

SAFE kids **HEALTHY** kids
HAPPY kids



Helping Teens Handle Death and Loss

It is natural for parents to want to help a child deal with death and loss. But, what should they say and do?

A parent's role is not to tell teens how they should or should not feel. Parents help by accepting the painful feelings and grief. Teenagers want comfort. They need to understand how they can grow and learn from these difficult times and emotions.

Teens experience grief with many different emotions. Parents provide support when they take time to listen and understand their teen's feelings. It may also be helpful to share their own feelings and experiences.

Shock, disbelief and denial are common—especially when a death is sudden or unexpected. This protects and shields the teen from overwhelming emotions. Teens need time to absorb what has happened. They may say, "It didn't happen" or "It's not true." Support teens by letting them know that it is **hard** to believe that the death or loss has occurred.

Teens commonly express anger at friends, family, doctors, hospitals, God, themselves—even the person who died. With time, this anger will pass.

Quiet time is helpful. Often there are no words that will comfort. It is sometimes better for a parent to just sit with a teen. Listen to their words. Let them cry. *You do not need to say a word.*



Some teens may feel empty and depressed. Parents need to continually watch for signs of depression. It is common for teens to feel sad and empty. However, phrases like "I can't go on without him" may be a cry for help. If you feel your teen is *not* coping with the loss, consult your doctor.

Teenagers often feel the need to talk about the person who died. It helps them to remember and laugh about funny things the person did or said. Parents should ask their teens to share memories of the person who has died. With time, the memories become less painful.

Dates are important to teens: the day of the loss of the loved one, a birthday or special holidays. These dates may also be important times for friends to gather and "be together."

It can take 6 months to a year for a teen to accept death and remember the person with happy thoughts. It may also take 6 months before a teen can actually grieve for the loss of the one they love. Unfortunately, parents cannot shield their teens from experiencing tragedy. Still, they can give them the skills to cope and go on with life.

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.
544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week.