

Involuntary Signs and Symptoms Indicating Teen May Need Extra Help

- Sleep interruptions, dreams/nightmares.
- Inability to concentrate at school resulting in academic failure.
- Low self-esteem, depression, not caring about physical appearance.
- Social isolation, lack of involvement with sports teams or school related activities.
- Self soothing with food or lack of appetite
- Increased irritability, moodiness, restlessness
- Activity in high risk behaviours ie: drugs, alcohol abuse, erratic driving, sexual experimenting,

To help a teen with their loss, explore resources and supports available in your area. School counselors, pastors, or grief support workers can be valuable resources. Find the teen a **confidential, safe place to be nurtured emotionally.**

Important Role of Caring Adults

The role and responses of a caring adult when someone has died has a **major impact** on the way a teen reacts to death. Adults that won't talk about the death, thinking that somehow the teen will be spared the pain and sadness could not be any further from the truth. Teens will grieve anyway. Often adults think talking to the teen will make them cry, the fact is, they are crying anyway. They need to know it's okay to cry and feel sad. Tell them the grief will soften over time. The stabbing pain of loss will not last forever.

Triggers in Loss

Remember that the death of a loved one is an **unforgettable, unsettling, and confusing experience.** As teens are experiencing many emotional & physical changes, navigating through a loss with it's complexities can knock a teen off centre.

Be **gentle and caring.** Be mindful of the **'year of the firsts'** ie; birthdays, anniversaries, traditions etc. as these times are normally when families connect and the absence of a loved one may make those times more difficult. Communicate openly about feelings and the absence of that family member. Honor the loved one by saying their name, share stories about them openly and freely

Additional Resources

Book: Helping Your Grieving Heart For Teens – Dr. Alan Wolfelt
The Dougy Center – Podcasts - “Grief Out Loud” <https://www.dougy.org/>

My Health Alberta - <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwld=aa131190>

Health Link BC - <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/aa131190>

Six Ways Adolescent Grief is Different:
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/six-ways-that-adolescent_b_5148211

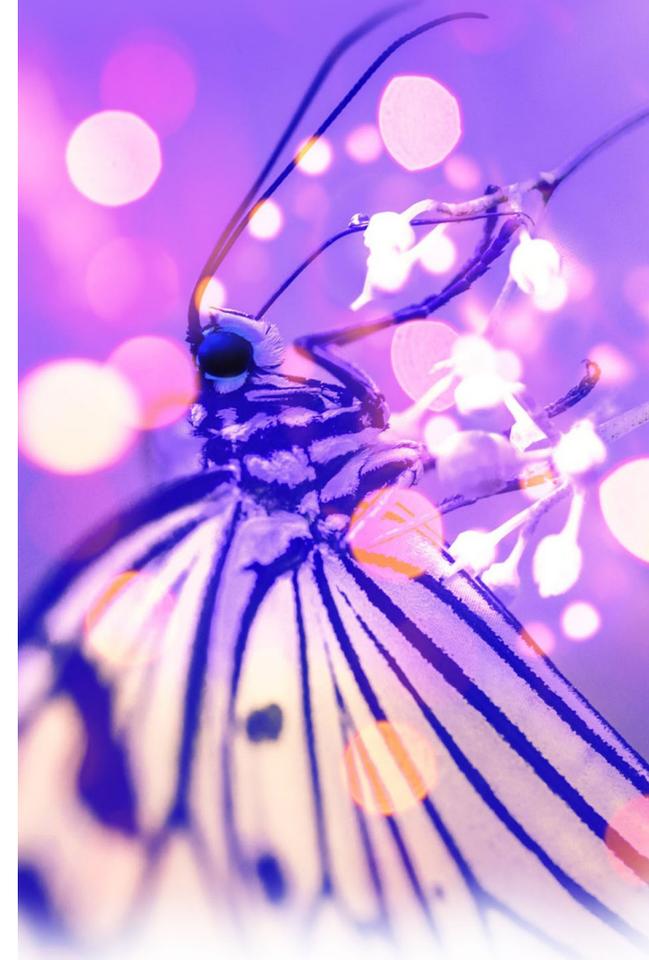
Hotline for Teens:
<https://teenhealthandwellness.com/static/hotlines>



24 Hour Crisis Line
780-743-HELP (4357)
1-800-565-3801



HELPING TEENS WITH GRIEF



Teens Mourning

Every year teenagers from all over the world experience the loss of a loved one. The loss may be a sibling, parent, grandparent, relative or friend. Often, the loss has been an individual that has been instrumental in supporting and creating their identity, therefore the death will be a part of their lives forever.

Parents, teachers, counselors and friends will play a critical role in caring for and supporting teens during this difficult time. It's important that the supporting adults are **honest, loving** and **communicate clearly** about the death. This crucial time can be a chance for teens to learn that both **joy and pain are outcomes from loving others deeply.**

Be Strong

Often well-meaning adults will tell teens to "be strong" which inhibits teens from sharing their story. Grieving teens will involuntarily give out signs that they are struggling with their loss and don't understand the triggers they experience. They are confused but feel the pressure to act like they are in a much better place than they really are.

Teens may hear comments when someone dies such as; "hold your head up", "be strong", "keep going." They may pretend they are fine for the surviving parent or siblings. They may not even know how they are going to make it, forget being strong for someone else. They may **turn their own grief inward and not really do their own mourning.**

Too Old & Too Young

The teen years can be very difficult as teens realize they are no longer children but also not yet adults. They may find themselves with one foot in their childhood and the other in entering the adult world. **This time of life can be confusing and difficult.** The changes they are experiencing are foreign and leaving behind the comforts of childhood, transitioning into adolescence, is filled with uncertainty. The death of a parent or sibling can be devastating during this very difficult stage of life.

During the loss of a loved one, teens may have many other pressures in their lives such as; peer, academic, physical and emotional. They may have the bodies of adults, look like men and women but the outward physical image may not necessarily mean emotional maturity. Teens will need the kind, consistent support from caring adults to work through grief and do the work of mourning.

Sudden Deaths

This kind of grief comes suddenly and unexpectedly. The death may be the loss of a parent due to a heart attack, a sibling or friend in a motor vehicle crash, or a friend that has died by suicide. **The very nature of these losses can leave the teen feeling dazed, numb and functioning almost robotically.** This "shockiness" may provide protection from reality while they slowly absorb the loss and their emotions has time to catch up to the facts.

Content taken in part from
Dr. Alan Wolfelt.

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Support the Teen

It's important not to assume that the teens experiencing the loss have a good support system around them. **Not all teens have the necessary available support and they may be relied on to provide support to their family.** They may have been told, "they are the man or woman of the house" or that they need to "grow up" and support the other surviving members of the family. Teens having to take care of other family members may have been forgotten and not have the opportunity to authentically mourn or they may feel they do not have permission to do so.

Teens often find comfort and support from their peers but when it comes to the topic of death, peers may become distant and aloof because they've never experienced a death and they are unfamiliar and feel afraid, so they ignore the loss/death entirely.

The death of a parent may result in a teen searching for independence as they are now experiencing new roles and responsibilities. It's not uncommon for conflict with other family members to develop. For a period, teens may separate emotionally from their parents. The combination of the normal process of forming an independent identity as a teen, and a death, can be cause for a tumultuous time within the parent and sibling relationships. If there was existing conflict between the parent that has died and the teen, a sense of guilt, regret and 'unfinished business' can plague the teens thoughts and emotions.

The teen needs a place to talk out what their feelings and memories are of the person who has died.