Similarities/Differences between Child and Adult Grief Process

**Similarities**

- Need to express grief openly
- Need to have their grief acknowledged by others
- Need extra support through the grief process
- Need assurance it was not their fault (magical thoughts)
- Need assurance they are not "going crazy"

**Differences**

- **Child's grief**: intermittent, sometimes seemingly absent  
  **Adult's grief**: continual awareness and experience of loss

- **Child's understanding of death**: limited to their age and cognitive development  
  **Adult's understanding of death**: more mature in their understanding

- **Child's ability to remember the deceased**: limited before puberty, may need help remembering  
  **Adult's ability to remember the deceased**: fully developed memories are complete

- **Child**: grows up with the loss, grieves longer  
  **Adult**: has already grown up when the death occurs

- **Children**: may talk openly about death  
  **Adults**: have preconceived notions about how people respond and may not share their feelings

- **Child**: depends on a consistent caregiver to meet basic needs  
  **Adult**: basic needs can be met by self

**Children's Response To The Death Of A Significant Other Depends Upon:**

- The cause and type of death.
- The child's age, gender, and developmental level.
- The nature of the relationship with the deceased.
- The manner in which the child is informed about the death.
- How well the child is prepared for the death.
- The child's mental health and coping style prior to the death.
- The reality, honesty, and scope of the information given to the child.
- Other recent or concurrent losses in the children's/family's life.
- The openness of the family environment to allow and promote discussion of the death and expression of feelings about the death.
- The nature and availability of a healthy support system.
- The caregiver's ability to acknowledge and role-model grieving.
- The child's self-esteem.
- The family's ability to accept healing and reinvest in living.
- The caregiver's awareness about and ability to accept the children's way of grieving.
Normal Grief Reaction In Children

- Anger at the person who died.
- Anger at the surviving parent.
- Anger at doctors/nurses for not saving the life of the one who died.
- Anger at God/self/life. It is not fair that their loved one died.
- Fear that other loved ones will die.
- Fear of getting the same disease or experiencing the same event responsible for the loved one's death.
- Fear of doctor's/hospitals.
- Fear of separation from attachment figures or safe environments.
- Fear of getting close to others who may in turn die.
- Guilt that they caused the illness and/or death.
- Guilt that they could prevent the person from dying.
- Guilt that they are having fun while the loved one is ill/dead.
- Denial of the loved one's illness or death.
- Searching for the deceased person.
- Sadness and/or depression.
- Yearning/pining for the deceased person.
- Difficulty concentrating and temporary drop in school performance.
- Acting out behaviors.
- Thought of not wanting to live/being unable to live without the loved one.
- Temporary withdrawal from friends and activities.
- Short-term difficulty or unwillingness to discuss the deceased.