

## **GRIEF RESPONSE IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS**

In keeping with the theme of orienting staff on what to look for in campers and students, children and teens can exhibit behaviors that may be questioned by staff, but may actually be reactions or responses to a loss.

The ways in which these reactions are exhibited tends to rely on the developmental stage of the child. Other outside criteria will also help determine how a child will react to a loss; do they have a supportive family, are they allowed to ask questions, cry, show emotion, are the parents showing emotions and talking about the loss in the child's presence?

There are many normal grief responses in children and teens, but some that may be encountered in a camp or school setting may be:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Inability to sleep
- Nightmares
- Loss of appetite
- Fear of being alone (clinginess)
- Fear that they will die
- Physical complaints (stomachache, headache)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression
- Social withdrawal/isolation
- Reverting to a younger age (thumb-sucking, bedwetting, baby talk)
- Aggressive behavior
- Anxiety
- Thoughts of suicide
- Risky behaviors

If these behaviors are being exhibited, it is suggested that they be reported and the parents notified. It is likely that if a loss occurred the camp or school would have been notified previously, however, if a history is unavailable, the parents need to be involved, and a counselor would probably be referred.