

# SUPPORTING TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS AFTER THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE



Your Life Helper

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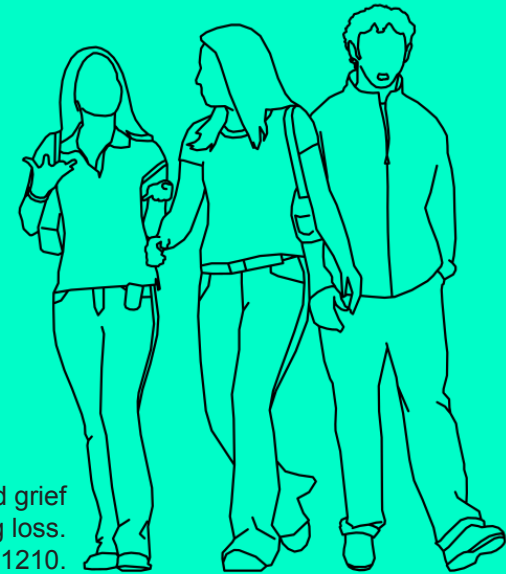
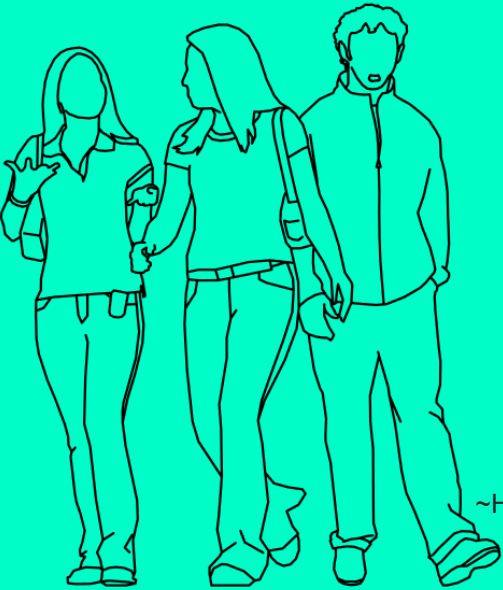
THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION  
WILL HELP SUPPORT TEENS AND  
YOUNG ADULTS AFTER THE DEATH OF  
A LOVED ONE



# A BEST FRIEND

A best friend knows you in a way no one else does. When you're a teen, this connection can be particularly unique and intense.

Between school, texting, and social media, teens are in constant touch with each other. As they work to establish their identity, friends are who teens often talk to about their hopes, fears, dreams, and insecurities.

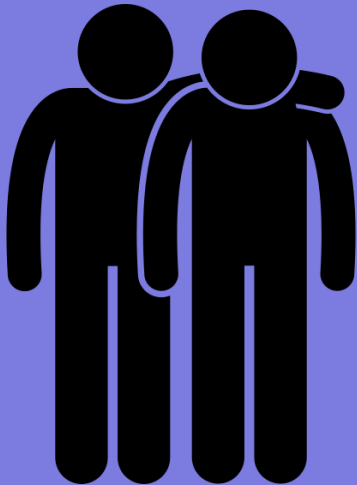


~Herberman Mash, H. B., Fullerton, C. S., & Ursano, R. J. (2013). Complicated grief and bereavement in young adults following close friend and sibling loss. *Depression and anxiety*, 30(12), 1202-1210.

TIPS FOR  
SUPPORTING TEENS  
AFTER THE DEATH OF  
A CLOSE FRIEND



# SUPPORTING TEENS AFTER THE DEATH OF A FRIEND



When a friend who understands you on such a deep level dies, it can be devastating. For many teens, this might be their first experience with grieving someone who is part of their day-to-day life. Because they aren't officially family, teens may feel left out of the rituals and routines surrounding the death. They also may not receive the same support and care as people tend to focus on the immediate family.

As a parent, caregiver, or support person for a teen grieving the death of a close friend, what can you do to help? Grief is different for everyone, so it's difficult to talk in absolutes about what each person needs.

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# TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF



- Self-care is often listed last, almost as an afterthought, but in this situation, it's vital that you attend to your emotional and physical needs. This will enable you to be more present and available for your teen. Even if you didn't really know the person who died, you can find yourself overwhelmed, thinking about what it would be like if your child died, or worrying about the family of the teen who died. Try to eat nourishing food, sleep, move your body as you're able, and reach out to friends and family to talk about how you're affected.

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# BE HONEST AND ANSWER QUESTIONS



- If you're the person who will tell your teen about the death, do so as soon as possible and in direct language. It might sound like, "I have some sad news. Joanna died this morning. She was in a car accident." Your teen is also likely to find out about the death on social media, from friends, or at school. Either way, it's helpful to ask what they know and if they have questions. If there is misinformation circulating, help quell rumors by clarifying what happened. It's OK to not have all the answers. Let your teen know if it's something you can try to find out.

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# LISTEN



- Even if a teen isn't talking much to you about the death, anything you can do to be a good listener is important. As an adult, one of the hardest things is to see your teen in pain. It's understandable that you might want to try and fix it, but when it comes to grief, it's more helpful to just be present. Acknowledge the urge to fix it, and then work to listen without giving advice, dismissing their feelings, or filling the silence with platitudes.

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# EXPECT AND VALIDATE FRUSTRATION OVER HOW OTHER TEENS ARE ACTING.



- It seems almost inevitable that teens will be confused or upset by the outpouring of grief from those who weren't as close to the person who died. Between social media posts and emotional expression at school, your teen might have a strong reaction to these declarations of grief. Validate their feelings and acknowledge your teen's view of their relationship with the friend who died. After validating and acknowledging, you can also offer ideas for why other teens could be so affected. We never know someone's past, and this death might be sparking grief for them related to other losses. Knowing there are possible reasons for these reactions can help alleviate some of your teen's frustration.

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# TALK ABOUT THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA.

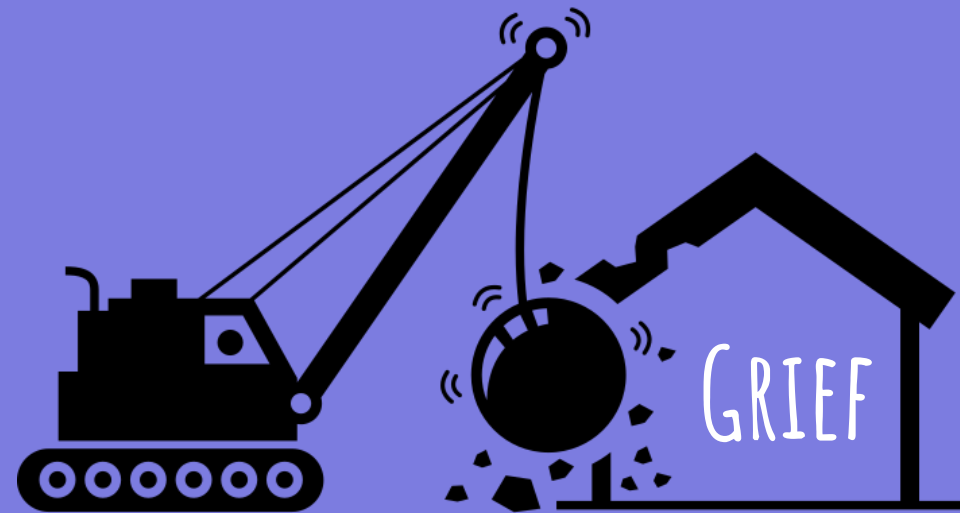


- Teens often turn to social media to connect with others and express their thoughts and emotions about their friend who died. Social media isn't inherently good or bad when it comes to grief, but it's helpful to discuss how your teen could be affected. As perplexing as it is, there are times when people will say hurtful or untrue things about the teen who died and those who love them. Teens often post about their feelings with the hope they'll receive supportive comments. Sometimes it's an effective strategy, and other times the response won't feel as helpful or understanding as your teen wished. If this happens, talk with your teen about what words and sentiments do meet their needs and strategize how they can ask for and access that type of support.

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# DISMANTLE STEREOTYPES ABOUT GRIEF

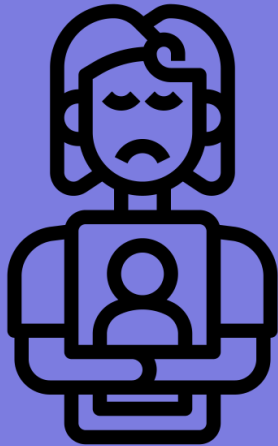


- Many teens (and adults too) struggle with what grief is supposed to look or feel like. Reassure your teen that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. It's different for everyone and will change over time. Most people expect to be overcome with tears and sadness. Sometimes that's true, but not always and not for everyone.
- Teens can also feel anger, numbness, confusion, relief, or something else entirely. Grief is more than just emotions. It affects us physically (tired, wired, headaches), cognitively (hard to focus, spinning thoughts, compromised memory), and spiritually (Why me? Why my friend? How could something like this happen?).

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# REMEMBER GRIEF IS ONGOING.



- The influx of support and acknowledgment that occurs immediately after the death tends to fall away pretty quickly. As soon as a week after a death, some teens encounter pressure to move on or get over their grief from teachers, friends, and others who want them to get back to how they were before the death. Checking in with teens over the long term provides reassurance that their grief and their friend are not forgotten and gives them permission to grieve as long as they need.

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# THE GRIEVING PROCESS: COPING WITH DEATH



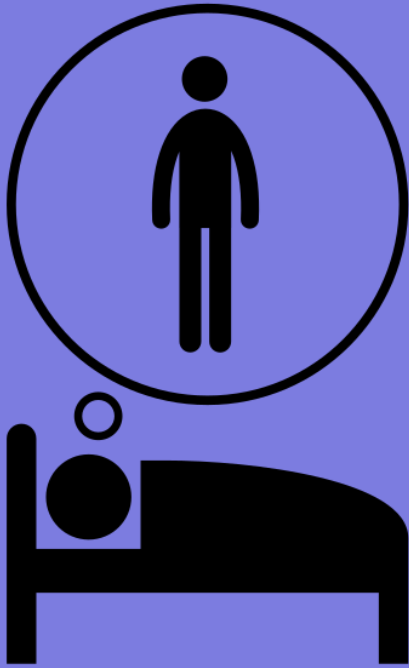
## Wellcast

On WellCast, we're dealing with a very difficult subject. How do you deal with the death of a loved one? How do you live your life in the face of a life-changing event? We don't have all the answers. Honestly, you'll need to work through your through the stages of grieving in a way that works for you. But we do have some advice to help you heal.

THOUGHTS AND  
BEHAVIORS OF THE  
GRIEVING YOUNG  
ADULT



# DREAMS OF THE DECEASED



- Will mom/dad/family be okay?
- Will I be next? Concern for own mortality.
- Retells events of the deceased's illness and death.
- Maybe I should move back home—they need me to take care of them now.
- Will I have to drop out of school or quit my job?
- Dreams of the deceased.
- Feels as though the deceased is with them in some way.
- Now I won't get to know mom/dad/brother/sister as an adult, grow old together.
- Who am I without my loved one in my life?

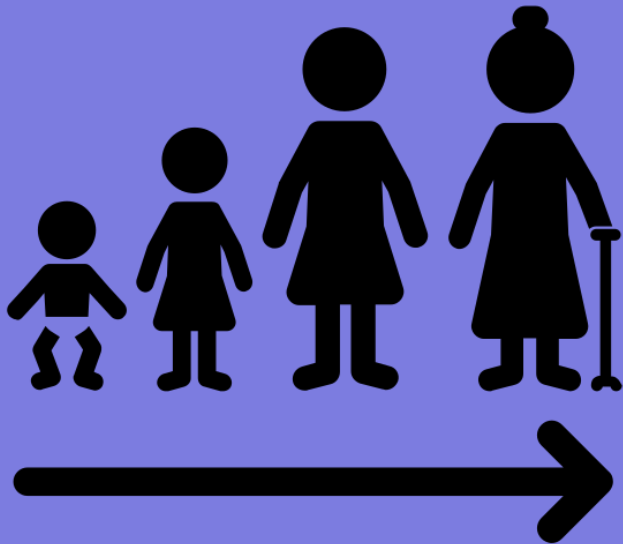
# WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP WILL I HAVE WITH SURVIVING FAMILY MEMBERS?



- May seek out someone who has experienced death and form a relationship.
- I feel so alone.
- What kind of relationship will I have with surviving family members?
- I don't feel connected, can't go home—it's not the same.
- I can't concentrate—can't make classes or go to work.
- Bursts into tears and retreats.
- May present without emotion regarding the loss.
- I feel angry, guilty, hopeless (or any of the grief reactions).
- I miss their phone calls, emails, snail-mail, and communication.



# I'M NOT READY TO GROW UP, TO BE THE NEXT GENERATION.



- I miss their support and encouragement.
- I'm not ready to grow up, to be the next generation.
- We were best friends, now we won't share in life rituals and passages, marriage, family rearing, career, etc.
- I can't ask for help. I don't want them to worry about me.
- I feel numb.
- I feel unable to carry on with normal activities.

# GRIEF OUT LOUD: TEENS TALK ABOUT LOSS



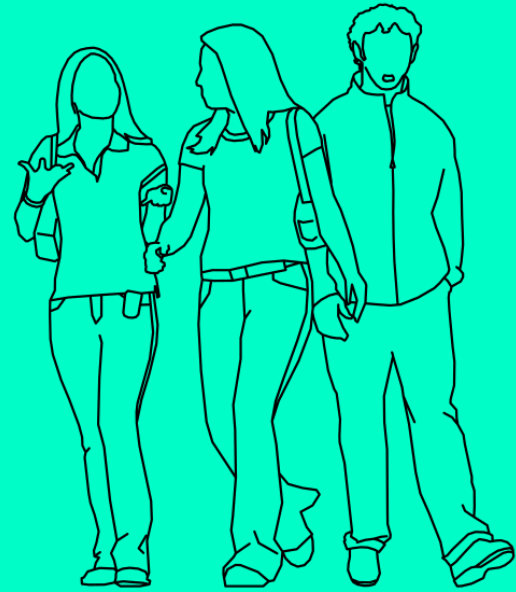
## [Hospice of the Chesapeake](#)

This video was made for Hospice of the Chesapeake as an educational piece to start the conversation about grief with teens. Funded by a grant from TransAmerica, the film was created by Sugar Farm Productions and Kat Korbela, an Annapolis High School Performing and Visual Arts Magnet Program video intern.

IF YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW  
IS GRIEVING AND WOULD LIKE  
MORE RESOURCES OR TALK TO  
SOMEONE, PLEASE USE THE  
CONTACT INFORMATION BELOW  
TO REACH BOARD CERTIFIED  
COACH MELISSA JAMES.



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