



SUPPORTING YOUR GRIEVING TEEN

OLENTANGY LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief: our internal reactions and responses to a loss (thoughts and feelings)—not something we “get over” but “live with”

Mourning: the outward expression of grief; how we show our thoughts/feelings

Healing involves mourning the loss

Trauma Reaction: a normal response to an abnormal event

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is natural. Grief is unique to each person. Grief is life long, but softens over time. Grief can come and go like waves in the ocean; it can seem like we are on a roller coaster. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Our own experiences with grief and loss can affect our conversations with our children.

Grief affects teens:

1. Emotionally
2. Physically
3. Socially
4. Cognitively
5. Behaviorally
6. Spiritually



TASKS OF GRIEF/6 NEEDS OF MOURNING

Tasks of Grief:

Understanding – that the person is no longer alive; telling the story in your own words

Grieving - Experiencing and expressing the feelings of grief

Commemorating the life of the person who died; remembering and having rituals

Moving forward, while still honoring your loved one. Not forgetting or getting over. Adjusting to the change.

6 Needs of Mourning:

1. Acknowledge the reality of the death.
2. Allow yourself to feel the pain of the loss.
3. Remember the person who died.
4. Develop a new self-identity.
5. Search for meaning.
6. Allow others to help, now and always. Receive on-going support from adults.

COMMON FEELINGS AND RESPONSES TO GRIEF

Typical development:

- Navigating their own identity and feelings of independence from parents/caregivers. Need to fit in, social acceptance by peers.
- Dealing with puberty and changes in their physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Brain and cognitive reasoning still developing.
- A more “Adult” approach to death, ability to conceptualize death and try to make sense or find meaning, while still having a sense of invincibility of their own mortality.

Grief responses:

- Emotional: shock, disbelief, numbness, fear, confusion; bury/hide feelings of grief and sadness, may come out as anger, loneliness, and frustration. Don't want to be seen as different from peers.
- Physical: sleep disturbances, appetite changes, fatigue. Symptoms may mirror anxiety, depression.

COMMON FEELINGS AND RESPONSES TO GRIEF: CONTINUED

Grief responses:

- Social: more engaged with friends and multiple activities to distract from the pain of grief. **OR** isolation and withdrawal from friends and family. Anger and frustration with the grief may turn towards others close to them, lashing out.
- Cognitive: lack of concentration and focus, short term memory, declining grades, apathy.
- Behavioral: risk taking behavior, lack of interest in activities, testing rules, aggressive toward self or others. **OR** more engaged and feeling like they have to step up and into the shoes of friend or family member.
- Spiritual: question meaning of the death, question faith. Anger toward God or higher being/power. Why would someone good be taken from us?



COMPLICATIONS

- Sudden and unanticipated
 - no opportunity to say good-bye
 - questions about circumstances
 - blame; question if death could have been prevented
- Traumatic death
(homicide, suicide, fire, accident)
- Changes in family or friend support
- Multiple losses
- COVID-19 – normal routines have been interrupted, grieving other losses, illness, mourning rituals may not occur, decreased social support/physical contact



TRAUMA

- Adolescents may show signs of traumatic stress when they have been exposed to fearful situations, believed they could have been injured, witnessed violence, or tragically lost a friend or family member.
- The impact on any given young person depends partly on the objective danger, partly on his or her subjective reaction to the events, and partly on his/her age and developmental level.
- An event is traumatic if the individual “perceives” it as traumatic.
- It’s natural to feel vulnerable, unsafe, and anxious after a traumatic event. The nervous system is signaling to the brain that something bad could happen again and that the world is not a safe place. The brain will react with freeze, fight, or flight response.

TRAUMA, CONTINUED

- “Trauma” refers to intense feelings of shock, fear, anxiety and helplessness. Trauma is caused by events of such intensity or magnitude of horror that they overwhelm an individual’s ability to cope.
- Emotional or psychological trauma is the result of stressful events that shatters an individual’s sense of security, making him/her feel helpless and vulnerable.
- The death of someone loved always causes painful feelings. But when there is a sudden, violent death, we have an especially difficult time acknowledging and absorbing the circumstances of the death itself.
- Any traumatic experience can impact learning, behavior, and relationships.

GRIEF VS TRAUMA

Grief = Sadness	Trauma = Terror
Generalized reaction is SADNESS	Generalized reaction is TERROR
Grief reactions stand ALONE	Trauma reactions generally include grief reactions
Known to the public and professionals	Largely unknown (esp. in children)
Does not disfigure identity	Attacks and distorts identity
Guilt says, I wish I would have...	Guilt says, It was my fault
Dreams of person who died, was hurt	Dreams of self dying, being hurt
Pain is related to the loss	Pain is related to tremendous terror and sense of powerlessness, fear and loss of safety
Anger is NOT destructive	Anger is assaultive (even if non-violent trauma)

HOW TO HELP

Provide a safe, secure, structured environment for conversation.

Avoid statements such as “I understand just how you feel,” “time will heal,” or “you will be okay.”

Ask **what** they are feeling and thinking, be present. Provide support by listening to questions, concerns, worries and feelings. Allow your child to tell their story without trying to “fix” them or the situation. Validate and normalize their feelings and reactions.

Share/model your own reactions and feelings.

Understand that your teen may or may NOT want to talk about the death or traumatic event. But, continue to check in and ask them what they are feeling and thinking, even over the course of weeks and months.

Encourage outlets for emotional expression: art, music, writing, physical activity, prayer service.

HOW TO HELP, CONTINUED

Be aware of potential triggers to their grief and trauma; i.e. community events, books, video games, shows, violence in the news. Suggest that they limit their exposure to social media for a while.

Recognize that their own physical reactions to their grief may be scary. Encourage him/her to use strategies such as focused breathing, stretching, or physical activity to regulate these physical responses.

There are many good apps to help teens manage feelings of stress and anxiety. Shine; MyLife Meditation; Insight Timer; and Calm. While these apps can help teach teens self-care, they are not meant to replace mental health counseling or check ups with your child's pediatrician.

Suggest positive ways to commemorate, remember, and honor the life of their friend or family member.

COMMEMORATIVE IDEAS:

Give back to others in their honor: volunteer; donate a gift; participate in a walk or run in their name or for a cause

Light a candle during a meal; place flowers on the table

Have a moment of silence; say a prayer or poem; share memories

Make a memory ornament or candle; add notes or memories to a stocking or gift box

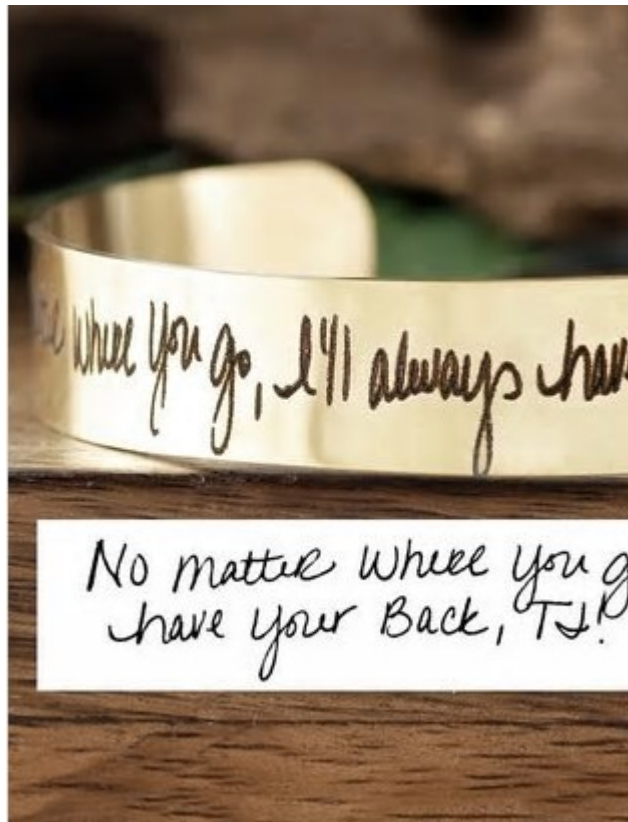
Go to the cemetery

Take a walk in their favorite park

Have their favorite foods; do their favorite activities; watch one of their favorite shows or movies

Look at photos; create a photo album or scrapbook; create an on-line “wordle”

COMMEMORATING



HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

Listen to music

Play music; sing; write lyrics

Journal, write poetry or stories

Draw, paint, color

Talk to a friend, family member, counselor, trusted adult

Go for a walk or run

Get fresh air

Work out

Practice meditation, mindfulness; find virtual programs and apps

Yoga

Dance

Read

Spend time with friends and family

Play games

Join a grief support group at school; in-person or virtual

BOOK AND WORKBOOK LIST

Companionship the Grieving Child. A Soulful Guide for Caregivers. Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. Companion Press, The Center for Loss and Life Transition. 2012.

Finding the Words: How to talk with children and teens about death, suicide, funerals, homicide, cremation, and other end-of-life matters. Alan D. Wolfelt. Companion Press, 2013.

Healing a Teen's Grieving Heart, 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends and Caregivers. Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. Companion Press, The Center for Loss and Life Transition, 2001.

Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas, simple tips for understanding and expressing your grief. By Alan D. Wolfelt, Companion Press, 2001.

The Healing Your Grieving Heart Journal for Teens. By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD., and Megan E. Wolfelt. Companion Press, The Center for Loss and Life Transition, 2002

Memories; Teen Journal. Cheryll Hill-Kippen

Reactions, a workbook to help young people who are experiencing trauma and grief. By Alison Salloum, BCSW, A Centering Corporation Resource, 1998.

BOOK AND WORKBOOK LIST

Weird is Normal When Teenagers Grieve. Jenny Lee Wheeler. Quality of Life Publishing Co., 2010.

Memories Matter: Activities for Grieving Children and Teens. The Dougy Center, The National Center for Grieving Children and Families, 2012.

Fire in my Heart, Ice in My Veins: A Journal for Teenagers Experiencing a Loss. Enid Samuel Traisman.

Reactions, a workbook to help young people who are experiencing trauma and grief. By Alison Salloum, BCSW, A Centering Corporation Resource, 1998.

Out of the Shadows, A Journal for teens who have someone they love complete suicide. Emilio Parga. Solace Tree, 2010.

I Will Never Forget You: A Teen Journal of Love and Remembrance. By Emilio Parga. The Solace Tree, 2008.

We Get It: Voices of Grieving College Students and Young Adults. Heather L. Servaty-Seib and David Fajgenbaum. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2015.

HELPFUL RESOURCES/LINKS TO WEBSITES

National Alliance for Grieving Children: <https://childrengrieve.org/>

The Dougy Center (Grief Out Loud: Teens Talk about Loss): <https://www.dougy.org/>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: www.NCTSN.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

<https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/tools-learning-resources/coping-traumatic-events-resources>

Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt, Center for Loss and Life Transition: www.centerforloss.com

Starr Commonwealth: <https://starr.org/product-category/books/>

Compassion Books: www.compassionbooks.com

Centering Corporation: www.centering.org

HELPFUL RESOURCES/LINKS TO WEBSITES, CONTINUED

Speaking Grief: <https://www.speakinggrief.org/>

What's Your Grief: <https://whatsyourgrief.com/>

It's OK to Not Be Ok, Megan Devine: <https://refugeingrief.com/>

Option B, Sheryl Sandberg: <https://optionb.org/>

Nationwide Children's Hospital Behavioral Health:
<https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/specialties/behavioral-health>

Franklin County Suicide Prevention Coalition: <https://franklincountyspc.org/>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org

LOSS (Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors) Community Services: <https://losscs.org/>

QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training

Mental Health America of Ohio: <https://mhaohio.org/>

CONTACT INFORMATION

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