

SUPPORTING TEENS WITH LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

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Sources

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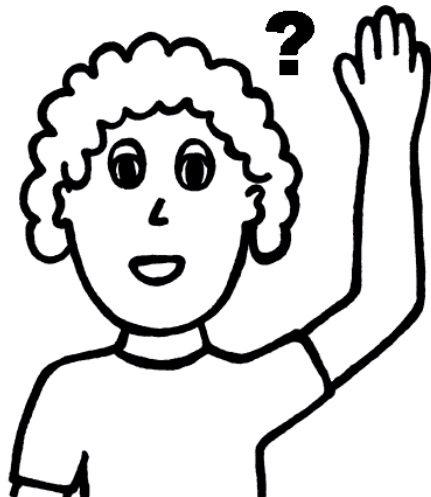
*Compiled by Karen Preston and Lucy Chapple,
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Seek professional help:

- If unusual or intense behaviour continues
- If children show no grief or delayed grief
- If children seem unusually vulnerable or anxious
- If the young person is at risk of depression or suicide
- If they feel 'stuck' in their sorrow
- If they withdraw from or avoid social activities
- If they are always tired
- If they take unnecessary risks
- If they don't have anyone safe and trustworthy to talk to
- If they feel there is no purpose in being with others or doing anything
- If they are under other significant stresses at home

Seeking professional help is a sign of courage. It shows the young person is ready to move on.



Your main aim:

To create:

- a space
- a time
- a face



A few thoughts to consider ...

- Each child's grieving is personal and unique.
- Mourning is not indulgent—it is healthy and necessary.
- Think in terms of a grieving space not a grieving period.
- We revisit grief and this is normal.
- Mourning can be triggered by different things at different times in different situations.
- Try to find out the facts and respond as truthfully as possible to questions.



- Children may deny the death has happened at first and search for the dead person - this is normal.
- Attending the funeral can be helpful for those grieving.
- Try to keep daily routines going at home and school.
- Behaviour difficulties and anxiety can increase for a while—deal with these with caring and compassion.
- Reassure the young person that the pain of loss will lessen with time.
- Being jealous of others happiness is normal, (Why are they having fun when I am so sad?).
- Concentration can deteriorate and emotions will go up and down. Reassure the young person that they will feel in control again soon.
- Older children may worry they are “going mad” with grief. Encourage them to talk and be reassuring.
- Make sure the person supporting the child has support themselves.



- After the death:
 - The funeral can be helpful for the young person.
 - Their view of the world may change.
 - Returning to school may be difficult (it may be helpful if the class knows about the loss).
 - Anniversaries may be difficult.
 - Teens may use drugs/alcohol to deal with the pain of loss. This just intensifies the feelings and can be a significant health risk.
 - Encourage young people to take care of their health at this difficult time.



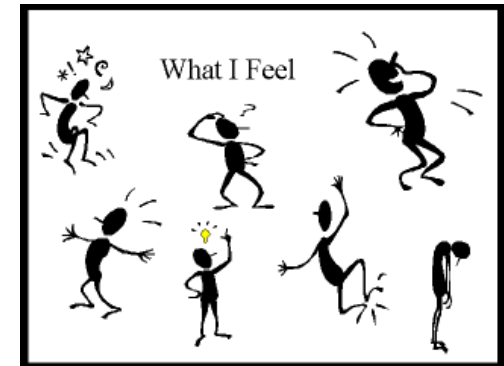
- Talking can help - it won't heal a broken heart but it will help them live with it. Talking to other teens who have experienced loss can be especially helpful.

Dealing with teenagers

- Young people may 'bottle' feelings up and be afraid of 'breaking down' They may need to work through feelings indirectly using a variety of resources.
- Teenagers may have to take on new responsibilities at home and may need support with this.
- Encourage young people to find ways of taking care of themselves.
- Stormy relations prior to death can give rise to guilt and remorse - encourage young people to talk about these normal feelings if they want to.
- Encourage teenagers not to withdraw from other.
- Encourage young people to use the help they are most comfortable with (family members, friends, youth clubs).
- Make sure the young person does not punish themselves for things they cannot change.



The feelings:



- Listening to the feelings is sometimes all that is needed.
- Be sincere ... Children pick up "phoney" responses quickly.
- Re-assure the child that what they feel is normal—there is no right or wrong feelings.
- Don't rush to move children through feelings—they need time and space.
- Anger, guilt, blame and depression are normal.
- Children may 'act out' feelings in different ways.
- Children may "withdraw".
- Fear of losing remaining family members is not unusual.
- Despair may take place once child accepts the loss of a loved one. Patience and care is needed.
- Anger may manifest in anti social behaviour.
- Separation issues / physical problems / sleep difficulties are common. They maybe linked to anxiety and depression.
- Anxiety can be linked to real fears (where will we live? will we have enough money?).
- Relief may be felt (especially after a long illness—this may be linked to feelings of guilt).
- Acceptance can be achieved with time but this does not mean the love has diminished.

Dealing with suicide:

- Children can have very confused feelings (shock, horror, guilt, shame).
- It can be harder to establish the facts. (Suicide is a bigger taboo than death).
- You may have to explain mental illness—(where thinking and feeling can be so painful—its like a physical illness you can't see).
- The most difficult feelings are guilt linked to self blame (if only I had).
- Be aware of the child being at risk of depression or even suicide themselves (especially teens).
- Feelings of abandonment are profound.
- You may have to cope with press/news/facebook/texting.



- Reassure the child they are loved by those caring for them.



- Tune into the verbal and non-verbal message
- Listening and allowing for silence and contemplation is the best support



- Have a bank of resources available for children and young people to explore feelings (sometimes crayons and paper is enough)
 - books
 - puppets
 - photos
 - letters
 - postcards
 - DVD/video
- Focus on positive memories
 - memory box
 - memory candle
 - writing and drawings
 - photo album
- Try to resist wanting to 'fix it' or trying to 'cheer up' the young person—stay with their feelings

