

Many children have difficulty understanding what death means. Some experts feel these four concepts about death must be gradually understood as a child matures. Age-appropriate, clear, honest explanations from adults, schools and parents are helpful.

Irreversibility: Death is permanent unlike images children see in cartoons and on television. There is not recovery. It is common for children to resist the grieving process, as they may wait for the return of the deceased person.

Finality: All bodily functions stop after death. This is a difficult concept for a child who may worry that the deceased person is experiencing hunger or the need to go to the bathroom.

Causality: Children need to know — in plain language — what happened and why the body can no longer function. If they are not told, children tend to create their own explanations that may include self-blame and guilt.

Universality: All living things die. Children can observe this cycle in nature and with pets. They also need assurance that most people live long and full lives.