

Teens (13+ years old)

Understanding of Death

Most teens understand death. Many have experienced the death of a pet or loved one. It is normal for teens to think of themselves first. *“How does this death affect me? What will my friends think?”* Teens also engage in abstract thought. They may have questions about what happens after death.

How to Help a Teen

Support teens by being honest. Include them in family discussions. Be honest about your own emotions. Share your beliefs about death. Some teens may find comfort by helping others. But they should not be asked to take over adult roles. Some teens may turn to peers for comfort instead of family. Be patient. Respect their feelings.

Be flexible with their schedule. You may see some changes in behavior. Be patient. Make sure that your teen eats regular meals and gets plenty of sleep. Recognize the role grief plays in behavior and decision making. Talk to the counselor at school. Ask them to help support your teen. When the school is aware of what is happening, they can help. It also helps them to understand the context of any behavior changes.

Play is an important part of grieving, even for teens. They grieve in waves. They will feel sadness and other intense emotions. In between, there are normal daily activities. These may include going to school, sports, being on their phones, or spending time with friends. This pattern is normal and healthy.

Signs of Poor Coping

Grieving teens may have some changes in eating and sleeping patterns. This is normal. If the changes last for more than a few days, call their doctor. Keep an eye out for risky behaviors. These can be signs of poor coping. Take any comments about hurting themselves or others seriously.



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Memory Making & Keepsakes

These are personal items that teens can hold. They help teens feel closer to the person who died.



- Special items – Offer your teen a keepsake that belonged to their loved one. This might be a pillow, sweater, watch, jewelry, etc.
- Arts and crafts made with their loved one’s fingerprints or lock of hair.
- Letters from a loved one – If there is time, a loved one can create messages for the future. For example “a letter for my daughter’s graduation.” Or “a video for my brother’s wedding.” These can be done as letters or drawings. Videos are good, too.
- Photos – Make a book with photos of their loved one.

Resources

The Next Place by Warren Hanson

This book has comforting words and beautiful artwork.

Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins: a Journal for Young Adults and Teenagers by Enid Traisman

This journal helps teens express their emotions. Teens can write and draw in the journal.

Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers by Earl Grollman

This book talks about emotions and thoughts teens may have after someone dies. Each topic is a single page. Teens can skip around to pages that interest them.

Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens by Alan Wolfelt

This book offers 100 ideas to help with grief.

Websites:

- www.centerforloss.com
- www.dougy.org
- www.toodamnyoung.com
- www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/bereavement

