

# TEEN Turning Points



## Assisting Teens with Healthy Grieving

Trauma has invaded the lives of students through auto accidents, violence, and suicide. There are too many critical incidents in the lives of youth.

With assistance, adolescents exposed to crises can learn appropriate coping behaviors. Teens without proper guidance may exhibit personality changes and signs of poor adjustment. Healthy grieving reduces immediate and long-term emotional problems.

Death is never easy to cope with, but it is a part of life. Losing a friend, classmate or loved one is one of life's most stressful events. For teens, surviving death can be especially traumatic because of precarious self-esteem.

Due to the great emotional pain associated with someone dying, whether suddenly or after a lingering illness, it is important to know how to acknowledge the teen's intense emotions.

### **Growing beyond pain**

For teens, growing beyond pain requires acknowledging feelings, accepting them, and sorting them out to gain new understanding.

Most adolescents usually do not have experience coping with death and grief. However, teens may have experience in coping with loss as they have lost friends who have moved away; they may not have been chosen for an athletic team or may have experienced the breakup of a dating relationship. Learning to let go and find positive lessons in tragedy is a vital transition for teens and adults alike.

### **Grief is natural**

Everyone goes through a period of bereavement when someone close dies. Each of us must find meaning in loss in spite of pain and discover the learning experience of loss. Grief is a natural, healthy response to a significant loss in our lives.

Contrary to popular belief, the grieving process is never the same for everyone. Grieving is highly individualized. No one can predict how grief is expressed or the time it takes to heal. These things are influenced by an individual's personality, ability to cope and the intensity of grief.

However, there are common feelings. Invite teens to express feelings. Like adults, teens need to express their emotions. Parents need to invite adolescents to discuss their feelings of anger, sadness, fear, confusion, rejection, guilt and hopefully acceptance.

Providing a healthy environment that allows teens to express their feelings is essential. A teenager allowed to grieve properly becomes less confused, builds coping skill and develops a stronger sense of worth. Loss is easier for teens to bear when they are surrounded by people who care. Parents are not expected to be experts in understanding grief. Adults and teens who have faced the death of a loved one are most often struggling together to understand loss.

### **Healthy grieving reactions include crying**

Healthy grieving reactions include crying, expression of feelings through art or writing in a journal, talking and sharing memories with others who have experienced loss.

### **Unhealthy grieving involves drugs or isolation**

Unhealthy coping would involve use of alcohol or drugs to numb feelings and forget. Another unhealthy approach would be isolation. Successful grieving allows the teen to remember the loved one who died and to put his or her life in a healthier perspective as a result of the loss. Resolving grief can promote a greater sense of well-being. Understanding grief does not make it less painful. The emotional scars of loss do not completely go away, they heal.

However, understanding teenagers and that the feelings associated with grief are normal will make them more bearable.

### **If you need help**

If you would like to talk with a counselor about helping someone deal with their grief or if you need help in getting through loss, call Crisis Services at (810) 257-3740

