



How to Help Teenagers Cope with Grief

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Writing/Journaling

Having a teen keep a journal of thoughts and feelings in the aftermath of a death is a wonderful tool for expression. Some teens benefit from writing a letter to the person who died in order to release some of their tough grief feelings.

Reading

Books written specifically for teens can be very helpful in validating and normalizing a teen's grief experience.

Music

Music is a powerful form of communicating, especially for teenagers. Not only can music be an excellent vehicle for bringing feelings and memories to the surface, it also provides a way to help teens relax. What music reminds them of their person who died? What was a favorite song their person liked? If they play a musical instrument, perhaps they can play the musical selection at a special time.

Social Media

Social media plays a very large role in teens' lives. It can be very helpful for teens who are grieving to give them a creative outlet to memorialize their person and to honor their grief. Videos set to music, photos with their person, quotes that resonate with them about grief can easily be shared with others, and they can receive love, encouragement and support for their loss. It also allows teens to connect with others outside of their own local community who are grieving as well.

It is important to note that social media can also be a hurtful place. Sharing can easily open the door for others to leave criticism and comments that are hurtful. The memorial post may not get as many 'likes' as they hoped making them feel invalidated. It is important to talk with teens about the potential downfalls of what we post on social media and be present to support them. In addition, virtual communities should complement in-person community and support, not replace it.

Visible Memorials

An **extremely important** mode of grief expression for teens is through visible memorials. This may take the form of posters, murals, social media pages, items left at the place of death or interment, etc. Teens should be given ample opportunity to express themselves and honor their person in this way, with the understanding that this need may continue for some time.

Keepsakes

Some teenagers cherish items that belonged to the person who died. It is not unusual for them to save clothing, jewelry, toys, locks of hair, photos and other personal items. Such "linking objects" help teens remember the person who died and honor the life that was lived.

Rituals

Teenagers **MUST** be given the opportunity to honor their special person through ritual. This may take the form of an actual memorial service or ceremony, some type of dedication, or perhaps visiting the place of interment. If it is a classmate who has died, it can be very healing to incorporate friends doing something together to honor their friend's life.

* Key Considerations

All too often, adults can be negatively influenced by the cause of death, particularly if the death was suicide or alcohol/drug-related. **It is extremely unhealthy** for teens to be denied adequate outlets for their grief based on how or why the person died. The bottom line is: someone special to them has died - regardless of the circumstances of the death. Adults (i.e., parents, school personnel, etc.) who disallow memorialization are creating an environment of frustration and hostility for the surviving friends. These survivors are left to feel as if they are being punished because of their friend's cause of death. One of the most important things we can teach teenagers is how to **honor life** regardless of how the person died.