

Responding to Death and Change During the COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 global health crisis is an unprecedented time of uncertainty, fear, and disruptions to our daily lives. While this is stressful enough under normal circumstances, add in grief and that stress gets compounded and overwhelming.

The physical distancing requirement, while in place to keep people as safe and healthy as possible, interrupts our ability to gather for community and connection, two things that are often so helpful in times of grief.

The experience of death can impact everyone differently and can cause disconnection for families. There are many ways families can support children and teens during the grieving process.

What does grief look like in teens?

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| Physical reactions: sleep disturbance, shortness of breath, tightness in throat, weight change (loss of appetite or increase of appetite), stomach aches, change in bowels (diarrhea) | Emotional reactions: sadness, guilt, anger, anxiety, lonesome, agitation | Behavioral reactions: forgetfulness, crying, dwell on mistakes, withdraw socially, wandering aimlessly, worrying about others-wanting them to feel comfortable, needing to retell the story of the loved one's death, becoming preoccupied with death of loved one, suicidal talk, dreams of the deceased, nightmares, |
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How to support your grieving child or teen

1. Listen to your child
2. Allow emotional expression
3. Encourage coping skills
4. Practice self care
5. Understand grief comes in waves
6. Establish and maintain routines
7. Ask for help
8. Make new memories

8 Things to try when the grief gets intense

1. **Breathe.** When we get tense we tend to hold our breath or have short, shallow breaths. First, just notice that you are breathing and then try slowing it down, breathing more into your belly, and exhaling a little longer than you inhale.
2. **Move your body.** This doesn't have to be a sport (but it can be) — take a walk, do a push-up, dance, or try cleaning. It's strange, but it can help!
3. **Express yourself.** Write, draw, organize, listen to/play music, or anything else that lets you express yourself without having to talk to someone.
4. **Make room** for whatever feelings are coming up. If you try to push them away, they will probably just push back harder. Feelings change and they won't last forever. Grief has no timeline, but it really does change over time.
5. **Be kind — to yourself.** Grievers tend to give themselves a really hard time for not doing grief right — whatever that “right” might be. Remind yourself you're doing the best you can in the moment and that it's okay you're having a hard time.
6. **Be a good friend — to yourself.** Experiment with telling yourself you can do this, even if you don't know what you're doing. You might be feeling emotions you've never had before or doing things in life for the first time and all of it is happening without the person who died. Take a moment to acknowledge how new and different this is and tell yourself, “Even if I'm overwhelmed right now, I will figure this out.” And then...
7. **Ask for help.** We know, this one can be really hard and scary to do. Keep it simple and remember that people usually want to help, they are just waiting to be asked.
8. **Take time to celebrate whatever is going well.** When you're grieving it can be hard to make space for feeling good. You might feel guilty if you find yourself laughing or having a good time. Taking a break from grief doesn't mean you love or miss the person any less.

More Resources and Tips for Parents

- Help your Teen Cope with Social Distancing
<https://www.teenwiseseattle.com/grieving-during-social-distancing-guest-blogger/>
- Grief and COVID-19: Mourning What We're Missing

More Resources and Tips for Middle and High Students

- Activities for Teens who are Grieving:
<https://www.tdcschooltoolkit.org/teens>
- Teen Tips
https://www.dougy.org/docs/Tips_for_Grieving_Teens.pdf
Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcBTBSrAg-8>

- Supporting a Child when Someone Far Away Dies

https://0c26ed70-b47b-4fad-8bbe-6ebbfecd2ec.filesusr.com/ugd/7ac232_bf000388459c496ca36eae1858e1dd98.pdf

- Grief Out Loud: Teens Talk About Loss:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgrRoJyljeQ>

- The Grieving Process: Coping with Death:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsYL4PC0hyk>