



Understanding Teen Grief – Tips for Parents

Yes, children and teens do grieve and need your understanding and support.

Teen years are already tumultuous years, and the bereaved teen needs special attention. Under ordinary circumstances, teenagers go through many changes in their body image, behavior, attachments and feelings. As they break away from their parents to develop their own identities, conflicts often arise within the family system. Life becomes even more complex when a father, mother friend or other significant person dies -- a shattering experience faced by one child in every ten before the age of eighteen. While people in all age groups struggle with such losses, teenagers face particularly painful adjustments following the death of a loved one.

Do teens grieve like adults? Teens grieve deeply but often work very hard to hide their feelings. Fearing the vulnerability that comes with expression, they look for distractions rather than stay with the grief process long enough to find real relief. Feelings can be turned off quickly, much like flipping a light switch. Teens can act as if nothing has happened while they are breaking up inside. You may observe teens who take on the role of caregiver to family members or friends, in effect denying their own grief. Gender makes no distinctions when it comes to experiencing grief, but the outward signs may be different. Young men of this age may have a particularly hard time when they have been taught that showing emotion is something that girls do but macho guys don't.

Who do teens trust and talk to? Teens often trust only their peers, believing that no one else can understand how they feel and how they react to life's problems. Relationships with friends can be deep and meaningful, sharing conflicts occurring at home and details of their love lives. To gain the trust of teens, adults must become good, nonjudgmental listeners. Let teenagers know that you are interested in them, in their views, in their ideas and thoughts. Let them know that you like and care for them. Support their ideas or gently introduce new ways to approach their ideas. Acknowledge their grief and offer your thoughts of how to ease their pain.

How can WE help your teen? Hospice Georgina offers grief education and support for children and teens available in Georgina schools, in the home, and at our Sutton office. Referrals can be made by family members, guidance or self-referrals.

Ask your guidance counselor for a referral or call Hospice Georgina directly.

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