

## What is Grief?

### Grief is:

- the pain we feel when we lose someone we love.
- a normal response to loss.
- a natural part of the life cycle.
- very individual. Everyone grieves differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.
- an emotional roller coaster of highs and lows.
- often stressful.
- a process that takes time. Because we all grieve in different ways and at different rates, there is no set timetable for how long it will last.

### Grief is not:

- a disorder or disease.
- contagious.
- a sign of weakness.

### Many Factors Influence Grief

How hard and how long you grieve depend on the following factors:

- Your personality.
- Your relationship with the person who died.
- How the person died—sudden or expected death.
- The age of the person who died.
- If you witnessed the death.
- How you were told about the death.
- Your past experience with loss and death.
- Your culture.
- Your belief systems.
- What support is available to you.

### Where Can You Find Grief?

*Grief is everywhere.* It is all around us because it is a normal and natural part of life. The two most common experiences we share as human beings are birth and death.

### What Does Grief Look Like?

Grief takes on different shapes, attitudes and behaviors. Teens experience grief in many different ways and not necessarily in the same order or at the same time.

- **Anger:** You may lash out in anger because you feel you have lost control of your life. And it is normal to feel angry with the person who has died.
- **Withdrawal:** You may pull away from friends, drop out of clubs and sports, or cancel plans. Sometimes it's just easier to be alone.



More this way...

- **Inability to relate with peers:** Relating to friends can become difficult because their problems may seem very small and fixable compared to your loss.
- **Impatience:** You may become impatient or irritated with others—especially if someone complains about something trivial and fixable.
- **Overachievement:** You may try to be your very best to make it easier for other family members to cope. This can put even more pressure on you.
- **Lack of focus:** You may find it difficult to pay attention because your mind can't shut off what has happened. So you become unfocused and unorganized.
- **Drop in school grades:** Because you are having a hard time focusing, your grades may drop. If they don't go back up within a reasonable amount of time, ask a teacher or friend for help.
- **Lack of interest or motivation:** You may adopt a "why bother" attitude.
- **Worry:** You may not be able to stop worrying about your loved ones because of the fear that you might lose them, as well.
- **Guilt:** You may feel guilt because of something you have said/not said, thought, felt, or wished about the person who died. You may even think that you could have prevented the death. You may also feel guilty for wanting to feel normal again.
- **Overwhelming sadness:** This can feel like an incredible weight that prevents you from wanting to do anything.
- **Loneliness:** You can feel very isolated and different from your peers.
- **No outward response:** At school, you may act like nothing has happened so you won't call attention to yourself. At home, you may try to act like nothing is bothering you so your family won't be sad or worry about you.
- **Sexual activity:** You may engage in sexual activity so you can escape the pain and feel connected with someone.
- **Drug or alcohol use:** You may experiment with either or both as part of that "why bother" attitude or to mask or stop the pain you feel. Use of drugs or alcohol makes grief more difficult.
- **Unusual happenings:** You may experience seeing or hearing the loved one that has died or have vivid dreams about them. Some teens find this comforting since it feels like a connection with their loved one. Others may find it uncomfortable. It can help to talk or write about it.