



Aspects of Young Adult Grief ©

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Young Adults often feel invisible, overwhelmed, and frequently become, “forgotten grievers”. Adolescence is one of the most difficult and confusing stages of their lives. It is a major time of transitions and subtle loss. A young adult is saying good-bye to childhood and taking on new responsibilities. For many young adults their lives are an emotional roller coaster; their egos are hard at work trying to establish their new identity. They are working hard to gain their own independence. If the death of a parent, a loved one or a friend is added to their daily challenges of being a “normal” young adult you will most often find a frightened, confused, and isolated person. There are few people that a teen can turn to for help.

Young Adults needs are unique and listed below are some typical ones:

- They need to share in the family's grief process. They need to be included so that they don't feel isolated. Yet it is difficult when they are miles away from home attending college.
- They need to be loved.
- They need to be listened to.
- They need to understand. Share with them about grief and validate their feelings. Let them know its okay to cry. It is important to keep the doors of communication open.
- It is important that they be part of the planning of the funeral. This helps them to be recognized and it allows them to become an active part of the visible grieving process. Let them know what to expect at the funeral.
- Many times the death of a friend can open wounds of grief from the past. It is important reach out to the student who has suffered a death of a loved one, especially if their loved one died the same way. Many people keep their grief deep within until another death happens. Grief has a way of ripping open old wounds.
- Young Adults need outward signs of support (hugs, a pat or the back etc.)—these are important physical forms of support.
- Re-establishment of routine and discipline is an important way to provide security. Inconsistency in family is very typical during the first days following a death.
- Who are their role models? Who do they look up to? Their Parent’s, their teachers, counselors, caring adults and their peers that have experienced death. It is important for young adults of all ages to see their parents

- getting better. It is a heavy burden for teens when they see that parents aren't getting better. They need a stable environment to come home to. They need to see that their family is doing their best to cope with their grief. If this is not happening in a reasonable time seek professional help. We need to help the young adult feel a sense of family and belonging.
- Much of the young adult's time is spent in school and this can be a very lonely place. Though it is important to establish a normal routine again, there may be times during a school day that the student will not be able to cope or focus. Teachers can help by excusing the student and possibly providing a place for privacy and personal support. This allows the teacher to acknowledge the student's special needs and provide support at the same time. Talk to their teachers. Let them know how they are coping. Give them head's up on important date's such as anniversary of loved ones death, birthday's, milestone events in their life. All of which can cause grief moments.
 - Talk to the schools counselor and see if there is a grief support program at their school
 - Many times young adults will turn to the opposite sex for comfort. They want to belong; they want someone who will care about them. If a teen is dating someone and they break up during this time it can cause the loss to be more profound.
 - When pain is felt, relief is sought. Young Adults often give in to pressures of drugs and alcohol. They need to know that this is only a temporary means of escape and that it can and will cause a deeper depression. They need to be guided to a way of opening up and sharing their pain.
 - Young Adults feel frightened and alone. Any support a teacher provides reminds the grieving student every day that there is a person they can turn to.
 - Young Adults need their loved ones or friends to be remembered. If a fellow student dies during their school years it is important for the school to work with the students to memorialize by dedicating something visible for the student to see. Allow students to write a memory or say good-bye in a letterform. These letters can be put together and given to the parents. This can be very therapeutic for both the students and the grieving parents. A grieving parent's wish is for their child to be remembered.

Companions on a Journey Grief "Teens in Grief Support Program" ©
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- Our Youth Experience death at a higher rate than ever
- When grief enters a teen's life they feel very isolated and alone
- Confusion sets in and they become unfocused
- Grades can plunge, the risk of alcohol, drug abuse and risk taking is greater
- It is estimated that 2-3% of students will experience a death of a loved one during their high school years.
- 1-18 student by the age of 18 will experience the death of a parent
- 1-8 student by the age of 18 will experience the death of a sibling or a parent
- Our goal is to create a safe environment where teens can come to share their feeling and emotions.
- The help that we provide, helps teens to know that they are not alone, it will help them to understand the many aspects of grief, it will validate their feeling s and we will help them find hope and meaning in their grief.
- This program will be offered 8-10 times in a year in Schools
- Parent Sessions - Understanding your Child/Teen's Grief
- COJ offers Question Persuade Refer QPR Gate Keeper Training to help in the prevention of suicide.
- COJ offers prevention to suicide session to schools and our community

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When a Death is by Suicide

As we talked about at the beginning of this article, if the death of a parent, a loved one or a friend is added to their daily challenges of being a "normal" young adult you will most often find a frightened, confused, and isolated person. There are few people that a teen can turn to for help.

It is even more complicated when their loved one dies by suicide. For a teen/young adult this type of death is traumatic.

- There is no time for them to prepare mentally or emotionally
- Due to the shock and related stress those left behind may be unable to develop coping strategies
- There is the shock; they cannot believe what has happened they cannot wrap their mind around what has happened
- There is the disbelief and the big question of WHY???
- They struggle with guilt; they may feel guilty for the way they acted; for harsh words; or for what they didn't say
- There's the anger; How could this have happened to me???
- There's the depression; How can they survive???
- There's the STIGMA; What will people think???
- Teens may feel responsible for their loved one death and think that they somehow could have prevented the death
- Teens often share they didn't get to say good-bye and that they will never have the chance to say good-bye or that they loved them
- Teens often face grief alone, their friends are uncomfortable and don't know what to say
- Teens who grieve often feel that it is easier not to talk about their loss for they don't want their friends to feel uncomfortable.
- Teens try to be strong for their family, often they struggle with many issues alone or they bury them so deep within that they later can create major problems later in life
- Older teens and young adults manage to escape by means of their cars they keep busy and avoid their loss with again puts them at greater risk for long term resolution. This type of response doesn't always have negative results however it can delay their healing process.
- Younger teens 13-15 spend more time at home and can have tendency to be more withdrawn
- Death by suicide is overwhelming. Children need the strength of their parents to know they can and will survive. Children mirror their parent's reflections. So if parent cannot function how do we expect children to function?

Many people feel they have little to say, or are unsure what to say to the grieving young adult.

Suicide is the SECOND leading cause of death for ages 10-24.

Suicide is the SECOND leading cause of death for college-age youth and ages 12-18.

More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease, COMBINED.

Knowing that suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for young adults we recognized that the number of student effected by a death by suicide put our young adults at greater risk of suicide.

In looking at the risk factors that comes along with grief in general and the risk factors associated with suicide one can see that these risk factors put our teens who suffer the death of a loved one at greater risk of suicide.

Some of those risk factors are;

1. Death of a loved one
2. Parent's divorce
3. Relationship break-up's
4. Serious illness
5. Academic problems
6. Recent disappointments
7. Exposed to suicidal family members and friends

For every 1 death by suicide there are 100-200 young adults that attempt suicide.

We find our SOS support program very beneficial;

- It is a place where they can verbalize their thoughts and emotions
- It provides a forum for airing their grief and helps them to understand their grief
- It allows them to find support
- It allows them to lean that they have the recourses within themselves for helping themselves and each other
- It is a place where they meet new friends and it allows them to become mentor to each other.
- It validates their feelings and emotions
- It helps them to see that they are not alone
- The longer bereaved become models of hope

- There is a sense of doing something positive
- It is a place where they have found that their Moeller family truly cares about them
- Their self-esteem is enhanced by being able to help one another.
- It is a place where they learn to communicate to others what they are feeling rather than stuffing it down
- It is a place where they learn it is okay to cry, it okay to laugh and that it's okay to feel
- It is a place where self-esteem and self confidence is found.

COJ also offer Understanding your Child/Teens Session for more information call Companions on a Journey 513-870-9108 or visit our website at www.companionsonajourney.org

When we take the time to care I promise that you will truly "Make a Difference" to the life of a grieving teen.