

How to Support a Grieving Teen

Adapted from Help for the Hard Times by Earl Hipp

People who are grieving have individual needs and teens are surely no exception! Needs change as the teen progresses through their own unique grief journey. Here are some tried and true tips for being supportive to your teen:

- **Stay Connected:** People who grieve need to go through their grief at their own pace. But it can be much less scary and lonely if they know that others care about them and are not too far away if they need a listening ear or a helping hand. Let your grieving teen know, by your words and actions, that you care, that you will stay by them and be there for them when they need you. When you stay connected, and do not go away when they act weird or moody, you give the grieving teen the gift of real support.
- **Have Patience:** Teens in grief can be pretty challenging! Their mood swings, confused thinking, and occasional unusual behavior can make them less pleasant to be around. They just are not themselves intermittently. This behavior is a signal for you to gather up all the compassion and patience you can find. They will need your support and they need time to heal; your patience with them is a gift and an expression of truly caring about them.
- **Just Be You and Be There:** It is not your job to fix your grieving teen or convince them you know exactly what they are feeling (do you?). Just be there and you will be doing important grief support work. Even your ability to be comfortable with any silence that seems deafeningly loud, shows how much you care.
- **Expect Anger:** People, including teens, going through grief after a death often feel as if something or someone has been taken away. This is a normal response and the best response you can give in return is to allow them to vent and do not respond with being angry back. Sometimes they are so angry and their anger surfaces or spews out at the wrong time and at the wrong person. Again, draw on your patience and support methods, to see this difficult moment through.
- **Just Ask:** Start by asking your teen what kind of support they would like from you. Ask them to describe what that support looks like, feels like, sounds like. Often the teen will be able to articulate their needs, but also may tell you they just do not know. Keep asking, and in time, they may be able to tell you more.
- **Listen:** People experiencing a loss often feel compelled to talk about it, over and over again. They may say the same things again and again, but need to do so until their desire to do so lessens. Encourage them to talk about their loss by asking questions, staying interested and listening as long as they talk.
- **Help Them See Life Positively Again:** At some point, sometime down the road from a loss, teens will be ready to laugh again, hang with their friends and even find a way to remember their loved one with special stories of shared good times. Teens seek comfort and companionship after a death in their life, most often from their peers. This may be challenging for adults who feel left out of the support system. Again, draw on your best dose of patience to allow teens to reach out to teens. In time, they will likely also include you in their circle of support.

Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.

~Helen Keller

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