GENERAL DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES & GRIEF

	Ages 0 - 3	Ages 3 – 5	Ages 5 – 8	Ages 9 – 12	Ages 13 - 18
Understanding of Death	Infants as young as 4 mos recognize emotional expressions in others and can feel their parents' grief. They can and do grieve.	Understand that their pet is gone, but don't understand that death is permanent and irreversible. Prone to "magical" thinking & illogical associations.	Begin to understand that death is permanent, but they struggle to understand the physical aspects & the "how"	Understand that death is permanent and happens to everyone. May have morbid curiosity, or fears about others dying.	Teens understanding of and response to death are more similar to an adult's than to children.
Grief Manifestation or Response	Sleep disturbances, explosive emotions, or regressive behaviour.	Crying, confusion, and regression.	May express anger toward the pet, situation, or even the doctor. May ask many questions about the mechanics of death or body care.	May struggle to express their grief and try to keep their feelings hidden.	Teens often avoid talking about grief, leading parents to think grief is not impacting them. Research shows that teens often have more intense grief than other age groups.
How Adults can Help	Use soft, reassuring voices and movements to ensure child feels secure.	Give clear and simple answers to questions, read from books about loss, create a secure environment, and encourage physical expressions such as drawing & playing	Answer questions directly using the correct language, let them know it's okay to feel the emotions they are feeling. Encourage play, drawing, and stories to express grief.	Facilitate honest conversations, role model talking about grief, and ask children questions about their grief → this empowers them and gives them back some control.	Encourage open discussions, create opportunities to memorialize & express grief in non-verbal ways, and encourage teens to play an active role in the family's grief process.

Adapted from DVM Center's Kristi Lehman, MSW, LISW