

What Do I Do When Someone I Love Dies?

(Adolescent Grief)

What is grieving?

Grieving is the process of dealing with a loss in our life. There are many types of losses. Illness, divorce or breaking up with a friend are all losses. The greatest loss may be the death of someone you love, such as:

- A parent or grandparent.
- A sibling.
- An aunt, uncle or other family member.
- A friend.
- A pet.

Am I alone in grieving?

You may feel very alone after the death of a loved one. Remember that you are surrounded by friends and family who are going through the loss. Many people deal with the loss of a loved one, but each experience is unique.

What is it like? What will I feel?

Everyone grieves in a different way. Your feelings may depend on how close you were with the person who died. How they died may also affect how you feel. Grief may bring many mixed emotions. The feelings may change over time. You may have different stages of grieving. You may have feelings of denial, anger, depression, bargaining or acceptance. These feelings may come and go in any order.

Your loved one's death may make you afraid of dying. It may feel like you are in a bad dream. If your loved one suffered, you may even feel relieved by their death.



I feel guilty because I have bad thoughts about my loved one.

When someone dies, people often focus only on their positive qualities. Your relationship was a very human one, full of ups and downs. Many teens feel guilty about arguments they had with their loved one, especially after their death. They may also feel angry at their loved ones for dying. It is important to remember that you did love them, but they were not perfect. These emotions are common, healthy, and a normal part of the grieving process.

Why is everyone crying but me?

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Some people cry a lot while others never cry. Some teens are more open while others are private with their emotions. Either way, your feelings of loss can be intense.

How will I survive the loss?

When you are grieving, it is important to stay healthy and take time for yourself. People who are grieving often have:

- Low energy.
- A hard time sleeping or have nightmares.
- A poor appetite.
- A hard time concentrating.

Be gentle with yourself during this time. Be sure to get plenty of time to sleep, eat healthy food, get regular exercise, and take time for your hobbies.

Some teens try to numb the pain of their loss. Some may try to do too much schoolwork, club activities or hobbies. They may turn to drugs, alcohol or sex. These things might help delay the pain of grief for a while. No matter what you do, you will still grieve. Some behaviors can put you at risk for a great deal of harm. If you find yourself drawn to these behaviors, talk to a loved one or a health provider to find other ways to cope with your pain.

Find a local support group where teens that have also experienced loss meet. It might help you cope. You can also talk to a pastor, guidance counselor, therapist or other trusted adult.

What will other people think?

- People want to support you, but often don't know how. Friends may feel awkward and uncomfortable. They may not know what to say, especially if they never lost a loved one.
- Some people may say hurtful things without meaning to. They may say things like, "You're the man (or woman) of the house now," as if you could take the place of a lost parent.
- Remember that people do care. Sometimes they just have no idea how to support you.
- Be honest and direct with people about how they can help you. Tell them if you could use a hug, someone to listen, or even just to sit with you in silence. Most people will do whatever they can. You just need to let them know how they can help.

How do I remember the person I love?

Your grief is a sign of the love you felt. People who you love make strong, life-long impacts on you. This will most likely not go away when they die. Remember them by making a collage or scrapbook about them. Read a poem or listen to their favorite songs. You can get involved in the activities they liked or join a special advocacy group. Other common ways teens remember loved ones, include starting a scholarship or planting a tree. Birthdays and holidays can re-trigger intense grief. On those days, schedule quiet time to reflect or have a "fun" day to celebrate the life you shared with them.

What if it is something more serious?

It is common to feel lonely, helpless, scared and guilty during grieving. It is possible that you may also be depressed. If these feelings last for several months or you start feeling like life isn't worth living you should get help. If your grief continues to greatly impact you in school, at work, or with friends or family, it is important to talk to a health care provider.

ALERT: Call your child's healthcare provider or clinic staff if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.