

What can I do to support a teenager who is grieving?

- Make a memory box. Put together a box of significant items relating to the person they have lost (photographs, drawings and mementoes). This could provide a huge source of comfort to the young person. A mood diary/ journal, poem or artwork may allow a young person to express their grief creatively and independently.
- The thought of going to the funeral might be overwhelming, especially if they haven't been to one before. It might help to talk to friends and relatives about what happens at a funeral so that the young person feels more prepared. Remember, whether they choose to go or not, it is up to them. They may also want to help with funeral arrangements and other commemorative events.
- Following the funeral the young person may want to visit the grave, independently or with others.
- As a preventative measure, the PSHCE curriculum can be used to explore bereavement and grief. This will need to be done in a sensitive manner as there may be children who are vulnerable.
- There is no prescribed time for a student to be absent from school. Immediately after their loss, the prospect of them coming back to school may seem difficult to comprehend. On the other hand, they may wish to return so that they can experience normality. Each student will have their own, unique way of grieving and this should be taken into consideration, so that they do not feel pressured to return until they are ready.

Understand that their grief is important. Teenagers might feel ignored and unvalued as the needs of younger children and other relatives take over. Be sure to let them know that their grief matters as much as anyone's and that you are there to listen if they need it.

Respect their way of grieving. Unless their behaviour becomes self-destructive or dangerous, try to let them grieve in the best way for them. If they need time alone, don't force them to be around people. If they enjoy being around friends, don't stop them from socialising.

Be patient. They may reject your first attempts at getting them to grieve openly. They might never open up to you about their feelings, but knowing that they can if they need to is important.

Let them know you will look after them. Although they would never admit it, teenagers still want to know that there is someone to take care of them, someone to turn to if they need help. Even if you don't tell them this directly, by offering practical support you will let them know that you are there to care for them.

Try to boost their self-esteem. One side effect of grief in teens is a feeling of low self-worth. Try to do activities with them that they are good at, or praise them when they do something well, to let them know that they are valued and loved.

Maintain boundaries and discipline. Some teens can begin acting out in response to grief. You should take it into consideration that they are grieving. For example, you may forgive them coming home slightly late, or falling behind on their chores. However, you should try to not let major rule-breaking or dangerous behaviour be ignored, particularly if their safety is at risk.

Sometimes a bereaved young person may become involved in risky behaviours in an attempt to manage their grief and its associated emotion, by using alcohol and/ or drugs as a way of self-soothing. Self-harming can also be employed by bereaved young people in an attempt to help them cope with their sadness.

Telford and Wrekin Educational
Psychology Service

Grief, Loss and Bereavement

For ages 13-18

A guide for parents and school staff who are supporting children aged 13 to 18 experiencing grief, loss and bereavement.



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Understanding Grief, Loss and Bereavement

Grief is the process and the range of emotions we go through as we gradually adjust to loss. Loss can arise in many forms which may generate grief.

Examples of loss include: parental separation, incarceration of a family member, death of someone close or a pet, breakdown of a friendship or relationship.

It is important to note that grief is normal and natural.

Symptoms can include shock, numbness, despair, intense sadness, guilt, depression, relief, fear and anger.

"Children and young people mature at different rates and their understanding and responses to bereavement are likely to be based as much on their experience of life as their chronological age. The age categories given are guidelines only and it is important to realise that responses do vary and occur at other ages" (Monroe, 1993; Monroe & Kraus 1996.)

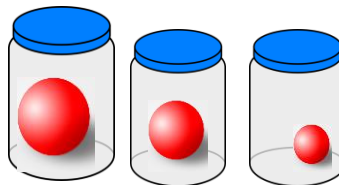
Remember, teens often feel more comfortable talking to people of their own age and they may choose to open up to a friend rather than you. Don't take this personally. They have to grieve in the way that is best for them. .

| Age | What death means | Possible reactions |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Young people (13-18 years) | Those within this age group generally understand that death/ loss is permanent however they may use denial to help them cope with the finality of bereavement- it can't/ hasn't happened. | <p>Young people may become withdrawn/ depressed and sad.</p> <p>They may socially isolate themselves.</p> <p>They may respond with anger and rejection, or with jokes and sarcasm.</p> <p>They may become dependent again, or regress to behaviors they have long ago grown out of.</p> <p>They may experience insecurity and low self esteem which can lead to bullying in school and difficulties coping with school work.</p> |

The Grieving Process (Barbara Monroe adapted Tonkin's model Growing Around Grief, 1996)

Barbara Monroe adapted Tonkin's *growing around grief model* by presenting three different sized glass jars to represent us as a person. Inside each jar she placed a ball to represent our grief. You will notice that although the grief doesn't get any smaller, we simply adjust and adapt our lives around the grief to cope and manage.

'No-one wants their grief to shrink. It's all they have left of the person who died. But if your world gets larger, then you can keep your grief as it is, but work around it'



Further Support

- Your child's school may have a trained ELSA that can support your child while at school in a 1:1 setting.
- Hope Again
<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>
- Child Bereavement UK
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/0800 028 8840>
- Mind UK
<https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- Looking after/ supporting a bereaved teen could be emotionally challenging for you, especially if you are grieving also. It is important that you take time for yourself and if you need to talk to a friend, family member or professional such as your GP or CAHMS.
- If you believe that the young person is suffering from anxiety/ depression and/ or is self-harming, professional help should be sought.

EPS Contact

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