

Anticipatory Grief for Teens

When someone you care about is seriously ill and may even die, it is natural to think about what your life would be like without that person. You may also experience feelings of loss and grief, even though your loved one is still alive. This is called anticipatory grief. It is a normal process of trying to prepare yourself for the death of your loved one.

Some reactions you may have

- Sadness and tears
- Feelings of being alone and that nobody understands what you are experiencing
- Depression -- feeling heavy, lethargic and like nothing seems to matter
- Change in sleeping and eating patterns
- Loss of interest in school
- Lack of concentration
- Denial that this is really happening
- Anxiety – like you can't stop moving, thinking or worrying
- Anger
- Fear of other loved ones becoming sick. For example, you may worry that if one parent is ill, your other parent may become ill, as well.
- Fear of unfinished business
 - › Not having the opportunity to say "I love you" or "goodbye"
 - › Not having the opportunity to make amends
- Thoughts about hopes and dreams that may not happen
- Guilt
- Avoidance of your loved one who is ill
- Worry about what life will be like without your loved one
- Frustration about disruptions in your daily life:
 - › Not being able to spend time with your friends because you are needed at home
 - › Missing a special event, such as a school dance or game
 - › Visits by a nurse or hospice staff in your home
 - › Seeing and hearing medical equipment in your home, such as an oxygen tank

Some challenges you may experience

- A change in family roles:
 - › You may need to take on added responsibility.
 - › You may need to take care of the sick family member.
 - › You may need to take care of younger siblings.
 - › You may need to act as the adult and make household decisions, such as meal planning, setting rules for younger siblings and paying bills.
- Changes in the family routine since your loved one has become ill:
 - › Your daily schedule may change.
 - › You may no longer be able to sit down to a meal together as a family.
 - › Other family members may be stressed, exhausted, worried and not readily available.



More this way...

Some challenges you may experience, *continued*

- The presence of medical equipment and staff in your home
- Feelings of fear and discomfort about having to visit or spend time with a sick family member

Some ways to help you get through this

- Request information about your loved one's illness.
- Identify support systems, such as family, friends, church or synagogue and the community.
- Identify someone you can confide in who is outside your family.
- Decide how you want to communicate with your loved one in person, via e-mail, or by telephone.
- If hospice is involved, ask the hospice team members for support. They can:
 - › Find more help for the family
 - › Lead a family meeting where everyone airs feelings
 - › Listen to your concerns
 - › Help you find information and answer your questions about your loved one's illness

Some ways you can express your thoughts and feelings

- Express what you need to say through writing (journal, letter, poem, song), as well as music or art.
- Create a photo album or memory book with your loved one.
- Create a special music CD by downloading music that your loved one and you can enjoy together.
- Create a family Web site for your loved one.
- Put together a photo CD for your loved one.
- Tape record or video tape conversations or stories with your loved one.
- Take breaks as needed without feeling guilty.
- Ask for help when you need it.

Talking to someone about what you are going through will not change the situation; it will not change your loved one being sick. However, it may give you what you need to get through this very tough time in your own way.