



## Helping Adolescents Cope After a Traumatic Event

Teenage years are challenging times for adolescents, as they are experiencing so many changes in their bodies. They also struggle with seeking more independence from their parents, and usually believe that nothing can harm them. Accordingly, traumatic events can make them feel confused and disoriented, even if they pretend to be tough. Every age group experience different reactions to traumatic events, teenagers will usually experience:

- |                                       |                                    |                                     |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| → Avoidance of feelings               | → Mood swings/irritability         | → Low mood                          |
| → Constant rumination about the event | → Decrease in academic performance | → Decrease in appetite and/or sleep |
| → Anger                               | → Social isolation                 | → Risky behaviors                   |

In order to help your teen cope after a traumatic event, there are few strategies you can adopt:

### 1) Make your teen feel safe again.

Teens do not like to show weakness; they might not be doing well even if they show otherwise. Increasing physical touch enhances the feeling of safety, even if they resist it in the beginning.

### 2) Help teens feel helpful.

Give them small tasks and responsibilities in the house, then praise them for what they have done and how they have handled themselves.

Avoid overwhelming them with too many responsibilities, as that might increase their anxiety.

### 3) Be open for discussion.

It is very common for adolescents to avoid discussions as they do not feel comfortable. To do so, try to engage in a conversation while doing an activity together (e.g. cooking, playing a game). This allows the discussion to not feel too intense.

### 4) Be open to peer support.

Most teenagers do not feel comfortable discussing sensitive matters with their

parents. However, they might be more open to discussion with relatives or close family friends.

### 5) Stay calm

After a traumatic event has happened, children and teenagers tend to look at their parents for reassurance. It is crucial to not share your fears with your teen, as well as when they are around. In fact, they tend to notice such details.

## Example: How to help adolescents cope with the loss of a loved one

1 Adolescents usually are scared to talk about their feelings towards death. Accordingly, encouraging them to talk by starting a conversation such as “I know it is difficult that grandpa passed away. It’s always been recommended to share our feelings. How are you feeling?”

2 Most teenagers are curious, and this will show during difficult times such as losing a loved one. You might find your teen having many questions about death. It is recommended to always

answer their questions without giving additional information. Moreover, it has been shown that referring to God is very effective in helping both teenagers and parents during grief.

3 During these tough times, It is okay to have more flexibility with rules, academic and behavioral expectations. Also, it is a must to inform the school what your teen is going through in order for him/her to get support from their teachers.



## References

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