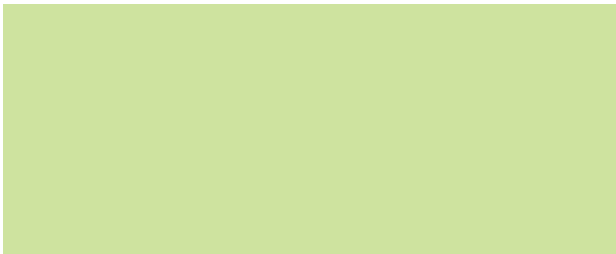
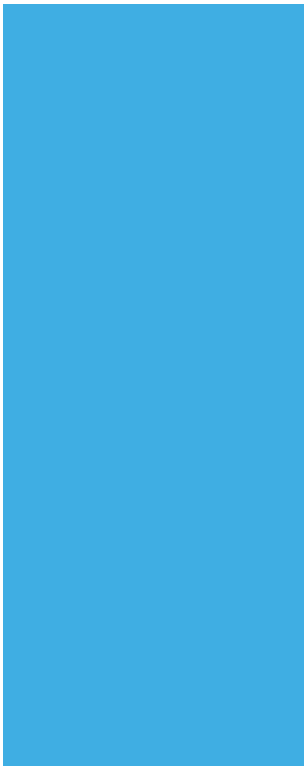


# Understanding Your Own Grief Journey

## Information for Teens



**Grief** is a natural response to love and loss. People who are grieving experience a variety of feelings, sometimes in succession, sometimes at the same time. Some feelings that you might have when you are grieving include:

Helplessness

Sadness

Hopelessness

Guilt

Fear

Confusion

Emptiness

Restlessness

Despair

Irritability

Low motivation

Low energy

Loneliness

Anger

Shock

Inability to concentrate/focus

Increased/decreased appetite &/or sleep



## Some things you may be going through:

- Experiencing many different feelings, sometimes at the same time or even within the same hour. You may feel better one day then sad the next. Grief is full of ups and downs and it will be difficult to predict how you will feel. Sometimes, anniversaries, special dates, or events will remind you of the person who died and the swirl of emotions will occur again.
- Feeling guilty. Sometimes people feel relief right after the death, then feel guilty for feeling relieved. If this happens to you, you might feel embarrassed to talk about your feelings for fear that others will think less of you.
- Feeling let down or alone. Sometimes, when people don't know what to say or do, they don't do anything. You may find yourself feeling angry, disappointed, or frustrated when your friends or family members let you down, usually without meaning to. You may feel alone because no one you know has gone through something like this before and you don't think anyone will understand or accept how you feel.
- Wanting to talk about the person who died and about how he/she died. OR Not wanting to talk.
- Wanting to protect others from grief by not talking about sad memories or the person who died.
- Experiencing lower energy. Grief is hard work! You may not be eating or sleeping well.
- Needing support. You may need or want someone there with you at the funeral or memorial service for comfort or help. You may find that you want to have access to friends or adults who you feel understand you.

# Common Questions:

When someone important to you dies, you may find yourself asking a lot of questions. Here are some questions you may ask and the possible thinking behind them.

## **“Who else will die?”**

You may be concerned about your own safety and security, or fear that you will have to feel all of these feelings again and again.

## **“Who will take care of me?”**

You may be wondering what will happen to you and if you will be okay.

## **“Why?”**

You may be wondering why people die, why this happened to your family or to this person. You may wonder why bad things happen to good people while good things happen to “bad” people.

## **“Is it my fault?”**

You may feel like the death was your fault. Or you may be wondering if you could have done something differently.

## **“Is it my responsibility to take care of the family now?”**

You may be wondering about increases in responsibilities or expectations that can occur when someone has died.

**“Will I always feel like this?”**

**“When will the pain go away?”**

When you are grieving, the emotional pain sometimes feels like it will never go away. With time, you will notice that the pain is not as intense and that you will be able to return to more typical activities. If you find this is not happening for you, let a trusted adult know so that you can get the additional support you need to help you resolve some of your grief experiences.

## **Talking helps!**

You may find that you prefer to confide in peers rather than parents or teachers. Many teenagers avoid talking to family members about their feelings or about the person who died out of concern for them. “Whenever I mention \_\_\_\_ (the person who died), Mom cries. I don’t want her to feel worse, so I just don’t mention him/her”.

Talking to friends who understand and support you is very important. So is having a trusted adult that you confide in, such as a parent, teacher, counselor, neighbor, or relative. Sometimes people do not want to talk, but feel more comfortable expressing themselves through art, music, books, or activities.

# Going Back to School

Going back to school after a death can be very difficult for someone who is grieving. Facing other students, concentrating on work, going through typical routines can present special challenges.

You can help with the transitions by:

- Discussing with the counselors, teachers, or other staff members any special requests you might have about talking with teachers and other students. (What do you want others to know? Do you want to be part of the discussion about what happened?)
- Developing a plan with the counselors or teachers for when you might become upset and unable to remain in the classroom. Include in that plan: Where can you go? How do you communicate the need to go to that place? Who are the people who are willing to talk to you when you become upset at school? How do you communicate to the teacher the need to complete an alternate activity?
- Working out a plan if you have difficulty with your work.
- Working out a plan to handle questions that friends and others might ask.
- Planning for celebrations that might be especially difficult for you such as holidays, birthdays, and anniversary dates.

# Some Things to Remember

***There is no time frame for grieving!*** Grief can come in spurts, feelings can come and go, but each person's grief journey is unique and impacted by other losses and grief experiences that he/she may have had. It may be confusing to have a "good day" and be "back to normal" only to struggle with grief for an extended period of time a little while later. If you feel distressed by this experience, talk with a trusted friend or adult who can support you.

***Commemorations are a personal choice.*** Commemorations are times when people acknowledge or think about the person who died and his/her importance in their lives. Activities can be formal or public events, such as funerals, establishing scholarship funds, memorial events, or charity events. Others can be private, informal, and for only family members or close friends. These can include activities such as planting a special tree, making a memory book, or making a special meal together in memory of the person who died on a special anniversary. You may find that you want to plan and/or participate in a variety of these types of activities.

***Grief can impact life events.*** Holidays, anniversaries, and significant events may be stressful throughout your life. During these times you may observe a return of grief responses. Let your caregivers/support systems know your ideas about what you would like to do to acknowledge these special events, such as planning a special meal, taking a vacation, or spending the day together.

***Grief is grief:*** It can be tempting to judge or evaluate whether your grief is legitimate based on the relationship between you and the person who died. A recent death can stir up thoughts and feelings from a previous death in your life. Additionally, concepts such as "not existing," "forever," "bad things happening to good people" can heighten fear, anxiety, sadness, or anger. If you are having a strong emotional reaction to a death, realize that this is okay, and talk with a trusted friend or adult who can support you.

# Signs that additional assistance/referral is needed

You may:

- is depressed or withdrawn;
- begin or resume cutting;
- show aggression or have frequent emotional outbursts;
- feel that you want to hurt someone else or yourself;
- be experiencing auditory or visual hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that other people don't see or hear);
- be using drugs or alcohol;
- have a preoccupation with or focus on death and dying;
- have experienced multiple losses in a relatively short period of time;
- feel your adult caregiver is overwhelmed by grief and is unable to attend to your grief journey as well.



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