning of self-assertion
Preschool stage	Concrete operational	Phallic oedipal (superego/conscience)	Initiative vs. guilt (purpose)	More complex capacity for categorization; creative, concrete, magical cognition; dependency issues widened to include exploration of power and gender (man-woman, boy-girl, little-big); internalization of adult prohibitions as private conscience begins	Beginning understanding of finality of death as a concept, although not in relation to close attachment figures, who are viewed as absent and expected to return; concrete language and magical thinking used in understanding of causality; possible interpretation of adult explanations of cause of death in concrete or self-blaming terms
School-age stage	Concrete operational	Latency	Industry vs. inferiority (competence)	New capacity to repress-simplify the complex self through more elaborate categorization and stereotyping of experience (Piaget); better capacity to use the ego's mechanisms of defense (Freud); wish to master grown-up tasks (Erikson); conflicts resolved with adult prohibitions through same-sex identification	Understanding of finality of death, but concrete or confused understandings of cause of death likely; may appear unaffected or uncaring, while maintaining close relationship with the image of the deceased family member and, at times, deliberate illusion that deceased is present; possible sense of shame for being different from conventional, intact families
Adolescence	Formal operations	Genital	Identity vs. diffusion (fidelity)	New capacity for abstract thinking makes possible the re-creation of self in relationship to parents and to wider culture; reworking of previous stages in resolution of identity-attachment processes (individuation); intensification of sexuality, requiring new balance between passion, reality, and conscience.	Adult understanding of death and grief, but still vulnerable to fantasies that dead family member might return; possible entanglement of grief and loss with separation processes