

# Bereaved Teenagers

## Responses to grief

Most adults have strong memories of their teenage years, usually because they are emotional times. They can be very happy times, when lifelong friendships are formed and you feel camaraderie with others of the same age. You will have shared passions and dislikes and may experience your first love.

For both boys and girls, hormones may start to run riot leaving them feeling as though they are on an emotional rollercoaster. They are often surrounded by adults who find it difficult to cope with the effects of this; they may be dealing with a child who was chatty and sociable and is suddenly sullen and uncommunicative. Or, a child who once followed all the rules but has now decided to make up their own; such as not going to school or staying out late. Imagine then throwing into this hotbed of emotions one of life's most stressful experiences, the death of someone close.

In our experience, teenagers who have experienced the death of someone close to them often say that they felt isolated from what was going on. Adults would assume that they were grown up and therefore should be able to cope better than a younger brother or sister, so they may be left feeling unsupported. The death of a significant person can make a teenager feel very insecure at a time when they are starting to think about becoming more independent.

- You may notice some of the following behaviours:
- going back to behaving like a younger child
- being disruptive in school
- becoming angry easily
- seeming detached and not bothered about anything
- becoming withdrawn, they may spend a lot of time alone in their bedroom
- isolating themselves from the family; they may spend a lot of time with friends
- taking on the role of the person who died
- depression

## Offering Support

Teenagers can have particularly strong relationships with their peer group and as a result may appear to seek support from them in the first instance. This can be difficult for a grieving parent who may want to offer and support. It is important to remember that this is a normal part of adolescence and that often teenagers turn to their peers for support for all kinds of emotional issues. However, their friends may not have the emotional maturity to be able to offer ongoing support, and friendship groups can in turn have their own difficulties, your support will still be very important.

They are old enough to be sensitive to your feelings and may not want to upset you or they may feel embarrassed by your tears. Try and find a way of making this more comfortable for them by reassuring them that your tears are normal and that it will not happen every time they want to talk.

- Keep in touch with your child's school; sometimes this is the place where teenagers act out their distress through disruptive behaviour. It is important that the school understands that the behaviours may be a cry for help
- Be open and honest and allow them the opportunity to ask you questions even if they do not seem talkative
- Allow them to take part in decision making for example about funeral arrangements or what to do on birthdays or anniversaries. At the same time ensure that you remain the parent, teenagers may feel they have to take on the role of the person who died
- Offer them the opportunity to access professional support
- Point them to the information available on our website in the Death and Bereavement section. There are suggestions of helpful books to read as well as links to other organisations that may be of support.

If you have any concerns that your child may be depressed, talk to your GP or suggest that they do.

Call us: 0118 934 2604

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