

Helping Teenagers Cope with Grief

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Objectives:

- Identify the leading causes of death to teens
- Identify the range of grief reactions among teens
- Learn how to support teenagers in crisis

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Primary cause of death to older teens (15-19)

- Unintentional injury
- Homicide
- Suicide

(National Center for Health Statistics National Vital Statistics Reports March 7, 2005)

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Adolescent deaths are usually:

- Sudden
- Unexpected
- Traumatic
- Violent

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Think back to your experiences with death during childhood -

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- When and where did it occur?
- How did it affect you?
- What did you see, hear, smell and feel?

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Developmentally, teenagers know that death is:

- Universal
- Irreversible
- Nonfunctional

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Reactions to grief:

- Cognitive
- Psychological
- Physiological
- Behavioral
- Social



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Reassure teenagers that their reactions are normal

- "Adolescents are apt to think that they are the discoverers of deep and powerful feelings and that no one has ever loved as they love."

(Jackson, 1984, p. 42 as cited in Corr, Nabe, & Corr, p. 363)

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Continuing bonds -

- "Remaining connected to the deceased seems to be a necessary part of the bereavement process – that is adaptive and facilitates an accommodation to the death."

(Klass & Rubin, as cited in Silverman, Nickman, & Worden, 1995, p. 261)

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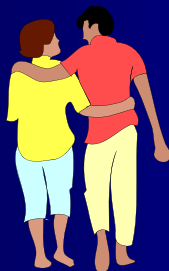
Children maintain a connection to the deceased by:

- Making an effort to locate the deceased
- Actually experiencing the deceased in some way
- Reaching out to initiate a connection
- Remembering
- Keeping something that belonged to the deceased

(Silverman, Nickman, & Worden, 1995, p. 264)

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What helps?



- Emotional Support

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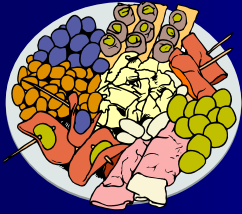
What helps?

- Cognitive Support



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What helps?



■ Material Support

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Youth professionals and volunteers can help by:

- Providing activities that reduce stress (playing music, staying busy or releasing pent-up emotions)
- Encouraging them to develop a personal belief system
- Encouraging them to accept support from adults and friends
- Providing a mutual support group of peers
- Providing friendship and support over time

(Balk, 1991; Balk & Hogan, 1995; Hogan & DeSantis, 1994 as cited in Corr, Nabe & Corr, 1997, p. 363)

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Beneficial outcomes of mourning experiences:

- Having a deeper appreciation of life
- Developing emotional strength
- Enhancing problem-solving skills
- Showing greater caring to loved ones
- Strengthening of emotional bonds with others
- Increasing empathy for others
- Developing better communication skills
(Corr & Balk, 1996, p. 211)

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Summary

- The leading causes of death to teenagers are human induced – accidents, homicide and suicide
- Teenagers may experience a broad range of grief reactions
- Adults can learn how to support teenagers in crisis

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Thanks for participating!

- Please complete the program evaluation.

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