



A Guide for Grieving Teens

*Prepared for you by the OhioHealth
Hospice Bereavement Team*

This booklet was developed by OhioHealth Hospice as part of the Grief Support and Education Outreach to Schools Project, made possible through a grant from The Columbus Medical Association Foundation.

Introduction

This guidebook is written for teens coping with the death of someone they love. It gives teens suggestions about healthy ways to cope with grief and loss, ways to help a grieving friend and what to expect at a funeral or memorial service. This booklet is also for parents, professionals and other caring adults who want to understand and help teens as they experience the normal, yet very difficult process of grief and loss.

Tips for Caring Adults

Adolescence is a time when teens are developing their sense of identity and struggling with issues of dependence and independence. Understanding and coping with feelings can become even more difficult if a loss occurs during this time. As teens learn to cope with grief, they experience many normal feelings and reactions. As a caring adult, you can help grieving teens by reassuring them that their feelings are normal. You can also help by just being there and listening.

Encourage them to talk about what they are feeling and thinking even if they say they are OK.

Common Reactions to Loss

Normal Grief Reactions

Grief is a normal response to loss. It includes all of the intense feelings and reactions that follow the death of a loved one. At times you may be unsure if what you are going through is normal. Grief is different for everybody, but you will likely experience some common feelings or reactions such as:

- + Shock or denial
- + Feeling numb
- + Postponing or avoiding grief
- + Sadness and crying
- + Anger and resentment
- + Mood swings (emotional ups and downs)
- + Fear of forgetting your loved one
- + Feelings of guilt or regret
- + Difficulty concentrating
- + Physical complaints
- + Changes in grades, sleeping and eating
- + Over-responsibility (at home, school)
- + Withdrawal or isolation
- + Relief
- + Loneliness
- + Fear of death
- + Anxiety

Tasks of Grief for Teens

The process of grief is unique to each individual. There is no magical time period to “get over” the death of a loved one. Sometimes it is helpful to view grief as a series of tasks to be worked through. Tasks that can help you are:

Understanding. This task involves accepting the reality of the loss and understanding that the person is no longer alive. Many people instantly feel shock and denial after a special person dies. These are normal reactions that can be worked through by talking about your loved one and re-telling your story.

Grieving. Grief is a normal process. In order to heal, it is necessary to allow yourself to experience and express your feelings and reactions. It may be helpful to read about grief, attend a support group or talk to someone about your thoughts and feelings.

Commemorating your loss. It is helpful to remember and honor the life of the person who died through talking, writing, drawing, rituals or any way that is special to you. Meaningful remembrance can help you adjust to these difficult changes in your life.

Going on. Grief does not last for any certain period of time. Your experience may depend on your relationship with the person who died, your age and how the person died. People can become hopeful again by paying attention to important relationships and activities and by setting personal goals.

When to Ask for Help

Grief is a difficult process and everyone experiences it differently. If coping seems very difficult for you, you may need some extra help. Talk to a trusted adult about what to do if you experience any of the following thoughts, feelings or reactions:

- + Thoughts of hurting yourself
- + Not taking care of yourself
- + Using or abusing drugs or alcohol
- + Aggression
- + Extreme eating or sleeping changes
- + Depression (lack of interest in friends, family or activities, feeling sad almost all the time, loss of energy)
- + Ongoing school problems
- + Other risk-taking or destructive behaviors

Tips for Caring Adults

While grief is a normal process, there are some behaviors that cannot be ignored. If grief reactions seem exaggerated or persist over long periods of time, seek counseling, group support or further assistance. Some signs that teens need extra help include:

- + Suicidal thoughts, actions (seek immediate, professional help)
- + Depression
- + Risk-taking behaviors
- + Substance abuse
- + Aggression
- + Destruction of property
- + Anxiety
- + Eating disorders

Helpful resources include physicians, health or mental health centers, school counselors, hospices, local churches or social service organizations.

How to Help Yourself

- + Give yourself permission to grieve. It is okay to cry.
- + Listen to relaxing or comforting music.
- + Write your feelings or thoughts in a journal.
- + Write a song, eulogy or poem about your loved one.
- + Go for a walk or run.
- + Talk to friends or trusted adults. Talk about the death of your loved one and explain how you are feeling. Ask for support.
- + Use art to express your feelings and memories — draw, paint or sculpt. Create a collage out of nature items or pictures and words from old magazines.
- + Exercise or play sports.
- + Take care of yourself. Eat well and get enough sleep.
- + Create a memory book of photos or memory box of keepsakes that remind you of your loved one.
- + Honor your loved one by having a private memorial service and planting a tree or flower, lighting a candle or reading a poem with family and friends.
- + Participate in a grief support group with other teens who are grieving the death of someone they love.
- + Talk with a school counselor, grief counselor, religious leader or other trusted adult if it seems hard to cope.

Tips for Caring Adults

- + Be there
- + Be willing to listen
- + Don't judge
- + Answer questions honestly. You don't need to have all of the answers
- + Encourage outlets, activities and routine
- + Reassure teens that their feelings of grief are normal
- + Reassure teens that they are not at fault
- + Don't be afraid to share your own feelings, memories
- + Allow time for grief — don't expect it to resolve quickly
- + Pay attention to holidays, birthdays or special events that may be difficult

How to Help a Grieving Friend

Do:

- + Acknowledge their loss (Say, "I'm sorry for your loss")
- + Listen
- + Offer to spend time with your friend
- + Send a card
- + Attend the funeral or memorial service
- + Send flowers, food or cookies
- + Offer a hug
- + Encourage normal activities
- + Remember that holidays and special days may be difficult, especially during the first year
- + Ask them how they are doing at different times

Don't:

- + Act as if nothing happened
- + Avoid talking about the loss
- + Say, "I know just how you feel"
- + Tell someone how to feel
- + Expect them to "get over" their loss

Remember Me

*Love doesn't die, the physical body does
So when all that is left of me is
That memory and the love you have
Then find a way to share those gifts I've left you
In your own way.*

— Anonymous

Attending Funerals or Memorial Services

Funerals help to honor the life of the person who has died and to provide support for the family and friends of the deceased. Here are some important reminders that may help when you attend a funeral, memorial service or calling hours:

Say something to the family and friends of the person who died. You could say “I am sorry for your loss”, “I’m so sorry” or tell a story or a memory of their loved one. Introduce yourself and your relationship with the person who died if the family does not know who you are.

Remember that you have choices about your level of participation during the services. You do not have to view the body, but you should speak with the family and write your name in the guest book. Be aware of other cultures or religions. Ask someone if you are not sure what to do.

Tips for Caring Adults

- + Encourage teens to attend the memorial service or funeral, but give them choices about their participation.
- + Help them prepare for the funeral. Let them know what to expect and offer suggestions for what to say.
- + Encourage them to dress and act respectfully.
- + Offer to attend the service with the teen in order to provide support.
- + Be prepared to support and listen to the teen’s reactions and feelings after the service is over.

Suggested Reading for Teens

Dower, Laura. *I Will Remember You: What to Do When Someone You Love Dies*. This guidebook points out that grief is hard work and helps teens explore choices and discover their ability to live on after the death of a loved one.

Fitzgerald, Helen. *The Grieving Teen: A guide for teenagers and their friends*. Written specifically for teens, this book includes topics such as death from AIDS, post-traumatic stress disorder and Internet support. It provides real-life experiences and is sensitive to differing religious and cultural practices.

Hipp, Earl. *Help for the Hard Times: Getting through Loss*. Cartoons, quotes and line drawings take youth on a hopeful and entertaining journey through the many losses and challenges of teen life.

Kuehn, Eileen. *Death: Coping With the Pain*. This highly readable, multicultural book blends information, stories and photographs to demonstrate how grief can be faced with integrity and safety.

O'Toole, Donna. *Facing Change: Coming Together and Falling Apart in the Teen Years*. This book helps teens understand their losses and discover creative coping strategies to deal with them.

Sabin, Ellen. *The Healing Book*. This is an interactive book, journal, and conversation-starter. It invites teens and children to express their feelings, explore their concerns, and ask their questions.

Salloum, Alison. *Reactions*. This workbook is an excellent resource to help young people recognize and understand the reactions common to the experience of trauma and grief.

Traisman, Enid Samuel. *Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins*. This is a best-selling journal for teenagers who have experienced the death of a loved one. They can honor, record and realize their many thoughts, feelings and questions related to the loss and their memories.

Wolfelt, Alan D., Ph.D. *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas*. This book offers 100 teen-friendly ideas for understanding and coping with grief.

Suggested Websites

- + American Hospice Foundation: americanhospice.org
- + Association for Death Education and Counseling: adec.org
- + Compassion Books: compassionbooks.com
- + The Dougy Center: dougy.org
- + Hospice Foundation of America: hospicefoundation.org
- + National Alliance for Grieving Children:
nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org

Suggested Reading For Parents and Professionals

The Dougy Center. *When Death Impacts Your School: A Guide for School Administrators*. This book for school principals and other administrative staff is filled with practical information about how to work sensitively and effectively with your staff and students before and after a death or school crisis.

Grollman, Earl A. *Bereaved Children and Teens: A Support Guide for Parents and Professionals*. This is a comprehensive guide to helping children and teens cope with the emotional, religious, social and physical consequences of a loved one's death. Topics range from explaining how adolescents grieve to outlining concrete methods that help children cope.

Kuehn, Eileen. *Loss - Understanding the Emptiness*. Readers learn to identify a variety of losses, gain awareness of the intense feelings and behaviors associated with the initial shock of loss and gain ideas about how to help teens heal. It contains multicultural photographs and a section on how to help others.

Schuurman, Donna. *Never the Same - Coming to Terms with the Death of a Parent*. This book tells the life changing impact a parent's early death has on a young person.

Wolfelt, Alan D., Ph.D. *Healing a Teen's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends, and Caregivers*. This book teaches about the unique mourning styles and needs of teenagers. It also includes simple activities and tips for relating to and spending time with the grieving teen.

OhioHealth Hospice Community Grief Program

The Community Grief Program provides services to anyone who is coping with the death of someone close to them. Programs are funded through donations, fundraising and cooperative partnerships. Some services are provided at no cost and others are provided on a sliding fee scale.

Services of the Community Grief Program include:

- + Grief support for all ages
- + One-on-one counseling for individuals and families
- + Educational programs about grief and coping
- + Consultation for organizations
- + Expressive arts therapy
- + School-based grief support services
- + Information and referral

Programs for children and teens

OhioHealth Hospice offers ongoing programs for children and teens through the Community Grief Program, including support groups and individual counseling. A school outreach program is available to provide consultation, education, and grief support for children, teens, parents and school personnel.

About OhioHealth Hospice

OhioHealth Hospice is a comprehensive program of healthcare, counseling and support services designed to meet the needs of terminally ill patients and their families. Together with the patient's doctor, the hospice team works to promote comfort by managing pain and other symptoms while focusing on the emotional, social and spiritual needs of both the patient and the family.

***For more information about the Community Grief Program
or OhioHealth Hospice:***

In Columbus call: (614) 533.6060

In Delaware call: (740) 615.0540

Toll-free: (888) 389.6231

**NEED TO
TALK?**

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Or visit ohiohealth.com.



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