



WAYS TO SUPPORT GRIEVING ADOLESCENTS

- Teenagers need the truth – if they don't get it from the adults around them, they will piece it together in other ways, often ending in misinformation.
- Find a way to remember and say goodbye. Go to a memorial service, send a card to the family, or other activities which help the adolescent gain a sense of mastery and control in this situation.
- Allow opportunities for peers to process the experience together – to discuss their own grief experiences, fears, concerns and questions about death and dying.
- Encourage the adolescent to engage in fun, positive, distracting activities.
- Newly bereaved students may have difficulty with school work following a death. Some experience short term difficulties with concentration, memory, low energy, fatigue, all of which impact performance. In contrast, some bereaved adolescents absorb themselves in school work and activities. In the weeks and months after a death, communicate with the student on a regular basis about assignments, and make a plan with specific and flexible goals for work completion.
- Be a good listener, without offering advice or judgement. Avoid statements such as, "I know how you feel" or "you'll get over it".
- Provide safe places for grieving. Work with the adolescent to decide how breaks could occur during the day if needed.
- Be sensitive to grief "triggers". Triggers can be anything from hearing a song, seeing someone who reminds them of the deceased, or certain times of the year. Allow the student some private time or be a compassionate listener, if he or she needs to share. You can also consider talking with the adolescent ahead of time if you anticipate something that would trigger a grief response.
- Know that you cannot fix it. It is natural to want to ease pain, but there are no easy answers, no way to "speed up" the grief process. Provide support for grieving. Not all students are talkers, and many may choose not to express their feelings.
- Ensure healthy and regular meals, adequate rest and sleep, exercise and normal schedules.
- Encourage use of relaxation activities or strategies.
- Encourage adolescents to engage in practical activities which would be helpful to the family of the deceased.
- Get help if it is needed. Most students go in and out of grief. They have difficult days. They experience sadness, anxiety, fatigue and anger, but are able to continue attending school and enjoying activities. If the adolescent experiences drastic changes in behavior that might include: suicidal ideation, prolonged depression or anxiety, preoccupation with memories of the deceased, risk taking behaviors, etc., consult a mental health professional.