



C E N T E R F O R  
G R I E F & H E A L I N G

A program of Hospice of the North Shore

### **Specific Reactions to Sudden Death/Trauma**

- Feelings of anxiety, fears, and worries about safety of self and others
- Increased levels of distress
- Increased somatic complaints (whiny, irritable, moody)
- Changes in school performance
- Statements and questions about death and dying
- Asking the same questions over and over again
- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of interest in usual activities
- Changes in behavior/increased emotions
- Regression in behaviors
- Hate or anger statements

### **What Can I Do to Help?**

- Reinforce ideas of safety and security.
- Listen to and tolerate your children's retelling of events.
- Use simple, direct terms to describe what happened.
- Children may misunderstand information about the event as they are trying to make sense of what happened (believe things happened that did not happen).
- Do activities that will reinforce the message that one person can make a difference to help and heal. Activities can include drawing pictures and sending cards.
- Provide reassurance to children that uncomfortable feelings will get smaller and easier to handle over time.
- Maintain the family routines – sleeping, eating, and extracurricular activities.
- Provide soothing activities, such as reading books, listening to music, taking a walk, riding bikes etc...

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call the Center for Grief & Healing at (978) 774 - 5100.





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## **When to Seek Professional Help for Your Teen**

Please note that temporary changes in behavior are normal for grieving children. However, if your child is experiencing excessive or prolonged difficulties in any of the following areas, professional counseling can help. Please call the Children's Program at (978) 774-5100 for more information.

### **Signs of complicated mourning:**

- Sudden unexplained changes in behavior
- Child continually shares no thoughts or feelings about the loss
- Excessive and prolonged periods of crying or temper tantrums
- Prolonged numbness or loss of interest in activities
- Withdrawal from friends, refusal to socialize
- Sharp drop in school performance
- Persistent negative attitude about the future
- Extremes in sleeping, eating, or weight
- Frequent headaches, stomachaches or other physical complaints
- Prolonged fear of being alone or frequent nightmares
- Child acts much younger for extended period of time
- Child threatens to hurt self or others
- Child is physically abusive toward self, other children, or animals
- Denial of the reality of the death
- Persistent panic or fear
- Drug or alcohol abuse

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## Suggestions for Supporting Your Teenager

1. Provide a safe environment for your teenager through structure, discipline and education.
  - **Structure** – maintain routines as much as possible.
  - **Discipline** – Although it may be hard to enforce rules when your teen is grieving, they need adults to be reasonable and caring but consistent and firm. Limit setting provides a sense of security and reassures your teen someone is in control.
  - **Education** – share what are normal grief reactions and what grieving people need.
2. Provide “emotional coaching” for your teen by modeling appropriate emotional reactions to loss. Let them know that any feeling is okay as long as they find safe and healthy ways to release them.
3. Encourage methods of expression – talking, music, art, sports, writing, photography.
4. Recognize that, even if your teen did not have a close relationship to the peer who died, he/she will be affected by the death. It may trigger previous losses or it may “shake” your teen’s sense of invincibility.
5. Facilitate an ongoing connection with the person who died, if appropriate. Include the memory of the person who died in your celebration of important events in your teen’s life.
6. Encourage your teen to participate in normal adolescent life as he/she feels able.
7. Allow more time than usual for your teen to be with his/her peers.

### Behaviors you may observe:

- **Sleep disturbances:** Be aware that your teen may want to sleep more or may have trouble sleeping. Although they may be asleep when you go to bed, realize he/she may wake up in the middle of the night and have trouble going back to sleep. Ask your teen how he/she is sleeping.
- **Repetition:** Teens may want to tell the story of what happened over and over. It is their way of trying to make sense of the experience and find a place for it in their world.
- **Guilt:** Your teen may feel guilty. Do NOT negate any of the feelings he/she shares with you by saying something like, “Don’t feel that way”. It is how your teen is feeling and he/she needs to be able to explore why they feel as they do. Ask your teen to tell you why he/she feels guilty and do your best to help them see the other side.
- Teens may become quiet, withdrawn, anxious, and sad.
- Listening and comforting a teen without avoiding or over-reacting will have critical and long lasting positive effects on the teen’s ability to cope.

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### Normal Grief Reactions

It is important to remember that there is no right way to grieve. The following is a list of some very common grief reactions you may feel at various times during the grieving process. They may come and go, like waves. If you are able, be aware for your own well-being what may trigger these responses. As common and normal as these may be, it is perfectly fine for you not to experience these particular emotions. They are in no way a measurement of grief or your feelings towards the person who died.

- \*tightness in your throat
- \*mood swings
- \*eating all the time
- \*gaining weight
- \*feeling empty inside
- \*hard time concentrating
- \*wanting to withdraw
- \*lacking energy
- \*catching a lot of colds
- \*feeling out of control
- \*thinking you won't be okay again
- \*feeling relieved
- \*feelings of anger
- \*trouble sleeping
- \*not eating enough
- \*losing weight
- \*crying unexpectedly
- \*heaviness in your chest
- \*working too much
- \*tired all the time
- \*hearing your loved one's voice
- \*searching for the person who died
- \*living in the past
- \*sensing your loved one's presence

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# CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO GRIEF

*What They Think, Feel and Do Based on Developmental Stage*

Age	Thinks	Feels	Does
<b>3-5 Years</b> <i>(Pre-school)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death is temporary and reversible</li> <li>• Finality of death is not evident</li> <li>• Death mixed up with trips, sleep</li> <li>• May wonder what the deceased is doing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Withdrawn</li> <li>• Confused about changes</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Cranky</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cry</li> <li>• Fight</li> <li>• Become interested in dead things</li> <li>• Act as if the death never happened</li> </ul>
<b>6-9 Years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About the finality of death</li> <li>• About the biological processes of death</li> <li>• Death is related to mutilation</li> <li>• A spirit gets you when you die</li> <li>• Their actions and words caused the death</li> <li>• About who will care for them if a parent dies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Withdrawn</li> <li>• Confused about the changes</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Cranky</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act aggressively</li> <li>• Become withdrawn</li> <li>• Have nightmares</li> <li>• Act like it never happened</li> <li>• Lack concentration</li> <li>• Have a decline in grades</li> </ul>
<b>9-12 Years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About and understands the finality of death</li> <li>• Death is difficult to talk about</li> <li>• That death may happen again, and feel anxious</li> <li>• About death with humor</li> <li>• About what will happen if their parent(s) die</li> <li>• Their actions and words caused the death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Lonely</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Abandoned</li> <li>• Guilty</li> <li>• Fearful</li> <li>• Worried</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behave aggressively</li> <li>• Become withdrawn</li> <li>• Talk about physical aspects of death</li> <li>• Act like it never happened</li> <li>• Have nightmares</li> <li>• Lack concentration</li> <li>• Have a decline in grades</li> </ul>
<b>Teenagers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About and understands the finality of death</li> <li>• If they show their feelings, they'll be weak</li> <li>• They need to be in control of their feelings</li> <li>• About death with humor</li> <li>• Only about life before or after the death</li> <li>• Their actions or words caused the death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Lonely</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Abandoned</li> <li>• Guilty</li> <li>• Fearful</li> <li>• Worried</li> <li>• Isolated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behave aggressively</li> <li>• Become withdrawn</li> <li>• Allow themselves to be in danger</li> <li>• Grieve for what might have been</li> <li>• Have nightmares</li> <li>• Lack concentration</li> <li>• Have a decline in grades</li> </ul>



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## Suggested Resources: Teenagers

Buckingham & Huggard. Coping with Grief.

Helps teens identify, cope with, and deal with grief and loss.

Canfield, Hansen & Kirkberger. Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul.

Wonderful, short, encouraging stories for teens.

Capacchione, Lucia. The Creative Journal for Teens – Making Friends with Yourself.

Easy techniques for teens to express themselves through writing and art.

Deaver, Julie Reece. Say Goodnight, Gracie.

A teen deals with loss after a friend is killed in a car accident.

Dower, Laura. I Will Remember You: What to do When Someone you Love Dies. A Guidebook Through Grief for Teens.

A grief journal and book all in one. Explores what life and death mean to the individual, rituals, teen issues and related feelings and emotions.

Fitzgerald, Helen. The Grieving Teen.

Non-threatening resource book for teens that has easy to read topics.

Gootman, Marilyn E. When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens about Grieving and Healing.

A short book that normalizes the many emotions teens experience after a loss.

Greene, Constance. Beat the Turtle Drum.

A thirteen year old deals with the death of her sister.

Grollman, Earl. Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love.

A classic version of ways teens can cope with death, loss and the feelings associated with grief.

Heegard, Marge. Coping with Death and Grief.

For ages 10-14 years. Children tell stories and learn about death and grieving. Suggestions for adults helping children manage anger.

Hoping Skills Company, LLC. Tomauro Kits. (978)921-2237; 1-888-815-HOPE.

Unique and meaningful products for children and adults that encourage self-expression. [www.HopingSkillsCompany.com](http://www.HopingSkillsCompany.com)

O'Toole, Donna. Facing Change.

Helpful information for teens about coping, understanding and healing through loss.

Traisman, Enid. Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins.

Journal for teens dealing with the death of someone close to them.

For additional resources or a free phone consultation,  
Please contact the Center for Grief and Healing: 978-774-5100.



## List of Things “To Do” For a Grieving Student

- Attend Services (wake and/or funeral).
- When a grieving student comes back to school, take time to talk privately with him or her, offering support and letting them know you will be there to talk or to listen.
- Be a good listener.
- Don’t fall back on clichés. A grieving child’s deep and extremely complicated feelings of loss are often dismissed with overly simple, empty phrases such as:
  - Give it time.*
  - Keep busy.*
  - Be strong.*
  - It’s time to move on.*
  - He lived a long life.*
  - Life is for living.*
  - This is a blessing.*
  - At least she/he didn’t suffer.*
  - Now she/he is in a better place.*
  - You’ll become stronger because of this.*
  - Be glad you had her/him for as long as you did.*
  - She/he wouldn’t have wanted you to be sad.*
- Do say:
  - I’m sorry.*
  - I’m thinking of you.*
  - I care.*
  - I want to help.*
  - I’m here for you.*
- Use the name of the person who died.
- Write a letter.
- Send flowers – not now, but in a week, or a month.
- Recognize “grief bursts,” listen, and be sympathetic.
- Send another card... and then another.
- Remember them during the holidays.
- Mark special dates on the calendar. There are four times in the year that are typically very vulnerable for the grieving person:
  - Immediately after the loss.
  - 2-3 weeks after the loss.
  - 6-8 months after the loss.
  - Special holidays, anniversaries, memorials.
- Establish a memorial fund or event.
- Plan a memorial book for the library.
- Plant “seeds” of hope.
- Give a blank book to the child for use as a journal.
- Help create a memory book, box, quilt, garden.
- Give a gift of scent – lavender relaxes, rosewood and bergamot together lift the spirits, peppermint invigorates, chamomile and lavender are sleep aides.



## **How to Address a Death at School**

Provide the facts of the death as they are known *and* as the family has given permission.

It is okay to give the cause of death without glorifying it and going into detail.

Provide a clear statement about what it means to be dead. Correct any magical thinking.

Give the children in the classroom permission to have both feelings and questions.

Provide assurances for their own personal safety and care.

Ask the children about their own losses, how they felt, and what made them feel better.

Tell them what to expect (a wake, shiva, a school service).

Discuss what it will be like when the bereft child returns to school – what is appropriate to say and do.

Tell them where ongoing support can be found.

Provide ongoing information if needed.

Check on your students, especially the day after a wake, or service.

Allow them to grieve.