

Helping Your Teen Cope with Grief

Teens grieve differently than adults. Their behavior may range from cold and withdrawn to clingy, and they may not always be able to clearly express what they need. Keep in mind that teens:

- Want and need to be included in important decisions
- Don't want to be treated like a child
- Work through grief in a similar manner, but have less coping ability and life experience to do this
- Need the space and respect that adults get
- Feel pain just like adults, but cannot always express it
- Don't want to stand out from their peers
- Have limited support resources available to them. There are more services for adults than for children and teens.
- Already have a full-time job growing up. Grief makes this tough job harder.
- Experience and express grief in an on again-off again way for a longer period of time than adults. Sometimes, they just have to shelve their grief.
- Don't want to add to your pain, so they may not tell you what they're really feeling

Grief, like parenting, requires supervision, patience and clear communication. At such an uncertain time in their lives, teens will look to adults for guidance. Be direct about the support you are offering, and be specific about what you will and will not do. Keep in mind these ways to help teens manage their grief:

- Allow them to vent their feelings.
- Reflect back to them what you are hearing them say so they know they've been heard.
- Reach out to them no matter how they are acting. Sometimes, it is difficult to deal with or understand their behavior, but remember that the behavior is taking the place of their words and pain.
- Walk with them side by side instead of sitting down in front of them expecting them to say what's on their minds. Sometimes, it's easier to express their feelings when they don't have to do this face to face.
- Encourage them to talk about the person they have lost. This is a necessary part of healing.
- Assure them that you are strong enough to hear their words.
- Gauge how much information/details teens can handle if they are asking for more information about the circumstances of the death.
- Take care of them, and watch for any unusual behavior or physical symptoms that they may not be able to see. Grief needs attention and management.
- Protect their health. Make sure they are getting appropriate sleep, exercise and nutrition.
- Get back into a routine as soon as possible.
- Be consistent at home with rules and schedules, but be flexible when needed.
- Establish boundaries that equal safety and love—within reason.
- Develop a back to school plan:
 - › Contact/meet with the school counselor.
 - › Let teachers know what has happened.
 - › Set up tutoring with a teacher, student or friend to help your teen catch up.
- Contact school or community resources for support.
- Accept all expressions of grief, including creative expressions.



More this way...

- Spend time with them.
- Stay physically close if you feel they need that reassurance.
- Eat meals together.
- Dose it. Don't ask every five minutes how they are doing—give them space to grieve.
- Understand that a new skill set is needed for this new life. You are both adjusting to living a new normal.
- Find ways to honor and remember your loved one together.
- Provide helpful books—discuss or read them together.
- Maintain important family traditions—especially ones connected to holidays and life events.