

au uso / Tei

Nga tuakana me nga teina

For Siblings



In this chapter we will have a brief look at children's reactions and understanding. Young children tend to view the world as black and white so keeping things honest and as simple as possible will help. We have a number of books relating to the death of a baby that are specifically written for children. Please contact us if you would like to take a look at these.

Up to 2 years:

Children of this age do not understand death but can still be affected by the death of your baby. Some reactions can be:

- Crying more

- Being less active

- Being more clingy than normal

- Wanting a bottle/dummy again

You can help by providing a comfort blanket/toy, cuddle them, keeping up normal routines as best as you can and speaking calmly to them.

3-4 years:

This age group has limited understanding of the permanence of death and can easily ask when baby is coming back again. They can feel frightened with big changes and will need lots of reassurance that you are there for them.

Some reactions can be:

- Stubbornness

- Withdrawing themselves

- Changing their eating/sleeping patterns

- Returning to crawling/bet wetting

- Being irritable/have tantrums

- Being clingy

You can help by keeping routines as normal as possible, reassure them with words and cuddles that they are safe. Try to limit separation from them, be patient with them – they are not understanding why this is happening. When talking with them, use words that describe your/their feelings. Be honest with them as you explain death is part of life. Avoid words like 'baby is sleeping' as this can lead to them being afraid of sleeping themselves or thinking you aren't coming back again if you sleep.

Children 5-12:

This age group are still learning and some may still think that death is temporary. They may still ask 'when is baby coming back' which can be distressing. It is important to keep reassuring them that they are safe and loved and that they can ask you questions. Be honest with your answers.

Some reactions can be:

- Looking for their sibling/calling out for baby
- Blame
- Forgetfulness
- Withdrawal
- Changes in eating/sleeping
- More tantrums
- Antisocial or aggressive behaviour
- Not wanting to go to school
- Playing up at school
- Fearfulness
- Dreams about their sibling
- Easily distracted
- Physical symptoms – tummy ache, head ache
- Anger

You can help by including them in the planning of your baby's funeral, helping them to write a letter or draw a picture for their sibling, making a scrapbook. Tell them you know that they are feeling sad and let them know you are too. Reassure them that they can come to you for cuddles and keep their routines as normal as possible. Encourage play – children will often use play as a way of processing what's happened. Give them regular encouragement.

In summary:

No matter the age of the children, they will be affected in some way and these ways will be seen over the next few days/weeks. Allow them to grieve in their own way and be there to support them, encourage them to talk about their feelings and they will learn that grief is a part of life that is different for everyone and that they are OK to feel how they feel. You may find that your children don't seem affected at all. Understand that they are and they will be processing what's happened and need to be allowed to express their grief however feels normal for them. You can help them best by understanding their reactions and being patient with them. You can still set boundaries (in fact children need these), but explain these gently to them always reassuring them that they can come to you.