

Talking OutLOUD

Teens & Suicide Loss: A Conversation

Companion Materials

COMMON REACTIONS OF GRIEVING TEENS

- Loss of appetite, sleeplessness or troubling dreams.
- Mood changes over the slightest things.
- Anger and lashing out, sometimes at any time for no apparent reason.
- Unexpected outbursts or crying.
- Guilt over something said or done, or something left unsaid or undone.
- Intense anger at the deceased for dying, often followed by feelings of guilt for being angry.
- Feelings of restlessness and difficulty concentrating.
- Numbness. Not feeling much of anything.
- A feeling that the loss isn't real and didn't happen at all.
- Sensing the deceased's presence, expecting the deceased to walk through the door at the usual time, hearing his or her voice, or a sensation of seeing the deceased out of the corner of their eye. Talking to pictures or conversing with the deceased in a special place.
- Assuming mannerisms, traits, or wearing clothes that were favorites of the deceased.
- A need to retell and remember things about their loved one, to a point of repetition that becomes a burden to others.
- An inability to say anything about their loved one or their loss at all.
- The need to be overly responsible and take on the role of the "man" or "woman" of the household (distracting themselves from their own feelings by taking care of everyone else).



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FIVE WAYS TO SUPPORT GRIEVING TEENS

- Check in with them, let them know that you're there for them no matter what, and that you want to hear how they are feeling if/when they want to share it with you.
- Realize that they may not share all the grief work they are doing, but that doesn't mean they aren't doing it. Sometimes they may not want to share their emotions with you, other times they will - lean in and lean out. When they do share, validate the emotions they're experiencing by saying something like, "I understand," "that sounds really hard," or "that makes sense."
- Remember that adolescence means independence. Needing space and time on their own is a normal part of growing up. Give them space when they ask for it. Try not to take over and tell them what to do. And try to avoid power struggles. As difficult as it can be in the moment, empathize with their desire to assert control in a scary time, rather than attempting to fight back or overpower it.
- Be honest and transparent: let them know you are also experiencing extra stress. Showing them that you're dealing with your own difficult feelings helps them know their feelings are okay.
- Care for yourself. You have a lot to deal with. Showing self-care is also a good way of modeling the practice to your teen.



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REFLECTION QUESTIONS/JOURNALING PROMPTS

For Teens

- What have your parent(s) and other adults in your life gotten right about helping you cope?
- What do you wish they'd do differently?
- What would you like them to understand about how you're dealing with your loss?
- If they're worried about you, do they actually have reason to be? Why/why not?
- If you could ask them for something to help you cope, what would you ask for?

For Parents

- How could you let your teen know about the film while still giving them the space to make their own choice about whether and when to watch it?
- What's been trickiest about supporting your teen?
- What's your biggest fear about your teen and how can you get support around it?

For Everyone

- What feelings did you have as you watched the film?
- Did you particularly connect with any of the teens or adults in the film?
- Did you hear anything that surprised you? Anything that was familiar?
- Was there a moment you found especially compelling or interesting?
- What did you learn that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?



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