



Core Principles of Teen Grief

Grief is a natural response.

Grief is the body and mind's way of responding to the death of someone important. Even though it is a normal part of life, it often feels anything but normal. Teens may feel out of control, confused, or overwhelmed by emotions, thoughts, and physical reactions. Recognizing that these responses are part of grief can help teens begin to understand and work through their experience.

Every teen's grief is unique.

No two grief journeys look alike. Each teen will experience their own mix of feelings, thoughts, and needs over time. There is no single "right way" or "wrong way" to grieve, and comparison to others' experiences can feel invalidating.

Healthy coping makes a difference.

While grief doesn't follow rules or a set timeline, some ways of coping are more supportive and constructive than others. Encouraging healthy outlets such as talking with trusted people, creative expression, movement, or rest can help teens navigate their grief. In contrast, self-destructive or harmful behaviors may create longer-term challenges.

Every death is different.

How a teen grieves is influenced by who died, their relationship with that person, and their own personality, culture, and support system. The loss of a parent, sibling, friend, or classmate may each bring up different emotions and challenges. Because peer connections are especially important in adolescence, tensions may sometimes arise within families. Teens may shift between reactions quickly from sadness to anger to laughter to numbness and all these responses are part of coping.

Grief is a lifelong process.

Grief doesn't have an end point, but it does change over time. Intensity may soften, and the ways grief shows up can evolve. Teens may move between remembering their person and re-engaging in daily life, often learning how to carry grief while still finding meaning and joy. Grief is not an illness to "get over" but a natural, ongoing process that becomes part of their life story.

Adapted from resources by The Dougy Center and other current best practices in supporting grieving youth.